

Process Documentation Report:
Jagori's
Feminist Leadership
Development Course
(FLDC)

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I. Introduction

This report on Jagori's Feminist Leadership Development Course (FLDC), planned across five phases between 2016-2018 is based on conversations with course organisers as well as selected participants. The latter were drawn from organisations in Madhya Pradesh (Pradan, Ekta Mahila Sangh, Lamta Nari Shakti Mahila Sangh, Paraswada Nari Shakti Sangh), Rajasthan (Centre for Micro Finance), Jharkhand (Srijan) and Gurgaon (Nari Shakti Manch). In addition, the writer participated in Phase Three of the course held in September 2017 at the campus of Pradan in Itarsi, Madhya Pradesh. On this occasion. I listened to the presentations by all the participants. on their learnings from the course, achievements and challenges in application.



Jagori's Feminist Leadership Development Course (FLDC) is intended to prepare a cohort of NGO workers from diverse backgrounds to view gender as a significant and indispensable aspect of their work. That is, irrespective of the nature of their engagements in the not-for-profit sector, FLDC's key objective is to encourage a mode of thinking that views all forms of human activity as fundamentally gendered and recognition of this fact as a significant aspect of achieving the objectives of social and economic equity. Participants in FLDC are, in turn, expected to act as thought-leaders in their organisations and fields of activity, formally and informally setting in place contexts for initiating and taking forward discussions on the various manifestations of gender and power.

FLDC has sought to achieve this objective through, firstly, providing a feminist vocabulary that 'genders' multiple aspects of social and economic activities that, otherwise, tend to be treated as purely 'economic' issues or those connected with 'health' or 'housing'. This perhaps the most significant aspect of the Course, viz., the diverse background of the participants and the organisations they come from. The significance of this lies in the fact that a very wide range of NGO workers who may not earlier have considered the gendered dimension of their work are introduced to thinking about gender as an indispensable aspect of their work.

Hence, FLDC included participants who work in such contexts as microfinance, women domestic workers and garment workers, sex-work, food security, self-help groups, natural resource management, housing rights, problems faced by single women, journalism, men's groups, child rights and disability rights.

Themes explored

In order to proceed towards the goal of insinuating gender as the fundamental grounds for all social interactions, the FLDC was organised around a number of themes, each addressed by one or more invited speaker. It is important to understand that while the themes – to be outlined in this section – appear as independent foci of discussion, the manner in which the different phases of the Course have unfolded, their entanglement has become obvious. That is to say that while for pedagogical purposes Course content has been organised around specific themes that relate to gender, the nature of the lectures as well as discussions between resource persons and participants has unequivocally foregrounded the overlaps between the various themes. This, as will be more explicitly pointed out later, has had significant consequences for the manner in which participants were encouraged to think about gender.

The most discernible themes – beginning from the first workshop on (insert date) – were

- 1) Gender and power
- 2) Masculinities
- 3) Men as active participants in thinking about and eliminating VAW
- 4) Social identities
- 5) Gender and power
- 6) Masculinities and the role of men in eliminating VAW
- 7) Social and cultural attitudes towards single women
- 8) Dalit women and the impossibility of framing a singular identity called 'woman'
- 9) Gender and the law
- 10) Gender and disability
- 11) Thinking about gender and the history of the Women's movement in India

While 'Gender and power' is listed – and could be identified – as a separate theme, it might best be regarded as a meta-theme that underlined all aspects of the discussion and was fundamental to how all the other themes were organised and the manner in which participants were encouraged to think about social life in general and the manner in which gender plays out within it more specifically.

The Participants

The extent to which a course is able to achieve its objectives should be located in the context of biographies of those who participate in it. That is to say, in order to evaluate how well a course was received, it is important to understand the kinds of capacities the participants bring to the course: what was their capacity to receive? An understanding of this aspect will assist in both the strengths and weaknesses of the course.

The course began with 32 participants from 13 NGOs, 6 women's federations and one youth group. The participants were drawn from 6 different states across India, namely, Bihar, Delhi, Haryana, Jharkhand, M.P. and Rajasthan.

What is notable is that the participants came from backgrounds where – for lack of resources and opportunity as well as various other constraints – it is difficult to imagine that they would have the opportunity of learning and talking about the kinds of issues FLDC focussed upon. By 'background', I mean both the individuals' personal biography as well as the nature of the institutions they might work in. My observations suggest that taking both these contexts into account, ideas such as 'gender and power', 'sexualities', 'gender and the law', 'disability and desire', 'patriarchy and masculinities' are not topics they would have had opportunities to engage with. **This, itself (before everything) is, in my opinion an extremely important reason for a process such as FLDC: it has introduced feminist thinking and its connections to a wide range of everyday as well as 'grand' processes to a range of participants who, otherwise tend to be left out of such forms of learning.**

Types of Activities

I am of the opinion that FLDC's organisers displayed a keen understanding of the complex relationship between learning and learners by organising teaching and interaction through multi-modal methods. That is, they did not deploy the same methods as might be used in the most obvious setting where ideas about feminism are taught, viz., the university. Hence, in addition to lectures, FLDC interactions involved poster-making, games that sought to uncover the nature of gendered power, analysis of films and other media texts, such as advertisements, and group discussions.



