

Gendering of the gender budget: Some concerns on Kerala budget 2022-23

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Presenting a separate Gender Budget (GB) along with the main budget has become a practice in Kerala for the last 5 years. In this context understanding and interpreting budget has to be correlated with the Gender Budget. Gender budgeting has put forward a system to analyze the approach of the budgets in its allocation with a gendered frame. It theoretically implies fiscal equality policies and programs in a governance process (Nishita,2020, Chakraborty 2013). The popular interpretation of GB is as a tool towards 'mainstreaming gender' in a specified local, state, national or international budgeting process¹. This approach focuses on restructuring revenues and expenditures to promote gender equality at various levels. But as far the practices that are seen in national and state budgets, a separate gender budget statement which categorizes gender specific allocations get projected as the Gender Budget. Many a time the formulation of policies and allocations concerning women are based on specifically targeted programs where the strategic² needs of women won't get any prominence. That means welfare activities are mainstreamed in the documents using the available national and state funds. The cross-sectional analysis should enable fiscal allocation which addresses long term structural changes too. This can only address the strategic needs in terms of gendered hierarchies.

Generally, the arduous challenges that comes across the process of gender budgeting are listed as the lack of vision and clarity in innovation which limits the economic agents to

¹Gender Mainstreaming is the common mechanism to address gender biases and include gender issues in the development process. Many countries have adopted this mechanism following the common Platform for Action as part of the Beijing process from 1995 onwards. The process of including gender in states policies widely accept this trend as it is not challenging the structural dominations of patriarchy

²Caroline Moser (1998) introduced the theory strategic needs and practical needs to address in the gender planning process in development process. While strategic gender need address the long term

clearly visualize the appropriate measures, data paucity and the ineptitude of the new institutional mechanisms to translate it to effective outcomes (Chakraborty,2016). The Kerala Gender Budget document of the previous year (2020-21) had pointed out the limitations on the implementation of the Gender Budget methodology. It mentions about the non-availability of gender disaggregated data and the absence of a wider vision in incorporating women in development planning process. It also highlights the consequential restrains of including gender as an integral part of the planning process where adequate support for social investment and provision of public goods has to be included. The approach in Kerala's GB has been to visibilise women across sectors in plan write-ups and to leverage more funds for women specific sectors/agencies. This has enabled to ensure certain programs that addresses the concerns of gender in the state through specific fiscal provisions.

An attempt is made here to glance at the Gender Budget document 2021-22 in comparison with the main budget document of Kerala. In his budget speech, the finance minister was trying to emphasize on the new ways of looking at the entire Budget. It will be interesting to discuss the methods in which the state has taken special initiative to present its Gender Budget with gender specific allocations for the last few years. Usually, the gender budget document is divided into Part A, which includes schemes which are 100 per cent allocated for women and Part B where the coverage between 30-99 percent is expected to directly benefit women. But in the Kerala budget, part A covers 90 to 100 per cent women specific schemes and Part B includes all the schemes in which the budgetary allocations are less than 90 percent.

Under the plan schemes, Gender Budget 2022-23 has an overall allocation of 20.90 per cent with a marginal increase of 1.36 per cent compared to 2021-22. The allocation for part A is 7.26 percent and part B is 13.64 per cent. Every year a marginal increase is seen in the allocation. These expenditures are only allocated through plan fund. So, the calculation of 20 per cent has to be understood as only plan fund allocation but not from the total fund (Pulikamath,2022)³. It is important to look at the form of allocations in terms of priorities and gender specific approaches. Many schemes are spread out in the budget document mentioning gender variables with regard to allocations. As mentioned above, the general

³ Pulikamath has discussed this aspect in detail in his article on analyzing Gender Budget in Kerala in an article published in Mathrubhoomi on 16th March,2022. In this article he clearly mentions that while we take plan and non-plan funds together only 2.68 per cent is allocated for Gender Budget.
<https://www.mathrubhumi.com/in-depth/analysis/kerala-budget-2022-gender-budgeting-analysis-1.7349035>

budget is not a standalone document, it has to be analyzed along with the Economic Review and the Gender Budget document. The 2021-22 gender budget document was broadly spread around three areas with emphasis to skill development, employment generation, livelihood security, creating an enabling environment for women to work through ensuring basic facilities and the last- prevention of gender-based violence. In 2022-23 these priorities were modified in such a manner that women's safety and gender mainstreaming got prioritized with education, skilling and employment, health and social security, and gender friendly infrastructure followed.

