



The Taming of a River: Gender, Displacement and Resistance in Anti-Dam Movements¹

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Abstract

The discourse on displacement caused by large dams had never acknowledged the gendered nature of the issue, except perhaps as a footnote until the late 1990s. This paper makes an effort to plug that gap in the context of the gendered nature of displacement, resistance and analyses India's development policy within a feminist framework. The paper focuses on the experience of displacement and its impacts on women of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, especially the adivasis. It also addresses issues of women's participation in anti-dam movements from the perspective that such resistance represents a moment of transformation for them and their communities.

Author Profile

Bina Srivinasan was the founder member and Coordinator of Swashraya, a women's group in Baroda which organized slum women for basic rights. From 1991 onwards she was also a freelance journalist and researcher and wrote on women, displacement and minority women. She was a Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex in 1999-2000 and a WISCOMP *Scholar of Peace* in 2000-2001. Her book *Negotiating Complexities – A Collection of Feminist Essays* was published in 2007, the same year she passed away.

¹ This excerpt from the monograph of the same title is included here to honor the memory of Bina Srinivasan, who dedicated her life to the struggles of development induced displacees. August 13, 2012 marks her fifth death Anniversary.

I will speak about the problems of the Bargi dam. 162 villages lie in the submergence zone of the dam. People have been uprooted from these villages (which cover 3 districts). Till today they have no means of survival, they don't know where the next meal will come from. Those who can, have taken to fishing. Many have gone to cities for mazdoori (casual labour). Many of these are adivasis (indigenous peoples) who will go hungry, but won't beg for food from anybody else.

When they go for mazdoori, many die. They earn some money. What can they bring back home and run their families. Adivasi men spend half the money on daru (liquor). Food for children comes from money earned like this.

Of the 162 villages submerged some villages have been displaced 2-3 times and were finally resettled at the edge of the forests. Even here the area is water logged. The water causes their huts to fall, they put their homes up again, to face the same fate.

Women also face problems. They also go for work. There is nothing to eat here. If there is a meal in the morning there is none in the evening.

This is the condition in all 162 villages. Children cannot be educated. People have sold their cattle, they have no food to eat, no clothes to wear. It is very difficult. There are no school teachers, no doctors. Where do they go, if they go, if they fall ill? Bijadari in Marla district, Ghausu in Sivni district. In Jabalpur they go to the colony. Some even die on the way to the hospital or while returning back.

They have a minimum of possessions: a thali (plate), a lota (small jug). Before submergence many had 60-100 acres of land. They used to have plenty of ghee (clarified butter), milk. Today they don't even have ashes. Sarkar (the government) does not think of vikas (development), it thinks only of vinash (destruction). People in submergence areas have to give up their lives for sarkar to reap the benefits. Dalits, adivasis and many others share the same fate.

Some can do fishing. Some cannot. They do mazdoori. Buses are full of people going for mazdoori. They go to nearby places. How do we describe their condition? It is so bad....we do not see any hope...the sarkar will not understand our language. They think people who have been submerged are not suffering. They fool us. They talk only to the sarpanch, leaders, dalals (pimps)--all of them want to loot us.

....Bargi dam oustees have not been rehabilitated, whatever the sarkar says. Will the sarkar show us the policies?...after the construction of the dam the sarkar told us not to go away. You will be resettled they said. We did not go and when the waters began filling in the dam, the sarkar said, let the waters come the people will flee like rats.

- Virabai, displaced by the Bargi dam in Madhya Pradesh who is an active member of the Bargi Dam Visthapit Sangharsh Samiti.² This excerpt was taken from a presentation she had made in Saatalai, at a meeting of women and displacement in 1995.

Virabai is 50 years old. Like thousands of other women she has harrowing stories of the trials she has undergone since she lost her home when the Bargi Dam was constructed in Madhya Pradesh nearly ten years [ago]. If each of their experiences were to be recorded it would lay bare the dark side of the development that has purportedly been brought about by dams in India.

The efforts of national and international resistance movements have brought into sharp focus the detrimental effects of dams worldwide. The World Commission on Dams (WCD), which was set up to review the performance of dams all over the world, has acknowledged that large dams cause serious social and environmental problems.³

The initial impetus for the 1998 formation of the WCD, which includes both proponents as well as opponents of large dams, came from the struggles of the people adversely affected by large dams. Anti-dam movements the world over came together to exert pressure on financial institutions like the World Bank (one of the major financiers of large dams) to set up an independent body to examine the social, environmental and financial impact large dams have on local communities.