The following give some idea of the different means that were deployed as learning methods

1. An activity that involved the participants' talking about their, who kept the names and their meaning.
2. Activities regarding understanding masculinity, including analysis of a film in terms of masculinity.

3. Brainstorming sessions that involved art and literature where participants were asked draw metaphors for males and females. This led the foregrounding of popular ways of representing gender (turbans, farmer, 'breadwinner', moustache; and, tree, nature, etc.)
4. Activities on perceptions of sex and sexuality
5. Performative activities around social and personal violence (where no one raised their voice against an activity that involved an experience of pain)
6. Activities emphasizing the importance of collective action versus. individual will to 'win at all cost'.
7. Activities regarding right to choose, education, health and right to property.
8. Discussions and activities on the stigma of women and singleness: particularly sexuality
9. Activities on caste and its manifestations
10. A group activity regarding what people understood by the term feminism

II. The Learnings: Specific Themes

In this section, I deal with some of the specific themes that have been dealt with during the different phases.

Perhaps the most significant learning that could be discerned from both one to one conversations as well as group discussions is what could be called '**denaturalisation**'. This refers to a way of thinking about the world in social rather than **natural**. So, most frequently, our conceptions about gender are naturalized and we subscribe to views such as 'men and women behave differently because their behaviours are biologically determined'. Learning to think in terms of how our behaviours and identities are brought into being through processes of socialization is perhaps one of the most difficult objectives of any course. This is because in most of our life contexts – the family, marriage, work, friendship, etc. – we think 'naturally' about social relationships.

The following comment by a course participant provides a glimpse of the beginnings of the process of denaturalisation that FLDC appears to have initiated:

'We socialize our daughters to speak softly, walk properly and not go outside, however we never restrict our sons. The course makes us question why these codes and conducts are imposed on girls and women.'

Or, as another participant pointed out:

'To understand violence and patriarchy, we have to understand the context of the family (Pariwarik vishleshan).'

Family and kin relations are some of the most naturalised of all categories of thought and to open up these intimate areas of human life to social scrutiny is an extremely important step in the journey towards critical thinking. This is a fundamental lesson of feminism and both the above observations strike at the very root of the most fundamental form of naturalisation, that which relates to family and gender identity.

Intersectional thinking – where different processes, identities and behaviours are brought into the same frame to understand any particular situation – is another aspect that emerged as a learning from FLDC. Importantly, this is also an aspect of breaking down the theory-practice binary such that it becomes possible to perceive that everyone is capable of theorising social relations, rather than it being an activity that only some people do.

The following anecdotes from different participants indicate how participants engaged with intersectional thinking.

Participant: I can now understand why people don't change as quickly as I want. The 'theory' has helped... I couldn't understand the community.... the people.... their understanding.... 'theory' brings together a number of context....

When probed further, the same participant went on to say that:

'FLDC...helped to clear a lot of our confusion...earlier women would not come for meetings and I used to get angry...after FLDC I have now understood women's constraints as to why they may not have come... this is also a change within me...I used to get very angry earlier...personal and organisational changes... we understood the differences among people.... how to talk to different kinds of people and convince them of our points of view

(NSM): W3: we are also able to understand why our work is not progressing...we have understood certain contexts: what village has that woman come from, what is the shape of patriarchy there?

What the above statements indicate is this: that FLDC participants have begun to think not merely in terms of what an individual does (or does not do) but, rather, what are the broader social structures within which that individual is positioned –as wife, mother, person belonging to a particular community and class – that also determine individual actions.



This theme was carried forward in a number of other discussions. So, for example, it was pointed out that

'to address social inequalities...and there was also talk of feminism...which is not just for one person...to remove all kinds of bhed-bhav...whether gender or caste...it (FLDC) is an attempt to bring about equality... that's we learnt about feminism...we used to think that feminism is only about women, this is not true, it's about all forms of inequality.

In this course...jati, religion, class. have all been discussed.... It has also helped us break down the idea of a singular woman.... that there are differences between upper caste women and Dalit women.

Another participant pointed out that:

'[We] work with garment workers... there is no wage equality here between men and women... we also work with domestic workers... we used to talk about labour act, factory act etc; we didn't really discuss social and domestic issues; but after this training we did 'gender training' with them [the workers], talked about patriarchy. Earlier we used to only think of them as labourers.

A participant who worked for an organisation that deals with micro-credit pointed out that:

'When I started talking about gender, they started saying earlier it was just about loans, what's this about gender? However, it was important to understand how women might deal differently with money, why they may not be able to get loans as easily as men, and other things'

'I felt so lucky to be part of this training; I had no idea what pitrasatta is: no idea what patriarchy is...'



