

## **Rural Working Women and their Stories in their ‘Language’: A Case Study**

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### **Structured Abstract:**

**Purpose:** There are many working women, and they all have their own tale of struggle. This paper aims at finding out the linguistic repression of rural working women and the differences between the urban and rural work places for a woman worker. The setting remains strictly rural.

**Methodology:** This paper is purely based on primary data collected from five women, from five different professions. They have been interviewed with different set of questions, encouraging them to share their views and struggles. Conclusions have been drawn analyzing the responses of sample respondents.

**Findings:** After conversing with these women, and also few other women of their same professions, it can be concluded that , gender as well as your area or locality, both play crucial role in how you are being treated. And as this paper mainly focuses on language, the verbal vulgarity has a higher graph in the rural areas.

**Research Limitations:** There are still women who are not willing to talk about their journey or are still scared to break through the patriarchal language.

**Practical Implications:** The language of those rural working women, for whom establishing their voice has been a challenge but still they make it possible.

**Originality:** The studied region has never been taken under for women empowerment survey earlier and these women have never been interrogated before. This paper shall contribute a little new experience to the genre.

**Keywords:** Language, Repression, Patriarchy, Ecriture Feminine, First Wave Feminism, Fourth Waver Feminism, Rural Women.

### **Introduction**

Feminist researchers on language, expose the oblique patriarchal agenda behind linguistic discourses. They argue that language is one of the strategies used by men to fortify and perpetuate patriarchal ideologies. The label “female” confines to domesticity and creativity is regarded a taboo for women. Still there has been a huge lot of women breaking through this stereotype every time and going out to work, explore and bring lashes down on patriarchy.

This survey is made on a rural backdrop with those women, who not only fight the battle against patriarchy but also the rural ideologies and enhanced taboos attached to women.

The setting being a village panchayat of Bhatjangla, Palpara, Krishnagar, Nadia, five work fields are taken in the forefront, with due respect and gratitude towards other professions too, which could not be included in this paper. It is about how women are shunned from using their language in patriarchal work field, even today, notwithstanding their capabilities.

### **Literature Review**

Working on the language of women in this patriarchal society has been a talk of words since first wave feminism. There has been works which have enlightened me to take up this topic and contribute my part in it. Buchi Emecheta, Nigerian female writer, has very vividly pointed out the women struggle and repression in her works. Her novel The Slave Girl, is considered to be one of the very best pre colonial books, where she narrates the double marginalisation that a black girl faces.

Ama Ata Aidoo, a Ghanaian author, in her work The Girl Who Can, is a short story that has dealt with the African women's struggle to establish their place in the society. Again in the works of Margaret Atwood like her The Handmaid's Tale, narrates the struggle of the handmaids who are forbidden from using their birth name and have to use their male masters' name. It explores the theme of women in subjugation and their breaking through it.

Indian poetess, Kamala Das in her autobiographical poetry An Introduction, talks about her linguistic repression. She had to fight with her own people to establish her voice through a foreign language, English, instead of her mother tongue.

Bengali women writers have immensely contributed in establishing the status of women, dismantling the social norms. Writers like Mahashweta Devi, Tilottoma Majumdar, Taslima Nasrin and many more have always painted through their words in their works, the struggle of women authors, working women and house wives and their marginalisation.

In west Bengal the female literacy rate is 30.25%, higher than surrounding states. School enrolment of girls is 39.1% compared to 60.9% of boys. The female work participation rate is 5.58%, low compared to 13.99% for India, because women do not work traditionally out of home. While the Indian constitution grants equal rights to women, this is not the reality in

West Bengal. There are signs that the women are becoming emancipated, however. In this purview the author proposes to do a qualitative study on the topic “Rural Working Women and Their Stories in their language”, so far knowledge goes such type of study has not been conducted in India earlier.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This paper aims at finding out the following things:

- The jobs that the rural women dare to take up as professions.
- The treatment they receive at their respective workplaces, and their differences.
- How the language of the women is repressed and their battle to establish their voice.
- Differences traced between urban working women and rural working women.

