

**Socio Economic Status of Slum Dwellers with Special
Reference to Women: A Study on the CIS Gomti
Region of Lucknow City**

Thesis

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Anushree Nagpal

under the supervision of

Prof. Masood Ahsan Siddiqui

Department of Geography, Faculty of Natural Sciences

Jamia Millia Islamia

New Delhi

CHAPTER - VI

CONCLUSIONS

“There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is impossible for a bird to fly only on one wing.” - Swami Vivekananda

The study analyses the status of women using both the primary and secondary data. It is well known that women have faced exclusion, violence and atrocities and have remained a marginalised group in all ages, across different regions and different societies and cultures. Quite in keeping with this observation, our study revealed that despite the progress and advancement made by our country in diverse fields, the ground reality about the condition of women has changed only marginally. The patriarchal ideology of the home being a woman’s ‘real domain’ and marriage being her ultimate destiny hasn’t changed much. Thus, if one looks at the status of women then and now, one essentially has to look at two sides of the coin; one side which is promising, and one side which is bleak.

The status of women has continued to change and evolve from being at par with men in all activities ranging from education to performing religious rites during the Vedic times to be viewed as mere objects of sensual gratification during the modern times. Our study revealed that all religions of the world regard women and men being at absolute par with each other and that the role and presence of women as mothers, wives, care givers has been lauded and acknowledged in all societies and cultures, at all times. While Islam makes it essential for everyone, especially women (muslimatin), to obtain education, Christian women boast of having one of the highest levels of literacy in the country. Likewise, while Islam exalts the role of women as

mothers, with Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) stating ‘heaven lies under the feet of your mother’, Old Testament Bible too mentions ‘if anyone curses his father or mother, he must be put to death’ (Lev., 20:9). Hinduism too praises and worships women in the form of deities like Durga, Lakshmi, Saraswati possessing immense power and knowledge. While the aforesaid is true, there is enough evidence that these praises and adulations remain on paper only as the present day ground reality is starkly different.

Even after 70 years of Independence, women continue to be the weaker sex, grappling with social ills like unfavourable sex ratio, glaring gender gap in literacy, poor health, violence both at home and at workplace to name only a few. Apart from the Quran, none of the religious texts mention about the inheritance and the property rights of the women. It was only after Independence in 1956 that the Hindu Succession Act, to protect the inheritance rights of Hindu women came into power, while the property rights of the Christian women are protected by the Indian Succession Act, 1925. It should be mentioned that these laws were modified a number of times for them to be in favour of women in letter and in spirit. The greatest sufferers however, are the women belonging to the weaker section, who in addition to belonging to an already marginalised group, suffer further exploitation due to their lack of skills and training as well as their financial and economic dependence on the male folk.

India continues to be a developing country with one of the lowest sex ratio in the world. Patriarchal social set up with strong preference for the male child continues to be one of the main reasons for low sex ratio in the country. One of the major outcomes of falling sex ratio, is rise in the incidences of violence against women. It was seen that uneven sex ratios are associated with men reporting having committed intimate partner violence. Amongst the many forms of violence against women

domestic violence is very common. Domestic violence can be physical, emotional, verbal, economic or sexual. The gravity can be understood by the fact that 70 per cent of Indian women have experienced domestic abuse at some point in their lives. As far as the education and literacy are concerned, there exists wide gender disparity in the literacy rate of 16.3 per cent. This gender gap in education exists at all levels. In terms of their participation in politics, women around the world find themselves under-represented in national parliaments as well as away from major decision making positions. Having faced inequalities in their access to most of the basic rights like right to survival or right to education, women's political rights, have largely been ignored. In keeping with the global trend, the participation of women in politics in India has in general been low key. Despite the clear cut constitutional mandate for providing equality to women in the public domain, discrimination and stigma against women continue to persist even after more than 70 years of Independence. They form part of the syndrome of exclusion from political power. There exists a gap between 'dejure' and 'defacto' aspects of the status of equality given to women. Perpetuation of patriarchal political structures functioning in conjunction with caste, class and gender subordination, lack of consensus, unwillingness and general apathy towards giving tickets to women candidates, as well as the perceived inability of women candidates to garner adequate support and resources for their respective constituencies are few of the major reasons for lesser participation of women in politics. As far as the economic participation of women is concerned, women are more prominently employed in the informal sector than the formal sector. While the participation of women in economic activities in the formal sector of industries, services and agricultural sector is measurable, it is not the case with the informal sector like

measuring women's participation in household chores, training and educating children and other such aspects.

