A qualitative field study on the capabilities and freedoms for women in a developing context challenging the approach of Amartya Sen

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ABSTRACT

The ‘capability approach’, developed by the Indian economist Amartya Sen, has been widely used in the field of development and has contributed a perception of development that is different from the traditional understanding of it. Despite this, the theory has received a great amount of feminist critique and it has been concluded that the field lacks empirical data on how women in developing countries can be fully understood from the approach of Sen. This field study aims at filling this gap of empirical data as well as to examine how well Sen’s approach can contribute to the understanding of women in a developing context. Responses such as the one of Martha Nussbaum and other feminist critique of Sen is examined using a field study on poor women conducted in the state of Karnataka, India. The collection of data has been conducted through interviews with urban poor women as well as with women working with women empowerment at a local organization. Participant observation in the field has been complementary to the interviews. This study reveals that Sen’s capability approach is incomplete to some extent in order to understand the situation of women in a developing context. This lack of understanding is further completed with Nussbaum’s work. Finally, the modern feminist critique against both Sen and Nussbaum shows a lack of analysis in them both in terms of intersectionality and power.

Key words: Amartya Sen, Martha Nussbaum, Feminism, Power, Capabilities, India, Women
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to the topic
Even though it may come as a surprise to some, the world is actually becoming a better place. Poverty is reducing, less people die in armed conflict every year and the rights of women are rising in rocket speed around the world (Rosling, 2018). Despite this, there is a lot of work left to be done in the field and the theories on how to reach development are endless. Nevertheless, how to measure development in the first place seems to still be a debated concept. One of the most famous in the field is the Indian economist Amartya Sen whom in the 1980s developed the widely established theory of ‘‘capability approach’’ presented in the book ‘‘Development as Freedom’’ from 1999. Sen is a professor of Economics as well as a professor of Philosophy. In 1998, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for his contributions in welfare economics. His ‘‘capability approach’’ has been widely used in the academic world as well as by organisations such as the United Nations to understand the concept of development and what it really implies as well as how it should be measured (Atkinson, 1999:2-3). Throughout history, development has been discussed and understood in terms of economic development. Both in GDP per capita as well as on an individual level where a very materialistic view has been used to measure well-being and development by looking almost exclusively at income. Sen has been pioneering in changing this (Atkinson, 1999:1). Despite this great international recognition, he has received some amount of feminist critique for his theoretical framework not being strong enough to take every aspect of being a woman in a developing context into consideration. Many have turned to a scholar called Martha Nussbaum whom, some years after Sen released his book, developed his framework in a more feminist direction. However, even Nussbaum has received feminist response as the field is in a constant progress towards new discoveries and approaches. What was written about women in relation to development in 1999, which is 20 years from now to be exact, might no longer deserve the recognition it still receives according to some researchers in the new generation of academic scholars. The lack of empirical data on this particular issue has left many desk-top researchers confused on the topic and the importance of bringing more of this to the field has been frequently requested, as seen further down in this thesis.

1.2 Objective and Research Questions
Furthermore, the aim of this field research, besides trying to fill some of the gap of empirical data on how poor women in a developing context is perceiving their own capabilities, is to
investigate how well Amartya Sen’s theory of capability approach can be applied to a case of women in the district of Karnataka, India. This research also aims at looking deeper into what is missing in the theory of capability approach according to Nussbaum and some of its feminist critiques, and how well that particular critiques can fill the possible gaps of Sen and Nussbauman. Moreover, the objective of this study is to;

‘Provide empirical data on how urban poor women in India perceive their own capabilities in relation to the capability approach by Amartya Sen as well as to examine how well Nussbaum and the feminist critique of that given theory can complete the understanding of poor women’s situation in developing countries through a case study conducted in Karnataka state, India.’’

To fulfil this purpose, the following four research questions will be answered;

1. How do poor women in a district such as Karnataka, India perceive their own capabilities and freedoms?

2. How well is the capability approach of Amartya Sen fit to describe the capabilities and freedoms of women in a developing context in relation to the empirical data using the case of Karnataka state?

3. How well is Nussbaum completing this understanding of women’s capabilities in a developing context?

4. Taking into consideration some of the feminist critique of Sen and Nussbaum, how does it complete the understanding of women’s capabilities and freedoms in a developing context?

1.3 Structure of this thesis
First, a shorter background chapter will introduce the reader to the situation of women in India. This is for all possible readers who have not visited India themselves or simply lack knowledge about the situation of women in the country in order to understand the context in which this field study has been conducted. This will be followed by a brief introduction of the Organization ODP and some main concepts of it that the reader needs to be familiar with in order to fully understand this thesis. After this, the theoretical chapter will begin by a closer
look at the main concepts of the capability approach followed by an introduction to Martha Nussbaum's additions to Sen’s approach as well as some key feminist criticism towards them both. A brief literature review will then clarify why this research has importance to the field. The methodology describes the course of actions taken to collect the data through two main strategies; interviews and participant observation. It also introduces the reader to the approach and some brief ethical considerations, limitations and delimitations as well as evaluation of sources. This is followed by the presentation of findings which introduces a selection of the empirical data collected in this field research trough eight identified themes. Every theme is constructed based on the common characteristics of the interviews. The key findings of the observations are comprehended into one paragraph to finish off the presentation of data with. Finally, this empirical data is analysed with support from the theoretical chapter in an analysis based on three themes; Sen, Nussbaum and the feminist critique against them both. At last, the research questions will be answered along with some suggestions for further research.
2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Women in India

To give a more complete understanding of the situation of women in India and hence being able to put the presentation of findings in a context, a shorter background is provided in this chapter.

During the last decades, the gigantic nation of India has undergone some great progress both in terms of economic growth as well as in the area of human development. The success on a nation state level is very present indeed, however, around 50% of the population are marginalized in areas such as social life, sexual and reproductive rights and political participation. Many women in India are stuck “inside the four walls”, meaning they lack fair opportunities to seek work outside of the household as well as being very dependent on their husbands in the social life. Domestic violence, lack of education, child marriage, rape and sexual violence are examples of other problems women and girls are facing on a daily basis in India (Kishore and Gupta, 2009:4-10).

In more quantitative terms, the progress done to empower women in India is clearly inadequate. At least if one is to believe the “Gender Gap Report” provided yearly by the World Economic Forum. In 2018, India had a rank of 108 out of 149 countries measured in gender inequalities around the world. This is a falling rank compared to 2006 when India was on place 98. The worst areas for women are “Health and Survival” (rank 147 out of 149 countries) as well as “Economic participation and opportunity” (rank 142 out of 149 countries). In other words, India is one of the world’s worst countries to live in as a woman in those areas. However, when it comes to political empowerment for women, India is among the top countries in the world with a rank of 19 (out of 149 countries) (World Economic Forum, 2018:123). Despite being one of the world's largest economies, India follows the same pattern as many of the poorest countries in the world when it comes to the mobility of women, for example. According to a report from the World Bank, challenges such as poverty and lack of education for girls follows the same patterns throughout the six largest developing economies namely Brazil, China, the Arab Republic of Egypt, Indonesia, Nigeria and India (Narayan and Van der Weide, 2018:13).
2.2 The Case: ODP

The above statistics evokes the question on how it is possible for a country like India to achieve the agenda 2030 and reach the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) when the opportunities and capabilities of women are limited. How can one move forward towards a development when 50% of the population is not entirely on board? Many NGOs are fighting to improve the situation of women in many developing countries, including India. One of them are The Organization for the Development of People (ODP), a non-profit organization located in the town of Mysore, Karnataka state, in India. It was founded in January 1984 and has ever since been working with various forms of development issues ranging from HIV/AIDS awareness to women empowerment, two examples of questions that is highly relevant for the development of India according to ODP. These programs and projects range throughout various geographical areas in Karnataka in towns such as Mysore, Mandya, Kodagu and Chamarajanagar (Odpmysore.org, n.d).

As our research focuses on women, we have joined the Women Empowerment Program (WEP) provided at ODP. The WEP started in 1988 and its main goal is to ‘‘Empower poor and marginalized women to have access and control over resources and ability to exercise their rights with freedom’’. The aims of WEP are several, for example to ‘‘to enable poor and marginalized women gain equity, justice and legitimate voice in their lives’’ (Odpmysore.org, n.d).

The formation of so called ‘‘sangha groups’’, groups of about 20 women who get together and discuss financial questions such as savings as well as take loans and support each other socially, has been a major effort from ODP to strengthen women. These “sangha groups” are self-help-groups and the word sangha will be used throughout the thesis, when referring to the self-help-groups. Usually, the Sangha members meet once a month to save money and socialize. ODP also give loans with a very low rate of interest to poor women to enable them to start up business or invest in other areas of their lives such as expensive marriage or health issues. They also give awareness sessions with women about women’s rights (Odpmysore.org, n.d).
3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this theoretical chapter, Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum's approaches will be introduced as well as the feminist critique of their frameworks.

3.1 Amartya Sen and the ‘‘capability approach’’

In the book ‘‘Development as freedom’, published 1999, Amartya Sen argues that the most important way to measure well-being is in what people are able to do (‘‘doings’’). The actual wealth that people possess are of less importance, according to Sen, initially because it does not matter how much money one has if basic freedoms are not granted. First off, it is worth mentioning the word ‘‘functionings’’ that Sen provides. To have the capability to achieve something, one needs a set of skills called ‘‘functionings’’. The functionings are a range of skills that allows a human to do something that they wish to do (Sen, 1999:75). For example; if a human wants to get a job, there are a couple essential skills that are required to get a certain employment, perhaps such as being literate or know manufacturing. If this person has the capability to get a certain job depends upon that person's set of skills to do so; which are called functionings. If the person cannot read, the capability for employment will be very limited for example. A functioning is also an environment that allows one to reach capabilities, such as being ‘‘adequately nourished’’, ‘‘being free from avoidable disease’’ and ‘‘having self-respect’’ (Sen, 1999:75).

In his theoretical framework, he provides five ‘‘capabilities’’ that are in the centre for human well-being. These five (5) capabilities are:

1. Political Freedoms (the right to participate in free and fair elections to decide who and on what principles one should be governed. Includes free media and forums for free debate)
2. Economic Facilities (the right to engage free in the labour market, the right to savings and economic facilities. Sen also mention women’s right to seek employment outside the home)
3. Social opportunities (The right to basic education, gender equality, women’s rights, right to basic health facilities, childcare and access to decent work)
4. Transparency Guarantees (The right to absence of corruption and a functioning legal and interior system)
5. Protective Security (The right to shelter from armed conflict and alarming poverty, including emergency facilities) (Sen, 1999:38-40).