The WCD consisted of dam-building agencies like ICOLD, financial agencies like the World Bank and representatives of anti-dam struggles. Based in South Africa and chaired by Kader Asmal, the WCD had a two year mandate to review the performance of large dams. The WCD commissioned various studies and papers from different parts of the world. These reports represented a variety of viewpoints on both sides of the issue. The final report of the WCD was released in November 2000 in London when the WCD was also formally de-commissioned. The final report was also released in Africa, Asia, Latin America and North America. In India, the report was made public in Delhi.

Despite these studies, the discourse has never acknowledged the gendered nature of the issue, except perhaps as a footnote. This paper is a small effort to plug that gap in the context of the gendered nature of displacement, resistance and policy analysed within a feminist framework.

I will refer to three dams: the Bargi dam which has already been constructed, the Maheshwar dam, which is the first hydro-electric project in India to be built by a private company and the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP). All three dams are part of the Narmada Valley Development Project (NVDP), which will harness the river Narmada for irrigation and generation of electricity. Those displaced by the Bargi dam have formed an organisation called the Bargi Dam Visthapit Sangharsh

² All names have been changed. Bargi Dam Visthapit Samiti is an organisation formed by the oustees of the Bargi dam and has been struggling for proper compensation since 1991.

³ See *Dams and Development: A New Framework for Decision-making*, the report of the WCD, released in November 2000 for its comments on gender impacts of dams (114-116).

Samiti (the Samiti), while a group called the Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save the Narmada Movement, or the NBA) spearheads the movement against the SSP and Maheshwar dams.

For the purpose of this study I will focus on the NBA, one of India's leading anti-dam movements, as well as draw upon the experiences of women who have been part of other anti-dam movements. While the struggles against the SSP and the Maheshwar dams fit well within the context of other anti-dam agitations, the NBA has employed different gender strategies in the struggle against the SSP and the Maheshwar dams. It is also distinct in relation to gender organisation in both the areas. I have therefore qualified these differences within the NBA in the case of gender strategies employed in the course of resistance against both these dams.

I will focus on the experience of displacement and its impacts on women. I will also address issues of women's participation in anti-dam movements from the perspective that this resistance represents a moment of transformation for them and their communities. Although largely undocumented, women's experiences of both displacement and resistance are important facets of the history of India's large dams.

It would be false to say that the experiences of women have been completely excluded from the literature on large dams, but it is also crucial to see how women have been written about in these texts. Much of the recent literature does address the impacts of dams on women, but their experiences are rarely integrated into the overall assessment of the dams' impacts⁴. Often women are given the role of 'contributors'⁵ rather than considered as actors in their own struggles, especially in context of the history of movements.

In the context of forced migration Indra says:

*.....the historical 'problem' with research did not simply derive from the invisibility of women in it. In fact, women have been extensively written into kinship, marriage, socialization, and enculturation studies since the rise of fieldwork-based ethnography in the early 1920s. The issue was how were women and men represented and analytically characterised. The 'problem', then, was how social theory informed empirical work by organising how and what we see.*⁶

To create a literature that introduces a further subversion of hegemonic structures like patriarchal systems, a layered interpretation is required. This would necessarily be one that enters the domestic space and interpersonal relations as it examines the dynamics of power equations within the private and public realms....

⁴ See for example Patrick McCully, *Silenced Rivers: The Ecology and Politics of Large Dams* (London: Zed Books, 2001) and World Commission on Dams, *Dams and Development: A New Framework for Decision-Making* (London: Earthscan Publications Ltd., 2000).

⁵ Stree Shakti Sanghata, *We were making History...Life Stories of Women in the Telangana People's Struggle* (New Delhi: Zed Books, 1990), 10-20.

⁶ Doreen Indra, "Not a room of one's own," in *Engendering Forced Migration: Theory and Practice*, edited by Doreen Indra (New York: Berghahn Books, 1990), 23.

Enforced displacement: violent transformations

Enforced displacement often pushes a community towards transition. This moment of passage is fraught with perils; it is a time when a community is called upon to draw on its cultural, social and economic reserves in order to maintain its earlier coherence. It is also a moment when each of these resources is bound to change and reconstitute itself in a process of adjustment to the experience of displacement.

