



WOMEN AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN UTTAR PRADESH (1888-2001)

THESIS

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7.1 Introduction

This thesis is an effort to compile a comprehensive index of gender development, focusing on the key issues in the life of women in Uttar Pradesh. Discussed in the present thesis is an in-depth situational analysis of UP women measured across the time period 1888 - 2001. It unravels various realities that are rarely spoken of about the once most prominent state of India. It is quite hard-hitting to uncover numerous facts that point to the aggrieving truth of women's continuing oppression over the decades.

This academic investigation has gone into detailed secondary source analysis to understand the socio-economic, political and health situation of women in UP from 1888 to 2001. It required going into the education, economic and social condition and issue of violence in UP concerning women. This warranted looking at the level of literacy and education among women of Uttar Pradesh along with several indicators, analysing progress and identifying gaps. Also explored is the condition of economic disparities and changes faced by women in UP in terms of employment opportunities. It involved a detailed review of female work participation rate across various sectors and factors affecting female enrollment in different industries in Uttar Pradesh. Agriculture has been one of the defining features of the Indian economy since the time immemorial. This research has underlined the historicity of UP women's association with agriculture, their roles and functions, factors that influence their participation and remuneration.

The comprehensive research also required examining the status of women in politics and identifying the obstacles that have surfaced in this regard, the level involvement of UP women in political affairs over decades and how far they have reached currently. The issue of health and nutrition is another priority issue for women that required analysing specific conditions and causatives.

7.2 Observations and Findings of the Study

Although there have been undeniable improvements between 1888- 2001, that promise to bring light into the lives of women, having looked at the subject from every dimension, one can infer that we still have miles to travel. Uttar Pradesh continues to be one of the most backward states of India in terms of per capita income and other pointers of socio-economic development. High incidence of poverty and high population growth rates widen the existing gap and constrain the development efforts. Uttar Pradesh is nowhere near universalisation of elementary education and total literacy.

The status of women in Uttar Pradesh has various high and low indicators. However, the overall status of women and girls in Uttar Pradesh as obtained by various statistics is grim. A huge chunk of women in UP continues to be incapacitated of reading and writing, a lot of the poor, pregnant and powerless. UP is a major region of a highly sexist northern plain of India, and the all-pervasive misogyny continues to thrive since medieval times, based on ancient feudal values and obsolete customs. It is observed that women and girls of Uttar Pradesh suffer a large share of adversity on account of a society sharply stricken by the disparities of caste, class and gender. We notice adverse sex ratio, the decline in child sex ratio (0-6 years); female foeticide, and poor health status of pregnant mothers, neglect of girl child; higher female Infant Mortality Rate, low awareness regarding contraception and family planning, large family size, high teenage pregnancies, high Maternal Mortality Rate, low contraceptive acceptance, lack of male participation and enormous cases of abortions.

The agonisingly adverse status of women and girls after five decades of socio-economic planning is proof enough that the state needs to undertake some serious steps and pull itself out of the conundrum of an adverse gender crisis.

The Indian government has taken several measures to redeem the situation by granting equality of gender in the Constitution as a Fundamental Right and as a part of directive state policy. Seven decades of independence have also witnessed a plethora of laws passed by the State legislature and the Central Government to protect women from discrimination and crimes and strengthen their position in the social and economic sector. Countless commissions and committees have x-rayed the status of women, progress made, and issues that they face. Numerous recommendations have

been made to improve the situation. Innumerable schemes and programmes have been launched by various ministries of the government to address women's problems, giving special attention to education, health and nutrition.

The seven-decade struggle for reform has undoubtedly brought about a considerable effect on women's suffrage. Few of the vital indicators of development have perked up remarkably- the life expectancy of women has gone up, education levels are getting better, economical and political participation has risen. However, the areas of darkness overpower the hope for a brighter future for women and girls. A sharp rise in violence against women, both at home and outside, orthodox norms and backward societal structure are the dangers to be looked out for.

A wide gap exists between progressive legislation and effective law enforcement. It can also be said that almost all advances made remain confined to urban Uttar Pradesh and the vast rural hinterland seems persistent in resisting change. The geography of a state provides its own constraints to developmental efforts. Thus, we are left with a somewhat mixed overall picture that says the life of an average UP women remains not substantially altered. However, no matter how distinct rural and urban worlds can be, it is evident that there has been cooperation from both ends in joining forces with modernisation. Spatial comparisons such as the present one can give an insight into what lessons there are to be learnt from the regions that have the edge over the others. Regionally disaggregated studies can help in recording progress minutely and can be thereby used to review and improve efforts.

Some of the major reasons for the persistency of women's adverse situation in Uttar Pradesh are as follows:

- Ineffective policy implementation, negligent of responsibility by people who are involved in the empowerment process.
- Lack of resources and infrastructure in education and health fields for women.
- Low level of awareness among women of the available schemes, lack of access to information on health, sanitation, education and employment.
- Ongoing oppression and control of women by male members of the family, the village communities through threat, violence, denial of financial independence and freedom of mobility.

- The subservient mindset of women, reinforced by centuries of cultural and religious patriarchy.
- Lack of regular evaluation of the women development strategies and the absence of a continuous measure of progress made.

Recommendations that can be made in light of the observations made during this analysis are as follows:

- The government should increase educational and social awareness on the issues of gender discrimination, crimes against women, need and benefits of gender equality.
- Adequate allocation of resources should be made for the unmet needs of education and health, and efficient tracking of progress made by policy interventions.
- Gender sensitisation of media, authorities and organisations involved in meeting the health, education and employment needs of women is needed.
- The government should initiate efforts to change the discriminatory mindset of men.
- Campaigns to create awareness among families and communities about the debilitating condition of women amidst them and the devastating consequences of patriarchal oppression on women should be organised.
- Devising new policy interventions should involve ground-level workers, experts and organisations who have closely worked with women and women representatives themselves.

7.3 Directions for Future Research

In India and around the world, more researches should be done on the condition of women in various systems. Geo-spatial specific investigations can uncover causatives that are definite and detailed. Research in the future can concentrate on unearthing the obstacles to effective interventions and policy implementations. Also, an ethnographic understanding of women and men's mindset in culturally conservative societies can offer insights into the inherent resistance towards women's liberation and empowerment in such societies.

7.4 Conclusion

The self-awareness of women's situation has become an essential aspect of challenging the heteronormative gender perspective. Patriarchal oppression of women is faced by women all over India. But often, women don't see it as an offence. To change women's condition in Uttar Pradesh, as well as across India, it requires a transformation of the mindset, especially of women themselves. Gender consciousness among women, situational awareness of their historical experience, a progressive perspective of themselves and their position in society are quintessential as the basic foundation for the socio-economic and political transformation of women towards gender equality.