

Women and Decision Making in Urban India: A Gender Geographical Study of Varanasi City, Uttar Pradesh, India

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ABSTRACT

The society which is structured on patriarchal lines is responsible for marginalizing women in all spheres of society, economy and decision making process. Gender differences led women to suppress in the decision making on various issues occurring in their daily activities. Roles and responsibilities of women and their choices are restricted to specific sphere. The present paper is an attempt to assess the socio-economic status of women living in Varanasi city and their participation in decision making process.

The number of the subject selected from the study area (Varanasi city, Uttar Pradesh) was 600. An interview schedule and questionnaire were simultaneously administered to the selected subject. Result indicates that participation of women in decision making may likely to affect by socio-economic status of women. Awareness companion, inculcation through text books and interventory programmes are required on gender sensitive issues.

Key Words: *Socio-economic status, participation, decision making*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Society is a collective institution which regulates and controls the activities of daily life of its members. The life of the individual reflects the nature of the society. The nature of prevailing personality and its structure of an individual i.e. his/ her religion, educational status, form of family, marital status, is a significant component in any society formation. Thus the fractured status of individual should be measured through its social composition and an individual location in its social hierarchy. The study of Mittal and Ketkar (1970) reveals that the socio-economic factors such as education, religion, place of residence, and standard of living, are some important factors, which dent an influence on individual personality. Keeping in view factors how develop and shape the personality of an individual. Raju and Bagchi (1994) contributed significantly in the emerging field of gender study. It integrates different scales of analysis and combines economic explanations with local dimensions such as religion, culture, and societal constraints on gender roles in South Asian countries. With their empirical and theoretical evidences they focused that female work is undervalued and greatly exploited.

Treas and Drobnaić (2010) leading international scholars tried to investigate how culture and country specific social features influence our household and personal lives. They further observed 'household remains a bastion of traditional gender relations—even when employed full-time, women everywhere still do most of the work around the house, and poor women spend more time on housework than affluent women. Education systems, tax codes, labour laws, public policies, and cultural beliefs about motherhood and marriage all make a difference'. Any accounting of "who does what" needs to consider the complicity of trade unions, state arrangements for children's schooling, and new cultural prescriptions for a happy marriage. With its cross-national perspective, this pioneering works speaks not only to social scientists concerned with gender and family, but also to those interested in scholarship on states, public policy, culture, and social inequality.

The progress of science and technology has led to tremendous development in certain areas like education, transport, communication, mass media like news papers, radio, films, etc; this has resulted in many changes in the life styles of men and women, the world over. The impacts of these changes are more evident in the urban areas than rural. The role, position and function of women are slowly improving toward rationality and more democratic. The age at marriage has been steadily rising. Education is spreading among women and there is a growing desire for participation in outdoor economic and social work.

Participation is a voluntary process by which people, including the disadvantaged (in caste, gender, income, or education), influence or control the decisions that affect them (Saxena). Though participation at individual level refers to identify their own needs, to get choices, share in decisions, implementation and evaluation of that action. For women to participate effectively in the social, economical, political and reproductive matters, for the development of the society and of themselves, a congenial and conducive atmosphere should prevail throughout the society. Under the existing traditional and patriarchal social conditions, there are multifarious factors like caste, class, colour, religion and education that determine the extent of women participation in the decision making.

II. OBJECTIVE

The present study has been undertaken with the following major objective:-

- To study the impact of socio-economic status of women in decision making process

