

GENDER BASIC COURSE

A REPORT

11-14 NOVEMBER 2008
GANGTOK, SIKKIM





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JAGORI has been organizing Gender Basic Course for grassroots level and community activist for many years. With the objective to clarify different concepts and understand the interrelation with prime social events today, it also equips them with a perspective to monitor and evaluate themselves and everything around them. The GBC has always been the platform to form and strengthen networks and play an active role with the women's movement.

In reference to that, this year JAGORI conducted its English GBC in collaboration with Human Rights Law Network, Sikkim at Hotel Highway, Gangtok for four days.

Unlike past years, all the GBC's participants were women, activists and service providers who had been working on the issues related to women's daily life. 22 participants from three districts, north, west and east districts of Sikkim, from various organizations working on health, HIV, Violence Against Women, counselling, disability, environment, SHGs, etcetera. The four day workshop comprised of gender, patriarchy, power, Violence against women, empowerment, health and development.

Seema and Anupriya were the resource persons from JAGORI. Doma, a human rights lawyer & activist, also the HRLN state coordinator there, played a very inspiring role enriching the discussions and making it more culture specific.



The training module for the workshop:

DATE	SESSION	CONTENT
11 Novembe	Introduction to the workshop Building learning environment Understanding Power	Introduction of JAGORI and GBC Introduction of the participants Expectations and apprehensions of the participants and Spelling out the objectives and program schedule Ground rules Sociogramming Construction of power identities Sources of power Intersection of different systems of dominance
12th November	Recapitulation Understanding Gender and its implications on one's life Patriarchy Film and discussion	Self exploration of gender identities Social construction of gender Construction of stereotypes of femininity and masculinity Sites of Gender As a system that underlies gender discrimination 'Football Shootball Hai Rabba'
13th Nov	Recapitulation Patriarchy Health	Implications of patriarchy – violation of rights Women's Reproductive Health
14th November	Trip to Changu Lake Recapitulation Empowerment Evaluation Concluding the workshop	Indicators and Principles of Empowerment Gender equity and equality Condition and Position of women Rights Based Approach Viewing one's work with a gender lens Evaluation of the workshop/feedback from participants

DAY I

All the participants had arrived a day earlier and thus the workshop began early.

The day started with a round of introduction of the participants and then led to a brief orientation of Gender Basic Course and JAGORI's work.

Then the participants were engaged in a clock game which was basically played to make all know each other. The group was divided into two and put in two circles one outside the other. Both circles were asked to move, one in clock wise direction and the other in anti-clock directions. The resource person was to make a clap and the circles would stop moving and then find the nearest person around and get to know her. This game was played four times and the group loved it. There was so much of excitement and thrill everywhere. It was great to know that many of the participants were actually able to meet and know more than 4 people.

The strengthen the process of ice breaking another greeting game was played where, both the resource person held a large piece of cloth as a boat and defined a crisis situation where to life save only 5 people could be in the boat. Each set of five then got both another 5 mins to talk amongst themselves and know each other well.

After the exciting game all were asked to share their experience and feelings, which was very positive and encouraging.

After a short tea break, all the participants were asked to share about their expectations, contribution and apprehension from the training. All were asked to think on their own first and then four groups were made to discuss and make chart paper presentations. The presentations were then shared with the larger group.



Some of the *Expectations* are as follows:

- How can women and men in our society be equal?
- To know about violence against women and strategies to deal with it.
- To know what rights and benefits can a disabled woman make use.
- How to make rural woman/ men aware about their rights?

- To know about legal rights of women and involve police in effectively helping women.
- Information on income generation programmes for women.
- Information on human rights law network.
- Strategies to deal domestic violence cases.
- Information on women's empowerment.
- How to network with other NGOs working in the villages.
- How to ensure and enhance participation of women in NGOs.
- How to deal with the gender discrimination between girl and boy.

Apprehensions:

- There is not enough time to deal with all of these issues that has come as expectations.
- Whether everyone will participate in the workshop.

Contributions of the Participants were discussed and some *Ground Rules* for the workshop was decided.

- All the participants will ensure participation and will encourage others for the same.
- Time for the sessions will be maintained.
- Everyone will see to that all get chance to share.
- All will respect others opinion and will not personally humiliate any for the same.

After this exercise the group was asked to share their experiences till now. Followed by a break the next session began where the participants were played the sociogramming exercise.

