

Mumbai's Man-made Disaster

During the last fortnight, a relatively unknown suburb in Mumbai made headlines, nationally and internationally. Now suddenly everyone is familiar with 'Kalina', a tiny suburb off the Western Express Highway at Santacruz. Its only claim to fame earlier was its proximity to the domestic airport. But from July 25, 2005, the place assumed notoriety as one of the worst affected areas where people had to be rescued on makeshift rafts and boats. Most of the horror stories of the deluge are either from Kalina or the neighbouring areas of Kurla and Sakinaka.

The television cameras and newspaper reports have concentrated on two prestigious residential enclaves that house the Air India and Indian Airlines officials. Most of those buildings, which were erected in the sixties, are four storey structures. The colonies are enclosed with thick stonewalls to keep out the encroachers. Both colonies were submerged with 10 feet deep water.

While this made headlines, for someone like me, who lives and works in Kalina for the past decade, water logging in this area known as the 'Air India Colony' is nothing new. Even a slight downpour results in water logging. So on the terrible Tuesday when the water levels started rising, it was a certainty that the Air India Colony area would be submerged. What one did not realize was that the fury of the torrential rains along with the floods in the Mithi river would cause the levels to rise above 10 feet to submerge the ground floor flats until the water reached up to the first floor.

Why the water levels rose so suddenly and so sharply is a larger question of faulty planning and destruction of the eco-balance, which I do not intend to venture into in this article. A lot of probing and

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questioning is taking place right now in the city as to the causes, which led to the devastation in the city. My concern here is something smaller and more specific.

On the night of July 26, 2005, while the water levels were rising, what did the residents of the Indian Airlines building do to save themselves? They broke the stone wall and let out 10 feet deep water into an already flooded busti called Shanti Nagar. The gushing waters swept away a dozen houses and submerged the entire busti. There were no three and four storey structures. So all that the residents could do was to climb on to the roof of the few tenements which had built a makeshift first floor. For three days men, women and children were huddled together on these rooftops without food, water and electricity. It is a miracle that they survived at all. Without this slim anchor, they would all have been swept away with the fury of the waters. On the third day, a Muslim trader waded through chest deep water with huge vessels of kichadi and drinking water. The residents recall this gesture with tears in their eyes. By then they had lost all their meagre belongings, clothes, food grains, household articles, the television sets and the refrigerators which some of them had acquired after years of struggle, pinching pennies every day.

Later, some other NGOs stepped in with medicines and disinfectants, and again later others came in with clothes and food grains. When we visited the area a week after the deluge the government relief still had not reached them.

The residents are angry. They say that the busti existed even before the Indian Airlines colony was constructed. Some say they have been in the area for three generations. Their forefathers worked on paddy fields. When the Air India and Indian Airlines colonies were constructed, no attention was paid to rainwater drainage systems, which resulted in water logging within these colonies. Yet, Shanti Nagar had not faced similar problems at any time before. The stonewalls built to keep the encroachers out became death traps, hemming the residents in, where a dozen people died of suffocation.

Now the Aviation Minister has promised a package of 25 lakhs to the Air India Colony and half this amount to the Indian Airlines Colony. But where does Shastri Nagar figure in this reconstruction scheme? Is the Rs.5000 promised by the Government adequate to compensate them for this man-made disaster? Does the vicarious liability not lie with the Indian Airlines to compensate the busti for the damage it has caused due to its acts of omission and commission?

Flavia Agnes, Mumbai.

Educated Employed Wives

India's economy remains primarily agricultural, though this will change within a couple of decades. The vast majority of women in India has always worked - in the fields, side by side with their men. Women from the economically least privileged strata of the society have also usually worked as servants, unskilled labourers, and more

recently, as low level workers in factories and plantations. More recently, urban educated upper and middle class women have begun to be employed in relatively small but significant numbers in segments of our developing economy. The increase in women's education among upper and middle class women has raised their productivity in the modern economy's job market. More educated women are coming out of their homes and entering into the labour force. For these women and their families a single income earned by a male head of the household is no longer sufficient to run the home. The wives' wages have become essential.

Working wives face challenges different from those of housewives; in most cases the working wives' multiple roles disturb the expectations of other family members who have a great range of demands on these women's time and attention. Inherited gender norms result in married working women finding themselves torn, tired and suffering from guilt over their concern that they may be neglecting their children and homes. Only when a woman performs all her socially designated roles within the family in addition to her job outside she is ensured a position of dignity within the family. If a woman has a middle class job it threatens the men's sense of patriarchal power and leads to marital disharmony. Women sense their husband's fear and resentment. Working women struggle as they undertake demanding work outside the home without any reduction, modification or adaptation in their familial role. Working wives whose educational and income levels exceed their husband's are likely to suffer more tension and dissatisfaction in their married life. That means, for too many women, that the more she is successful in

her job, the more conflicts get exacerbated in her home. This dilemma is a consequence of our age old stereotyped view that men have a career and women take a job; this in turn implies that men must be provided greater support and demand more powerful roles than women.

Women who start and work at their jobs for an appreciable period before marriage and continue them afterwards with a minimum number of breaks are in a better position to make the marriages well adjusted than those who continue in them without breaks for child rearing and other social obligations. Husbands who spend a maximum of their available time on their career usually expect and receive support from their family. Any woman who attempts this strategy is heavily criticized and considered inadequate.

The main problem of these married working women is how to harmonize her two roles, one at home and another at the workplace. Women are still expected to be primarily responsible for housework and raising children and are supposed to play a subservient role to the male head of the household. These normative expectations make it very difficult for a wife to succeed in her role as a wage earner. A working wife is usually only viewed as economically advantageous to the family if she can successfully accomplish her professional, wife and mother roles simultaneously.

Role conflicts for these women result in many negative consequences. They lead to substandard job performance and a host of dysfunctional affective and behavioural outcomes, and they are also negatively related to organizational commitment, job satisfaction and participation in decision-making. In addition to role conflicts, role distances and role

alienation from other members of the family make the situation more stressful. Many wives favour sharing housework more equally with their spouses, and believe it would result in fewer conflicts. But thus far the vast majority of wives has not been able to get this cooperation, and instead encounter active or passive resistance and opposition when they raise this issue. Employed women, although they enjoy a slightly higher authority in domestic decisions than those without work, nevertheless experience fatigue and self-doubt because of the conflicting demands of their multiple and contradictory roles.

Many middle class employed women spend at least six hours per day in household duties; despite this effort they feel that they are neglecting their children. At the practical level it is most often their children's unmet needs that bother the women, particularly in the context of a growing dearth of affordable reliable household help and the absence of affordable high quality child care creches. When a wife takes a middle class job all family members enjoy the added income that her job brings, but dislike her changed role and status at home. They do not accept it if she has to neglect some of her traditional roles as a result of her employment. Even for wives who work outside the home, her work in the domestic sphere remains compulsory. When this culturally defined pattern is not maintained it contributes to stress, depression, conflict and negative assessments of marital quality. Middle class educated families and their communities must understand the economic and other benefits of an educated woman's contribution as a worker and as a wife to the family and the society.

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