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

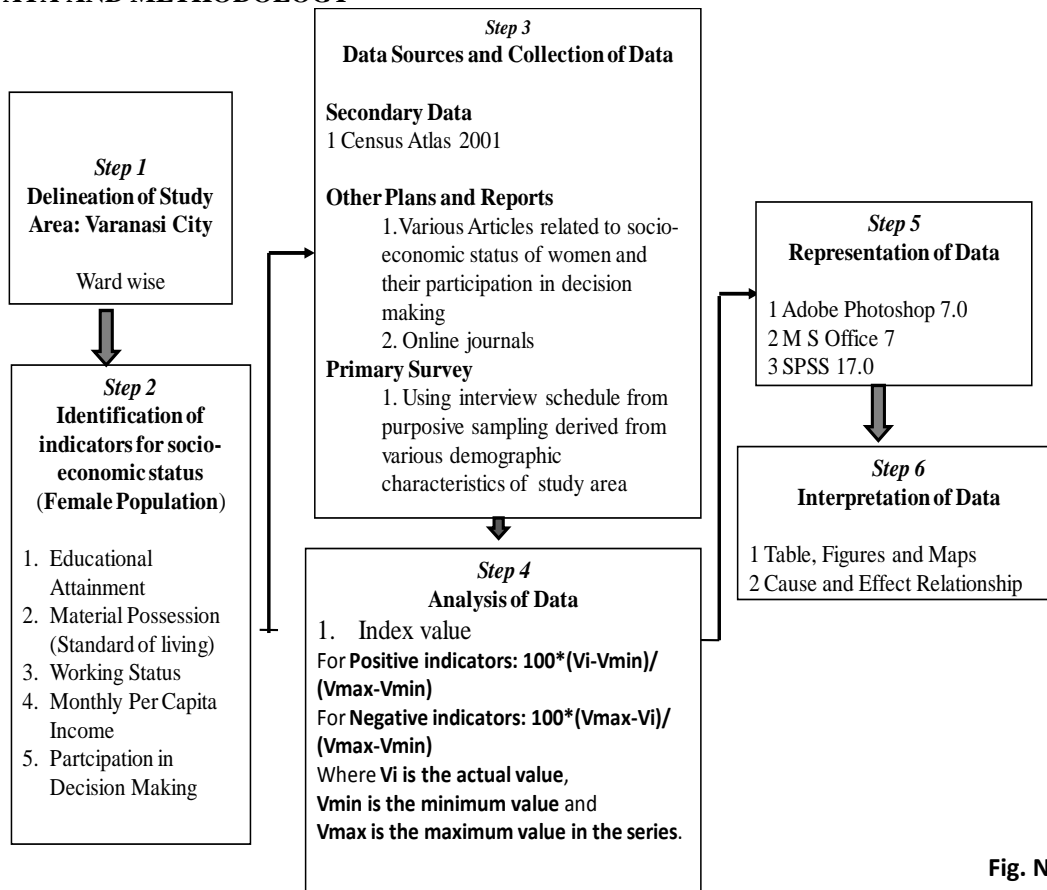


Fig. No. 1

III. STUDY AREA

Varanasi 'The Sacred City' in the 21st century has acquired great importance at national and global level. The extent of the city touches Banaras Hindu University in south and its western and north western part mostly surrounded by villages and agricultural land. Varanasi as it is now officially known is a major trade centre of Purvanchal (Eastern Uttar Pradesh and Western Bihar). Recently, many cultural events have been revived, which attracts tourists in various ways and justified the multi-culturism in Indian society. Actually, Varanasi reported as a cultural capital of India, and its significance is quite visible among the tourists, scholars and philosophers. City is located along the left crescent shaped bank of the Ganga river. It extends between 25° 15' to 25° 22' N latitudes and 82° 57' to 83° 01' E longitudes, covering an area of 74.3 sq.km (according to MCA).

