

## **Executive Summary**

### **A Gerontological Study on the Health Hazards of the Cashew Workers of Kerala**

It is a matter of little doubt that environmental problems will be one of humanity's major concerns of 21<sup>st</sup> century and it is becoming apparent that sociologists can play an important role in shedding light on these problems and to delineate steps to cope with them. Cashew nut processing being one of the most promising sectors employing a large group of women workers needs to be more standardized in procedures, as they are dealing with food commodity. The compilation of the experiences of the workers points out that now cashew trade has only priority for price than for valuing relationships. Indian rules remained strict about factory facilities...where some companies followed and some ignored.

After the home environment, it is the workplace where many people spend majority of their time. Therefore women who work outside home, needs to be provided with a congenial atmosphere that help them preserve and retain their vitality as a mutli –role personality. Health is a major determinant of the quality of life and for the elderly, a significant predictor of life satisfaction. Thus there is an emerging call for a feminist approach to health promotion for aging women to recognize the existing health care practices which limit the health care opportunities and choices for older women ;and to discuss how such basic feminist principles as education, egalitarianism, empowerment and inclusion can be used to improve an older woman's experience in the health care system.

Gerontological theories state that over use and abuse of the body surely catalyzes the process of ageing especially in women. Women who are already burdened with multiple tasks at home ; with rearing of children ,the elderly care, and other never ending demands of the family are

literally struggling to meet both ends. Moreover lack of financial support from the husband and alcoholic problems aggravate the stress levels of the women workers .The aged women workers suffer from the pain of being abandoned by their loved ones once they become incapacitated to make a living. All these tensions make their life miserable and therefore even if they are not healthy, they believe in completing their phase of life in the most active and positive manner. Therefore it is now the state's responsibility to take care of their retirement benefits and the legal provisions of settlement. Due to lack of education the women are unaware of their rights and often fall a prey to falsified version of their rights and it's high time that the needs of women during their tenure and after are covered. This is possible only through sensitization programmes by the NGO's of the community.

All of the experiences related by the workers, their unprecedented illness and subsequent indebtedness as well as their poverty and social insecurities also underscore the need for efficient and quality health care services in the different sectors where people from the lower strata can meet their needs .The inefficiency of government medical care services not only impair the utilization but also denies woman workers their basic right to health care. Provisions of quality health care services are possible only when public health and developmental policies are strengthened in an egalitarian, gender sensitive and socio-culturally and ecologically appropriate ways .

An integrated approach with good management practices (GMP) along with provision of public health and developmental services with active participation from local self governing institutions ,trade unions and the community will be the most meaningful way of promoting health. In essence through this study it seeks to enhance the self-esteem, raise consciousness ,empower and validate recipients of treatment or services .Thus through this feminist gerontological perspective

it is intended to pressurize organizations or Government to respond to the needs of older women and to eliminate stereo types, societal attitudes and to broaden the range of roles available to the aging women.