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Thesis Title: Understanding the Socio-Economic Lives of Women Workers engaged in mid Day Meal & ICDS: A Feminist Perspective (A Study of two district of Bihar)

Keywords: Women Scheme Workers, Intersectional Marginalization, Social Reproduction Theory, Care Work, Labour

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FINDINGS

This thesis examines the socio-economic conditions of women working under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and Mid-Day Meal (MDM) Scheme through a feminist and intersectional lens. The thesis reveals that despite serving as the backbone of two of India's largest social welfare programmes, these women workers continue to remain economically insecure, socially undervalued, and institutionally marginalized.

The findings demonstrate that women engaged in ICDS and MDM perform multiple roles extending far beyond their prescribed responsibilities, while receiving low honorariums, limited social security, and inadequate employment benefits. Their work is characterized by heavy workloads, irregular remuneration, lack of formal recognition, and poor career progression. The thesis further establishes that caste, class, religion, marital status, and geographical location significantly influence their working conditions, opportunities, and experiences of discrimination, highlighting the intersectional nature of inequalities within welfare programmes.

The thesis also identifies a persistent gap between policy intent and programme implementation. While ICDS and MDM are designed to strengthen child development, nutrition, and education, frontline women workers often operate under severe resource constraints, administrative pressures, and weak grievance redressal mechanisms. Stakeholder analysis reveals that bureaucratic processes, fragmented accountability, and limited institutional support adversely affect both service delivery and workers' welfare.

Using feminist political economy and theories of recognition and redistribution, the thesis argues that the labour of women scheme workers is systematically undervalued because it is perceived as an extension of unpaid caregiving rather than skilled public service. This institutional invisibility perpetuates employment insecurity and restricts access to labour rights and social protection.

The thesis concludes that strengthening India's welfare delivery system requires formal recognition of women scheme workers, improved remuneration, comprehensive social security coverage, capacity building, effective grievance redressal, and gender-responsive policy reforms. It recommends a rights-based approach that acknowledges the indispensable contribution of ICDS and MDM workers to the functioning of the welfare state while promoting dignity, equity, and decent working conditions.