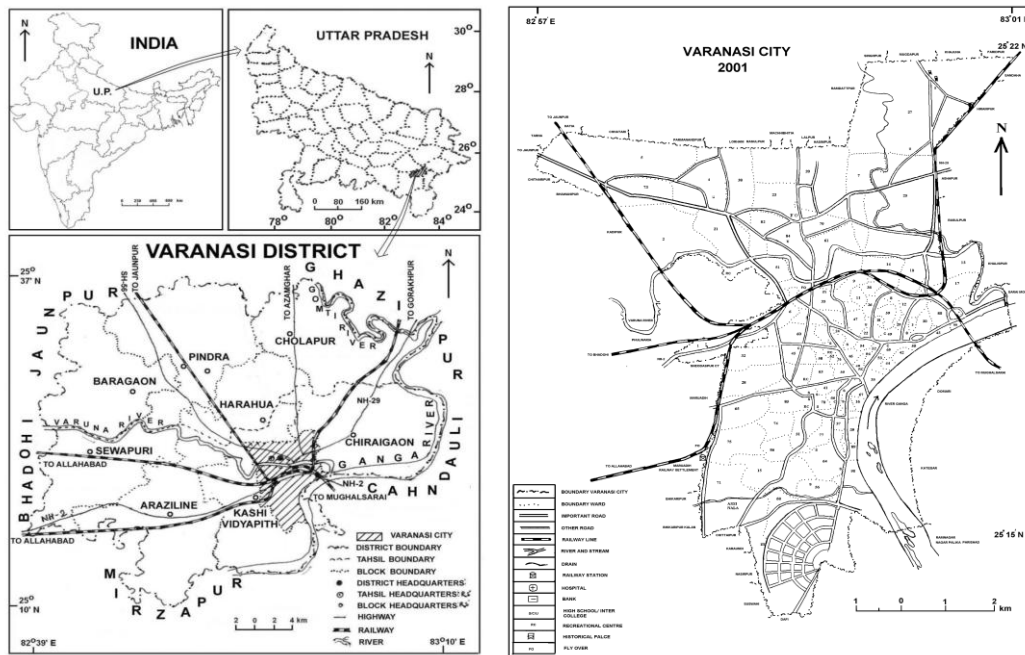


Fig. No. 2

The city lies between the Varuna river in the north and Assi river (now converted into Nala) in the south (fig.2) the city is situated in the middle Ganga plain having sub humid climate with scorching hot summers and dry winters. Because of cultural aesthetic it happens to be the first choice of residence in and around city. According to 2011 census, the population of the city is 15, 97,051 persons including 47.06 per cent of female population. It consists of 90 municipal wards. The average female population density is more than 10,000 females per sq. km. Sex ratio is 899, lower than the national average.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

The study focused the reproductive age group from 14-49, which represents the most vital and active population segments in society. 72.5 percent respondents are Hindu and 27.5 per cent are Muslim. 44.2 per cent households belong to general category followed by 43.3 per cent OBC and 12.5 per cent SC/ST social group. It reveals that in the urban area the predominant communities are general and backward social group.

Education is the key that helps in empowering women. Education also undoubtedly contributes to development. It is universally accepted that female literacy rates have a positive impact on health, and other social issues such as crude birth rate and death rate, mean age of marriage, awareness of rights etc. It raises income, improvements and also enhance the level and magnitude of women participation in various development projects. According to Seth (2001), “the productive and creative energies of the women of India have to be released through creative and sound education to which they must have at all cost. This would be the key to their empowerment.” In the figure 3a the bar diagram shows that 15.3 per cent of women are illiterate, 18.0 per cent are up to primary level educated, remaining share is literate more than secondary or higher secondary. Religion wise distribution of respondent’s education shows comparatively higher status in Hindu women (52.6 per cent) than Muslim women (18.8 per cent) in higher education category. 29.1 per cent illiterate is in Muslim category and 10.1 per cent illiterates are in Hindu respondent. Figure 3.c reflects that 62.3 per cent women are housewives they do not earn but they support the earners to earn properly. The comparatively dominant occupation is labour mostly in unorganised sectors which is ranging from house hold workers to construction side workers. Least share (0.5 per cent) is occupied by production and transport.

Regarding wage of working women the range varies from ₹ 500 to 60,000. About 40.7 per cent of working women earn upto ₹ 6000. The income group of ₹ 6,001-12,000 share of working women is 31.0 per cent where as 17.7 and 10.6 per cent occupied by ₹ 12,001-18,000 and > 18,000 respectively.