Displacement presupposes a belonging, a unity with earlier locations. It also presupposes a degree of cultural, social and economic autonomy. This sense of rootedness and the notion of the home exist alongside intricate power equations that are constantly being negotiated and contested in everyday lives. Inequalities exist prior to displacement: gender, caste, class, culture and economic distinctions affect the struggles of women and men both within and outside their communities.

As feminist scholarship has established, unequal power relationships are acted out in the household and the community, so despite its traumas, displacement is not the beginning of the struggle for access to resources and the power to control them. The home, therefore, is not seen here as an idyllic space of equality. With or without displacement, gender inequalities are entrenched in the family and the community and violence against the vulnerable has the sanction of society. Nevertheless, the displacement caused by the development projects has traumatic effects that seem almost permanent. The costs are most obvious for people uprooted from their traditional livelihood systems.⁷ For example, when adivasis are removed from the Narmada Valley into the plains of 'mainstream' society, the loss of forests, land and other natural resources are most visible. The qualitative impact of displacement – the way communities adjust to alien social and cultural contexts – are more difficult to understand. It takes time to gauge the effects.

Communities react differently to 'geographical' displacement depending on its cause. However, geography is much more than mere physical space. Human beings are constantly acting upon geography and changing it to suit their purposes. In that way social customs, laws, culture, religion are all part of the geography.

It is clear that the most vulnerable sections of the communities bear the brunt of the trauma of displacement. Women and children, as has been documented, suffer the most when a community flounders and seeks to win back some, if not all, its autonomy and agency. The disempowerment of a community usually exacerbates the discrimination suffered by the least powerful constituents within it.

⁷ This is not to say that policy makers or proponents of the SSP have taken even the total economic loss suffered by the displaced population into consideration. They have been guided very much by a development paradigm that celebrates modernisation in the form of technology. To give one example, the economic valuation of forests or natural resources poses a serious problem because in the context of adivasi life, natural resources are inextricably interlinked with the social. Even so, it cannot be said that even a crude economic valuation of the losses incurred by the adivasis in the Narmada Valley due to the SSP has really been attempted by the State.

Communities are heterogeneous and assume multiple forms and are constantly adapting to their environment. With enforced dislocation, agencies outside the community dictate the pace and direction of those changes; radically altering the economic, social and cultural makeup of the community.

Displacement alters the caste and gender structures of a community. It also affects different sections of society in very specific ways and often constitutes a drastic realignment of social as well as gender organisation. Human and social development if not seen as intrinsic to development can trigger off of a whole range of negatives in contrast to the bounties that development is supposed to bring in.

Yet displacement also has to be seen as a moment that can usher in radical changes. It is an ambivalent moment. There can be circumstances in which it could offer limited choices that did not exist before. For example, in the SSP resettlement sites the number of girl children in schools has gone up as compared to the original villages. Similarly women's access to the market has increased. This does not mean that the quality of life has changed for the better, it only means that it has placed before women certain choices that were not available to them in the Narmada Valley. Adivasi women from Gujarat who have been in resettlement sites for more than ten years now also understand that they can stand for Panchayat elections if they wish to.

On the whole, displacement from the Valley has thrust the adivasis of the Valley into a process of modernisation. Even if it is an unbalanced process, with the dice loaded against the adivasis, it has created some choices. Enforced displacement also raises issues of direct and indirect violence. State violence in implementing development is presumed here. The history of all dams in the Narmada Valley is replete with evidence of this. Economic and social violence are part of enforced displacement. In Gujarat, economic violence has resulted in male migration to inhospitable regions like Saurashtra, from where thousands of locals migrate each year towards South and Central Gujarat.

The women who are left behind have to cope with the threat of social violence by their own community as well as the 'host' community. In the plains of Gujarat cropping patterns are dependent on pesticides and fertilisers and to buy these, adivasi families are forced to borrow money. Women managing the farm and the home on their own face threat of sexual violence as well as social violence as they go about trying to raise money for their crops. Many of the Bargi dispossessed have been forced to shift to slums in cities like Jabalpur. Here they face multiple threats to their lives.