It will be meaningful to compare these two approaches. Employment generation was one of the priorities in the previous year. While quoting data from the Periodic Labor Force Survey 2019-20, the GB document says that there is a substantial increase in female workforce participation rate in Kerala to 26.3 per cent⁴ which is higher than all India rate of 22.8 per cent. The acclamation for this high rate goes to the increasing participation of the less educated and low paid women workers and also to the higher literacy rate in Kerala. As a state which in many ways hold vertical growth in terms of health, education, literacy etc. of the women, and its continuous focus on gender responsive budget from the 9th plan onwards, reveling the 26 percent female participation is not so an invigorating approach. Existing practices reveals significant gender inequality that exists in the state in terms of wages and remuneration. The Economic review (Chapter,7, 2021) discusses these asymmetries in detail. It states that the gender disparity in wages is evident in regular/salaried employment class too, but more crucial in casual labor. Though the wages of women engaged in casual labor in Kerala are higher when comparing to the rest of the states, gender difference in wage gap persists here also. A state which proudly presents its pro labor stance with the highest minimum wage in the country, the gender discrimination in terms of wages is yet an issue to be tackled. The budget allocations are not showcasing any provisions to address this disparity. While the participation of women in the formal sector is diminishing, the jobs that are created in the informal sector are mostly with informal nature. More 'innovative' schemes are on improving the skills of women through different agencies which again are not planned given the specific circumstances of women in Kerala with respect to the cultural and patriarchal clutches. Home based work is increasing on a large scale (pandemic has induced a 'new normal' home-based work for a different class of people which has to be discussed

⁴ Periodic Labour Force Survey 2018-19 shows an increase in female workforce participation rate in Kerala to 20.4 percent.

separately) with more women confining to the spaces of household narrowing the paid/unpaid binary. Many houses have cut short their out-of-pocket expenses of domestic help, childcare and old age care through spacing women in the threshold of the household with a 'super woman' approach. But the rights of these women as workers contributing equally to the family and society is not considered as a revered concept. The wage gap in this labour progressive state is so high that women in the informal sector mostly earn half of the prescribed men's wages. MGNREGA is projected in plan B with majority of the funds that are allocated are spent as wages for the women workers. But the basic wage fixation issues and other entitlements included in a regular job is not discussed in the gender budget methodology. MGNREGA is a national scheme with pre decided norms on the creation of employment which narrows down the possibilities of women limiting to certain activities where skill is not a criterion. But the job assurance it creates prompt women to leave their traditional, skilled jobs to join the scheme work. This limitation of MNREGA associated activities is not seriously discussed in the planning or budget. This crosscuts with the issues of wages also. The same pattern is followed in the Ayyankali Urban Employment Guarantee programme initiated by the state government. In this scheme also majority of job seekers are women and there is no systematic plan to develop a job pattern while considering the issues of gender gaps. An example which divulges this lack of vision is the special scheme under the Life Mission housing programme where in an urban allocation, there is a provision of paying Rs. 25000 as an additional amount to construct the basement. This is showed as job creation under urban employment programme. This is contradicting the process of 'gender mainstreaming' itself in the budget. In the GB document it is mentioned that "women's housing" could be an easy way of expending funds meant exclusively for women.

If an inclusive, equal plan and policy approach comes in, there could be more of such innovative plans in the budget through converging the fiscal allocations for a sustainable livelihood development of the women workers. Last 10 years Kerala is witnessing a substantive increase in the number of workers coming from other states in search of work and all of them are engaged in some kind of wage labor both in the formal and informal sectors. While women are mostly getting into service sectors like domestic work, hospitality industries, garment industry, food and fish processing industries men are into construction, medium and small industries and other wage labor that are available on a daily basis. This has noticeably reduced the number of working days of male wage labourers of Kerala thereby more women engaging in some kind of paid work with less minimum wages. All these are

complex situations for a state like Kerala where efforts for more inclusive fiscal approaches should definitely occupy the planning process.

In 2022, women's safety is the most prioritized area in Gender Budget. Many programs in the name of women's safety turns to be protective measures to support women within the male dominated structures. It reiterates the stereotypic feminine notions through programs like 'pink police'. Last year Kerala witnessed violence against women in both public and private spaces, especially many dowry related deaths. This has created so much of ruckus about the fabricated private space of Kerala families and has generated strong public opinions against such anti-women practices. While these discussions should get prioritized in fiscal inclusion, the approach in the budget looks contradictory. When we look at the Plan A, SC/ST women development programs, big chunk of the money is being allocated for the marriage support for ST and SC women (around 8 per cent). The existing studies and analysis of Gender responsive budget clearly shows that the tendency to spent gender related public expenditures will be under protective and welfare services. This again reinforces the patriarchal framework in fiscal allocations too. The studies showed that most of gender related public expenditure falls under protective and welfare services, which reinforces the patriarchal thinking in framing policies for women (Chakraborty,2013, Shafeek,2020)⁵ . This again contributes to the increasing number of violence both domestic and public, dowry deaths etc. These critical issues should find prominence in the Gender Budget approach. Here again many times immediate practical needs like short stay homes or one stop centres gets easy accommodation within the budget whereas strategic long-term needs which prevents those kinds of atrocities against women is not getting derived through the approach. There are many programs like Bhoomika, Nirbhaya, Ente Koodu etc. that appears in the budget through Women and Children, Social Justice, and Health departments but how far these programs address these issues in a systematic way to combat violence and harassment are important.