Just as importantly, many reflected the following view:

'It was the first training of its kind for me.... meeting people from diff districts and organisations.... all working on gender issues'

The sub-text of the above is that it was also the first time that they had thought about how to link gender with other contexts. Hence:

[We gained a] a more nuanced understanding of gender and oppression.... power and masculinity. When we work with our communities, we were also able to explain to women what feminism is ...there is a lot of misunderstanding this even among women. Clearing of definitions and concepts and the internalisation of these.... FLDC has taught us all this.

Srivastava (SS): *How much was 'gender, discussed earlier in your organisation?*

'Not at this deep level, even though we work only with woman workers. We worked on labour but not linked gender so much with work. We used to only touch on gender and feminism.... or violence...but not so much in terms of conception and definition wise

'Also, earlier we were not able to talk openly...I was very hesitant as to how to talk about these things...post FLDC, things are different.'

As noted earlier, different participants came to FLDC with varying capacities and skills. The following excerpt from a conversation with a participant who had some previous familiarity with the concepts the Course discussed, succinctly puts forward what appears to be a general opinion among a large number of the cohort:

'Along with the facilitator, when we began to analyse the interplay and interconnectedness between culture, mindset and the systems and structures, we realized that those systems that are positioned with power in the cultural sphere... most often than not define laws and policies. And thus, the mindset is influenced... thereby perpetuating a trend which does not change resulting in subsequent subjugation of women at all levels and the over marginalization of the vulnerable sections of society.'

FLDC's theme of **Masculinity** particularly impressed participants and they were unequivocal on the significance of this theme. The following extended quote from the same person encapsulates the excitement of discovering a new area of thinking:

'I was a barely literate woman and no idea about gender. When I got married, I had certain ideas about being a wife...things that I had learnt. When Madhu and Anand came to talk about gender.... but Jagori talked to us about gender rights even though we were barely educated...how would this have happened without organisations such as Jagori...I feel so happy to talk about these issues in family and village...'

'I used to think that men are completely superior...but then I learnt about masculinity. Earlier, I used to go along with my father and brother...they would say 'what is this meeting you have till 7 pm?' [Later] I told him that 'you don't work in this area, so you don't know anything' This is masculinity... I thought, that even though my brother is 15 years younger than me, he can ask these questions...out ancient thought is what has led us to this situation...men have to 'allow' women to go out, work late etc.'

'My husband was reading an adhyatmik [religious] book and I came home late one night...my husband showed anger at the in-charge who was dropping me home...I thought 'what is your understanding of me after 20 years of marriage...you haven't understood me at all... I have 3 children...you said to me "go out and talk to people", but when I do, you say don't'. This is the issue of patriarchy...and masculinity

For many, an understanding of masculinity was also to understand the different processes of socialization:

'From a very young age, we have seen that the father is the head and decision maker of the household and the brother (even if he is younger than sister) is considered the care taker of sisters. We are socialized into these roles from a very young age. These norms and roles are not questioned by anyone. It's a norm for men to not cry and move around freely without restrictions. If the boy or men digresses his role, then he is taunted and scolded (for eg: don't cry like a girl; if the husband helps the wife, then they call him a slave of his wife). While attending the course, many women skip the program on some days because they say that they haven't finished their household chores and their husbands get angry when they don't get food on time. Eventually, women started questioning, as to why women are designated to do the housework. It's a fact that both are humans and both men and women feel hungry, then why is this responsibility given only to women?'

And that:

'The society ties both men and women in specific roles. A man is expected to earn money, be tough and physically strong. While a woman is expected to do care work, be soft and fragile. The course, helps us understand that, as humans we have both these qualities and hence it's supposed to be our choice to choose who we want to be.'

While participants grappled with a concept – masculinity – that was new for most of them, they also expressed certain nuanced ideas about what they had learned:

'When I came back after my first training at FLDC, I decided to hold a training on masculinity...people were looking at me like 'why is she talking about masculinity...'. While talking to the group I also tried to convey the idea that that even women can internalise masculinity.... I wasn't able to talk about these things earlier People were hesitant when they heard me.... after all the man is the mukhiya [head] of the house... but then we were able to discuss it more openly....

If masculinity was a new topic, that of **Sexuality** was both a difficult and yet important one that was broached in various ways, with participants underlining its importance in various ways.

Participant 1: *'All of us got together to discuss the topic 'the single woman': define who is a woman and thereafter who is a single woman. Startlingly, the responses revolved around woman as an identity bestowed or overshadowed by man, she was not looked as a single valuable entity. Hence her being single stemmed from the reality that her identity was not attached to that of a man and hence she has no identity of her own. Hence, a single woman has to carry a double burden of being a woman, and furthermore a single woman. This concept was further understood with respect to her sexuality, reproductive role, social role, economic stand in society, culture and religion, labour, caste, class, education and the manifold challenges to make her presence felt as an individual entity and as a human being with dignity who equally contributes to the growth of the nation.'*

'While understanding laws related to violence against women, we also understood the perceptions around the body and sexuality of women. Women's bodies are tools for sexual exploitation, to exercise control, to possess, control over reproductive functions and thereby creating conditions and situations to give her less scope for decision making. The judgments of many severe cases in the last decade are infected by caste, class and gender bias.'