At a point when development plummets into destruction, the survival of the communities is at stake. Women facing socio-economic pressures are seldom allowed to articulate their own needs as individuals. Therefore, it is important to bring to attention their struggles that are often radically different from those of men who are seen to represent the community and are the only ones who are deemed capable of negotiating with the state.

Women are central to livelihoods as well as to the social cohesion of the community and so it is essential to understand how patriarchal norms reconstitute themselves in the context of displacement. Displacement brings about changes in the sexual division of labour within a household. I will return to the issue of reconstitution of patriarchies as it is crucial to the way in which displaced communities try to assimilate after resettlement.

It is important to understand the coping mechanisms employed by women suffering the impacts of truncated rehabilitation. I make a distinction here between coping mechanisms and the exercise of agency. Coping mechanisms are basically used to make the best of a given situation of scarce resources within accepted social or patriarchal frameworks. Agency requires and implies re-definition of these roles: the action that follows therefore will necessarily be outside of established social, cultural and patriarchal norms. Agency translates into self-determination. This also requires more discussion and will be looked at when I narrate the experiences that women at resettlement sites have recounted to others and me.

Patriarchies, Identities and Displacement of Women

Patriarchal ideologies are central to the feminist deconstruction of gender inequality and social and cultural standards. I prefer to use patriarchy in the plural as I believe there are a plethora of male-centred systems in societies. The term 'patriarchy' has been criticized because it is often used without reference to a context. I agree with the view that patriarchy, when defined without contextual qualification is pointless. It has to be seen in a historical, social and economic context if it is to have analytical utility.

Avatar Brah says:

Patriarchal relations are a specific form of gender relation in which women inhabit a subordinated position. In theory, at least, it should be possible to envisage a social context in which gender relations are not associated with inequality. In addition, I hold serious reservation about the analytic or political utility of maintaining system boundaries between 'patriarchy' and the particular socio-economic and political formation (for example, capitalism or state socialism) in which it is embedded. It would be far more useful to understand how patriarchal relations articulate with other forms of social relation in a determinate historical context. Structures of class, racism, gender and sexuality cannot be treated as 'independent variables' because the oppression of each is inscribed within the other-is constituted by and is constitutive of the other.⁸

In the context of involuntary displacement then, the displaced and the displacing agencies both confer upon displaced women a disproportionate trauma in comparison to displaced men. A community that experiences disempowerment is bound to make women to shoulder the crisis. It is not to say that men are not affected when they face a crisis. It is only that men have social sanction to exert power vis-à-vis women in the family and in the community. Patriarchal

⁸ Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996), 109.

relations, internal as well as external to a community, grant men more agency than they do women.

The effects of displacement therefore are dispersed along diverse lines. In fact, in interacting with other societal contexts vis-à-vis displacement, patriarchal relations often intensify the oppression of women. Indeed we find that patriarchal power structures are often recreated in more rigid forms because of the insecurity that the community experiences. The notion of women as property often deepens as a displaced community grapples with the disruption of its historical and cultural continuities. The community tends to close ranks on women ostensibly to secure their protection.

Paradoxically, displacement reconstitutes patriarchies and women are allowed to perform certain tasks they weren't allowed to before. For instance, they are allowed to partake in public spaces and in the labour market as it is seen to be in the interests of the community.

As Nirmala Banerjee notes:

'...in the Indian patriarchal ideology women are regarded more as a highly flexible resource of the household rather than as its full-fledged members. Patriarchal authorities do not necessarily seek to confine women to the limited private space of the household. But they strive to ensure that women's actions in the private or the public domain are tailored to fit in with the designed needs of the former'.⁹

This reconstitution of patriarchies is intermeshed with factors that exert control on the community from outside. Entry into the market economy, displacement, increased penury due to globalisation, resistance movements, changes in national labour configurations, forced migrations, economic recession are a few such factors that push patriarchies to accommodate new roles for women. Nevertheless a close watch is kept on the activities of women lest they step out of the boundaries that patriarchies still maintain.

Needless to say some women do transgress because these are transformational moments even if they are involuntary to begin with. For example, women at resettlement sites are forced to take up casual labour to sustain the household economy and in doing so they are stepping out of the 'suitable' boundaries the community has traditionally formulated for them. This changes women's relationships with the household, the community, the state and other institutions. Similarly, when women participate in resistance movements they are allowed to do so because the interests of the community are seen to be tied to this resistance.