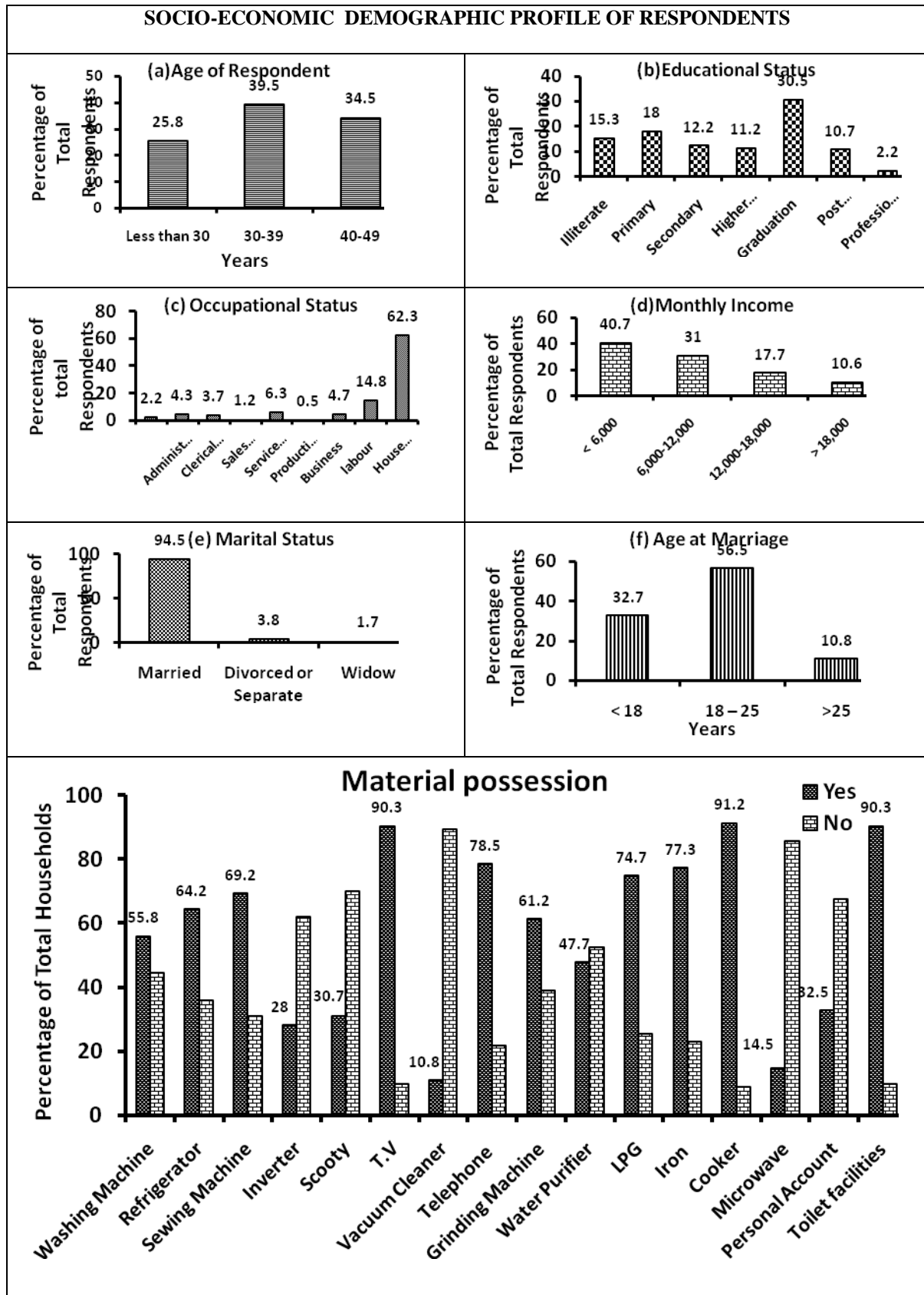
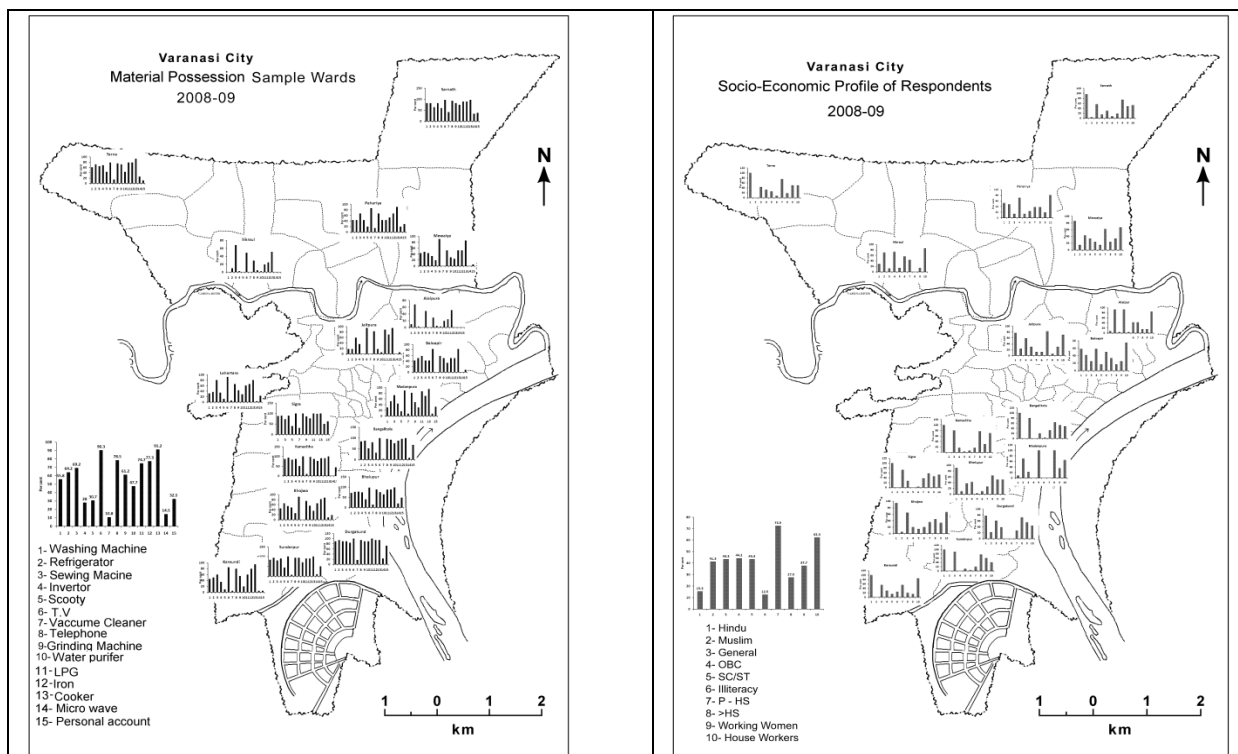