### **Methodology**

This method includes individual interviewing with the respective women. Women from five different professions have been included, keeping it strictly within the rural area, and two women who come from urban area to work in this rural area. Different questionnaires have been set up according to the person being interrogated, keeping in mind her workplace and job type. This work is strictly kept within rural areas and established female workers are interrogated. The study has been conducted at Bhatjangla palpara, a panchayat area adjacent to Krishnagar City of West Bengal.

### **Analysis and Discussion**

Interviewee responses are transcribed in this phase of the paper, and their views on being a female worker is taken into account, to draw a conclusion about how their voice is addressed even at this progressive period of time. Some of them are quite experienced in their respective professions and have come a long way. They have given a sketch of how the scenario has kept changing down the years. Some are new to their job, and they have pointed out how they are still struggling to bring a change and make themselves audible in this society who turns no ear to them. The author tries to portray the detail interview of the sample women below:

*DOCTOR (posted in a rural hospital)*

Q: How old were you, when you joined as a doctor? Which was your first posting?

Doctor: I was 23 years old, when I joined the hospital. It was in a remote village hospital, and it has been three years that I am still working there.

Q: How many female staffs were already there? How many of lady doctors did join with you?

Doctor: in last 25 years, there has been no lady doctors posted there. With me there was another girl, who got the same posting but declined from joining, out of fear of that notorious place. So basically I was alone, and still in this three years, no lady doctor has come, hence I am still the only lady doctor over there.

Q: Did you find it more difficult to be a female doctor, in that remote place?

Doctor: Yes it was really very difficult to work in rural area. After joining I learnt that I am the only lady doctor posted there. The area where I am posted is a very notorious place.. I got my job during my house staff ship. I joined just after the day I had completed my House staff ship.. I was the youngest doctor in my institute. It was very difficult for me to cope up with the system. All my colleagues were much senior to me and they were male. I did not get any kind of cooperation from them. but I took it as a challenge. I got my job by my merit and hard work so I had to continue it. There was no proper toilet, or rest rooms in the hospital. I had to take rest inside the O.T. I didn't give up, now it's almost 3 years I am working there.

Q: Do you think the language you had to use, while in rural area, as a doctor was pretty different from your urban colloquy?

Doctor: Yes language is a problem there..the community there has their own accent and they use some typical local words of which I had no idea...In the beginning When I used to sit in the opd I could not understand their language...I used to stop and ask my colleagues what does some particular words mean...eventually I started understanding them...

Q: Did you ever feel that your diagnosis or prescriptions are not being valued as much it should have been?

Doctor: yes, in many instances, rather in most of the instances. In the beginning people there didn't believe that I am a doctor.. It was a very unusual fact for them to digest that a 23 year

old girl can be their doctor...although I am sitting in the emergency on call room with my stethoscope on, they used to come and ask me "oh masi doctor babu kothay..deke dao"

Q: do you consider your gender to be the reason behind this treatment?

Doctor: Probably yes. Both my gender and my age played a vital role. you may say, I was doubly marginalised.

Q: the concept of "doctor babu" is very much predominant in the rural areas, as I have seen. So how did that address change for the lady doctor? As you have mentioned that in last 2 decades, there had been no lady doctors there, so how did they address you?

Doctor: "O masi", "O modhu", "O sister", "Ai je meye", "O pakhi" etc. are the terms the patients use to address me.

Q: What changes are you noticing down the years? What do you look forward for yourself in this workplace? How do you make a stand?

Doctor: people are becoming compassionate, but whenever the question arises of accepting the diction or decision of a female doctor, their ego gets hurt still, I guess. But I hope gradually, they will accept me, for I am trying my best to establish the fact that notwithstanding my gender, I am a doctor and most importantly, a human being.

*POLITICIAN:*

Q: How old were you when you joined politics?

Politician: I was 13, when I joined the party. I was asked to stick party posters, party hoardings and flags.

Q: how old were you when you got your first ticket for electoral post?

Politician: I was around 30 years old.

Q: Were you given a worthy place or a subsidiary area for your first election?

Politician: I was elected for a remote place, where most of the people declined to appear for. My family has always been love by the rustics, so it was not that tough for me, but it was an unhappening place for a woman.

Q: what was the reason, that they thought of you? Were you doing exceptionally good in your field?