As this thesis is focusing on the situation of women in a developing context, the chapter of "Women and Social change" from Sen's book "Development as freedom" tells us more about the biggest challenges Sen identifies for women. He makes one particular notion about women in developing countries in general, using examples such as India, about something refer to as "missing women". Sen discovered that in many developing countries, the proportion of women compared to men are suspiciously low. This situation of "missing women" are initially caused by sex-selective abortions, female infanticide (murder of newborn girl child), lethal violence against women and inadequate healthcare for girls according to him (Sen, 1999:106).

3.2 Nussbaum

As mentioned before, many have turned to Martha Nussbaum to complete the theoretical understanding of women in a developing context. Nussbaum is an American philosopher whom in 2001 wrote a book called "Women and Human Development: The Capability Approach" where she developed the capability approach to be more applicable to the case of women as a marginalized group lacking rights in every area of society compared to men. Not that she finds Sen inadequate or stands in opposition to him, in fact, they worked together to a large extent. However, she acknowledges some of the patriarchal structures' women face in every aspect of their life in depth throughout her work and adding specific capabilities she finds missing in Sen. Many of these ideas emerged in field research where empirical data proved a gap in some of the complex aspects Sen had overlooked in a woman's life in a developing country. According to Nussbaum, there is a need of ten (10) capabilities besides the ones presented by Sen. Not all of these will be presented here, as we simply make the notion that not all of them are necessary additions to Sen. For example, capability number ten (10) called "Control over One’s Environment" is separated in two parts where A is Political. Nussbaum describes this as "Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one’s life; having the right of political participation, protections of free speech and association". This is sure an important capability, but there is nothing in it that is not covered already by Sen. Therefore, only four of Nussbaum's capabilities will be discussed in relation to our empirical data. These are;
1. ‘Life. Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length; not dying prematurely, or before one’s life is so reduced as to be not worth living.’

3. ‘Bodily Integrity. Being able to move freely from place to place; having one’s bodily boundaries treated as sovereign, i.e. being able to be secure against assault, including sexual assault, child sexual abuse, and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction.’

5. ‘Emotions. Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger. Not having one’s emotional development blighted by overwhelming fear and anxiety, or by traumatic events of abuse or neglect.’

6. ‘Practical Reason. Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one’s life.’

(Nussbaum, 2001:78-80)

Moreover, Nussbaum explains that all these capabilities are dependent on each other in very complex ways. For example, political participation or the opportunity to seek work outside home are strongly related to literacy for example. As well as the opportunity to seek work outside home is strongly related to bodily integrated and the opportunity to move freely. Nussbaum further discusses the importance of capabilities number six (6) Practical Reason that is central for all others to work in a genuine way. Nussbaum claims that it is not only about the opportunity to e.g. seek work outside home, but how current discourse and power relations etc interfere with the choice’s women make in all these areas (Nussbaum, 2001:82). Nussbaum claims, even though there in many cases might be legally possible to exercise certain freedoms there are invisible obstacles in culture or in institutions that stop these freedoms from being exercised (Nussbaum, 2001:85). In other words, she points further to how norms, institutions, values, cultures and discourses affect the freedoms of women and their critical way of making choices on a level that Sen does not, for why many have turned to her instead of Sen.
3.3 The feminist critique

3.3.1 Intersectionality

Even though similar conclusions are stressed in the article ‘Women's Human Rights: From Progress to Transformation, An Intersectional Response to Martha Nussbaum’ written by Dr. Shreya Atrey, critique is directed towards Nussbaum in her work. The article is a feminist response to Nussbaum where Dr. Atrey claims Nussbaum, as well as Sen, are missing an intersectional perspective on women’s situation in a development context. Atrey writes, which is the foundation of the term ‘intersectionality’, that

"The purpose is to understand whether the successes of the women’s movement and women’s human rights have improved the conditions of women who are disadvantaged not only because of their sex or gender but also disadvantaged by their race, colour, caste, religion, region, disability, age, sexual orientation, etc’’

(Atrey, 2017).

In other words, intersectionality is connected to power but instead of seeing women as a homogeneous group sharing common obstacles, as Nussbaum does, it recognizes the differences in power relations within certain groups based on other disadvantages such as skin colour or class. For example, a poor woman will in general face other (often greater) issues compared to a rich woman in a development context, and the same applies to dark women compared to light skinned women. Even though Nussbaum acknowledges that her suggested capabilities works together and affects one another, she does not reflect upon the concept of intersectionality in her literature (Atrey, 2017). We consider it reasonable to add this concept as it provides a deeper understanding of the challenge’s women face in a developing context.

3.3.2 Power

In addition to this, further critique has been directed towards both Sen and Nussbaum, for not taking power into enough consideration in their theories. In the journal ‘Three-Dimensional Power: A Discussion of Steven Lukes’ Power: A Radical View’ the author Keith Dowding discusses the renowned three-dimensional power theory of Steven Lukes which presents a dimension of power that works through ‘ideological domination’. This is a theoretical dimension that initially suggests that people whom are being dominated by power acquiesce to it, or even actively supports it. As the dominating group aims at preventing conflict between different groups with different interest to occur, it helps the dominator to maintain
power without any opposition from the dominated group/groups. In other words; people believe in the values which oppress them. Dowding draws on one example of Sen and Nussbaum who both claimed Indian women willingly were giving up their food and health for their male counterparts. He claims them both to lack an in-depth analysis on the power structure (for where he suggests Lukes) that makes these women act in such a way (Dowding, 2006:138-139). Dowding discusses the paradox of Lukes and asks himself - who are Lukes or any other to categorize what is oppressive and what is not based on a personal values? Many times, domination by men in developing countries are blamed on the culture. Dowding makes the conclusion that throughout history, a woman has been dependent on her husband’s survival, therefore the support of his domination has been rational. However, today, that is no longer the case. Dowding writes;

‘One that is often suggested is that such behaviour ‘is part of our culture’ or ‘that is what is expected of us’. One way of considering this matter is to suggest that the expected cultural behaviour was once rational. It was once the optimal equilibrium of a survival game. Now, however, the equilibrium strategy is only so because it is still played: it is no longer optimal. The cultural hold-over can be criticised because it is no longer reasonable.’
(Dowding, 2006:139)

In other words, Dowding consider it perfectly reasonable to criticize both Sen and Nussbaum for their approaches as the complexity of power is missing in their provided frameworks especially in the situation of women.
4. LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1 Where is the gap?
A lot of research has been carried out on the topic of Sen, being one of the most well-known and widely appreciated human development theorists throughout time, however, a body of prior work indicates a lack of empirical data in the field of Sen and critique against his theory of capability approach. The majority of literature available on the feminist critique of Sen are desk studies and many of them are addressing a lack of empirical data on the topic. As our research aims at exploring different theoretical approaches to Sen, not so much priority has been given to the section of literature review.

One research relevant to discuss is one conducted in the area of violence against women in relation to the deprivation of freedoms of women written by Loretta Pyles called “The Capabilities Approach and Violence Against Women: Implications for Social Development”. Pyles discuss the applicability of Sen’s approach in the subject of violence against women and she points specifically to the importance of Nussbaum in the area of bodily integrity. She writes;

“While Sen (1999) has certainly been attuned to the unique situation of women and the necessity for increased attention to women’s vulnerable position in order to enhance their capabilities, he has not proactively addressed the issue of violence against women”
(Pyles, 2008:36)

In addition, she points to the lack of data in the area. She urges the importance of contributing to the dialogue on the subject (Pyles, 2008:36). In the conclusion, she provides her own suggestions on areas where research is lacking. She writes that

“Evidence-based practice studies of micro-enterprise programs for battered women, job development endeavors in urban and rural areas, and the effects of political participation on the well-being of communities are just a few ideas of endeavors that could be assessed”
(Pyles, 2008:37).
To our understanding, this field research on women in Karnataka fits very well into what Pyles defines as lacking in the field and we consider our empirical data filling parts of the missing gap.

There are several other scholars making similar conclusions. For example, in an article called ‘Development as empowerment’, written by Marianne T. Hill in the journal ‘Feminist Economics’ from 2003, Hill argues that Sen’s framework is useful yet insufficient due to a lack of analysis in power relations. According to Hill, power works primarily through institutions and she develops a framework in relation to both Sen and Nussbaum that suggests an evaluation of systematic power relations in the capabilities women are given in life. Hill mentions that Sen himself makes a notion about the flaws of his own theory to describe these relations and how it affects the capabilities of certain groups. Yet again, her study is a desk study that lacks empirical data to fully draw conclusions on the lives of women in developing countries. Furthermore, she makes the conclusion that there is a lack not only in Sen, but in the field in general. Both of empirical data as well as she claims a strong conceptual framework is missing that truly captures all dimensions of being poor or being victim of gender inequalities especially in developing countries (Hill, 2003: 118-30). Again, this points to the importance of what our research can provide to the field.
5. METHODOLOGY

5.1 Approach and Generalizability

An abductive approach has been implied for this research. Abductive method is about working with an already existing analytical framework and apply it on your own research with new interpretations on that specific phenomenon. You start off with a concept and develop it further where you bring forth new understandings and explanations (Danermark et al., 2005:90-91). When examined the capability approach, we moved between the empirical data and the theory to create a new understanding of how the women perceive their own capabilities. This approach is not meant to provide a whole new theory or prove if a theory, in this case the capability approach, is right or wrong. It is about using an existing framework and apply it on the research to bring forth new explanations and understandings through own interpretations of a phenomenon (Danermark et al., 2005:90-91).

In terms of generalizability, Karnataka state is a very typical example of an Indian state where many NGOs are working with women and increasing their status in Karnataka and in the Indian society as a whole. Women in Karnataka face about the same problems as women do in the rest of India (Lakshmana, 2007:8-11). Because of this, Karnataka has been chosen as a representative example for conclusions that will be drawn based on the whole of India. Furthermore, as women’s situation in India is somewhat similar to many other developing countries according to the background chapter of this thesis, some conclusions can be drawn upon women’s situation in developing countries in general we believe.

5.2 Data Collection

5.2.1 Semi-structured interviews

The first method which has been used for this research is semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviewing is useful when the researcher does not want to limit the respondent in their thoughts and reflections. Compared to structured interviews, where all the questions are set and must be asked in a specific order, semi-structured interviews are designed to be more open in their characteristic. It also allows the interviewer to decide themselves the sequence of the questions and to ask further questions if needed to achieve significant answers for the research (Bryman, 2012: 471-472). The reason for choosing semi-structured interviews is simply because we do not want limited but rather reflective answers. These interviews have been carried out with two main types of sampling: partly women working at the organization
ODP with questions related to women empowerment, and partly women receiving help from ODP. These are further referred to as ‘purposive sampling’ and ‘convenience sampling’. First, a purposive sampling has been used where a total of four women whom are working at ODP have been interviewed in one semi structured interview each. Only the interviewed lady and the two interviewers who are the authors of this thesis have been participant (no translator has been used in these four interviews as these women had sufficient English skills). This sample has been used since these women are experts in the case used for our study, which is what purposive sampling means; to specifically choose the respondent based on that person's expertise or knowledge in a given area (Bryman, 2012:422). At first, our intentions were to only interview the women receiving help from ODP. However, when discovering a lack of critical reflection in this particular group of sampling it became obvious that interviews with staff working with women’s issues was necessary to complete the understanding of a woman’s life in India. These four women have received the same questions, which can be seen in the appendix section. Each one of them has given their own perception of women’s capabilities in different areas in interviews ranging from 30 minutes up to two hours.