Participants were eager to make the connection between what resource persons had discussed with them and their personal experiences. Hence, in one of the workshops, the resource person has broached the topic of sexuality along the following line:

Resource person: 'So then what is Gender & Sexuality: Who do you go to bed as – Gender... Who do you go to bed with – Sexuality'.

The following are some of the responses from participants when asked to reflect upon the 'sexuality' discussions in the Course:

Participant 1: *'This course helped me question a lot of societal norms. One such example is when I said that, no person has a right to ask or tell me what to do with my body, as it's MY body. ... One girl had gone to a village fair and while she was returning, 2-3 men groped her and raped her in a jungle. In the morning, when a herder saw her he called the police station. Once the girl was taken back to her village, everyone bad-mouthed her and questioned her character. It was said, that the girl used to befriend men, and hence she was raped. it's a general assumption that, only "bad women" are raped. After this, the family of the rape survivor married her sister at a very early age because of the fear that even she would be shunned by the society. The younger sister was married in a far-away place... The villagers never cared about whether the girls were happy or what they experienced. However, after joining the course, we kept asking these questions and our thinking about women's oppression has changed. The police caught the rapist, but the women and her family are still pressurized to take their complaint back.'*

Participant 2: *After the course, our perspective about the following changed... Surrogacy- I have always wanted to be a surrogate mother, but after the recent discussion on surrogates and the lack of support of the family and the state, I have grown to understand the structural implications of surrogacy.'*

Participant 3: *'Disability and Sexuality- Previously when I saw disabled people then I sympathized with them, but never gave it a thought. However, during the course, I was pushed to think about the circumstances and problems of disabled people. Many disabled women are denied their sexuality. Added to this, a disabled women's uterus is removed because she is considered incapable of bearing children.'*

Participant 4: *Previously, I used to think that rape was the fulfilment of sexual desire. However, during the course, there were many cases (like the Bhanwari Devi) that showed us that rape was an act of power and not to fulfil desire.*

Participant 5: *Marital rape- Rape doesn't just happen outside the doors of the house. It can happen with the bedroom, between both husband and wife. Even when a woman is tired, she is not asked whether she wants to have sex or not. Only the husband's will is important for sex to happen in a marriage. However, this isn't sex, but rape.*

While, participants displayed an increasingly open attitude towards discussing sexuality in general, perhaps the most striking aspect was their desire to reflect upon the personal:

A participant: 'A change that occurred after this course, is the whole idea of sexuality. I do not hesitate expressing that I desire sex. After I joined the course, I started to ask questions of the everyday norms. One of the question that struck me even during this discussion was, "if we treat our vagina like any other body part, then will we attach the same importance of honour to it?" Added to this, whenever I read or see things, I most often view it with a feminist lens. Previously too, I used to be conscious about things, but after joining the course I am able to articulate things better and also able to understand the things that govern my action. I am very disturbed at present. Sometimes I am able to voice out my opinion, but most times I can't because I feel that it wouldn't make a difference. The deeper I go into this discourse around gender, the more unsettled I feel. Many times, I feel helpless due to the lack of solution to these issues...'



The theme of **Disability** and gender also found great resonance among the participants. As one pointed out:

'We began to understand and brainstorm, how incapacity, physical or intellectual, affects the standing of persons with disability in the eyes of the community and subsequently the general outlook. In what ways does this experience of disability influence the perception and performance of gender roles so defined by socialization, culture and gender identities.'

The plight of women with disabilities is disheartening as they face a triple handicap and discrimination due to their disability, besides their gender identity and issues. The Indian society, the economics and the market has neglected the plight of women that are not healthy and functional in the normative sense, but rather impaired and thus, almost consequently, disabled.

Further we also understood how the general approach and prevailing societal attitudes around sexuality and disability were considered as not connected. However, the reality is, as we discussed and watched lived realities in the documentaries and movies and as more and more persons have expressed over the years, is that persons with disabilities are also sexual beings with sexual fantasies, dreams, feelings and desires like anyone else. However, they are often unable to express their sexuality or fulfill their desires, not so much due to their disability, which to a degree would prove true, but because of the restrictions of their mobility, negative social attitudes, inadequate and lack of resources, social and health services and support systems, and unable to claim their rights just like other persons.

Although for a country like India, it poses as a mammoth challenge, we were also able to witness the examples of what is being done to affirm the rights of the disabled from the first-hand experiences of the facilitator who works towards the rights of the disabled.'