The group was asked to re group itself in response to the answers of the questions or statement made. After which everyone shared their opinion and also experiences if any. This was a good exercise to bind the group well and also find out their level of understanding on different issues. Some of the statements were:

Group yourself according to the :

- First alphabet of your name.
- On the basis of your favourite colour.
- On the basis of the different districts you have come from or belong to : the group divided itself into 3 subgroups, the north, south and east Sikkim districts.
- What do you like best about your district? : Some shared the beauty of the nature, some shared the richness of medicinal plants, some talked about the friendly nature of the people, and some felt the richness of culture and traditions made their districts exquisite.
- What do you dislike the most? : some talked about the bad roads, some of no hospitals and schools, some shared about the increasing problems and concerns on alcoholism and domestic violence on women.
- On basis of education: there were many groups ranging from those who hadn't completed school to those holding a doctorate degree. Many participants shared how they were stopped from attending schools due to financial crunch in the family though their brothers were allowed, or because their school/ college were very far away. Some shared how they never wanted to study as they felt whatever was taught was not actually required to deal with the everyday struggle of existence. This followed a discussion the whole issue of formal education vs. folklore and common knowledge and how the former was destroying the other.
- How many people have worked in other areas before joining the development sector? A lot of the participants had worked in other sector.
- What was the reason for choosing to work in this sector? the reason being that they felt that by working in this sector they will actually be able to help women gain their rights and freedom from violence.
- On the basis of your marital status: the group first divided themselves as single, married and separated or divorced.
- Was it an arranged marriage or did you know or were seeing your partner before?
- How many of you have changed your name (first and/or family) after getting married?
- How many of you believe in inter-caste and inter-religion marriage? And how many of you have married inter caste and inter religion?
- How many of you refused to give or take dowry in your marriage?
- How many of you have decided to remain single? What are the reasons for this decision?

After a round of discussion they regrouped themselves to married, looking for someone and never to marry. Participants shared their experiences to choosing and re-choosing their stand. Sharing brought in discussion of the need to get married and of heterosexual vs. homosexual relations and the social sanctity that the former hold to justify it as normal. Those part of the married group shared if there's was an arranged or love marriage, inter-caste/ inter-religious marriage. All of them had changed their name after marriage. On the issue of dowry though the group at first negated the existence of the same among the tribals and Buddhist populations, but later realized the subtle forms of gifts exchange as marks of it. It is needless to say that the participants sharing on this topic had experiences of the complexities of marital relation for the women, her loss of identity and independence and also frequencies of violence meted by her. There was still a hope in them to find a right 'partner' with whom they really would share their life.

- Divide into groups based on your religious identities: majority were Buddhist, some hindus and some tribals.
- How many of you observe fasts: all participants said they observe fast. All of them were women. Some kept it for their families, some for their religion, some to be fit.
- Is there a fast for a girl's or a woman's well being also: participants couldn't think of any.
- How many of you have experienced violence? How many of you have not experienced any sexual violence? : Only some of the participants claimed to have faced violence. But when the term was explained and shared all joined them. There was a lot of sharing of personal experiences. The vulnerability of women and women being women's worst enemies came up. The later was decided to be discussed at length in the days to come.

After a lunch break the group gathered for a round of songs, folk songs from the state and then entered in to the second half of the day. All the participants were asked to share three identities of them. Most of the participants shared their relational identities, them being someone's daughter, wife, and mother. The group found it difficult to think of identities which were solely theirs. After another round of discussions some of the identities on the board were woman, Buddhist, middle class, social worker,



The discussion brought in facets of power discrimination and violence as grounds for committing violence against one. To understand power and its aspects in one's life power tableaux was played. The larger group was divided into four sub groups and each were given a site to enact or mime. The sites included home, workplace, religion and panchayat. Each group was given 20-25 minutes to prepare the tableaux. The tableaux should reflect on power relations within each site. the groups were to present their tableaux one at a time. Once a group freezes, ask the audience to observe closely. Ask the audience what they see, "who is in a position of power and powerlessness, what is the source of power?" such that power relations become evident.



After the presentation of all four groups, each were asked how they felt and what they wanted to show from what they did.

The discussion which followed listed the different expressions of power, at workplace, the difference in positions and job profile exhibiting one as powerful in comparison to other, or at home, wife playing the role of the powerless in comparison to the husband and daughter in comparison to son. The participants felt it was something they felt and saw everyday. Inequality in exertion of power domains have always been seen as normal and just, unless recognized. It then turns discrimination and finally come out as violence.