Regarding the interviews with women receiving help from ODP, the sampling is a mix between ‘convenience sampling’ based on women in Sangha groups and a ‘purposive sampling’. A ‘convenience sampling’ refers to a sampling based on what the researcher can get access to (Bryman, 2012:201). Simply put, these women have been chosen as they are the ones we have met in the field and have been able access. They are also chosen since they are all typical examples of women in a developing context, therefore they are fit to answer how such women in Karnataka perceive their own capabilities. The goal was to conduct one-to-one interviews with these women, but it appeared to be nearly impossible due to the curiosity of the rest of the group whom was not intended to participate but interfered in the interviewing process anyway. Therefore, group interviews were the final decision as the best type of interview for this sampling. These interviews have been conducted in groups of 15 to 20 women where one or two English speaking women have translated the questions and the answers to us, summed up the discussions occurring in the group if they did not agree with each other or cleared out the response if several women were talking at once. In one case, no women could speak English and in that case, we had one male translator with us. A total of four (4) group interviews has been carried out, the first one with 20 women. The second one with 15 women, the third one with 17 women and the fourth one with 15 women. This equals a sampling size of 67 women in total whom has participated in group interviews during this
field study. Just as the interviews with the ODP staff, these interviews have been semi-structured, however with influences of being unstructured as the conversations many times has been floating away due to e.g. curiosity of the respondents. The questions for the group interviews have been more specific on the situation of the interviewed women, rather than the situation of women in general as with the other interviews as seen in the appendix. The group interviews have been ranging from 30 minutes up to 1 hour and 30 minutes. One example transcription of a group interview is attached in the appendix.

5.2.2 Participant observation
The second method used for this research is participant observations which has been a complementary for the interviews, in order to get a better understanding of the whole context. Participant observation is also known as “ethnography” and is a method based on the researcher entering the field which is being observed to collect data through field notes (Bryman, 2012:431-432). Participant observation can be done in several different ways. For this study, an overt observation has been conducted, meaning that both the organization that we have been with and the women that we have met are fully aware that we are researchers (Bryman, 2012:433-441). The reason for being open with our identities was because we needed to get access to the field, which required that we had to tell the organization about our work and study as they were the ‘’gate-keepers’’ that let us into the field. These observations helped us to understand the broader picture of the setting, the culture and the routines of the women when they gathered and was very complementary to the interviews.

The period of time for the participant observation was six weeks whereas during the first week no field visits were conducted. The first week was very much about understanding the work of ODP and observing their work and having interactions with the staff of ODP. During the remaining five weeks we had three field visits per week, which brings us to a total of 15 field visits during the stay and refers to places outside the ODP office. These 15 field visits do not include the four interviews that we had with the ODP staff. The field visits have taken place in the Karnataka district, in both rural and urban-rural areas.

5.3 Ethical considerations
All the interviewed women, both ODP staff and the women receiving help, has been recorded and well informed about what the information will be used for. In addition, they have given their consent before and during recording and we have promised that the material will be
treated confidentially. Exactly how they have been informed is seen in the appendix. All participants are anonymous and above 18 years old. They have been given fictional names in this thesis. The topic of capabilities is not sensitive in its nature, however, in many cases there have been discussions that can be considered sensitive. For example, when discussing personal experiences of sexual or domestic violence. These topics have been treated with much carefulness and have only been discussed on the initiatives of the interviewed women. Another dimension worth mentioning is the fact that ethnography or participant observation has been criticized for being an ethically problematic method for data collection. As Bryman (2012:138) identifies, there is a risk of lack of ‘’informed consent’’ when conducting a participant observation, which this study partly is based on. In our case, both the organization as well as the women in the field has been informed about being observed, however, there are quotes appearing in the empirical data that has been spoken in personal interactions with e.g. staff of ODP during office time. These observations and conversations have been very complementary to the understanding of our research questions, for why some are brought up in the presentation of findings. The staff have been well informed about our purpose of being there, but not to what extent they themselves also have been observed. It should, however, be impossible to track their identities in this thesis.

5.4 Limitation and Delimitations
During this field research, there has been some limitations and delimitations which has been taken in consideration when writing this thesis.

The first limitation has been the language barrier where we have not always been able to speak with the women in English and have therefore had different interpreters for some of the observations in the field. This might sometimes leave out some important information or lead to misunderstandings, which could have been avoided if we would have known the local language or if the women that we have met were familiar with the English language. It has affected the study in a way where some answers during interviews were inevitable somewhat basic rather than in depth.

This also led to another limitation. Some of the translators have been the ones who work at the ODP. We observed that when we used the staff from the ODP as translators in fields, the women would respond and answer the questions differently compared to the interviews which have been conducted without a translator or with an interpreter who is not connected to ODP.
There is a possibility that some of the answers were more biased due to the presence of ODP staff as many women appeared to be scared of giving the ‘‘wrong’’ answers. For example, when asked about the challenges for women in Karnataka, they gave us answers such as ‘‘nothing’’ or ‘‘everything is very good here’’ in almost every case where ODP staff were present. Later on, this was not a problem however, as we used translators not connected to ODP, and this has not affected the outcome of the research to a large extent.

The third limitation has been the issue of not blending in properly while being in the fields and doing the participant observations. As we were at different places for every new field visit, the curiosity of the women to know about us and our presence in the fields, made it difficult for us to blend in. A lot of time-consuming procedures such as photo shoots occurred. However, at ODP, it became easier for us to do the participant observation because we were in that environment for a longer period, where the staff were familiar with our presence. Another limitation was that we were not able to conduct single-interviews with the women in the sangha’s, which was the initial plan. Their curiosity disturbed the solo-interviews and hence, single interviews with all of them was not an option anymore. The word limitation has created a range of delimitations as seen below.

In terms of delimitations, a number have been made. For example, the choice of conducting the study on women was the first one as well as the choice of Karnataka, India. As mentioned before, this delimitation was made due to Karnataka being a very typical and representative state of India. The word limitation for this C thesis has forced us to only choose the most accurate and relevant capabilities (according to us) of Nussbaum for analysis. The limitation of words also made us choose only two feminist critiques of Sen and Nussbaum, as the theoretical chapter would be too general otherwise.

5.5 Evaluation of sources
The primary sources used in this thesis is our own collection of empirical data through interviews and participant observation. As secondary sources, several different academic papers and scientifically reports written by scholars have been used who are deployed within the field. The sources have been carried out with caution. We do wish to acknowledge that one source, regarding the organization ODP used in the background chapter, may be a biased source as we use their own webpage. However, since there is no other source available to be
used to get access to that information, the source has been used anyway with that fact in mind. We do not, however, consider it to decrease the credibility of this thesis.
6. PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

6.1 Short introduction to the empirical data

In this presentation of empirical data, eight different themes will be presented. These themes are a result of common features which has been found while conducting the interviews and those features will be presented below. A short explanation of each theme will be presented, as well as quotes from the interviews will be offered in each section, to demonstrate the following themes. (1) Marriage and Divorce, (2) Violence, (3) Men, (4) Money, (5) Inside the four walls, (6) Culture and Old traditions, (7) Corruption and (8) Gossip.

As mentioned earlier, four of these interviews has been conducted with the women working at the ODP who has been working with women empowerment for a couple of years. They have been given fictional names, when presenting the data in order to not reveal their identities. These names are ‘‘Pihu’’, ‘‘Myra’’, ‘‘Divya’’ and ‘‘Ishita’’ and these names will be used when referring to what they have said during the interviews. The other four interviews are group interviews and the answers have been collected as one unit, since there were similar responses multiple times. Last, the observations will be shortly presented.

6.2 Themes

6.2.1 Marriage and Divorce

Throughout the interviews, the importance of marriage has been identified as a theme where divorce is not accepted in the society. Marriage is regarded as a natural and given part of a woman’s life and has been mentioned several times, in different manners. Both Pihu and Divya as well as the women in the group interviews speaks about marriages, where they lift up different aspects of marriage. Ishita speaks about her experience of being a divorced woman and the challenges which she has faced. It becomes clear that marriage is a matter of security as well as a symbol of status, while a divorce is a complicated procedure that takes a long time. Many women say it is very important to spend a lot of money on a fancy wedding, even if they suffer from poverty, marriage is a priority. It is also a matter of stigma where a divorced woman must live with the consequences of leaving a man for the rest of her life. Child marriage is also common, mostly for poor women in rural areas.
Pihu says;
“The society you know, if they don’t spend [money on a fancy wedding] the society looking ‘oh, oh that marriage was not thaat good’. They speak, right? Even the boy’s side. Here the Hindus marriages, the girl’s family has to spend marriage. The whole marriage expenses the girl’s side family has to look into. It is the culture. If the boy says that ‘I will bring one thousand people’, you have to feed one thousand people (...) Even if you are poor, you have to show that ‘ok I can manage’. (...) If you go to Chamarajanagar [nearby village] everyday there will be one or two cases of child early marriages’.

Divya says:
“Girls are not able to complete their education because they get married in a very young age”

During one group interview, we asked the women about the importance of marriage. They responded to live as a single is nothing they want. Marriage is a security for them. Many of them speak of the importance of marriage at a young age, that every woman has some kind of ‘expiration date’. One woman says;
“If you are not married by 23 and have no children by 26 people will ask questions”

Ishita has own experiences of getting a divorce. She lived with an abusive husband and is now living as a single woman for the rest of her life. Her mother did not want Ishita to get a divorce. She says;
“I am single. Now it has changed, I say boldly I am single. I am there. I have broken it, my relation I have no more with my husband, I have taken a divorce. He abused me mentally (...) Probably in my family, I’m the first women taken a divorce, from my father’s side and mother’s side. (...) My mother is so furious. She understand my situation but still she is furious. (...) I cannot open my mouth at home, I cannot tell her back anything. ‘It’s your fault your life is this’ she says. (...)My mother don’t want me to marry again. It is better to live alone, single.’

6.2.2 Violence
Violence against women by their husbands, beatings and fearing to go out because of harassment, is the second theme which has been recognized. There are many women who testifies that violence in different forms occurs towards them and women in general. All four
of the ODP staff, Pihu, Divya, Ishita and Myra speaks about this issue and so does the women in the group interviews. The harassments are both inside the house, also expressed as “inside the four walls” as well as outside their homes, for example at the workplaces. Some women fear deadly violence from men, and one woman speaks about the problem of gender based lethal violence being portrayed as suicide.