Fig. 4

Out of 600 respondents, 94.5 per cent women are married, 3.8 per cent women are either divorced or separated and 1.7 per cent women are widow. Regarding average age of marriage of respondent \pm SD is 19.74 ± 4.38 which is ranging from 11 to 36 years. While husband's average age \pm SD= 25.56 ± 5.27 ranging from 15 to 50 years. Percentage of the age at marriage less than 18 years of Hindu women (24.8 per cent) is less than Muslim women (53.3per cent). In the second and third category of age at marriage of Hindu women is greater than Muslim women. It means in Muslim society gives priority to early marriage. Earlyhood marriage is one of the obstacles for the further education and development in the context of health and individual personality. Early marriage is another "protective" mechanism- but it increases the length of the reproductive period, and fertility. Education wise distribution of respondent age at marriage supports less preference by graduate and more than it (6.5 per cent) to early age of marriage.

Out of total households asset availability is surveyed. The equipments which reduce women's workload, make their task easy, and enhance her accessibility have been enquired. Now a day these equipments become necessity of life style in urban area. In the combine way these asset make the status of household even. Washing machine, refrigerator, sewing machine, inverter, telephone, T.V, LPG, cooker, iron are such assets which have shown its availability among more than 55 per cent households. The share of percentage of availability of water purifier, personal account for women, extra land property, personal vehicle, personal account microwave, and vacuum cleaner decreases from 47.7, 32.5, 32, 30.7, 32.5, 14.5, and 10.8 percent respectively which is shown in fig number 3.