The group realized that all the sites they had enacted had expressions on violence. Also women were found in majority powerless situation. They have no respect and no recognition. Women have always been on the deceived end of power politics. Like in reference to the previous exercise, all the participants were giving in identity of that they have inside their household. The resource person pointed out that in case there were male participants they would identify themselves with status and achievements acquired outside their homes. Women have always been conditioned to believe that there place is only at home. Therefore they are in great pressure to be and do good in their place of belonging, and thus the whole yardstick of women trying to be the 'good' women and 'good' girl always.

SOCIAL IDENTITIES

Random/Sporadic Violence		Systematic/Systemic Violence
Youth	AGE	Elders and Children
Rich	CLASS	Poor
Brahmin, Baniya, Rajput	CASTE	Dalits
Male	GENDER	Female, Kinnar
Heterosexual	SEXUALITY	Homosexual/Bisexual
Everyone else	RACE/ ETHNICITY	Adivasis, North east
Hindus,Buddhism	RELIGION	Muslim/Christians
Non-disabled People	DISABILITY	Disabled People (physically, mentally, sensory)

From the identities listed,

- All the social identities are not homogenous groups or categories, each are also interconnected and interdependent.
- Thus every individual actually has more than one identity, which has a very important role to play in determining his/her status in the society.
- The facilitator then focused on the Gender as one of the prime social identities as it is one that cuts cross in all other social identities. Also gender is something very much part of the private life of the individual. It begins in the family with our loved ones, with whom we share the home and hearth, thus the gender identity not only something acceptable but also, its something justified and thus come justified the asymmetrical power relations with it.
- Also the gender identity attempts to control the sexuality of the individual.

The group was quite unclear about the concept of sexuality. Sexuality is not synonymous to sex. It talks about attraction, in various forms and expression. Expressions can be in any form, it can be love and interest in art, culture, music etcetera. Sex being one of its form.

The social sanction to a form of sexuality, heterosexuality and the politics of maintaining the unbalanced power quo between men and women was also discussed. The sanctioning actually unjustly abnormalises all other forms of sexuality. Heterosexuality too has a expression of power through it. It's the 'normal' and accepted form of relation. Social sanctioning also limits expressions of attraction.

There was also a discussion made on the 3rd gender category.

The discussion was intriguing and the participants seemed to have their first exposure to such topics.

Day II

Followed by a break, the next issue taken up that day was Gender.

Two participants were asked to volunteer for this exercise. Ask one participant to become a newborn boy (name him Kamal) and the other to become a newborn girl (name her Kamali). It was explained to the volunteers that they had to take one step forward if and when they feel an opportunity has been accorded and one step back if and when they feel an opportunity has been restricted or denied.

The group was to indicate changes (physical, emotional, sexual, psychological changes) that take place in girls and boys at that particular age. A time period of a few months was first taken and then it increased to gaps of few years. The groups had to be constantly encouraged to think deep about any change in terms of assigning different roles and responsibilities, restrictions for playing certain games, do's and don'ts in behaviour, pressure in performing certain rituals, opportunities for self empowerment, etcetera. The last day's exercise on sociogramming, discussions done too helped them.

It was very clearly visible that from the very birth of the child, opportunities and prospects for better life resources were predominantly found in the hands of boys and men. Women were found to be caught in the web of restrictions and control. Analysis at very stage, on how discrimination affects one's personality, choices, opportunity and career and how just all these discrimination are made by society.

The participants were asked to think of their own childhoods – did their parents or teachers ever tell them to “Be a good girl” or “Act like a man”? Ask them to reflect quietly for ten minutes and write down in their notebooks three occasions on which they can remember being told to “Be / Behave like a good girl” or “Act like a man”. In each of these cases, the participants were asked to answer:

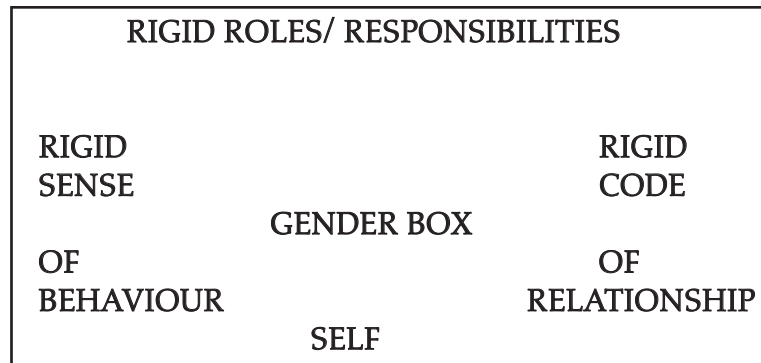


1. What was the message being conveyed?
2. When was the first time you received such a message?
3. Who was the person who gave that message?
4. How did you feel?
5. How would you have felt if had someone from the other sex passed this message, than the original messenger?
6. How was the message conveyed? Are there other ways of conveying? If yes, what?
7. What happens if one disobeys?

Then the participants were asked to form four groups and each group was asked to share within themselves their experiences. 15 minutes were given for sharing. The facilitators drew the Gender Box, asking each group to answer to every question.

The debriefing showed how all the messages were targeted keeping a socially acceptable role in mind for man or woman, which came with some very well defined responsibilities, which determined every manifested behaviour we carried out. All these were very well related to the relationships we share for being a social being and all these final cater to the development of the Self, based on the perception of the consequences of obeying or disobeying that message.

- The exercise used the 'Gender Box' image to explain the rigid norms, values, expectations and stereotypes that are constructed by the society around us, through messages given to us as part of our socialization from our very childhood, which results in the social identity that each carry.
- There exist a separate Gender Box for women and men. There is a clear difference in the roles, responsibilities assigned, relationships and also in the behaviour patterns. The difference results in different development in self in men and women. Men turn into a conformant and constructor of the gender stereotypes, whereas women become the follower.



- The 'third Gender' or the 'transgender' category are in the worst state as they are part of neither of the boxes and thus are socially ostracized and face serious discrimination and violence.
- All the four walls of the box are determined by the socially laid norms and expectations. They differ socially, culturally and are also time specific, actually form the parameter form determining masculinity and femininity.
- It was not difficult to grasp that the male is the primary messenger and that the woman is a carrier of the message. This is what maintains peace within the gender box, to ensure construction and maintenance masculinity and femininity and thus a smooth functioning of patriarchy.
- There was a clear demarcation of the authority and responsibilities that are transmitted to men and women. Men are the 'norm' of society and women are the 'carrier', though the only difference between them is that of their reproductive role!
- The construction of masculinity and femininity is social. The biological difference was very marginal. The process of socialization through its agents has created this. But the sociological conditions and factors have a profound impact on our natural and biological conditions. People have accepted them as normal and justified, and they perceived as biological. Thus women today have failed to reason and question anything. They accept all that comes to them.
- A large number of people act as agents in this process in trying to initiate the 'good' and the 'bad' image into everyone from a very young age. Starting from family, peers, teachers, community, all actors and social institutions enforce the messages aimed at gendered socialization, through rewards and punishments.
- The norms, expectations and values from the ideology, which is carried out by the Gender Box. The ideology is very powerful, and there is a general consensus that gender discrimination exists and it is grave, but it is accepted today as normal,

mundane and just. What complexes the picture is that there is the whole system of rewards and punishments attached with it to maintain it. Its is the strong fear of the consequences, mainly the fear of losing the 'good' image that make people conform to the rigid stereotypes, and thus they find themselves in the Gender Box.

SEX	GENDER
Biological	Social
Differences	Discrimination
Static	Changes
Universal	Depends on time, space, place, context and culture.

Gender thus forms the basis of the discrimination one faces.

The experiences shared by the participants were highly gendered and discriminatory. All the participants were excited and amazed to see how similar messages they had received for being a girl. They got very intrigued when they themselves could perceive that not only were the messages similar but also the agents of communication and even the age about which such messages were passed too was same too. The participants realized how deep the impact of these messages have been on how they had been treated from their childhood for being a girl and how every time they had thought or even tried to go out of this box, they have faced resistance.

After the day long discussion on gender, it was inevitable to see where can we find it? Groups were made to discuss and present where and how gender was visible in different sites of Resources, Space, Relationship and Language. Debriefing on the exercise, discussions on equal rights to property, equal treatment meted to daughter and daughter in law, opportunities and restrictions through control of spaces, defining the boundaries of relations.