Gender and the Law was another theme that participants pointed to as particularly important in furthering their understanding of gender issues in general. This topic has, of course, appeared in various guises in this report already and this point is mentioned separately to underscore its importance as part of the FLDC. A further observation in this context will be found in the 'Recommendations' section below.



III. How have the FLDC deployed their learning in their own work?

A key objective of FLDC is act as source for as wide a dissemination of ideas of gender justice and the capacity to view everyday relations through the matrices of feminist principles. Hence, it is crucial to get some sense of the interaction between the FLDC participants and those with whom they work in their respective areas. What is the extent to which FLDC participants have been able to impart their own learning among their target groups as well as co-workers? This section is based on conversations with very disparate groups from Madhya Pradesh, Gurgaon and Ranchi. In MP, I had extensive group discussions with village women from the Gond, Kalar, Kavar and Yadav communities; in Gurgaon, the women I spoke to were from UP and Bihar and worked in the local factories, whereas in Ranchi I interacted with co-workers of those who had attended the FLDC. The diversity of these groups – each with their distinct socio-economic, caste, ‘tribal’, and rural/urban characteristics – provides a reasonable picture of both the success and difficulties of achieving the objectives FLDC seeks to attain. It also provides a preliminary picture of the extent to which FLDC participants have been able to convey ideas from the Course to a broader constituency

Madhya Pradesh, district Mandla, village Godadehi

Here the group consisted of women of different ages, all belonging to local self-help groups. Workers from Pradan work in this village and I had wanted to get some sense of how and to what extent the ideas picked-up during the FL DC had found their way to the ground. I will merely reproduce snippets of summaries made of the wide-ranging conversation with the women of Godadehi in order to indicate the different ways in which ‘gender’ has found a way in tier consciousness.

SS: Can you tell us something about women’s share in parental property in your village?

‘...Most often, lands are in husband and brothers’ name. At the time of parent’s death, women are given a “choice” and asked if they want land in their name. But women feel that giving them respect is much more important than getting land in their own name. Very few women claim land in their own name. When brothers take care of their sisters and are present to rescue them from all problems, then women do not claim land in their name. However, if a woman has land in her name, then she can earn income from it. The choice is always between love and land. Most women choose love. When some women choose land over love, then she is viewed with hatred and she is considered a ‘bad’ women by society. But we think that if she needed land because she had no other means of income, then she is not a bad woman. The rationale is that women are “equal” members of conjugal family’s wealth and the brothers only have his natal family’s wealth, hence this land is in the brother’s name. The women’s name on land is not formally listed unless she has lost her husband or doesn’t have a brother. In the future, we want to give our daughters equal right to our resources. Many times, if the daughter is married in a far-away village, she isn’t given any land as it’s of no use to her (can’t be cultivated).

What was notable here was awareness and learnings from the sessions conducted by one of the FLDC participants who works in the village.

- The women pointed to discussion on gendered differences between men and women and the means to reduce these differences
- They spoke of how gendered differences were illustrated using “Kamal-Kamli” (a training tool taught by Jagori).
- The women also spoke of other training tools to show how a woman’s identity is formed. This

included one which is used to show how a woman is often identified as someone's daughter, wife or mother and not by her own name. Hence losing her individual identity.

- Another activity that the women spoke of was Taraju (the scale). The women pointed out that even though women do more work than men, their work is not valued as much as men's work. Most often it's assumed that household work is either the easiest work or it's not considered as work.

One of the women pointed out that:

“If my daughter aspires to study further then in spite of having a good marriage proposal, I won't force her to get married. Marriage is a life-long process but an opportunity for a girl to make her own future is once in a lifetime”.

Gurgaon, Haryana

Another interaction with women working in the garment of Gurgaon provides a further glimpse into what those who have participated in the FLDC have been able to bring to their own work contexts. Here, I would like to specifically concentrate on comments by a young woman who was trained by an FLDC participant. The meeting took place in the premises of Nari Shakti Manch in Gurgaon. We had been having a long discussion with both those who had participated in the FLDC as well, their co-workers, and the people they have trained. These were both middle-aged women as well as those slightly older. All the women that the FLDC participants from Nari Shakti Manch have trained had been (or were) garment factory workers. The women spoke of the lack of property ownership among women (some suggesting that asking for this would cause 'problems' with brothers), the various forms of domestic violence and the fact that quite often the women who suffered it would withdraw the case for fear of further repercussions, and that male supervisors in the factories frequently used sexualised language to both insult the women as well as 'keep them in their place'. Throughout our conversation, a young woman sat slightly away from the group, but appeared engaged with the conversation. I asked her to join in with her observations. Asha (not her real name) said she was the daughter of a woman who has been trained by the FLDC participants and her remarks provided some of the most valuable insights into the role played by FLDC.