Part II of the main budget document states that the Government has started knowledge economy mission as one of the innovative approaches within the knowledge economy sector to create 20 lakhs employment opportunities in the state within five years. It affirms to build up strong skill infrastructure ecosystems as part of this mission in the state. But no such plans are integrated in the gender budget document with reference to specific areas or sectors which

⁵ These have been the experiences in approaches by central and state governments who have adopted Gender Budget policies.

can create more employment opportunities for women. 'Work from home' or 'work near home' are the new concepts that are emerging in these approaches. Budget says that it is aimed at educated 'housewives'. Even though it sounds more appalling to address the unemployment situations of women, setting women within the clutches of 'housewifization'⁶ embraces stereotypic roles of women again and it demands more responsibility for the household matters from women being in the vicinity of their houses.

Skilling has been discussed as another priority area in the budget. When we again look at the second part of the budget, there are so many activities proposed like startup mission, skill building activities, micro enterprises, converting micro enterprises to small or medium enterprises etc. Past few years we have witnessed the mushrooming of so many public and private skill building agencies nationally and also within the state. But how far these skill building agencies are capacitated themselves to develop a sustainable skill ecosystem with reference to the contextual particularities is the question. These concerns in the main budget have no link in the GB document in particular with reference to informal sector. Specific programs that match the sociopolitical and cultural ecosystem of Kerala have to be developed and skilling should enable women to sustain those activities through state facilitation process. Plan A programs which are otherwise 100 percent gender specific programs according to the central budget, the dilution Kerala has brought has affected its allocations⁷. Majority of the categories coming under plan A is Kudumbasree, NRLM, NULM, ICDS related programs which are the existing flagship programs within the prescribed framework. It is limiting the scope of gender related activities through certain welfare related programs. While the convergence of various departmental programs through consistent planning can make a change in the long-term strategic needs related to gender such an attempt is not having any space in the GB document. It compartmentalizes departments. For example, when it comes to agriculture, there are certain agriculture allied activities that fiscal exertion could support rather than focusing on access to property(land), value addition emerging out of these ownerships which disrupts the gender stereotypes. The same concerns are valid in the areas of science, mathematics, engineering, information technology, arts and

⁶ This housewifization concept is important to discuss. The division of labour debates and the process by which women got confined to domestic responsibilities are old but relevant discussions in feminist theory. This concept discusses how capitalism exploits women using the work and family balance in their capital accumulation strategy (Mies,1986, Dalla Costa, James,1972).

⁷ Gender Budget in India funds for women (such as the Mid-Day Meal scheme). Since its initiation, the gender budget has increasingly been dominated by Part B funds for women (such as the Mid-Day Meal scheme). Since its initiation, the gender budget has increasingly been dominated by Part B.

culture etc. In a state with high rate of women's education, gender specific actions should enable the skill of the educated women. The percentage of allocations in plan B are very minimal when these broader areas are concerned.

Care economy was introduced as a potential area of employment in the last budget, but this aspect hasn't got any specific mention this year. While knowledge economy is gaining attention in the planning process, interpreting 'Care' as an important category in the knowledge economy theory seeks attention. In a state like Kerala with maximum number of professional care givers in different forms from professional nurses to ANM, paramedical experts, the potential of developing this sector through novel approaches can boost women employment participation. Kerala is widely understood as an ageing society with old/geriatric care is evolving as a long-term need of upper- and middle-class families. Home management is also a potential demand driven area where the old generation need support. But this again has to be linked with the concerns of skill and socio-cultural ecosystems. The knowledge economy mission talks of creating jobs in and around the household. But linking the concept to more broader spheres of the Kerala society and also with issues of mobility, status, decent work etc. will only generate a sustainable knowledge bridge. It goes beyond the virtual accumulation and spread out of expertise to more spatial accompaniments.