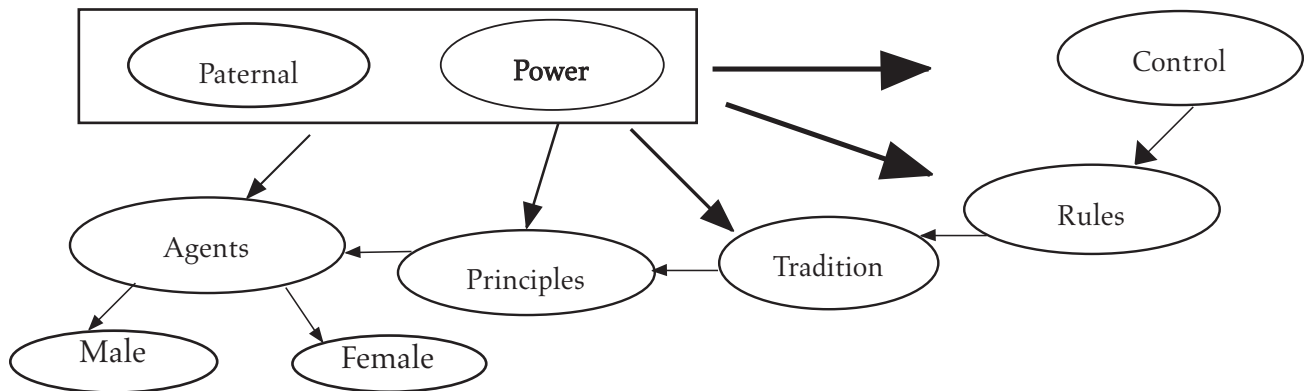
The day ended with the screening of 'Football Shootball Hai Rabba', a film on gender discrimination and violence.

Day III

The day started with a story telling exercise on two frogs which was used to identify the social characteristics of male and female frogs. Then the discussion went to how all of this are social and how biologically female are much stronger than men.

The next issue of discussion was to understand the structure and politics behind gender discrimination; patriarchy.

PATRIARCHY: A DEFINATION



Patriarchy → POWER → Decision making
Domination
Control
Violence

CONTROL is maintained through RULES which supports it – GENERATION through GENERATIONS it gives and justifies POWER to men, saying it is natural and universal. One breaking the rule, if a man it is a MISTAKE, if a women it becomes a 'SIN'.

Patriarchy as a tree it has three major components - Leaves, Trunk and Root. The **Leaf** part reflects the customs and rituals are practiced in our society. This we could see as the expression of patriarchy which reflects and perpetuates the low/suppressed status of women in our society. It shows how cultural practices perpetuate and reinforce the discrimination between men and women and lead to women's oppression.

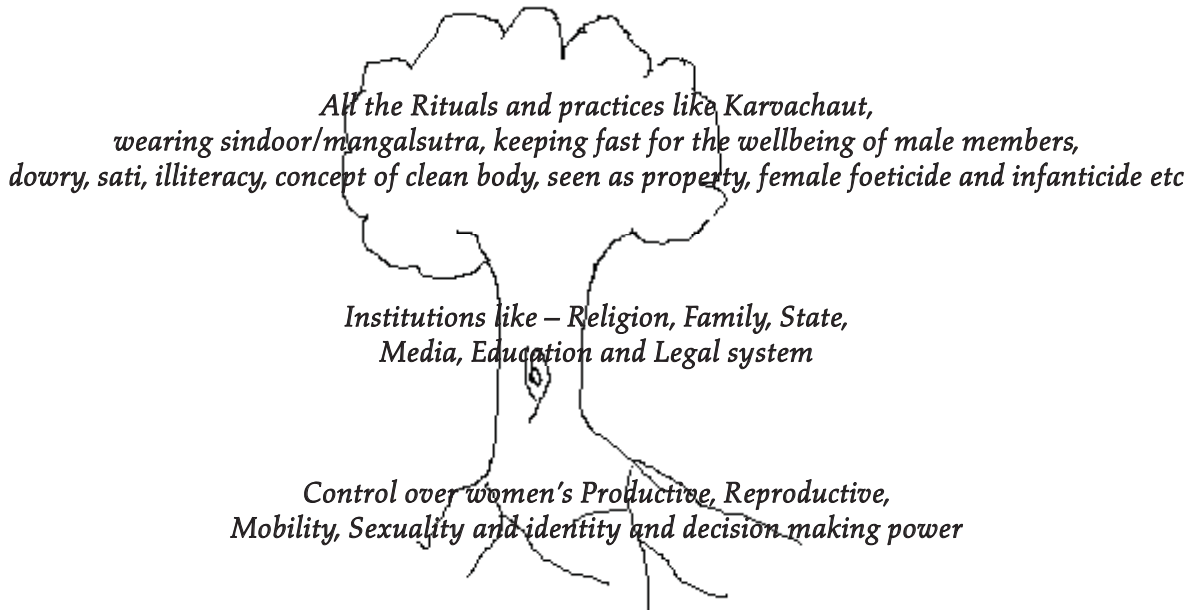
The **Trunk** part presents the different institutions which are simply a vehicle to reinforce and perpetuate the patriarchal values. All the institutions work in collaboration which makes the patriarchal structure very strong.