Pihu says;
“Yeah everywhere, rape exists. Molestation will be there. Some harassment will be there. Women are scared about that. (...) Suppose something happens, who is there for me? (...) Even to send a girl child alone to somewhere, they are scared (...) Beating is there, beating is common. Before, the husband beating you is common. If a husband beats he will say ‘She is my wife, who are you to ask me?’”

Divya draws similar conclusions. She says;
“Another issue is the domestic violence where both mental and physical harassment of women are common, especially by their drunk husbands. (...) They [women] are suppressed and ruled by the men and are abused if they do something without asking for permission. (...) The rape rates are high in the rural areas, including child rape.”

Ishita says:
“Basically, the thing is, some things for why women are not getting involved is the over-burden family responsibilities, one thing is sexual harassment at the workplace.”

Ishita also speaks about deadly violence against women that are portrayed as suicides. It is common that women get so abused that they die, or that men intentionally kill them, and to not get punishment they blame suicide. Ishita has worked with this in the past and she gives one example;

‘‘There was no clue at all, when that women died, we searched for this [signs of abuse], noothing was there. When the dead body was taken to the table for the post mortem, suddenly he took off her clothes. She has written here [points at the leg]: my husband is the reason for my death. She has written here, because she knew that he will close all the clues. (...) Many deaths are caused by domestic violence or burning women alive and then the perpetrator tries to make it look like a suicide.’”
Myra says;
‘Women do not feel safe. They are considered as a commodity (...) The problem is also, that women have to do both housework and paid work. And everywhere she is harassed’.

During the group interviews, many women testifies about these issues as well. They make sure to be at home before sunset. One woman says;
‘If 7 a clock and she is not home, I will call her and say Where are you? What has happened? Who is with you? Are you alone? She has to inform us. If she goes ANYWHERE, she has to inform. I like if she goes in group. Not alone. All friends together.’

Another type of violence that many women testifies about is the low rates of women compared to men, where women are being murdered and small girl children are killed due to male preference. As Divya says;
‘Even ratios, per 1000 boys only 911 girls are there. People don’t want the girl child. Even rape and murdering is there. And they do abortions of girls’

6.2.3 Men
This third theme is a description of how the women perceive men, husbands and equality. It is also about how they claim their husbands to perceive women empowerment. Many have spoken about male criticism of the sangha groups, that later have come to change when realizing that they can benefit from it too. Many also emphasize the importance of having support from the men. Some women are positive towards the male domination. For them, having their own pocket money is enough of women empowerment. A few women even say some women deserve rape (for example if she goes out in the night). Some women claim to feel equal to men, even though they recognize beating and other issues exists. Ishita on the other hand explains that behaviour change men must take place.

Ishita says;
“We have to bring behaviour change. In the Indian society boys are more considered as asset and women are considered as a liability. (...) When he changes, obviously society will change, right? Nature has given equal stamina and equal strength. It’s not a cultural thing, it’s a behaviour thing, basically. I have come to that conclusion, after working 20 years with this. We have to change the behaviour of men’
On the issue of women being perceived as the weaker sex she also says;

‘‘Though women can handle, manage such tough jobs but still there is a gender discrimination. Not only because women can’t do the work. The notion of the men in the society is that they don’t want to give higher jobs for women. Because they have some insecurity within them, they think; ‘if the women can start occupying our job, what will happen to us?’’

During the group interviews, many women say that men are trying to put them down. One woman, who is in charge of one sangha group, noticed that husbands talked bad about their wives when they went to sangha. She says;

‘‘But later on, we just stop it. Men started speaking very badly. They put you down. But they would say, oh no ‘this one is not proper’. If ladies joined with me in the sangha group going out, husbands would say their wife were spoiled. So I took it away and only met once a month for financial purposes. That is the easiest thing to do.’’

Another woman in a group interview says that male support is everything;

“Men support. You really need the men support. Brother, husband, your son or somebody else. You need good back support, you really should have. Otherwise you can’t survive (...) Yes. A man and money.’’

Divya claims she see a small change in the behaviour of men. She says;

“The husbands they are more supporting now. So the men now also they are thinking; ‘this is not our culture, we have to give respect to our wives and children’. We have to utilize our rights, so we are human beings, so mindset is changing. Cooperating each other and mutual understanding. Cheering each other. That types of qualities are improving among men.”

During one group interview, the following dialogue took place;

**Interviewer:** Do they feel equal to their men?

[translator speaking in local language and women nodding their heads]

**Translator:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** In what way?

[translator speaking in local language and women speaking]
**Translator**: She says ‘‘My husband is working in the bank, I’m working with the cows and in the home. We are equal. He is earning money, I am earning money.’’

**Interviewer**: Let me ask her this. Can she go out without asking for permission from her husband?

[translator speaking in local language and women shaking their heads]

**Translator**: No.

**Interviewer**: Can the man go out without asking for her permission?

[translator speaking in local language and women nodding their heads]

**Translator**: Yes.

**Interviewer**: Then how are they equal?

[translator speaking in local language and silence occurs]

(...) 

**Interviewer**: What happens if she goes out anyway? Without permission?

[translator speaking in local language and women starts speaking]

**Translator**: Conflict. The husbands will get very angry. The family members will come to counselling.

**6.2.4 Money**

The fourth theme is the one theme which has been brought up in each and every interview, to some extent; the importance of money. To be self-sufficient, have own pocket money and to run their own respective businesses are a few common features, recognized in the group interviews. Even Divya speaks about the financial benefits that can be achieved through the sangha-group. Ishita talks about a different method and concept which is used in order to earn money. It is called the “devadasi”-system where women and children are sold into the prostitution in the name of God, through pimps and middle-men.

During the group interviews, almost all women claim money to be very important for them. Mostly because they do not need to ask for their husbands’ permission when buying thing anymore. When asked if they wanted to engage in politics, one woman shake her head and the translator says;

“That rather focus on their own earnings and business and save the money for the future.”

A common notion is the male acceptance of the sangha when the husbands noticed they could get money from the loans as well. One woman says;
“But after joining, the husband noticed that he could get money also. So now it is no problems.”

Another woman says;
“He needs money, 10000 rupees, who will give? I will give. I will go to the sangha, write my signature and he will get money. Family will get money. Everybody is happy. And later, they liked that we were learning something.”

Similar to this, Divya says;
“Joining the sangha groups has facilitated the women to get access to money (...) Now they do not need to go for begging or for prostitution if they do not have money. Women with no skills have to work as domestic servants or begging”

Ishita explains the system of prostitution in the name of God where middle men and pimps, or family members of the victim, will earn money when a girl is sold to a temple. She says;

“They dedicate that girl to temple. They dedicate in the name of God (...) if a son is sick, or a father is sick and I’m promised he will get recovered; I’ll dedicate her. Somebody will take her, that person will pay. She will be offered in the name of God and then she will be used by the men, in the same village. He will give some money to the family or to her. (...) And later they started going to the brothels through the pimps, through the middle-man, and something like that. When started, she was started getting money, that more number of girls started getting into the dedication in the name of God. (...) This is called Devadasi-system and the government has completely banned dedication of girls. But now, they don’t do the rituals but they use Devadasi tradition and they continue to dedicate the girls for prostitution.”

6.2.5 Inside the four walls
A lot of women are not allowed to move freely from one place to another without the permission of their husbands. This is also something that has been brought up in every conducted interview. This statement is also confirmed by Divya and Pihu who acknowledge these restrictions apply for women, but not for men. The progress is slow and they are restricted in their lives, expressing their situation as still being “inside the four walls”. They are not free to go wherever they want and whenever they want. They make sure to be at home before sunset and makes sure that their daughters come home by then, or earlier.
Almost every woman claim she is not allowed to go out without the permission of her husband. The only exceptions are those women who do not have husbands (widows). They, however, do not go out late either since they fear harassments. One woman says;

“...women will not leave the house without the permission of her husband because otherwise she will face problems”

When asked if they wanted to get education, they laugh. The translator says;

‘No. They laugh because the husbands would never send them, they say. Husbands would not give the permission to go for education or for a good job (...) When joining the sangha, the husbands telling ‘we don’t need that, because we are in a village system and the lady goes out, the public will tell this and that’, now they are telling ‘ok, you can mingle with the public and you are saving the money. So you can go, but not cross the limits.’

When we asked what ‘crossing the limits’ means, he says it means going out without permission.

On this topic, Divya says;

“They [women] are suppressed and ruled by the men and are abused if they do something without asking for permission”

Pihu seems to agree;

“Men can go out anytime, anywhere, even night-time and then he can come back. But women is not like that. She has to be back before the sunset” (...) She has to be inside the four walls, she has to wear sari, she has to take care of her husband and children. That’s the way they have been brought up you know.”

6.2.6 Culture and Old traditions

The justification of different violent actions is sometimes done by referring to the culture and the old traditions. Culture and traditions are of a high importance and is seldomly questioned, but rather maintained and preserved. Culture and traditions are very much held responsible for a woman’s position, many interviews show. According to the Indian traditions, the family decides where to get married and with who. Marriage and traditions are important, as seen in the first theme, and they are trying to maintain the new changes that are taking place along
with keeping the old traditions alive and respecting the culture, indicators show. However, most women supports the old traditional cultures and values.

In group interviews, one woman says;
“The Indian culture does not allow to have sex without marriage”

During the interview with the translator, he says;
‘‘That is the culture, they are following the traditions of their elders (...) They say they must follow their ancestors’ traditions. (...) If they could manage the house and education at the same time, then maybe. But the Indian culture say; tick tock on the clock. They are too old for education now. ’’

Pihu says;
“Ooh because that is the culture here you know, if she comes late in the city OK, for us we are in the city (...) but in the villages, no. If she come late everyday then will have like ‘why is she coming late every day?’ ’’

6.2.7 Corruption
Low interest in the politics due to corruption, weak laws and a lack of representation of women in the all political levels, builds together one theme. There are various statements stated below in the group interviews where these subjects are mentioned. Pihu, Myra and Divya give their inputs as well in this theme. Many women claim two things are needed to engage in politics as a woman in India; a man and money.

During group interviews, one woman says;
“Men support. You really need the men support. Brother, husband, your son or somebody else. You need good back support, you really should have. Otherwise you can’t survive (...) Yes. A man and money. You need a lot of money when you stand in an election.”

During the interview using a translator, the translator says;
“They do not consider politics to be so useful for them because they see politics as a game of money. They rather focus on their own earnings and business and save the money for the future. Women without financial support and men support will not last long in the politics. (...) They have equal rights in theory but not in practice, they say.”
One woman explains that a woman is beaten by the police for being a prostitute, while the man just needs to pay off his crime with money. She says;

“Oh, they will take her to the police station. They will beat her. They keep her in jail, maybe 1 day, then she will go. They tell her ‘don’t do this’. (...) But the man who bought her will just get a fine.”