An analysis of primary data from the women folk in the slum colonies presents a similar picture. Though, the women of the slums contribute significantly in the finances of the family yet their social status is largely unrecognized. In spite of larger involvement in the family wellbeing in the form of earning, cooking, cleaning and care, the women are still deprived of their due place in the society. Women are disproportionately represented amongst the urban poor both in the category of those whose long-term poverty is deepening and those for whom poverty is relatively recent. Three reasons why women dominate among the poor in cities include first one is that the jobs women are engaged in are poorly paid part time jobs where job security is low even in the contexts where women workers are preferred. The second one is because of inequalities in resource distribution, and decision making power within the household, women do not always control their income. The third is that women generally do not command equal resources or assets compared to men in the society.

The women folk were found to be lagging in technical education so as to earn a livelihood in contrast to males who are equipped with technical skills. Though the enrolment of girls in the slums is satisfactory but because of the social stigma and concern for safety and security of the girl child, the dropout rates among them is very high after pursuing education till higher secondary level or less. Majority of the women respondents dropped out at primary level followed by middle school, secondary and higher secondary levels. In the absence of technical skills and appropriate formal education only 57 per cent women were working while the remaining 43 per cent were unemployed. Those working were largely engaged in the

informal sector. A vast majority worked as domestic help as well as most of the women earned between an income brackets of Rs. 2,000-4,000 per month. The discussions with the women respondents brought to light certain livelihood strategies they adopted in order to ensure their and their families' survival. Women may not exercise any control over their spouses' incomes but they are in charge of the budget allocated to them for running the house. Major cuts are unusually made by women in their own travel budget. Children, especially girls are often engaged by their mothers in home based economic activities (and not just household chores); girl child school drop outs are high in such slums. In some cases, where the household is headed by a woman in the slum colonies, financial shortages force women to diversify their livelihood activities in order to increase their income. The results of the study particularly revealed that the urban poor and women in specific are highly dependent on economic, social and psychological supports from their children and other dependents.

Existence of poor to moderate sanitation facilities and lack of awareness have posed a serious challenge to the health of slum dwellers specially women folk. Good number of women respondents reported suffering from a host of chronic illnesses, both infectious and non-infectious. These included hypertension, diabetes, asthma, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), arthritis, common skin infections like scabies and ringworm infections, mental illnesses, as well as reproductive health problems. Obesity too was common especially amongst older women. In terms of the BMI, a vast majority of the women respondents fell in the underweight category indicating the fact that they might be malnourished while 3 per cent were in the obese category. Easy accessibility to junk food, unclean street food, coupled with low awareness can be some of the reasons for the prevalence of non-communicable diseases like type II

diabetes, breathlessness, asthma as well as social isolation and depression. A relatively lesser percent of people fell in the ‘healthy’ category with BMI ranging between 18.5-24.9.

Our findings validate recent research in India that found that women living in communities with a more uneven sex ratio (more men) are more likely to report physical abuse by a husband, while controlling other household factors. Almost all women respondents in the study area, irrespective of their age, reported having faced at least one form of violence both at home and at workplace. In terms of political awareness, all the surveyed women respondents were found to be registered voters in Lucknow except the 6 per cent women whose names were not present in the voters’ list and about 89 per cent of the female voters possessed valid voter ID cards issued by the Election Commission of India and duly voted in the last parliamentary elections. Of the 89 per cent women voters, an overwhelming majority (97 per cent) consented voting for the party and the candidate their husband/ father-in-law or other male members of the family told them to vote for.

There are numerous schemes being run for the social and economic welfare and upliftment of the urban poor. Few of the prominent schemes include National Urban Livelihood Mission (NULM), Swarna Jayanti Shahri Rozgar Yojana (SJSRY), Rajiv Awas Yojna (RAY), Rajiv Rinn Yojna (RRY), as well as the Aasra Yojna. A particularly popular scheme was the Widow Pension Scheme launched by the Uttar Pradesh government to provide basic monetary support. However, it is worth noting that despite the welfare schemes and other enabling measure taken by the government, the condition of women slum dwellers has improved only marginally. A vast majority still remains uneducated, lacking in awareness, complex process as well as almost completely dependent on the men in their families, both socially and

financially. Are some of the major hurdles in the implementation of schemes. To bring about change in the social and economic conditions of women especially in the slums merely legislation and launching of scheme is not enough. Rather, the procedures for availing the benefits be simplified and mass awareness be created.