Asha's family are migrants from Bihar and both her parents work in garment factories in Gurgaon. Asha told us how her mother (the FLDC participant) had encouraged independence of thought and action in her. She spoke of how many of the ideas the mother had picked up at LDC had formed the basis of conversations at home. In particular, Asha was vocal about not putting up with unwanted male attention and harassment in public places. Sometimes, Asha's mother chimed in, 'I worry that she goes too far and picks fights with boys who might have made a remark or indulged in some form of harassment'. While saying this, Asha's mother beamed with a quiet pride. I include this anecdote to emphasize a specific aspect of FLDC: its possible impact beyond the obvious. While, it is difficult to make definitive statements in this regard, I have some sense that the ideas disseminated during FLDC are finding fertile ground in a number of different contexts. These may be unquantifiable, but their significance cannot be denied.

Ranchi, Jharkhand

Finally, in this context, I would like to mention a meeting in the village of Kujju near Ranchi. The Ranchi-based Srijan organisation works around this area on a number of issues. These include gender justice, HIV-intervention, livelihoods, prevention of domestic violence and sex-workers' rights. The most significant here appears to be the influence that FLDC participants have had on their fellow workers and hence the institutional culture of their organisation. At our meeting in Kujju, co-workers of the

FLDC participant described how the latter had initiated discussions on a variety of topics that were not earlier discussed in as open a manner. They articulated how they had been able to think of Adivasi and non-Adivasi relations in terms of gender (women's autonomy in each context), the gendered dimension of women mine workers and how to deal with parental objections when young female workers with the NGO are expected to travel with male co-workers during the course of their work.



IV. Resource Persons

There was unequivocal opinion that the resource persons had been chosen with care and their discussions genuinely opened up new worlds of learning and discussion.

V. Mentors

This is an area of concern and needs serious attention. Below are some comments from participants:

Comment 1: '...mentoring was not very well thought out. Mentoring was to be done at a voluntary time but only a few mentors were well experienced. and were able to be involved of the whole process. However, some were not able to follow through the whole process. Another issue was that, mentors and mentees couldn't meet face to face on a regular basis, and hence a bond wasn't formed.'

Comment 2: 'Mentoring is good because as mentees, we can identify our mistakes and learn. However, communicating with each other was very difficult due to a lack of regular contact. Added to this, very few participants submitted their assignments and the suggestions by the mentors in the assignments were not incorporated.'

Comment 3: 'Mentoring should include practicals in assignments because most women are involved in field work and it makes it more relatable for them.'

Comment 4: 'If mentoring is not done properly, then it would be better if it's not done at all.'

VI. Recommendations

- 1) Prepare a specially written booklet that covers the range of issues the Course seeks to dwell upon. This booklet should approach the topics drawing upon a variety of recent approaches and writings. There is a general lack of material specifically suited for the purposes of the FLDC. Suitable persons could be commissioned to prepare a module-wise reading material (in the languages the participants are most comfortable in) based on the themes covered in the FLDC.
- 2) Many participants were keen that 'gender and the law' be given a more prominent place since this is an aspect that affects everyday lives in a variety of ways. They were deeply appreciative of the resource persons who dealt with this topic and wished to have a deeper understanding of both practical as well as analytical aspects of the relation between gender and the law.
- 3) Greater emphasis on the analysis of everyday texts such as advertising, comics, soap operas, etc.
- 4) A better mentoring scheme. This is always a very difficult process, specially when the mentor and mentee do not have face to face interactions. Mentors should be given an honorarium. Otherwise, mentoring can be an unreliable process.
- 5) A greater emphasis to include more men in order that men understand issues of feminism and gender.
- 6) Length of the course: A course on feminism must understand the very real constraints of women's lives in India and particularly of those women – the majority in this workshop – who cannot pass-on the burdens of everyday domestic life to others such as hired help. Hence, it is important to think about the following, as pointed out by a participant: 'Another issue was whether to run the program in 5 phases. Traveling and distance was a major obstacle for people to come together. For instance, to come to Dehradun, we had to travel for about 48 hours and then back. Women have to handle household chores, pressures from family, agriculture work, NREGA work, etc. due to which, they couldn't give time to this.'

Some participants pointed out that:

'The [ability to participate] is affected by the distance and family commitments. For instance, during Navratri, women have to conduct some rituals, due to which it becomes difficult for them to attend the sessions. This is to say that, depending on the season, women's participation is affected in different ways. If we want to reach out to more people, then we have to take into the reality of women's lives. Eventually, women's interest in the issues will only motivate them to participate. To slowly break structures, we have to first start by scheduling the sessions around these structures, only then women can participate.'

One suggestion might be to decide places based on where the maximum number of people come.'

And further that:

'Currently, the FLDC program is conducted for 5 days in a phase with a gap of 4 months between each phase. Instead of this, the program can be held for 6-7 days per phase and should be preferably finished within a year or a little more than a year. Reducing the duration will be better for the program in terms of making it easier to participate in it.'

Though many were in favour of a shorter duration, they also suggested that:

'We should form state-wise groups for participants of the respective states to come together at one platform. For example, the participants from Jabalpur, Bhopal, Datia can form the MP group.'

