

Migrant women's aspirations in the city

Mithun Som, Anveshi City Project team

There is an increasing trend of women migrating alone to the city for education or employment in the last couple of decades. Increased presence of women in the cities plays out in a different way than men. Their presence in public spaces brings in a certain tension related to their sexuality. The city perceives a threat that sexuality pose to the functioning and imagining of the city. There has been gendered critiques on urban spaces which was part of the larger debates going on, on the threat being perceived by women's appearance in public spaces.

While critiquing Henri Lefebvre's idea of "right to city", Tovi Fenster had argued that "right to city" had overlooked the patriarchal power control which stops women from accessing public spaces of a city. Liz Bondi and Linda McDowell had unearthed the loopholes in urban planning and geographies, where the gendered perspective to plan a city have always been overlooked by the planners.

In order to understand how the women migrating alone to the city are posing questions and causing 'unrest', one needs to understand what does the city mean for a migrant woman and how does she interact with the city. What brings her to the city and what does she aspire for? How does the baggage of caste, class, region and religion with which she enters the city plays a crucial role as to where she gets located in the city. And in what way the complexity of other factors like support network, interaction with institutions play a role.

Through this paper, we try to address these questions to try and understand in what way the women migrating to the city is changing the narrative. This study is based on indepth interviews of 51 women who have migrated alone to the city of Hyderabad for education or job. These interviews are conducted as part of the ongoing project on "City and Sexuality- Study with Youth Living and Working in Hyderabad City" at Anveshi Research Centre for Women's Studies.