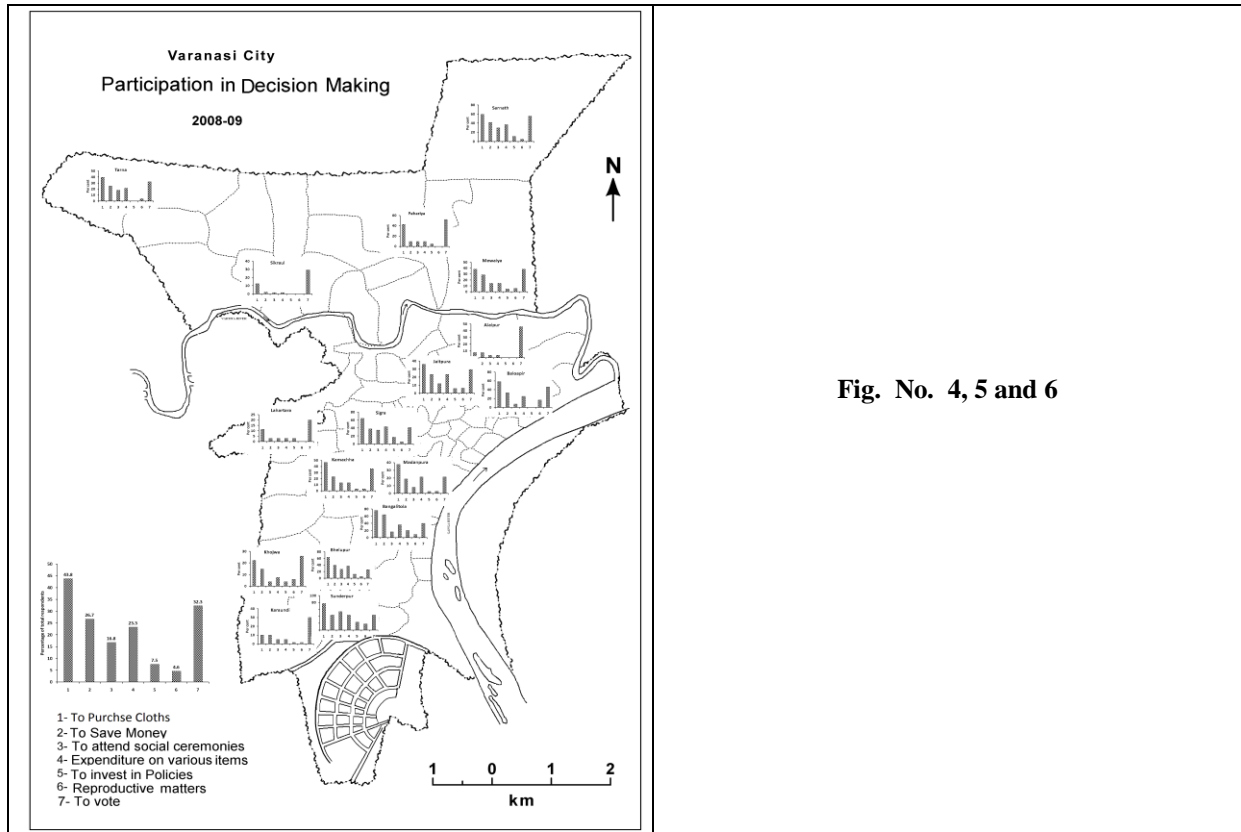


Fig. No. 4, 5 and 6

Status of Women in Selected Wards

Women are the half part of the real wealth of the region. They are different and better than the animals as they are endowed with the power to think and power to reason. They are superior form of life and have special capacity and potential for the earth surface through her action. Despite tremendous development in the field of science, education, and technology, there are glaring inter regional and intra-regional disparities in the social, economic, cultural and political empowerment of men and women (Panda, 1997). On this account the basic purpose of development is to enlarge people’s choices. In principle, these choices can be infinite and can change over time. The basic objective of development is to create an enabling environment for women to enjoy long, healthy and creative lives in accordance to their needs and interests and ultimately help of educational attainment, material possession, decision making, MPC (monthly per capita income) of household and working status level of socio-economic status of women. To measure this basic level of development, there is need for certain scientific methodology. This can be developed through the following way- Percentage of each variable was standardized by the given formula

For **positive indicators:** $100 (Vi - Vmin) / (Vmax - Vmin)$

For **negative indicators:** $100 (Vmax - Vi) / (Vmax - Vmin)$

Where Vi is the actual value, Vmin is the minimum value and Vmax is the maximum value in the series. The minimum and maximum index value ranges from 0 to 100. After standardization of each variable, a composite index was developed for each ward. The composite index is the mean of all the indices. Value has been