Politician; It was not about how good or bad I was. I was never even evaluated; I don't know why it was so. But after the communist government came to power in West Bengal, they made it mandatory to have 33% women in the politics. And I belonged to scheduled class quota, and the ticket was for schedule class female candidate. Hence they had no better options.

Q: How were you received by people (both commoners as well as the rivals), when you went on for vote campaign?

Politician: Common people were quite fine, but rivals and few male used to taunt me.

Q: Were your comrades cooperative?

Politician: None of my comrades came with me. They felt ashamed to campaign for a woman candidate. I went to the women empowerment cell and complained that I am being teased and no one is cooperating, and then they provided two other women. And we three went on for vote appeal. And the most painful thing was, after I won the pole, none of my comrades came forward to celebrate the victory. I saw other winners being celebrated by their fellow comrades, but I was alone. I took a rikshaw and came back alone.

Q: It has been quite a many years that you are active in politics. How many times did you nominated for elections? How many times did you come victorious?

Politician: I was nominated for four times, including the recent one. I lost once, in my second nomination, on the rest three.

Q: now when you have such a wider reach and prestige in your field, do you still find your decisions, dictions and opinions are being marginalised somehow?

Politician: The scenario has changed to some extent, I shall not lie about that. In my initial years, I was not even considered. When the elected candidates came together for a joint venture or any joint decision, I was always kept in a silence zone. There were obviously people, who supported me, but they were very few in number and stature. Now people at least gives an ear to me. Now I am a senior member with a strong record, but still somewhere

I always feel, had I not been a scheduled caste candidate, I would have never been nominated for any of the elections, even in this present day.

Q: Do you consider the female politicians in the urban areas go through same difficulties or they have a smoother path?

Politician: As much I have seen, every female candidate has a story of struggle of their own, be it in urban or rural areas. Even the leading female politicians of our country are no exception, but in urban areas, the patriarchal claws are hidden behind social masquerades, hence the women over there fight a different kind of battle, they deal with educated people mostly, and people who can be illuminated against gender binaries and stereotypes. Its my personal opinion, but I am sure they still fight a hard battle.

Q: will you mind sharing few instances, where you were attacked verbally, being a woman, an unmarried woman and an unmarried female politician?

Politician: oh! There are many such instances. I was threatened of being abducted, filthy slangs were thrown at me, but pardon me, I don't want to talk about those languages again.

Q: How many rural women did you inspire to join politics? How many woman from this village and villages near around, has joined politics, seeing you?

Politician: Many. I can raise a woman army any time.

Q: Finally what would you say to all those repressed women, who are still scared of raising their voice and are still silenced for being a girl?

Politician: I am a self-imposed woman activist and am trying hard to bring out the women from the shackles of patriarchy. As you know I am the elected member of the most remote and under developed part of this village, I often encounter woman abuses and the women have found a refuge in me. They come to me, open up about their problem and by God's grace many women have been possibly brought out of the repression of voice. They are earning their own bread, raising voice against their drunkard husbands and helping other women in distress too.

*TEACHER*

Q: The place you come from is a sub urban place. How much is the female literacy rate in your area?

Teacher: Well, my area is a lately grown area, where mostly the migrators are refuging hence they are bringing forth their culture which is very much traditional and stereotyped. They are still living in the darkened patriarchal thoughts where women are meant for domestic errands and produce babies. Hence the female literacy rate is very low.

Q: How many girls of your batch have opted for higher studies?

Teacher: Very few have completed masters in a regular course and it's only me who did post graduation in regular and have cleared net and am teaching in a college.

Q: Did you want to become a teacher since your childhood?

Teacher: Absolutely not. I wanted to join the glamour world. Till class x, all that I kept on doing was collecting information about the glamour world, ways to join it and concerned about enhancing appearance. I should confess that I considered myself to be quite beautiful to become a star.

Q: And then why this shift to become a teacher?

Teacher: I was rebuked and reminded that girls of sobre families don't hanker behind glamour world. And I had seen my sister just after her higher secondary. I couldn't gather enough courage to go against my family's diction. I was told, being a girl, I could pursue only two kinds of job (clerkship and teacher). Hence finally I decided that I have to become a teacher.

