

# India: International Working Women's Day 2018

Monday 12 March 2018, by [MANUEL Thomas](#), [T. Venkat](#), [TADEPALLI Srividya](#) (Date first published: 11 March 2018).

## A round-up of women's labour struggles in India

On March 5, **Penn Thozhilalar Sangam** organised a [demonstration](#) in Tiruvallur near Chennai. While recognising the value of women's labour, the participants also highlighted the apathy of the central and state governments towards workers in general and women's occupation in particular. The NREGA workers complained about the shrinking number of work days and the delay in distribution of wages. Garment workers highlighted rampant sexual harassment as well as victimisation by companies for forming unions. A 10-point charter of demands was presented that included revamping labour welfare boards.

**Several organisations** and came together in [New Delhi](#) for a protest rally demanding action on issues affecting women, from the right to work to the right to love, from the continuing threats to the security of women to the threats from the conservative forces. The march also reiterated the demand for 33% reservation for women in the parliament.

**All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA)** took to the streets of [Thiruvananthapuram](#) demanding that the government enforce the Maternity Benefit Act, as amended a few years back. They claimed that while the government had amended the paid leave to 26 weeks, private companies were still only offering 12 weeks of paid leave. This is in violation of the law. They also released a charter of demands for women workers.

While the protests and the paternalistic celebrations of women's achievements by brands and corporations could present optimism, the reality of women workers remains dismal. **India continues to slip down the ranks in gender parity.** An article [in The Economic Times](#) by Vaishali Sinha highlights that even as the country's economy went through a boom in the past decade, the condition of women in employment has only worsened as evidenced by India's rank in the Gender Parity Index (WEF) falling from 87 to 108. She argues for companies to become 'equal opportunity' organisations. She quotes economic reports to state that measures to draw more women into work and provide equal pay will give a huge boost to the national and global economy.

Unfortunately, the pay scale agreements of India's cricket players, released a day before women's day has become [illustrative](#) of the huge bridge that needs to be crossed in terms of equal pay. While the cricket association BCCI has raised retainer fees by over 200% across the board, the national level female players get a mere 10% of the fees of the male national players. The huge difference has come under [criticism](#) from many quarters.

It's ironic that the Indian government is celebrating women's day while forcing women to work in dismal conditions with poor wages that don't get credited on time. *Down to Earth* [has highlighted](#) the plight of nearly a million ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activists) workers who have not received their payments for months on end. Barring a few states, the ASHA workers get incentives

instead of a fixed salary. There are 43 activities they are supposed to engage in depending upon the need of the concerned area. They are supposed to get a combined sum of these incentives at the end of every month. Even this has now been delayed for several months. An [article in \*The Wire\*](#) about a nurse's strike in Alappuzha, Kerala that has been raging for over 200 days describes the poor wages and long working hours suffered by the highly trained nurses. The hospital that had failed to even provide minimum wage and statutory benefits has dismissed 112 nurses for taking part in the strike and has remained intransigent about conciliation.

### **Funds crunch leaves sex workers without healthcare**

Due to reduced grants from the National AIDS Control Organisation, Karnataka State AIDS Prevention Society [is undergoing a massive funding crunch](#). Nisha Gulur, Karnataka Sex Workers Union treasurer, told New Indian Express, "Outreach workers have not received salaries for 10 months. Distribution of condoms has stopped and they are no longer taking workers to integrated counselling and testing centres once every six months. Two years ago, in one targeted intervention (TI), there would be four outreach workers and 16 peer educators. Now, there are two workers and four peer educators. One educator has to reach out to 100 clients." Pushpalatha R, project director, Swathi Mahila Sangha, Malleswaram, said payments to doctors had been slashed by 20-40%. "Which doctor will render his services for that sum? Previously, workers were taken for sexually transmitted infections treatment once in three months, now it is six."

Out of all the media outlets to mark International Women's Day, the People's Archive of Rural India has, by far, the greatest collection. From [the Bhadels of Goa](#) (a community of women porters in Margao) to the [Kondhs of Rayagada](#) in Orissa who are trying to build a gender-equal society, from [rural entrepreneurs in Tamil Nadu](#) and [Uttarakhand](#) to [carrom champions from Maharashtra](#), their collection is a delight. Please do go and read them.

### **History of IWWD**

- **Don't forget what International Women's Day is really about - striking:** *The Independent* has a history of the day [here](#). The article has an arresting photo of Jayaben Desai, a British-Asian woman on strike at the Grunwick factory in 1977, holding a sign on the picket line.
- **From last year's edition of *Life of Labour* on International Working Women's Day:** [A brief overview of the origin of IWWD and excerpts from Jacobin](#) and Thozhilalar Koodam on the challenges faced in organising women workers today.

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**P.S.**

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