Similarly, Pihu blames weak law enforcement for many of the problem’s women face:

“They have rules and laws and all that, not that they are very strict. Even rape case, the biggest punishment I think is ten years of imprisonment. That’s all.”

Unlike Pihu, Myra blames corrupted politicians for the problem women are facing. She says;

“What happens is, the political leader that we have chosen are not doing their duty enough. They have been bluffing people. (...) If people get their rights, there are no more poor. Our country has got enough of resources. But the thing is; it is not distributed equally. (...) In our country, what happens is, they [the politicians] are dividing people on the basis of religion, gender, cast and class. It is a divide and rule policy’’

Divya, on the other hand, says that there is a lack of women at all the political levels because of the male-domination and the lack of money. She says;

“The corruption hits hard on the women because even if they get their foot in to the politics, the men will control them behind the scenes. (...) First of all, it is a male-dominant society. Suppose, one woman we are encouraging, there they [men] are controlling. That power, money power, it’s male, they are making the drama. So act, money. Money they are purchasing.”

She also includes that the men are easily escaped from punishments. She says;

“Morning they take the man to the police station and evening they’ll free to move home. There is no strong punishment. There is a corruption, again there is corruption.

One woman in the group interviews say that the work from ODP has helped them to understand they actually have equal rights to men. Before Sangha, the did not know that, so the men could fool them. She says;

“Their view on women empowerment is that they are now aware of what rights they have according to the Indian constitution, thanks to the sangha, who has given the awareness. They
are willing to fight for their rights. The freedoms and rights which they are striving for is to develop and have more knowledge through education."

6.2.8 Gossip
The final theme which has been recognized, is about how the society talks about people when one acts in a way which is not socially accepted. Many women in the interviews state that they must do, say and act in a certain way in order to not be excluded from society or their own families. It is a problem of gossip. Even acknowledging being a victim of rape, or children in the family being raped, is hard due to the fear of what people will think and say about the victim. This theme is very interlinked with all the other themes as it penetrates them all. Gossip is always there, in everything from marriage to rape and violence.

Pihu says;
“And one more thing is, if the child is raped the mother doesn’t want to tell it to the society, saying that, later child will have problem. If the child is raped the society will look the child as differently. (...) The same is for marriage. The society you know, if they don’t spend [money on a fancy wedding] the society looking ‘oh, oh that marriage was not thaat good’. They speak, right?’

The same concept appears in the group interviews. One woman says;
‘The woman must get married and have children, otherwise the society as well as the relatives will talk in a negative way about her”

On the issues of rape, another woman says;
“What happens here is that for four days, people feel sad. On the fifth day, they start talking. ‘She’s been raped, she’s been raped, she’s been raped’. Eventually, the girls leave the city.”

The same woman, when asked about cheating, says many girls will kill themselves due to the pressure of gossip and social exclusion. She says;
“You know the whole family will start shouting on her. The man will go to divorce immediately. The girls sometimes hang themselves. When people come to know she was having an affair, they [the girls] kill themselves.”
Ishita, whom is as mentioned before a divorced woman, says her friends and family speak bad about her choices in life. She says she is tired of adjusting all the time because of this. She gives an example of the bus, where her female friends always give up the seat for a male. But she refuses. When Ishita refuses, her friends get angry and are embarrassed of her. She says; **"The adjusting becomes a compromise for a lifetime"**

6.3 Observations

During the total of 15 field visits a number of observations has been conducted with some common conclusions. Most of the women in the field have started up own businesses with the help of ODP loans. Some women have been sangha members for over 20 years, while others only have been for one year or a couple of months. It includes tailoring business, fruit shops, beauty parlours and small-scale instant sticks industries. The businesses generally generate between 1000 to 3000 Indian rupees (about 10-30 US$) every day. This is an increase by several hundred percentages compared to the 100-500 rupees they earned before the formation of sangha groups and loans from ODP. A majority of women were housewives before starting up their own businesses. More than half of these women share their business with a male relative whom they have given some financial support to. Almost all women, except for one, says that their husbands are supporting them going to the sangha because it is financially beneficial for the whole family. Only one woman, a young lady with an own beauty parlour, says her husband was supportive from the start and that he is not involved in her business. The rest of the women testifies about male criticism of the sangha groups. Despite this, they all express gratitude towards the sangha groups and ODP, as they have learned to save some money as well as they have their own financial freedom. For example, they have some pocket money, which makes them more independent as they do not need to ask their husbands for money if they want to buy something. Some money from ODP has went to health-related issues, as the health care in India is very expensive.

During office hours (hours spent in the office of ODP) a lot of discussions has occurred on the subject of women’s challenges. One woman, working at ODP but not specifically with women empowerment, tells us about issues related to colourism. She specifically says that;

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"If a woman goes to look for a job here in India, they will look at her skin colour. If she has very dark skin, they will delete her application. It is very easy for a light skin woman to get a job"
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During one of the field visits, we were able to observe quite clearly that colourism issues are current and do exist. One of the women who we met pointed at the arms of the researcher and said: “ohh, very nice. beautiful, light light” referring to the light skin of the researcher.

Another observation is that many women have been married in a young age. When asked, they claim to not have been exposed to child marriage. But when doing the math, it showed something else. For example, one woman said she was 35 years old and had been married for 20 years. When asked at what aged she got married, she responded ‘’at 18’’ even though the previous numbers indicate she was married at 15. One other thing that these women had in common was that their marriages were arranged. These arranged marriages give these women no space to set demands, what so ever. Unlike one woman, working at ODP who said; “I am educated, I am rich, so I want that my husband to be like that too, when I get married. He should have a degree, at least one degree. And also have lighter skin than me, so our child can be light-skinned too.”

In addition to this, she mentions a preference for light-skinned women on the labour market compared to dark skinned women. She says; ‘‘If there are two women seeking the same job and one of them is very dark-skinned, they will choose the other one without a second thought’’.

She continued later to speak about children where she says; “If my child is gay or something, I will tell him or her to leave the house. I will have contact but on phone, but he or she must leave the house.”

The same woman also spoke about the differences in sexual desires due to gender. The dialogue went as presented below;

**Researchers:** So you say, men have more desires about having physical contact and sex than women?

**Woman:** Yes, they all want sex. Not so much women, they don’t want, they don’t do that stuff.

**Researcher:** So women don’t have any sexual desires?

**Woman:** no, of course not.
When the same woman was asked about what happens if a woman goes out without male permission, she said

“She will be beaten black and blue.”
7. ANALYSIS

7.1 Themes

The analysis of the previous presented empirical findings is presented in this section. It is divided into three themes. These themes are (1) Sen, (2) Nussbaum and (3) Missing Elements. Missing elements uses two kinds of feminist critique for analysis that relates to intersectionality and power.

7.1.1 Sen

Sen starts off by claiming that humans sometimes need a set of skills in order to be able to achieve a certain capability. That can be applied to many of the women that we have met in the field. These women do lack as Sen call, “functionings”, and skills that are required to achieve capabilities. But through ODP and with the support from the sangha group, the women are being able to speak up. They are given the information and the knowledge that they need so they can be aware of their rights. As it can be found in the group interview number three, the women say that thanks to the sangha groups, they are now aware of what the Indian constitution beholds for women. The skill-trainings that these women receive helps them work on their own, so they can be self-sufficient. Divya confirms that as well when she mentions that when women get different types of trainings, they become capable of doing something out of it. As Ishita mentions in her interview, there are women who do lack certain skills for certain jobs, which forces them to work as domestic servants or prostitutes in order to survive. Not having certain “skills” in form of education, experiences or even awareness of one’s rights, hinders many women to do things that they wish to do. That also confirms that Sen is right in his theory about the importance of not only having functionings as in skills, but also in giving the prerequisites to achieve capabilities.

Sen also writes about the concept of “missing women” where the proportion of women is low in population. In the interview with Divya, she speaks about the ratio of boys and girls, where there are less girls compared to boys. This is an effect of women being exposed to rapes and are murders, according to her. This is in line with Sen’s analysis of women's situation in a developing context where India is a male-dominant society. A woman’s level of status is low, or none, compared to men, for why a girl child is nothing some people want. Sex-selective abortions is also a problem according to Sen, which our empirical data confirms.
In the five capabilities of Sen, he mentions the right of women to seek employment outside the home. He acknowledges the importance of having the political rights as well as having the social opportunities, where everyone should have the right to education and good health. But all those things require that women have the “functionings” and the possibilities to practice those rights. Many women in India are not able to be part of the political system. Not because they do not have the rights for it, but because there are certain structures that inhibits them to get involved in politics. There is a low interest among the women towards politics because, to participate in the politics they need finance, which they do not have access to. In the theme “money”, from the empirical data chapter, it is clear money is very important for these women. In relation to Sen’s analysis, this partly proves parts of his theory while at the same time it appears inadequate. What made Sen pioneering was his notion about money being less important when measuring well-being. This empirical data rather points towards the opposite; money is highly important. The interviewed woman claims money to be linked to both corruption and male dominance. As some says;

“First of all, it is a male-dominant society. suppose, one woman we are encouraging, there they are controlling. That power, money power, it’s male, they are making the drama. So act, money. Money they are purchasing.”

“They do not consider politics to be so useful for them because they see politics as a game of money.”

The women recognize that there are a lot of corruption going on in the politics, which hinders them from entering the politics and impedes the work of women empowerment, as Myra mentions in the interview;

“’What happens is, the political leader that we have chosen are not doing their duty enough. They have been bluffing people. (...) If people get their rights, there are no more poor. Our country has got enough of resources. But the thing is; it is not distributed equally’.”

In that sense, the statement of Myra is not connected only to the capability of the political freedoms, which Sen writes about, but it is also connected to his fourth capability; transparency guarantees. This brings us back to the importance of money being linked with corruption. As men holds the financial assets, they can afford to engage in corruption in a way
women cannot. Furthermore, if corruption was not present, if transparency guarantees were
given, the importance of money would decrease.
Sen has a point when it comes to having the right to live with the absence of the corruption, but
as Myra and other women have stated in the interviews, the problem of corruption is also a
gender-based issue. We find this lacking in Sens analysis.

Moreover, many women in India are restricted and are not able to leave the house without the
permission of their husbands because of the risk of getting abused and facing other violent
consequences. They are, as said many times during the interviews, stuck ‟inside the four
walls’’. They are not able to utilize their rights because of practical restrictions. As Divya puts
it in her words;

“They are suppressed and ruled by the men and are abused if they do something without
asking for permission.”