Q: Do you face any kind of verbal repression at your workplace for being a woman?

Teacher: No such repression, but yes there works a kind of "she is a girl, and shall be considered" kind of a things works, which is very regressive. They don't tell you that you can't do this or that, but they tell, "Are you sure, being a girl, you can manage this?". And I personally feel that is enough subjugating.

*YOGA TEACHER (SHE IS ALSO A RENOWED SINGER OF HER PLACE):*

Q: Which one was more challenging to establish yourself at, yoga or singing?



Yoga teacher: It was more challenging to make a mark as a yoga teacher because I became a Stage performer (singer) years after making my identity as an efficient yoga teacher. But yes, being a performer and doing show also brought in many difficulties for me.

Q: So how and from where did your yoga battle start?

Yoga teacher: I was a swimmer in my childhood. The problem started arising when I reached my adolescence. I am talking about 1984. We had to wear swimsuit and which was not readily accepted in my village. I was often teased and taunted and thrown ill words and gestures at, so my dad decided to swap me from swimming to karate. Again in karate, there were no female teachers, so I got into yoga. I never thought that I would take yoga as my profession. I kept on practicing just to keep myself fit. But after marriage, scenarios got harsh. After I had my baby, things got worse and I had to do something to earn bread from myself and my daughter.

Q: How old were you, when you got married? And how did the situation get worse? Were verbally repressed or physically tortured?

Yoga teacher: Both. I got married at the age of 17 in 1991. I had my baby in 1995. All that I could understand from their words was that, I was nothing but just a maid to my in laws. They taunted me at every step, be that for my food, or my baby's food, or my living with them, numerous such things.

When I was three months pregnant, my mother in law told me "Arrange your own food." I was so helpless that I had to live on home delivery meal. Seeing this condition my parents took me home and I returned after my delivery with my baby girl. I was thrown into the kitchen when my baby was just one month old. I had to do everything. I had a rising appetite, but was not allowed to eat unless my mother in law provided me with a platter, I was forbidden from touching the refrigerator even. I didn't have money to buy baby food for my daughter, and due to deficiency of food, I myself couldn't produce enough breast milk to feed her. Neither my husband was willing to pay for her food nor my in laws. Then I decided to save my child, I'll have to earn our bread. My educational qualification was not sufficient to get a table job, still I managed to get a job for a singer in an office but was not allowed to do that. I was asked to request the recruiters to recruit my husband in my place, but that wasn't possible for he was not a singer. Likewise I was prevented from pursuing a job either. But I

had to do something, and the only thing left was yoga, so I started my yoga class in the year 1995 itself with four students, paying me 40 rupees per month.

Q: were you're in laws okay with your yoga class? And what happened to your singing? Had you stopped practicing completely?

Yoga teacher: I was allowed to take the classes in my bedroom. I continued my singing but behind locked doors. I used to practice in our store room, where I had to lock all the doors and windows, stuff all the openings with clothes and practice.

Q: Will you mind sharing your experiences about how you were silenced in your own house?

Yoga teacher: The biggest thing was that they didn't let me sing, which was the biggest blow to me. I felt like those caged birds who are even deprived of singing, and you know song was the only solace for me, the only way I could express my pain was through singing, but I was forbidden to sing.

Q: But after being established as a yoga teacher, you have also made your mark as singing sensation. Even after such crude forbiddance, how did you manage to tear through the silences and sing aloud?

Yoga teacher: I established my words for the first time, when my daughter was in class x. My husband met an accident and was rendered penniless. I had to take up all the responsibilities and needed to earn sufficient money. I got an offer to perform on a stage. And this time I didn't seek permission but I declared that I was going to perform. They heard me speaking so boldly for the first time and was left too shocked to response even. That stage show got me more offers and I didn't stop. People started acknowledging me as a singer too besides being a yoga teacher. My voice got its window.

Q: You do shows in other cities also, you have been to abroad too, for performances. You have to move around with your team of musicians, how did your in-laws and husband react to it?