Another area of concern in the GB document is about the programs and schemes for marginalized sections. The gender budget document has not listed any specific or contextual allocations for the marginalized communities apart from the general schemes that are previously existing. As mentioned above marriage assistance got a high priority. It is well evident from the experiences of the marginalized communities that pandemic has exacerbated the inequalities and the difficulties they combatted to manage new normal situations in terms of basic needs, work, virtual education etc. For example, the demographic issues of tribal communities even differ when compared to the mainstream communities. The patterns of violence that these communities experience differ from the mainstream communities. Many of the women in tribal areas have no access to mobile phones or they are unaware of the existing mechanisms available. Special programs to enable accessibility to basic services and also inclusive approaches are crucial. Along with violence, the issues that women face varies from poverty, lack of food, lack of day long childcare facilities for women who work outside, lack of social security measures etc. Agricultural needs of the tribal population have to be linked with forest related matters. So how these concerns could be addressed with priority

while developing fiscal allocations for the marginalized communities is extremely complex. There are no income compensation schemes for women who have lost their livelihood or have been alienated from the mainstream society. Only thing that has mentioned, is that some income security money for traditional sector women, but in a state where majority of the women are working in the informal sector, apart from traditional jobs, like domestic work the state's concern for such sectors are not reflected in the GB document. In the last budget, five crores were announced for domestic workers but there is no follow up on such issues or any additional allocations are also not seen. The limitations in terms of data and categorization are mentioned as one of the hurdles towards a comprehensive budget. But the means to tackle these structural disorders are not getting pointed out in the approach. Majority of the workers in terms of their representation are invisible in the state's policy efforts. Home based workers are one such sector where majority are women workers who are under very poor employment situations in Kerala.

Another major concern is on social security of women. In Plan A and B, there are various schemes that come under the social security and welfare head. If we carefully examine the programs in the social security title, it includes Women Development Corporation, Women's Commission, Gender Park etc. where majority of the fund are disbursed. Other programs listed are gender awareness and other trainings through different institutions. The question here is how do we interpret social security in the context of gender budget? In a state where the status of women in terms of equal treatment has lot of gaps, majority of women engage with informal economy and majority of the care givers in the state are women, the concerns of the state, for these categories of women could be the highlights of fiscal calculations in social security. The LDF manifesto (2021) assured to implement a pension scheme for homemakers ('house wives') in recognition of the importance of domestic chores. Though it is not yet materialized but the idea itself endorses the identity of women as housewives! But when it comes to the care givers of bed ridden patients, the state is able to offer only 600 rupees for women who spend most part of their life with the patients, either elders or children⁸. Most of the women workers who are in the informal economy suffer from wage loss when they are not able to work during illness or unexpected pandemic emergencies like COVID. The state is only able to provide nominal social security measures like pensions. They are not entitled to any other provisions of sickness support or other social and health

⁸ Aswasakiranam– This program is an assistance to care givers (largely women) for which 4250 crores for women is allocated. Monthly assistance of 600₹ to the caregivers of bedridden patients at home, including physically and intellectually disabled persons and old aged persons (Gender Budget document,2022-23)

emergencies. There was a huge COVID recovery package announced in the last budget, but no women were paid any income or social security compensation as part of the hardship they faced during COVID. While in the budget speech, 'long economic covid' was mentioned, there are no such recovery measures included in this year's documents to support women in the new normal situation. The study conducted by Gulati Institute on the economic and fiscal shock of COVID 19 on Kerala, has found that Kerala has witnessed large scale loss in employment and revenue during this period. The report emphasizes on financial support from the government to sustain the own account enterprises, where it specifies that without such support, many enterprises in the state will go under, leading to severe disruption in the economy (GIFT,2020)⁹. Women have been suffering from domestic violence, economic pressures and other family constraints during COVID times. The household burden of so called 'housewives' had captured much attention during the peak time of COVID. All these are severe concerns of common people in the present times. The outcomes of these analyses are not reflected in the budget.

The attempt here was to reflect the GB document in the broader socio-economic situation of the state and also in the macroeconomic context. This is not a comprehensive analysis of the budget but elucidating main areas of concerns with respect to GB and the main budget document. As Chakraborty (2016) points out "unpacking the 'social content' of macroeconomic policies is pertinent for rapid economic growth". The planning experts and policy makers have to adopt innovative tools to perspectivise gender inclusively to strengthen the approach in public spending decisions and in measuring gender differential outcomes of fiscal policy. New directions are always commendable but more in-depth discussions with experienced people in the field and also targeted community should enable more comprehensive approaches. Narratives from the field should be highlighted to strengthen mechanisms for long-term and strategic approaches towards a gender equitable public and private sphere.

⁹ According to the calculation in the GIFT study it was estimated that a sum of Rs 13,641 Crore will be required to support a significantly large number of own-account enterprises and workers employed in establishments, all engaged in manufacturing, trade and other services. The support for the primary will exceed this amount.

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