The capability approach is a good base to understand that human development cannot be
solely be measured by using economical terms, even though money is a very important factor
for these women. Sen’s approach is a good start, but incomplete when it comes to describe the
particular situation of women in India or in a developing context in general. The legal rights
to have capabilities are there for women in India. However, despite those rights, they are not
being able live a full-worthy life because of other reasons which will be discussed below.
Reasons exclusively related to being women and even if Sen’s capabilities covers a wide
spectrum of capabilities, his analysis in functionings seems lacking as seen in the next
paragraph.

7.1.2 Nussbaum
As mentioned before, many has turned to Martha Nussbaum for a more complete
understanding of women in developing countries. When looking back at the empirical
findings, it becomes rather clear that Sen is missing some crucial parts in his analysis that
Nussbaum manages to sort out. Again, it is important to mention Nussbaum’s notion about all
capabilities being dependent on each other. They constantly affect one another. For example,
in the very first capability, she points to the problem of premature death which is mentioned
several times as an issue throughout the interviews.
‘‘1. Life. Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length; not dying prematurely, or before one’s life is so reduced as to be not worth living’’

Many women have testified about suicide being a big problem among women in India. These suicides that they mentioned are to large extent caused by the circumstances it means by being a woman. ‘‘The girls sometimes hang themselves. When people come to know she was having an affair, they [the girls] kill themselves’’, it is said in one interview. Just as Nussbaum recognizes, apart from Sen, it is not only about having capabilities to function or having basic rights, but also about living a life in a society that enables one to not perish into nothing and eventually commit suicide. Even though Sen mentions the problem of ‘‘missing women’’, these women are missing due to deadly violence from others. Not deadly violence caused by themselves, as in suicide. This is also strongly connected to capability number three.

‘‘3. Bodily Integrity. Being able to move freely from place to place; having one’s bodily boundaries treated as sovereign, i.e. being able to be secure against assault, including sexual assault, child sexual abuse, and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction’’

This capability is undoubtedly one that fills a big gap in Sen’s capabilities when it comes to the situation of women. Many of the women whom we have spoken to express a deep fear of going out after sunset due to the risk of rape, as seen in the presentation of data. One woman says ‘‘Yeah everywhere, rape exists. Molestation will be there. Some harassment will be there’’, and similar responses have been given a numerous of times by different women. As one woman puts it; ‘‘women are treated as commodity’’. And with arranged marriages that many women testify about, the ‘‘choice in matters of reproduction’’ being very limited. This demonstrates that a woman’s body and its boundaries in general are not treated as sovereign, but rather the opposite. Everywhere she goes, she fears sexual violence and harassment. Even inside the four walls, in their own home, many women fear violence of all kinds.

“Beating is there, beating is common. Before, the husband beating you is common. If a husband beats he will say; ‘She is my wife, who are you to ask me?’”

As stated in the quote above, this woman (like others) says the domestic violence has decreased but it is still a major issue. Yet again, there is the problem of women’s bodies being
perceived as a property of men. To beat or to have sex with. A woman’s own sexual satisfaction is ever non-existing, according to some, like the woman telling men have sexual desire by nature that women lack. Sex to many women exists for the satisfaction of men. A woman having sex outside marriage becomes so stigmatized it forces her to commit suicide, in some cases, which proves the need of Nussbaum’s analysis compared to the one of Sen especially in her way of emphasizing the importance of the capabilities affecting one another. With such a lack of bodily integrity, it is not so strange to think women are dying prematurely in unnatural deaths for example. This makes capability number one very interconnected with capability number three.

The importance of marriage, the social stigma as well as the long procedure of getting a divorce forces many women to stay in unhealthy or unhappy relationships. This is very related to Nussbaum's capability number five.

‘‘5. Emotions. Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger. Not having one’s emotional development blighted by overwhelming fear and anxiety, or by traumatic events of abuse or neglect’’

A very concrete example of this is revealed in the solo interview with "Ishita" who speaks about her own situation living as a divorced woman with no new husband. Being a victim of mental abuse and domestic violence made it clear to her that she did not want to be with her husband. However, physical abuse from family members and society is something she will have to live with for the rest of her life because of the decision to leave him. Finding a new husband is not an option, she says. Her mom would find that an even worse alternative than having her daughter living as a single woman for the rest of her life. This situation is for sure disturbing women’s chances of feeling love and affection, as in Nussbaum's capability, and is instead creating fear of neglect and stigma. In other words, many women are stuck in a so called ‘‘damned if you do, damned if you do not’’ situation in relation to Nussbaum's capability number five. In the worst of cases, some women end up in a situation where they are so abused it eventually leads to death (again, interconnected with capability number one and number three) like the woman who had written on her leg; ‘‘my husband is the reason for my death’’.
Finally, capability number six demonstrates something that is missing in Sen’s approach as well. Practical reason.

‘6. Practical Reason. Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one’s life’

As written before, Nussbaum claims that in many cases, it is not the law that stops people from exercising certain freedoms but rather invisible obstacles in culture or in institutions that stop these freedoms from being fully exercised. Apart from Sen, who believes that as long as his five capabilities are guaranteed humans have access to freedom, Nussbaum has a different view. She relates this to capability number six and in this study, it is very clear that the problem for women does not lie within the rule of the Indian law. There is a constant blame on the culture throughout the whole presentation of data, for why women are facing burdens that men are free from. One conclusion that we as researchers draw based on our empirical data is that the critical thinking is much less with the poor women receiving help from ODP compared to the women working with ODP. Many women say they feel equal to men, even though it is very clear to us that they are not. Even though they acknowledge having to ask for permission or being exposed to child marriage, they still claim full equality exists. An in-depth explanation for why this happens is lacking in Nussbaum, but additional explanations for this can be found in the feminist critique of both Sen and Nussbaum in the next paragraph.

In addition to this, Sen’s approach covers a much wider range of capabilities needed for human well being compared to Nussbaum. Nussbaum’s capabilities can to some extent work as functionings for Sen’s capability (especially the one of social opportunities). In order for women to have social opportunities, for example to seek work outside home, they need the prerequisites for doing so. ‘Bodily integrity’ for example is such a prerequisite. In that sense, Sen is not lacking in his capabilities but rather in his analysis of how women are limited to reach these capabilities.

7.1.3 Missing elements
Even though Nussbaum’s undoubtedly manages to add some very valid points to what is missing in Sen’s analysis, not everyone agrees on Nussbaum giving a complete understanding
of women’s capabilities and freedoms in a developing context, as seen in the theoretical chapter.

First of is the critique put forward by Dr. Shreya Atrey regarding the lack of an intersectional analysis in Nussbaum. There is an obvious proof of the need of an intersectional adding to Nussbaum's approach showing in this particular empirical data. Furthermore, there are some smaller examples of power structures that makes it inaccurate to discuss women as a homogeneous group exposed to the exact same type of harassment and discrimination. For example, the one woman working at ODP (but did not participate in the interview process) who told us about the discrimination on the labour market for women with a darker skin colour. This is very clear example of a case where a light skinned woman might have privileges in a way that makes it problematic to have a discussion like the one Nussbaum or Sen has. Sure do women face common challenges due to their gender, such as the fear of rape or forced marriage, but some of all these burdens are not as heavy for women that are for example light-skinned. Or rich for that matter. The same woman also explained parts of her own dating life, as mentioned in the observation chapter. Because of her class affiliation, with educated parents holding big properties of land, she does not need to go for forced marriage or for prostitution for example. Instead, she can make demands on her future husband such as him being rich, light skinned and have at least one degree. For the poor women on the other hand, this is not an option. The same woman also explains her view on LGBT+ people, saying she would neglect her child if he or she was for example gay. In other words, if she had a girl child, that girl child would have the best possible conditions if she were born straight and lighted skinned. Dr. Atrey also mention age as one factor that affects women differently. Examples of this analysis being accurate is the expression ‘the Indian culture say; tick tock on the clock. They are too old for education now’ when the women were asked if they wanted to go for education. Many women also testify about having an ‘expiration date’. ‘If you are not married by 23 and have no children by 26, people will ask questions’ as one woman says. However, the woman who spoke about wanting a light skinned husband with at least one degree is 26 years old and is still not married. In other words, her ‘expiration day’ is postponed due to her class affiliation. In addition, she clearly states it is easier for a light-skinned woman to get a job. Considering all this, one can make the conclusion that Dr. Atrey provides an understanding of these women’s life and their capabilities on a level that both Sen and Nussbaum are missing.
Finally, the last critique brought up in this thesis is also a critique towards both Sen and Nussbaum. Keith Dowding, drawing upon the theory of Steven Lukes third dimension of power, is criticizing Sen and Nussbaum for not explaining why many women are defending a patriarchal society. Even though they both acknowledges women being victim of oppression on many levels, Dowding claims them both to lack an explanation for why this is the case and why it is not changing. According to him, the answer is found within Lukes and some of our empirical data underpins his analysis. For example, as Dowding claims, ‘‘culture’’ is constantly used as an excuse to oppress. Many women are defending cultural aspects that are oppressing them (assuming it is not in the best interest of a woman to get beaten up or forced to marry someone they do not wish to marry). By defending the oppressor, however, consensus is ensured and the risk of conflict is minimized, just like Lukes claims being the foundation of the third dimension of power. The women know it will be conflict if they argue with their husband, or if they go out without permission. Many fear violence in those cases, but still they show such appreciation for the ‘‘old traditions’’ that propose these violations. To us, this appears to be a survival mechanism from the women as well as an ideological strategy by the dominators (as in the men) for keeping power, just like Dowding claims.

Another example is the prostitution in the name of God, as Ishita speaks about. Women and children are sold into prostitution (called devadasis), thinking they are servants of God when offering sexual services to men. As Ishita explains, this is a banned system by the Indian government yet a very accepted system in some areas of south India and in some parts of the north of India. The reason for its acceptance is the middle men (who are profiting from the system) where hundreds of women and children are convinced to support a system which exploits them in some of the worst ways possible. God is used as a way of the dominators to make the victim of oppression to consent or want to be exploited for sexual purposes.

Furthermore, many women are testifying about male criticism towards the sangha groups, however, when the men started to notice the sangha was in their best financial interest, they let their wives go. As one woman says;

‘‘He needs money, 10000 rupees, who will give? I will give. I will go to the sangha, write my signature and he will get money. Family will get money. Everybody is happy.’’
Another example is Ishita’s explanation of the constant male criticism of the sangha groups. She says;

“Though women can handle, manage such tough jobs but still there is a gender discrimination. Not only because women can’t do the work. The notion of the men in the society is that they don’t want to give higher jobs for women. Because they have some insecurity within them, they think; ‘if the women can start occupying our job, what will happen to us?’”