- 7) There needs to be some discussion over the term 'Feminist Leadership', as distinct from an understanding of the world based on feminism that can challenge existing structures, including those that are supposedly based on feminist principles.

The following is excerpt is taken from a report following the May 2017 workshop:

'Using feminist principles [we] talked about some of the most important quality of a trainer, like:

- Her or his body language: If the trainer is too dominating, intimidating in their body language, and adopts the ways of a hegemonic masculinity the participants, the women participants, can get intimidated, and may not be able to participate in the discussions as much as they would want to or should.
- The second suggestion was around awareness, a feminist leader/trainer must be aware of the contemporary situations, so that you can critique the questions that are being raised, the policies being built and can strategize a training that is politically in sync with the materiality of different lives, for example, the maternity leaves debates.
- Third, a feminist leader must be a good listener. You must let the person complete their question, must listen, women historically have been unheard, hence a feminist leader must listen.
- Fourthly, openness. If a person does not agree with my point of view, I must respect it, and not take it as a challenge but rather engage with it. Not to try to set yourself in a rigid mould.
- Fifth, recognising your limits. Saying 'I don't know'. Knowing what you can do, and what you cannot do is very important.

Things to avoid as a feminist leader:

- Feminist leader must not force their point of view on others. You can have a dialogue, but you cannot force others.
- Biases, it is important to be aware of one's own biases and stereotypes to not give into early and easily made judgments.
- Must not misuse his or her position and force someone amongst the participants to speak up, repeatedly. This can make the person feel attacked or intimidated.
- Dismissal of others' experiences.

From the point of view of the author of this report, it is worthwhile reflecting upon the idea of producing 'feminist leaders' through discourses such as the above. There does not appear to have been a great deal of discussion on this topic. Or, at least, the participants I spoke to did not mention it in any significant manner. I believe that the points outlined above – how to avoid the pitfall of models of leadership that borrow from centralised discourses of power – are important and require more explicit discussion. As one participant from Madhya Pradesh pointed out: *'Most often, leadership even by women is done in a "masculine" manner. The course needs to think a little more to broaden the understanding of leadership. This also extends to the way a trainer conducts herself/himself. It's often assumed that a funny person wouldn't be a trainer. To be a trainer, one has to be "serious". These questions need to be dealt in further detail.'*

The author of this report is not offering a definitive opinion on this but believes that the question ‘what does the term “feminist leadership” actually mean?’ needs greater and more sustained discussion. If such a discussion took place on an extended basis, it was not reflected in my conversations with different participants.

VII. Concluding remarks

It is not possible to judge the effectiveness of a process such as the FLDC through purely quantitative means or through means that suggest degree of measurability. It is also important to remember that the effectiveness of a course such as this cannot be contextualised within a framework that suggests that certain outcomes might have been achieved – instilling feminist consciousness and effective utilisation of the measures of empowerment discussed during meetings, for example – immediately as participants returned to their organisations. It is best to think of the outcomes – though it is still too early to come to a quick decision on this – as consisting of both tangible and intangible aspects.

The ‘tangibles’ might be thought in terms of:

- 1) **Understanding of the abstract and concrete nature of gender displayed by the participants:**
Only girls cook in villages and boys don’t. Men in the house cooks partially mostly non-vegetarian dishes. Mostly women wash clothes. Discussion around parental property. Opting for parental property is seen as a binary between love and greediness. Thus, no one opts for parental property out of social stigma.
- 2) **An understanding of the concrete nature of women’s oppression and what to do about it (education, for example):** So, for example, in Godadehi village in MP, women talked about why men in villages practice polygamy. Why is it that women are not thus allowed? The women also spoke about if there is a choice between education and marriage of girls, women prefer education, thus showing education is given priority over marriage of girls. Many women expressed satisfaction over gradual transformation and more freedom of girls now as compared to when they were married.
- 3) **Discussions on patriarchy that helped in formulating a clearer understanding of the structures of patriarchy.**
- 4) **Discussions on how one must organise a training program to effectively manage the content as well as the time, and the clarity of objectives.**
- 5) **Discussions on new tools of training, methods to accelerate discussions in a group, and a sense of confidence.**

The ‘intangibles’, on the other hand might be listed as

- 1) Women speaking about the ability to ‘speak out’
- 2) Changes in their lifestyles: being able to encourage greater independence in daughters’ as well their own public lives
- 3) Continuous domestic negotiations between wives and husbands over housework, an aspect which would not even have been thought of as a possible topic of discussion

The growing idea of female camaraderie. So, as one participant mentioned *'FLDC has become very integral to us like a family- a social one, we have lovely bond', and another added, 'we want to keep this association with Jagori forever and would love to come for any event. We have built friendships that will continue for a long time.'*

While evaluating a course such as this, I believe the intangibles – that immeasurable aspect that nevertheless enhances one's self-worth and autonomy – is as important as the tangible.

