



Call for Papers

ICSSR (as part of project under Vision Viksit Bharat@2047) Sponsored

National Conference

on

Challenges of Women Empowerment in India's Informal Sector

Challenges and Potential Strategies for Achieving the Goals of Vision Viksit Bharat@2047 and the Sustainable Development Goals

11th & 12th February 2025

The United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) No. 5 and No. 10 emphasize Gender Equality and Reduced Inequalities, advocating for global efforts to address women's issues as a cornerstone of inclusive development. In alignment with these goals, the Government of India's *Vision Viksit Bharat@2047* (VVB) initiative aims to achieve inclusive development by uplifting the most marginalized communities and ensuring that no one is left behind. A central focus of this vision is harnessing the untapped potential of women, thereby empowering them both financially and socioeconomically. Additionally Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1, 2, and 8 aim to achieve *Zero Hunger* and *No Poverty* while promoting the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Decent Work Agenda for the period 2016–2030. In line with these goals, the World Bank advocates for self-employment and entrepreneurship by launching skill-development programs designed to improve the livelihoods of vulnerable workers.

An integral component of VVB@2047 is *Nari Shaktikaran* (women's empowerment), as it is widely recognized that no nation can achieve the SDGs without prioritizing women's empowerment. Esther Duflo (2012) highlights the symbiotic relationship between women's empowerment and economic development, arguing that sustained policy commitment to gender equality is essential to foster both empowerment and long-term development.

Further supporting this perspective, Hashemi et al. (1996) demonstrate that providing women with greater access to resources not only enhances their individual well-being but also improves the overall welfare of their families, creating a ripple effect that benefits broader societal structures. Similarly, Muchomba (2021) finds that economically empowered mothers protect their daughters from early marriage, prioritize the education of their children, and contribute to poverty alleviation within their

households. Collectively, these findings underscore the transformative impact of empowering women on both micro and macro levels of development.

Empowering working-class women, particularly artisans, has consistently shown positive outcomes when support programs are implemented effectively. Initiatives such as training, financial support, and improved access to resources and markets have enabled these communities to thrive, benefiting not only individuals but also the broader community.

For instance, D. Radicic et al. (2016) highlight the beneficial effects of innovation support programs in traditional manufacturing industries, demonstrating how such initiatives can drive progress and sustainability. Similarly, Hashemi et al. (1996) provide evidence from Bangladesh, showing that rural credit programs significantly contributed to women's empowerment, enhancing their economic and social standing. These findings emphasize the importance of targeted support mechanisms in fostering empowerment and community prosperity.

As part of an ICSSR-funded project under the initiative *Vision Viksit Bharat@2047*, we are undertaking a study of women engaged in Kantha embroidery in rural West Bengal. Kantha, a traditional form of embroidery originating from West Bengal, features unique patterns that often depict scenes from Indian epics and mythologies, rural life, or elements of nature intricately woven into fabric. Over time, Kantha has evolved, adapting to market demands and contemporary style trends.

The history of Kantha work in Birbhum is deeply intertwined with the efforts of the Nobel Laureate and polymath Rabindranath Tagore. Recognizing its potential as a livelihood opportunity for rural women, Tagore integrated Kantha into his rural reconstruction programs. He facilitated training centers to empower women artisans, thereby reviving and popularizing this traditional art form. Since then, Kantha has garnered attention from both national and international handloom and handicraft markets.

However, preliminary findings from our research indicate that the women artisans involved in Kantha work do not receive compensation that adequately reflects the time, effort, and skill invested in their craft. Creating a traditional Kantha saree requires approximately 450 hours of meticulous embroidery and stitching. This demanding process involves prolonged periods of sitting on the floor, causing significant strain on the artisans' eyes and backs. Despite the immense effort and dedication involved, the financial returns for their labor are minimal.

Also important to note is that two key capability deprivations are evident among vulnerable workers in the informal sector, as outlined by Amartya Sen (1983, 2013):

Educational and Skill Deprivation: Workers in the informal sector often face limited access to education and skill development due to their lower socio-economic backgrounds, which restricts their opportunities for upward mobility and professional growth.

Bargaining Power Deprivation: The absence of collective bargaining mechanisms leaves these workers at the mercy of intermediaries and private wholesale or retail buyers, resulting in lower real wages and longer working hours, further exacerbating their economic vulnerabilities.

These deprivations highlight the systemic challenges faced by informal workers and underscore the need for targeted interventions to improve their socio-economic conditions. Preliminary findings of our research show that our cohort- the Kantha workers also suffer from the above deprivations.

As part of the ongoing study, this proposed conference invites abstracts for paper presentations on related themes to explore and understand the challenges and opportunities surrounding women's empowerment in the informal sector in India. Also, with only six years remaining to achieve critical SDGs, this conference will examine the issues and challenges surrounding inclusive and sustainable development in the Global South, fostering dialogue on strategies to accelerate progress in these regions.

Abstracts are invited for the paper presentation in the following themes but **not limited to**.

1. Kantha Work: A Pathway to Women's Empowerment in Rural Bengal
2. Issues of Women artisans in India
3. Issues of women empowerment in informal sector
4. Success stories of women artisan turned entrepreneurs in India
5. Work, wage and profit in the informal sector
6. Capability deprivation, skills and education and SDGs.
7. State, NGO and Market and Women empowerment
8. Export opportunities for small scale and cottage industries
9. Rural Reconstruction through women empowerment
10. Ethnography of art and artisans with special focus on women artisans
11. Art and artisans of Tribal (Adivasi) Societies

The selected high-quality papers will be compiled into an edited volume published by a reputable publisher. We invite submissions of abstracts for papers based on original research that have not been submitted for publication elsewhere.

Abstract Submission Guidelines:

Please submit an abstract that includes the title of the paper, the author's name(s), keywords, a brief biography of the author(s), as well as their email address and phone number through the following

<https://forms.gle/vub6UuoWbi7sRGtq7>

The abstract should not exceed 350 words and must cover the following points:

- What is currently known on the topic

- Identification of a research gap or problem
- How your research addresses the gap or problem
- The research methodology used
- The contribution of your paper to existing knowledge or your study area, highlighting key takeaways from your research.

Important Dates:

Last date of Abstract Submission	26.12.2024
Intimation of Acceptance for paper presentation	05.01.2025
Submission of full paper	26.01.2025
Conference	11 & 12 th Feb 2025
Intimation of acceptance of paper for book chapter	25.02.2025

*Railway Tickets (Sleeper class) for the shortest possible route will be reimbursed upon producing the tickets. Accommodation for the paper presenters is being explored subject to the availability of funds.

Conference will be organized at Department of Anthropology in collaboration with Department of Social Work, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan, West Bengal; Kamala Nehru College and Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar College, University of Delhi.

For any queries, please write to icssr.vvb47.kanthaworkers@gmail.com

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