This does not mean that patriarchal, social and cultural orders melt away because the women are struggling for the interests of the community. This only means that patriarchies broaden and justify this participation in the market

⁹ Nirmala Banerjee, "Household Dynamics and Women in a Changing Economy," in *Gender, Population and Development*, edited by Maithreyi Krishna Raj, Ratna M. Sudarshan, Abusaleh Shariff (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 261.

economy or resistance movements as these actions are seen as a contribution to the cohesion and survival of the community or household. In other areas, like control of women's sexuality in particular, patriarchies continue to uphold values that do not necessarily see women as autonomous entities.

In a crisis, the notion of women as the repositories of the honour of the community comes into sharp focus. Patriarchal values embedded within the larger 'host' society that the community has been displaced into, interact with prohibitive norms for women. The rules are thus made more stringent, more inflexible as the displaced community perceives its identity to be in danger. Thus, '...belonging for women is [also] and uniquely linked to sexuality, honour and chastity'.¹⁰

Dress codes are important markers of this honour. Gujarat's mainstream communities see the adivasi dress as 'bold and open'. Thus displaced adivasi women in many sites have had to adopt the sari. Dress codes are based on controlling as well as hiding women's sexuality. They are linked to community honour, which ultimately is male honour. As women belong to their men, the female body becomes the repository of male honour and thus community honour. Therefore if women by their dress show that they are not under male control, it is a slight to male and community honour.

The implication of change in dress codes in resettlement sites is multiple. It also implies that the onus of assimilation (of the displaced community) into the larger mainstream 'host' community is on adivasi women. So it is adivasi women who in a curious twist are now responsible for the honour of the displaced community as well as that of the host community. Displaced adivasi women now become the de facto property of both the communities. Patriarchies of all the communities, regardless of economic, social and cultural variations, are extraordinarily flexible and cleverly justify reframing women's roles.

When adivasi women from displaced communities are forced to encounter 'mainstream' monetized societies, their mobility is restricted as the community fears for its safety and for the safety of its 'property'. This, despite the fact that adivasi social norms do grant women a greater degree of social mobility than upper caste Hindu societies or Muslim societies would prefer to.¹¹ Broadly speaking, some of the restrictions that upper caste Hindu and Muslim societies place on women's mobility compare unfavourably with adivasi social norms. Social and individual space is defined very differently by both, which is not to say that patriarchal controls are not in place in adivasi communities. They simply take different forms and the scope of patriarchal controls is different.

As evidence reveals, adivasi women's support structures are the first to crumble in the resettlement sites of the SSP. By this I do not mean that adivasi women are not resisting these negative changes or that all these processes occur in a

¹⁰ Kumkum Sangari, "Consent, Agency and Rhetorics of Incitement," in *Region, Religion, Caste, Gender and Culture in Contemporary India*, edited by T.V. Satyamurthy (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 251.

¹¹ Both Hindu and Muslim societies are not assumed to be monolithic in their social and cultural interpretations of the morality that is expected to guide human actions. They occupy diverse locations.

homogenous manner across the community. It is a nuanced process, which includes resistance from women, varied responses from the community and also includes intra-community struggles.

Double Displacement: Women 'outside' Society

Women who are displaced by development projects and from social institutions confront different sets of experiences. The experiences of married women are quite different from those of single, divorced, deserted or widowed women. I refer to marriage and family as social institutions. Both these institutions codify and operate patriarchal relations in its purest forms. Within the family, in all its diverse forms women are given apprenticeships in patriarchal roles. And it is within marriage that women live out the realities they have been trained for.

Women's movements the world over have criticised the family as being the central site of women's oppression. It is here, it has been argued, that with the sexual division of labour, demarcation into masculine and feminine roles begins. The family moulds women firmly into patriarchal do's and don'ts and trains them into unquestioningly accepting and internalizing the morality upon which the subordination of women is based.