This points again to the power dimension provided by Lukes, there is a male fear of giving up power so the strategy used is trying to make women dislike the sangha-group themselves. As one woman says;

“But later on, we just stop it. Men started speaking very badly. They put you down. But they would say, oh no ‘this one is not proper’. If ladies joined with me in the sangha group going out, husbands would say their wife were spoiled. So I took it away and only met once a month for financial purposes”

Other women testify and admits they themselves talk bad if a woman oppose her husband, supporting the male criticism of women empowerment projects in their near areas. One woman says “that is the easiest thing to do”. To us, this is in line with what Lukes identifies as the third dimension of power, brought up by Dowding as a critique against Sen and Nussbaum. However, there are also evidence that do not support this claim. For example, in the solo interview with Myra, she claims the situation of women to be an effect of corrupted politicians whom are not doing their “duty enough”. She claims them to use a “divide and rule policy” that divides the Indian population based on things such as class, caste, religion and gender. This oppose the theory of Dowding, as Lukes claims power is maintained by preventing conflict, not nurture it. However, much of our empirical data supports Dowding’s argument about culture, where an oppressive culture is still being defended by these women even though it is no longer necessary for their survival, as Dowding claims.
8. CONCLUSIONS

8.1 Answering the Research Questions

In this final chapter, we will answer the four research questions provided in the start of the thesis. Later on in this chapter, we will also make some shorter recommendations for future research on the topic in relation to the findings of this research.

8.1.1 Question 1

*How do poor women in a district such as Karnataka, India perceive their own capabilities and freedoms?*

Even though the responses have been different from village to village and from woman to woman, there are some general responses all women share. These responses have been summarized into eight different themes that affects these women to a very large extent. These themes are; Marriage and Divorce, Violence, Men, Money, Inside the four walls, Culture and Old traditions, Corruption and Gossip. For example, almost every woman during the interview process are mentioning a fear of rape or sexual violence. It is something that permeates all responses. Together with the need of asking for male permission before going out, it creates a situation where women in general are stuck “inside the four walls”. Even though the Indian law and the Indian constitution set no real restrictions for women compared to men, and even though the women are aware of that, old traditions and cultural values limits their capabilities and freedoms to a large extent. Money is a game changer for many of them. The importance of marriage and the negative perception of divorce makes many women stay in unhealthy relationships or to marry at a very young age. Some women say this is a problem, while other women express appreciation towards these traditions. Likewise, some women defend male domination while others are neutral or sad about it. Anyhow, they are all aware that it exists. The notion of being a second status gender is widely accepted. There are big differences in how women receiving help from ODP perceive women’s capabilities compared to the poor women working at ODP, where the latter shows a significantly more critical view towards the situation.

8.1.2 Question 2

*How well is the capability approach of Amartya Sen fit to describe the capabilities and freedoms of women in a developing context in relation to the empirical data using the case of Karnataka state?*
The capability approach by Amartya Sen provides a very liberal view on what is needed for development. In theory, as long as his five capabilities are provided, a human is able to reach its full potential. This is true to some extent considering our analysis. Not all Sen’s freedoms are guaranteed in the lives of the women from this field research. For instance, the example of transparency guarantees with freedom from corruption. Many women are testifying about the corruption (in favour of men), and if this was not the case, many of their problems would not exist anymore. It is obvious to us that Sen’s way of changing the traditional measurements of well-being were very necessary when it entered the field. Even though money is very important to them, assuming as to all people experiencing poverty, it is not the amount of money that limits these women to such a large extent. It is rather other factors such as the need to ask for permission etc. This brings us further to the ‘‘functionings’’, where none of Sen’s capabilities can truly work without the right skills or ability to utilize them. Many women lack skills for decent employment for example, yet again due to the reason of being forced to stay ‘‘inside the four walls’’. In conclusion, if the women would have all Sen’s capabilities (not only in the rule of law but also in practice) they would sure live decent lives. However, the answers for why they do not are rather found in Nussbaum.

8.1.3 Question 3

*How well is Nussbaum completing this understanding of poor women’s capabilities in a developing context?*

Martha Nussbaum adds a range of capabilities to Sen’s approach which to us made a lot of sense in relation to our empirical data. Nussbaum’s additions to Sen are very complementary to the understanding of women’s situation in a developing context. She adds capabilities such as ‘‘bodily integrity’’ which explains very well how women in a developing context are limited in their lives. As seen under the first research question answered above, moving freely from place to place without fearing assaults or harassments is a common problem for the interviewed women. Her framework completes Sen’s to a very large extent; however, we make one particular notion worth mentioning. To us, Nussbaum’s capabilities are rather ‘‘functionings’’ for Sen’s capability to work. The reason for why many of these women are not seeking work outside home or ‘‘gender equality’’ is not fulfilled (which are requirements in capability number three ‘‘social opportunities’’ by Sen) is because the abilities and the circumstances for these women hinders this capability to actually function. In that sense, Sen is not lacking specifically in his provided capabilities but rather in his analysis on the functionings that are violated for women to reach them.
8.1.4 Question 4

Taking into consideration some of the feminist critique of Sen and Nussbaum, how does it complete the understanding of women’s capabilities and freedoms in a developing context?

Sen’s work indicates a lack of understanding on the number of limitations, as well as the strength of their impact, in a poor woman’s life. This understanding is to some extent completed by Nussbaum who are providing a theoretical framework specifically targeted towards the life of women. However, even this framework is missing some important notions on how women are limited. Nussbaum has a way of assembling women into one group facing the same obstacles only due to their gender. Furthermore, she is missing the many faces oppression can take on that affects some women but not others. The intersectional response to Nussbaum completes the understanding of these women to a large extent, as several parts of our empirical data proved the differences of being an educated, rich, urban or light skinned woman compared to an uneducated, poor, rural or dark-skinned woman. Therefore, drawing conclusions only based on gender is highly problematic as it undermines the oppression on other levels that can either increase misogyny or reduce it.

In addition to this, the criticism brought forward by Keith Dowding (drawing upon the theory of Steven Lukes) completes the understanding of women to some extent. It may not bring a further understanding of the specific situation of women in a developing context as much as the intersectional analysis by Dr. Atrey, however, it brings an explanation for the slow pace of change. It brings a possible explanation for why some women praise old traditional practices, norms and values that are directly or indirectly harmful to them. This helps one to understand why development takes such time, especially in rural areas. However, despite this, there are also evidence in our empirical data that indicates other explanations for why development takes such time in India. For instance, the woman who blames corrupted politicians applying a ‘divide and rule policy’.
8.2 Further Research

Given the above conclusions, there is a need for further research on development for women in relation to both Nussbaum’s and Sen’s capabilities. Even though they both provide useful frameworks, especially Sen who managed to change the perception of development as freedom instead of development as money, they lack an explanation for why the situation is like it is. And if one cannot answer why women are being stuck inside the four walls, and why some women defend that position, it is hard to provide a theoretical as well as a practical solution for many of the problem’s women are facing. The new generation of academic scholars are on the rise in changing old ways of looking at development in general and for women in particular. Even though both Sen and Nussbaum were pioneering 20 years ago and has provided useful frameworks, they clearly need a modern update as the field is in a constant change. To bring empirical data to the field, especially in relation to the concept of intersectionality, is something we identify as important. Examples of concrete research that could be conducted in this area are research on colourism among women in developing countries or misogynist attitude among women themselves to give a further explanation of the situation. The concept of ‘‘missing women’’ provided by Sen is another concrete example of research to be conducted in relation to intersectionality. There is a lot of research that has been conducted on the concept of ‘‘missing women’’ e.g. why they are missing, in which countries the problem is relevant, how they are killed as well as what needs to be done to change this pattern. However, none is reflecting upon the concept in relation to intersectionality by asking the question ‘‘what types of women are missing?’. According to our study, for example women of darker colour face gender discrimination to a larger extent than women of lighter colour. The same goes for poor women compared to rich women. The question to be raised is then again whether Sen is missing something in his concept of ‘‘missing women’’ in relation to the intersectional perspective.
9. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Printed sources

Web sources


10. APPENDIX

Questions for women receiving help from ODP

Before starting the interviews using this questionnaire, the group has been informed about the purpose of this field study as below.

“We are two students from Sweden conducting a research here in India. Our study is about the situation of women in India and how women are perceiving their capabilities and freedoms. We will ask you some questions on the topic, and you do not have to answer them if they make you feel uncomfortable or if you simply do not want to. Nothing you say will be used in other purposes than for this research. You are all anonymous and can stop the interview whenever you want. The interview will be recorded”.

1. How long have you been members of the sangha group?
2. What was your situation like before joining the sangha group?
3. Could you tell us a bit more about what you are doing on your meetings?
4. What are your main reasons for joining the sangha? Is it financial, social or security reasons? Please explain
5. Could you tell us a bit about your/your family's economic and social background?
6. Could you tell us a bit about the present situation and problems that you or your family face in these areas?
7. How is your family affected by you joining the sangha group? Your husband for example (if you have one). Do your husbands support this? Why/Why not?
8. What are the biggest challenges for women in your area in general?
10. How important is marriage to you?
11. Is sexual violence or harassment a major problem in your area? Do you feel afraid when going outside?
12. Do you need to ask for your husband’s permission before going out? If yes, how do you feel about that?
13. To what extent do you feel equal to men?
14. What freedoms are there for men that does not exist for women? How do you feel about that?
15. Would you like to be able to do all the things men are free to do? Please explain why/why not.

Questions for women working at ODP

‘‘We are two students from Sweden conducting a research here in India. Our study is about the situation of women in India and how women are perceiving their capabilities and freedoms. We will ask you some questions on the topic, and you do not have to answer them if they make you feel uncomfortable or if you simply do not want to. Nothing you say will be used in other purposes than for this research. You are anonymous and can stop the interview whenever you want. The interview will be recorded’’.

1. Could you tell us a bit about your role here at ODP? how long have you been active and why did you start working here?
2. How long have you been working with women empowerment in general?
3. Could you tell us a bit about the impact ODP has on women empowerment? What do you do in your work?
4. What are the biggest challenges for women in Karnataka and in India? Why do women suffer such hard times finding employment or having education for example?
5. In the powerpoint presentation that we received when we just came here, it says that many women are victims of sexual harassment and assaults. Could you explain this, why it happens, what you do to help these women?
6. How does for example sexual assault and harassment affect women’s freedom to move?
7. Do you feel safe and secure as a woman to live your life as you please? why/why not?
8. To what extent do you feel equal to men? Please explain.
9. What freedoms are there for men that does not apply to women? Why is the situation like this? What can be done to change this?
10. Why are so few of these women in the sangha groups active in politics?
11. How come the women we have met and interviewed say they feel equal to men when it is so clear to you working here that they are not?
Example of one transcribed interview

Transcribing from 2018-11-19 Indian time 3 pm

“**What are the biggest challenges for women in your area in general?**”
80 % of woman is strong. Every child in one house wants to complete her education, wants to work, wants to earn. And she is. Every daughter, whatever cast creed or anything. Rich, poor – anybody. Poor people they go to the government schools – free educations they give. But we work instead now.

“**How many hours of work everyday?**”
8 hours

“**Everyday?**”
Everyday.