Root is underneath and invisible. It reflects the ideology of patriarchy which controls women's mobility, productive and reproductive power and her sexuality.

Some of the issues discussed were:

- Marriage is the best and sacred unit.
- Heterosexual is a norm.
- Fear of rape is used as weapon to control women's mobility and sexuality.
- Domestic violence and gender discrimination are accepted as a very common phenomenon. Raising voice against them is seen as an action of disrespect and harm to culture.
- Good women and bad women - images of 'good' and 'bad' are used as moral judgments premised on her character and her physical appearance.

Patriarchy Tree



- Women are women's enemy – Women too are product of patriarchy and are conditioned in order to strengthen it by imbibing the ideologies and values of this structure. There is a constant battle between the image of good women and bad women which has clear benefit and loss so many a times in these bargain women tend to oppress other women.
- Men are the norm and women are the messengers or carriers of it.
- Women are property of men.



To understand the violation of rights of women as a tool to keep women in control and possession the linkage was made from patriarchy to VAW. To understand the dimension of violence, the violence matrix was drawn, where small groups were made and every group was asked to share amongst themselves, experiences if violence with each other, keeping a few pointers in mind alike what was the incident, who was the violator, when and where it happen, what form of violence was it, was any action taken, if yes, then what etcetera.

The groups after discussion shared without any personal details, which was put down by the facilitator as a matrix.

Kind of violence	Site of violence	Perpetrator of violence	Any effort to stop it
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Points discussed were :

1. Known perpetrators of violence.
2. Most common site of violence is the home.
3. No safe place for women.
4. Perpetrators are of the privileged section. Violence is a means to show power.
5. Hierarchy of violence : rape the most sin crime, as it's a threat to the whole patriarchal system, as it brings up the question whose the father of the conceived child?
6. Women proves that they have had violations of rights and thus they are tortured and feared not to express themselves.
7. Patriarchy sanctions violence.
8. Why do women accept violence.
9. Violence as a form of social control - State as a perpetrator of violence.
10. Need to end silence towards violence.

After the long session, the group took a break and went outing in the city.



After dinner session on women's reproductive health continued, which addressed the myths of menstrual, sexual and reproductive health.

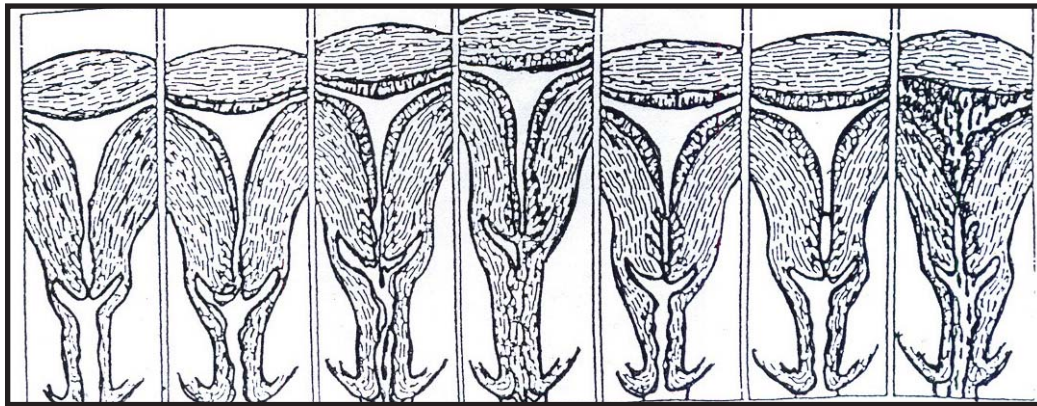
The gender socialisation process discourages women from exploring the needs and problems of their body and pushes women towards a culture of silence. The patriarchal system oppresses women to the extent that they alienate themselves completely from their own body.