The above inventory asks for reflections on a number of issues. These include:

- 1) How does Jagori plan to explore future opportunities for participants so that they might continue to consolidate a critical feminist consciousness? There is a risk that unless there is some form of on-going support, the work of the FLDC might, at best, remain a fleeting intervention and, at worst, might simply be forgotten, being remembered as just another workshop. It is important to remember that the vast majority of the participants do not come from environments that support feminist endeavours and it is important to provide some kind of 'back-up' support. In this context, it should be mentioned that the participants themselves have felt this need: a group of them organized a meeting in December 2017 in Madhya Pradesh in order to explore a future course of action that might lead to on-going interactions among the group. Is it possible, for example, that Jagori might help sponsor periodic meetings of participant cohorts?
- 2) How many topics can be covered within the course in order to make a realistic impact upon participants' understanding. Is it better for example, to have a smaller number of themes, overseen by a smaller number of resource persons? This might also be a way in which limitations of funding – if that is a constraint – might be overcome in the future.
- 3) It is sometimes suggested that a course such as this ought to be more focused and that in order to achieve this, there ought to be just one 'feminist' framework of analysis. I believe that this perspective doesn't sit well with what the best of feminist thinking has taught us: that issues of gender lie at the intersection of a number of other processes and feminist analysis requires multiple frameworks of analysis.
- 4) How should we think about the relationship between the FLDC and other courses on feminist methods and thinking? In general, we should be careful to not compare a course of this kind to seemingly similar ones that may be conducted by other NGOs. In the audience it addresses – specifically their socio-economic background and their 'cultural capital' – FLDC is quite unique and its significance will be lost through comparisons with, say, courses whose participants might be drawn from among those already familiar with feminist methods.
- 5) It is important that future versions of the course pay specific attention to the linkages between concepts, everyday life and the capacity to influence policy formulations. That is to say, participants will benefit through an understanding of how abstract ideas might be used to explain how people's lives might be changed through application of feminist perspectives to policy formulation. This is a difficult pedagogical venture but a start needs to be made and Jagori is ideally placed to do it.

The most striking aspect of the variety of activities through which FLDC has sought to achieve its objectives is that participants have learnt to connect everyday life events as contexts whose full meaning can only be understood through an understanding of the ways in which humans are always gendered beings and that their gender has consequences for their place in the world. This has been particularly noticeable for the female participants (easily the majority) who are now able to put words to their experiences.

Further, various aspects of the course have provided legitimacy to perceptions of inequity and discrimination that are frequently dismissed as excessive complaints against the 'natural' order of things, i.e. the relationship between men and women. The multiple ways of conveying knowledge – and quite complex and challenging knowledge at that – has also given participants confidence that this isn't only (as one person said) 'something that university lecturers can explain'.

It is also important to recognise that the Course has introduced participants to forms of knowledge and a capacity of critique that the vast number participants simply had no access to earlier, either formal or informally. It has introduced them to the idea that there is strong linkage between so-called theory and so-called practice: that 'theoretical' notions such as gender equality, women's autonomy, and power relations are the ways in which every day human sociality is formed. It is also worthwhile pointing out that a great number of participants come from rural backgrounds and I believe that – given the greatly asymmetrical system of education in our country – FLDC has functioned as an avenue of providing awareness of gender issues that might otherwise be completely denied. This aspect cannot be overemphasized: urban contexts are far more amenable to forms of critical awareness of the world that rural life may not provide.

During the course of gathering material for the evaluation, I visited (as discussed earlier) a relatively remote village in Madhya Pradesh where the overwhelming population is of the Gond indigenous group. I have described above how a worker with PRADAN (herself from a small village) had participated in the FLDC and subsequently carried out a 'gender workshop' in the village. In my village meeting with women of several SHGs, I had sought to get a sense of what the village women had made of the workshop conducted by the PRADAN employee. The women who gathered for the discussion can be characterised as some of the most marginal citizens of the country: they have no property in their own name; perform hard labour such as manual farming and tend leaf collection in distant forests; have minimal or no education and have limited or no opportunities for acquiring it. What was remarkable is that after initial hesitation in talking about gender issues – particularly the various forms of disparities between the genders from childhood onwards – the group became increasingly vocal and animated about the topic. The women were able to recall the significance of the stories – where gender issues were narrated in the manner of invented folk-tales – narrated by the PRADAN worker for their own lives as women. They were, in other words, keen to engage with the 'problem' of gender. While I do not mean to suggest that the PRADAN worker provided an instant solution to the problems of gender inequity faced by the women of the village, her intervention certainly appears to mark the beginnings of a dialogue and the sense that these issues are important to discuss, rather than 'mere' complaints by women.

In this way, FLDC appears to be reaching a population that frequently remains outside the catchment area of gender awareness programmes. The gradual dawning of such awareness is also – as was palpably noticeable in the instance narrated in the previous paragraph – the making of subjects aware of their own potential as humans and an understanding of the obstructions in the way of achieving such potential.

