

ജനകീയാസൂത്രണം മുപ്പതാണ്ട് പിന്നിടുമ്പോൾ...
2026 ആഗസ്റ്റ് 16, കോട്ടൺഹിൽ ഗവ. ഹയർ സെക്കണ്ടറി സ്കൂൾ
, തിരുവനന്തപുരം

സെക്ഷൻ : 4

പേര് : ശ്രീമതി ആർദ്ര

A major feminist critique of the People's Plan Campaign is that it chose to address gender justice in only a few specific ways, excluding others. Our discussions of PPC's future goals should address this feminist critique.

What does this feminist critique mean?

What comes into question are the determining factors of the above-mentioned selection process—its foundation is the idea of womanliness, oriented toward domesticity, and it is reflected in many projects that came under the Women Component Plan, i.e., projects like kitchen farming, home poultry farming, etc. Here, the practical needs of women were prioritised over strategic decisions that would contribute to maintaining gender justice. Moreover, many of the projects addressing women's needs are, in fact, catering to the larger interest of the state. This way, women remain domesticated, with limited mobility and public presence, despite having political representation or financial self-reliance.

What is the current status of gender justice in local governance?

Some of the LSGs have already switched to gender budgeting, and that definitely is hopeful. Incorporating a gender lens into every project or policy is an effective way toward a gender just administration. The role of institutions like KILA in promoting gender budgeting is remarkable—the training sessions and workshops for the LSG representatives are quite effective. During my research on the local government interventions in women's health, I closely engaged with one panchayat that was doing significantly good work in terms of incorporating gender. It was two years ago, and they were already thinking about switching to gender budgeting. Starting open gyms, self-defence training, and sex education classes were some of their commendable projects. Likewise, many LSGs have gender resource centres and the Kudumbasree-led initiatives for women. However, there is still room for improvement. From my research experience, what I understood was that there is a gap between projects and their delivery, and the problem lies in the conceptualisation and approach of these projects:

- 1) They understand gender as a synonym for women; as a result, the queer community gets out of the scope of these projects, and projects like sex education almost always only target women, leaving men and queer persons out.
- 2) Tabooed concepts like sexuality are hardly addressed
- 3) The projects sometimes do not reflect the real needs of women or queer persons.

How to build gender-just local governance

The aforementioned problems are rooted in our heteronormative attitudes and value system. The current training programmes need to continue, inculcating inclusive values through dialogues. Learning feminist ideas—not the theories, but the mundane feminist acts—is another important step that can be incorporated into our training programmes—this is already happening, but we need to think about creative ways to communicate such ideas.

I would like to focus on two main concepts: space and well-being. These two are connected, and we should address them that way.

1. Well-being

- Well-being is multidimensional, involving physical, sexual, psychological, and emotional aspects. It needs to be looked at from a public health point of view, at the least.
- Well-being is gendered, and it is also determined by caste-based and class-based social order, which affects access to it.
- Women's health is reduced to reproductive health, undermining the other aspects.
- Sexual well-being is heavily tabooed—we need to normalise talking about safe sex practices, abortion services, etc as the initial step and, in parallel, work on their availability and accessibility.
- Addressing gender-based violence as a critical issue—it should not begin and end with conducting awareness classes for women. We do have helplines and shelters for survivors. We should ensure they are empathetic and effective. Providing mental health services and legal support should also be incorporated into our existing system.

2. Space

- Spaces are gendered, classed and caste-based too. Our public spaces are not made for women or queer people, and they feel unwelcome in such spaces. We have libraries, reading rooms and other recreational spaces, but the number of women or queer people accessing them is limited.
- The need to build safe, welcoming spaces – exclusive spaces for women and queer people, as well as mixed spaces. Playgrounds, open gyms, co-working spaces, etc are already introduced by many LSGs – more such spaces need to be built and maintained as inclusive spaces. This will automatically contribute to the well-being of the marginalised genders.
- Spaces for leisure – building such spaces in a way helps to disassociate from the domesticoriented womanliness concept that was discussed earlier.
- The importance of creating safe spaces for women and queer people to talk, share their worries or simply to communicate how they feel—such spaces can have psychology professionals.

While connecting the two main aspects I talked about, it is important to mention that, as a foundational step, policymakers should listen to beneficiaries—having conversations can help in understanding how effectively a project/policy can be conceptualised and delivered. Small groups of representatives can visit beneficiaries or conduct focus group discussions—such interactions can also help in assessing ongoing projects and making them more effective