During the discussion lots of questions related to functioning of reproductive organs and problems related to menstruations were raised by the participants. Some of the topics of discussions were

What is menstrual cycle and how does it function:

Our uterus is an elastic muscular body, which is connected to the ligaments form the back (back bone). Together with it are two almond shaped ovaries full of needlepoint size eggs. The pituitary gland from its font gives the signal for the egg to get ready and the egg and the estrogen (hormone) get created together in the ovary. There may be more that one egg at one time. However, only one mature egg comes out of the ovary into the fallopian tube. This egg remains alive in the fallopian tube for twelve to twenty-four hours and if within this period it unites with the male egg, it fertilizes and the woman can get pregnant. If there is no male egg (sperm) to meet the female egg, the layer created iin preparation for the fetus comes out in the form of menstruation.

The participants were also interested to know how does a women get pregnant, what are the common reproductive problems a woman faces, why is periods painful, what is menopause and how do we understand we are getting one etcetera.



There was also discussion on white discharge and problems women face. Family planning methods were also shared.

Family planning

- Copper T
- Condom: Female /Male
- Diaphragm
- Tubectomy
- Injectibles : Depoprovera / Net en
- Contraceptive pills

They were so intrigued to know about themselves that they actually wanted the session to go on the whole night.

Day IV

The whole group went on a visit to Changu lake, gangtok in the morning. After back from the visit, the sessions continued after lunch.



Women's empowerment: the participants when asked to define empowerment, talked about, collective effort, women being given basic right to life etcetera. The facilitator pointed how the word empowerment have often been used lightly, joke the efforts done to change the situation, and that it too is another dimension of patriarchy. The example of 'durgavahini' in reference to the Gujrat Carnage, 2000 was shared as a negative impact of empowerment.

Also discussion on the fashion industry was made, as it often is quoted to represent women who are empowered, but when we probe deep we realize that these women actually are strengthening the status quo. They have no rights to take a decision, they are mere entertainers, and also they propagate the belief that women are commodities. The concept of liberation from the angle of security was also debated. Liberation is defined by one self, it cannot be put down by anyone else.

The power tableau exercise done on the first day was recollected and power was defined was 'satta', takat, aspects of dominance- the negative role of power- POWER OVER.

Power has both positive and negative role. Forms of power:

POWER OVER: dominance

POWER TO: to give someone power of information, skills etcetera

POWER WITH: collective power

POWER WITHIN: self potential/confidence

All the three POWER TO, WITH and WITHIN together constitute EMPOWERMENT.

The tableau was replayed and the group was asked to make the powerless people empowered.

It is very difficult to fight the game of power in the context of patriarchy as it constantly tries to justify and normalizes the POWER OVER. The social pressure againt any form of positive social change is tremendous. At times women too succumb to it as it is often advantageous for them and as they too are outcome of the same patriarchal nexus.

The groups then worked to find how can they include the dimensions of empowerment from a gender perspective into their work.

- How does your work define empowerment?
- What are its indicators?
- After the training, what changes do you advocate?



It was great experience for the participants to actually sit back and review their work on the issue of gender and empowerment. Many found it difficult to evaluate. Some of the suggested outcomes were:

1. Constant review of their work.
2. Breaking the chain of social perception, challenging the patriarchal roots in everything they do.
3. Networking to reach out to more and more people and also work in an holistic manner.
4. Work towards addressing the strategic gender needs which will change not only the condition but also the position of women in society.
5. Work from a Rights Based Approach rather than a Welfarist Approach.
6. Work from both the Equity and Equality angle.

Also the whole debate whether men again should be taken as the yardstick to women's development and empowerment was made. The group came to a consensus view that men should not be the goal of women's development. All are equal and let's work towards it. Often for that people in marginalized positions are required to be given special favour and in this context the issue of 'reservations' came up, which was realized to be necessary, for women even in today's developed nation stage, needs that extra push towards the egalitarian society.

The day and the workshop ended with the web exercise, where everyone was to comment on any other participants in the workshop. All were asked to give in positive feedback or even advices which one could use to improve oneself. A follow-up workshop request was also made by the participants so a thematic workshop was decided to be done soon.



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