Ratna Kapur and Brenda Cossman say:

Familial ideology was both shaped by and served to naturalize [family wage], and its allocation of gender roles. Women's roles within the domestic realm as wives and mothers was thus rendered a natural and self-evident product of their biological role in reproduction; simply a part of our collective common sense.¹²

And:

....This dominant familial ideology has both shaped and reinforced the public/private distinction, and the construction of the family as private. This understanding of the family as private, and beyond state intervention has operated to both immunize the oppression of women within this domestic sphere, as well as to obscure the extent to which this private sphere is itself created and protected by state regulation.¹³

This analysis remains restricted to certain kinds of families: it assumes that the nuclear family within an industrialized, capitalist society is the standard. It overlooks the fact that the family, in all its forms, does afford women protection and security when women are in confrontation with the 'larger domains' of the community, the society and the state.

In many of the interviews I conducted it was clear that the women do fall back on the family as a source of support. The family has strong roots in all societies and till such time as an alternative to the family emerges, striking just as strong roots, it is difficult to oversimplify the role of the family.

¹² Ratna Kapur and Brenda Cossman, *Subversive Sites: Feminist Engagements with Law in India* (Delhi: Sage Publications, 1996).

¹³ *Ibid.*

As Ratna Kapur and Brenda Cossman assert:

*In India, the nuclear family is not the dominant ideological form.....The idea of the sexual division of labour does not accurately describe the empirical realities of Indian women's lives. For instance, poor, rural women have long been involved in subsistence farming within the family. Their unpaid work on the family farm has been and continues to be essential for the subsistence food production.*¹⁴

So the experience of being outside these institutions can accentuate the experience of uprootment and displacement; these women suffer double displacement. How do we define 'socially displaced' women. 'Social' or 'society' signifies a certain set of demarcations that exclude or include categories of people; they place some kind of people outside its ambit and some firmly inside. The marital status of the women becomes the central locus of the entire experience of social uprootment and social dislocation. Although I initially resisted the idea of defining women's social identities by their marital status, a significant aspect of the social dislocation that women experience, stems from their position in the family vis-à-vis marriage. (There are of course, other categories of women, like widows, nuns and prostitutes).

In relation to social displacement of women we see that women's sexuality is at the core of this defining principle of social inclusion or exclusion. It is quite decidedly seen as an element that needs to be controlled: the more firmly a woman's sexuality is controlled, the higher is her status. Here again, the operative notion is that women cannot be trusted with autonomy over their own sexuality, that it is too dangerous to be allowed to exist unfettered.

An array of controls has to be in place to ensure that women's sexuality is firmly monitored. So a married woman is given pride of place in a society that first seeks male control over her and then seeks to have the family control her. It is true that different communities react differently to women's marital status. For example, Muslim communities do not usually look down upon widowed women in the same way as caste Hindu society does. Nor does adivasi society confer upon widowhood or desertion/divorce the same kind of contempt that Hindu society does. But even if we are to believe that adivasi societies do grant women's sexuality more agency and are also more inclusive of women's choices, why is it that these societies revert to patriarchal gender relations when in a crisis? Why is it that societies that are far more accommodating, even those that valorise women's autonomy, when in transition, fall back on the same set of values that abuse women's moral, sexual and social dignity?

I argue that this occurs because when it comes to women, there is some kind of continuity between adivasis and their value systems and those of mainstream Hindu caste society. There is a definite transaction occurring between various manifestations of patriarchal norms as codified in various societies. Patriarchal biases in families and the gender discrimination within the institution of marriage militate against women's autonomy. The autonomy granted to women (or wrested by women despite stringent norms) could be illusory, weak or

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

invisible. I refer to autonomy here as the choices that women make even while remaining within societal frameworks and while accepting these as unquestionable. I also refer to it as the choices that women make in their own interests, as opposed to those that prioritize the family, the husband or community.

Widowed, unmarried or divorced women are seen as aberrations as they subvert patriarchal norms which centralises power and control in male authority. These women, who aren't the 'property' of men, by their very existence deny these power structures. In the case of additional displacement due to dams, these women fight a multi-layered battle....

So if the act of, or the circumstances of being outside domestic and social institutions is to be defined as social displacement, we are presuming that there is indeed a oneness, a sense of belonging within the family. There are also various kinds of families. The nuclear family, the joint family, the extended family or the single parent family, function very differently from each other. In addition, these varied families are then placed within broader social institutions that define the roles of each of its constituents depending on cultural and social norms. Oppression to some degree or the other is a collective phenomenon for women and subject to class, caste, race or religion individual women's responses may differ drastically.

My attempt in recounting women's experiences is to understand women's varied locations and how they influence women's options and responses.

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