Yoga teacher: Even today, when I have an exceptional acceptance in the society, by God's grace, today when I am secured both socially and economically, the biggest hindrance to my success and moving forward has been my family. I am often looked down upon sceptically. I am charged with infidelity, was told that I am a shame to the family. I was equally thwarted

with verbal attacks when I open a separate yoga class for me. I have been charged with too many ill abusive addresses.

Q: How did you react to all these?

Yoga teacher: Simple, like all other girls, I cried, tried to convince them, tried to prove my innocence, but they turned deaf ears and continued. Then I realised they won't understand and I said to my husband: "If I am such a infidel woman, so filthy of a character and am earning my bread in such dishonest mean, why are you readily feeding on my income? Why don't you try and earn something?"

That was the first time I told something that would actually hurt his male ego to the greatest extent. After that he never tells anything but keeps on creating problems for me. Even last week I returned at 2 am from a show, and he didn't open the door, I had to wait the whole night at the entrance gate of our house. Now I have become quite used to with all this.

Q: How is your daughter helping you? Has she become your voice or she believes and follows the path of her father and grandmother?

Yoga teacher: She is the biggest support to me. We share our works. She is also in yoga from Bombay and she looks after the male and kids class and I look after the women class. She is a brilliant singer too. We perform together. And as she is there with me, the acquisitions against my character have lessened to some extent. She has not just become my voice but also my alter ego and reply to the struggle that I had been through till now.

Q: Do you want to contribute to the enhancement of those women who are still struggling the same battle and are not as courageous as you to break through the silencing grip of domestic patriarchy?

Yoga Teacher: I am already running a motivation class and am trying to bring up all kind of distressed women. It very important to be able to speak for your own. If you are deprived from your own voice and language, its equivalent to getting choked to death.

*SHOPKEEPER:*

Q: Since when are you sitting in this shop?

Shopkeeper: Since my marriage. It's been 30 years now that I am married and 29 years that I am attending this shop.

Q: How was the initial experience?

Shopkeeper: It was not much hard, apart from the fact that my husband had to face too many accusations.

Q: What kind of accusations?

Shopkeeper: The people around accused my husband of using me for his benefits. They even said that I being a newlywed wife, should have been kept away from the shop, where too many men come and sit and talk even. Transacting with so many male was not safe according to them.

Q: Did they tell you anything? Or has any customer behaved improperly?

Shopkeeper: Thankfully no. Neither the people around, nor any customer threw a bad glance or ill-word at me in this long period of time.

Q: So your journey had been quite easy?

Shopkeeper: Yes, I thoroughly enjoyed my work. Now People also acknowledge that, despite being a shopkeeper and dealing with so my customers, I managed to maintain an unscarred reputation and identity. This is the best thing that I have achieved.

### **Findings and Observations**

Women of rural areas are generally restricted to secured jobs like teaching or clerkship, but there are women who have broken through this construct and opted for daring professions like politics or shop keeping or stage performers.

Every workplace has its own drawbacks and hindrances and both men and women fight their own battle, but for some the journey remains a roller coaster ride throughout. It is often noticed that in work places women voice is repressed. They are often addressed as the weaker class of the society and are looked down upon as inefficient workers. As per the interviews, it is noticed in five different professions, women voice is repressed in five different ways. Somewhere they suffer from identity crisis, some are silenced by their in-laws, some had to

slaughter their childhood dream just to fit oneself in the box of the society and some had gone way too far from the diction of the patriarchy and established oneself as an distinct identity.

The thing noteworthy is the struggle to prove one's worth and how they manage to break through the shackle of linguistic battle of repression. After the fourth wave feminism, some women are still suffering the suffrage that the first wave feminism had to fight for. These working women's struggle for identity and individualism is praiseworthy.

The workplace scenario differs in wide scale between urban and rural areas. While a separate study was done on the urban areas, to trace the differences, it has been found that communicating language, the language of addressing as well as the language of work ethics, differ hugely.

### **Conclusion**

In a nutshell, every working woman fights their battle in establishing their voice amidst the darkening silence. It was very illuminating and encouraging to hear from them, their experiences and ways in which they have tried and still trying to make themselves audible. Working women in urban areas have a different battle from that of the rural areas. We hope that they will succeed in changing the notion.

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