Like, we have our own business. Shop and all. We decide. During lunch hours we close.

“**What about weekends?**”
Weekends no no, Sundays we have holiday. And if there is a function or something we close and go – because its our own business.

In the function, we also have ceremonies, wedding or so.

“**Is it good to have your own business?**”
It is good to have our own business because if you want a government job, you need to be educated. You need a government job, that is more secure, people think. In private sector, if something happens, whenever they want they can just throw you out. Nowadays, getting a government job is very difficult. That’s why we have our own business. If its running on good means, at least you can have your own money, pocketmoney and for savings.

“**Do you earn a lot? How much do you earn per day?**”
Nah, it’s not like every day. It depends upon.. 300.. 400.. it depends like that.

“**So approximately, every month?**”
If the wedding season is there, like April or august, we will earn more. It can be 2000 on a good month. If people buy expensive costumes, then we can earn 5000.

“**So when you meet in the sangha group, do you only discuss economics or other questions as well?**”
Naah, we were just talking about politics. A little bit politics. If anybody speaks about women, we go together and we let them know. When ODP invites for a strike, we all go. We all join. Rural, urban – all ladies. With a group of about 2000 people. 2000 ladies, minimum. Big strike. We discuss those rapists. We are against them. And we discuss women empowerment.

“**Is it common with rape and sexual harassments?**”
Yeah sexual harassments is very common on small girls, rather than women. Like, below 13 years. Its very hurting. Very hurting. It’s not that common but sometimes it happens. Like, a while ago, a small school girl was raped and killed. Three days back.

“**Three days back??**”
Yes. Not here, but somewhere in a nearby village. She’s been murdered with her school uniform still on. She was on her way to school and she was raped and killed.

“**So why do you think that happens?**”
What happens is.. some insane people might have done. Because she was wearing her school uniform. Right in the day-light. The girl was on her way to school.

“**So these cases are not common?**”
Not so much anymore. You see, now, there are a lot on TV and advertisements and EVERY mother is so careful now. Main thing is that. Mothers are very careful.
“So you mention politics before we started to record. Political issues. Do you discuss that in the sangha group?”
Only little. Politics? [asking the other women whom all shake their heads]
Not much.
“Everybody knows politics?”
Yes everybody knows politics.
“Why so low interest then?”
Nowadays politics is full of money, right? If you have money, you should be in politics. If you don’t have money, then you won’t be strong in politics. [Saanvi speaks in local language and the other women laughs. A woman on the floor points against us]
Should women be in politics? she’s asking you two. Why should women go in to politics? Business is much better. Earning is better than going into politics. If you have money, people have respect. If you have no money, no one respects you. No one will come to you. When you have money, save it for your old days. When your old, no one will take care of you. In politics, they can throw you out. But when you have your own business; who’s gonna throw you out? Nobody can throw you anywhere if you have your own money. You stand on your own feet. For me, for my children, for my family and for old age.
“She asked me if women should be in politics. Is it only men that should be in politics?”
[Saanvi translates to one other woman]
She says, both can be in politics but if a woman is in politics she should have good support. Men support. You really need the men support. Brother, husband, your son or somebody else. You need good back support, you really should have. Otherwise you can’t survive.
[woman shouts in local language and point at my book] She says, if you want to write and have an empty book, but no pen, then what’s the use of your book?
“So a man is like the pen? You are a useless book if no man supports you in politics?”
Yes.
A man and money. You need a lot of money when you stand in an election.
[Video recording turned off due to coffee break]
“So, how important is marriage?”
It is not VERY important, but it is important. Especially for a girl to have sex. Here in India we don’t allow girls to have sex, but you can get married and then you can have sex with your husband. Some people go for divorce but that is very long process. Not many people get divorce. I mean, what about the child and its future? Who is going to take care of the child? You have to show that you try to live together. But if he is a drunk and he beats you or something something.. then divorce is easier.
“Is it common with beating and such things?”
Drunk husbands is common. But beating not so much anymore. It was more before. You see, when we first started in the Sangha, our husbands did not like it. They said to us ‘oh you people are going, you people are joining.. you people are talking’. They had the opinion that if ladies meet and discuss women empowerment, then they will fight with the men or something like that. But nowadays when they know that the sangha is supporting, the family, and that the group is good. With good ladies. Now everything is cool. They respect. But first they disliked. They thought their woman would become more strong than him.
“But now the men are ok with you going?”
Yes, they used to say ‘oh no you are becoming strong. Now you are talking so much. You have learned to talk’ But now they know, we are not harassing them. We are not fighting with them. We are just getting along with them, and supporting them. He needs money. 10000 rupees, who will give? I will give. I will go to the sangha, write my signature and he will get money. Family will get money Everybody is happy. And later, they liked that we were learning something.
“So you also support each other in other issues as well? For example, if husband is beating?”
No one is beating. But men talking very bad. Especially in the beginning.

“What would they say?”
I will tell you mam, 10 years back we were very strong. In the beginning we went out a lot, go to the police station together. All problems, we used to go. Very strong. But later on, we just stop it. Men started speaking very badly. They put you down. But They would say, oh no this one is not proper. If ladies joined with me in the sangha group going out, husbands would say their wife were spoiled. So I took it away and only met once a month for financial purposes. That is the easiest thing to do.

“So do you vote?”
Yes mam we all vote.

“But if you are not interested in politics, how do you know what to vote for?”
We vote for someone who listens to us, for example when we don’t have water. If politicians speak about water, then we vote for him.

“So is there anyone speaking about women empowerment?”
[long silence occurs]. Yes, sometimes. Yes that’s there. But its competition. Between men and women, competition is there. They suppress us. They don’t allow us to come forward. They stab you in the back. This one here [points at a woman] she used to do politics. But the problem is also caste system. I have one cast, these two have one caste and she over there another. If you are my caste, you have to vote for me only. Do you have that in your place? No? Here we have mooore. And corruption. I mean, throughout the world there is corruption. [laughter]

“So, to get a job. What skills are most important for a woman to know?”
Education. One degree, that’s all you need. Any degree. But at least one degree. And computers.

“So if you are very poor, and have no husband or education, what do you do then? To make money?”
Ok, I’ll tell you. You have no education. No husband. No nothing. Totally on roads. First thing is, you go for maid jobs. Servants are very much demand in India. Every house need a servant. Swipping and swapping. You know this job, in India, any woman can survive. Unless she steals. Then she is no good. She should not steal. If she does not steal, even if she is uneducated woman, she can survive in this job.

“So.. being a maid is the lowest..”
YES, it is the lowest. When she comes to our house, we give her some coffee and one breakfast. If she does three jobs, she can have breakfast in my house then lunch in the next house and dinner in the last house.

“And poor men, what do they do?”
The poor men sells vegetables. If he is very poor. Vegetables. It is the lowest job for men. And also cotton bedding, they come here and shout.

“Is that formal work? Legal work? Is it regulated?”
There is no legal or illegal work. Everything is legal work. Vegetables, plastics and so one. Except for ganja[cannabis/weed]. You know, the plant. People smoke. That you should not sell. And drinks. People drink. Those things you cannot sell on the street.

“What about prostitution?”
Hmm.. prostitution. We have no license for prostitution. It is very illegal. It is not common. Maybe in 1000 women, 1 woman goes for prostitution. If a woman has nothing, does not want to work or to earn, then she goes for prostitution. They will stand in the railway station and she will be waiting for a man to sell for 50 rupees or something. If it's caught, its illegal. If it is not caught, then it is not illegal.
“What happens if they get caught?”
Oh, they will take her to the police station. They will beat her. They keep her in jail, maybe 1 day, then she will go. They tell her “don’t do this”.

“And the man, what happens with the man?”
Man runs off. He leaves the woman and he will run off.

“But if he gets caught by the police?”
Fine. They will give him a fine. [women speaking local language] They ask you how things are in your country? You know, outside India, sex is free. We heard. Any man can just go with any woman and have sex. They say there are areas, full of red lights. In India it is also like that. In Mumbai. There are small small rooms and men can pick any girl they like. You can just take her and go. They sell condoms on the spot. There are these machines, you can just buy condoms. It’s in Mumbai, Goa and Delhi also. Calcutta. Wherever there are beaches, they sell sex.

“Is it tourists who buy?”
No it’s not like that. Men you know.. it does not matter how much they had, they are not satisfied. You know men they marry with younger girls, and enjoy them until they get older. Then they need to find second wife. They want others. So they go out, 3 or 4 men, they go out and they have sex.

“So what does the women say about that?”
How will you know? How will you come to know? If she knows, she will fight and cry. That’s all.

“Then what happens if a woman goes with another man?”
Yes, that happens also. Sometimes when the old man marry a young girl, maybe with a gap of 10 or 20 years, the girl goes away to be with other men. So when husband goes for job, they find young man and have visits. Everything is okay, as long as no one finds out. If they get caught.. the lady will get screwed up.

“… Oh…”
You know the whole family will start shouting on her. The man will go to divorce immediately. The girls sometimes hang themselves. When people come to know she was having an affair, they [the girls] kill themselves.

“What?”
Yes. She hang.

“So there are much bigger consequences for women compared to men”
Yes. Definitely. We need equality, but it takes time. It's not going to happen immediately. It's not going to. Things take time. Now, both girls and boys are being educated.

“So you see change?”
Yes, but it’s slow. We are still inside four walls. It’s not like a girl can choose where she wants to go, with who she wants to meet or anything. So we are still very much inside the home, and inside the four walls. But it’s not so easy fixed.

“Would it be nice to not have it like that?”
[laughter]. [women shaking their heads] Marriage is important for us. We don’t want to go out and have sex with everybody. In marriage, both parents should say yes. We don’t want to force marriage, our daughters can choose, finish her education but when she wants to marry; she should ask us. Come and ask the parent. We are here, we have been bringing her up since she was a baby to this level. She can’t just go out and do whatever she likes. If my daughter is not home by 5.30 or 6.30.. you know.. my instinct will start.

“Do you get worried?”
YES, very much. If 7 a clock and she is not home, I will call her and say Where are you? What has happened? Who is with you? Are you alone? She has to inform us. If she goes ANYWHERE, she has to inform. I like if she goes in group. Not alone. All friends together.

“So these things you discuss in the sangha group also?”
Yes. But most of us has male child. They are all safe. No problems. If you have male child, you never need to worry.

“They can do more of what they want?”
Yes, they have no restrictions at all. Main thing we have is fear. Of rape.

“What happens when a woman get raped?”
- Nothing, you can’t help it. You cant fight a man, or two men, who rapes you. Maybe you can go to the police station, but then you should have the guts to face it. What happens here is that for four days, people feel sad. On the fifth day, they start talking. “She’s been raped, she’s been raped, she’s been raped”. Eventually, the girls leaves the city.

[Women says she must continue with the sangha group and we stop recording]