categorized into five groups which range from very high to very low status of women and this distribution is shown in table 1. Under the very high status of women number of sample wards are four naming as Sarnath, Bangalitola, Sunderpur and Durgakund, next descending order i.e high status group is occupied by Sigra, Bhelupur and Kamachha. Moderate and low status of women has been found in wards like Lahartara, Tarna, Pahariya and Khojwa and Mewaiya, Baloapir and Karaundi respectively in both categories. Very low status of women across the sample wards are Sikraul, Jaitpura and Alaipura. The same pattern reflected in fig. 7 and shows the ascending order of status of women in wards like Sikraul, Alaipur, Jaitpura, Baloapir, Karauandi, Mewaiya, Lahartara, Madanpura, Pahariya, Khojwa, Tarna, Kamachha, Sigra, Bhelupur, Sarnath, Bangalitola, Durgakund, and Sunderpur respectively.

Table 1: Distribution of sample wards according to Status of Women

Status of women													
Sl No	Name of the wards	Graduate and above	Index Value	Material Possession (> 10 items)	Index value	Decision making	Index value	Monthly per Capita Income (< Rs 1500)	Index value	Working status (House workers)	Index value	Avg. Index value	Level
1	Lahartara	17.1	22.3	34.3	33.3	68.6	100.0	68.6	28.0	74.3	24.4	41.6	M
2	Tarna	17.9	23.3	57.1	61.2	53.6	76.5	53.6	45.5	50.0	78.0	56.9	M
3	Pahariya	38.1	49.7	42.1	42.9	57.1	81.9	57.1	41.4	81.0	9.7	45.1	M
4	Alaipur	15.4	20.1	7.0	0.0	19.2	22.4	80.8	13.8	84.6	1.8	11.6	VL
5	Madanpura	21.6	28.2	34.5	33.6	40.5	55.9	51.4	48.0	64.9	45.2	42.2	M
6	Sikraul	0.0	0.0	16.4	11.5	4.9	0.0	92.7	0.0	85.4	0.0	2.3	VL
7	Mewaiya	23.8	31.0	25.0	22.0	42.9	59.7	71.4	24.8	66.7	41.2	35.7	L
8	Jaitpura	5.9	7.7	11.8	5.9	29.4	38.5	64.7	32.6	70.0	33.9	23.7	VL
9	Sarnath	74.1	96.6	76.9	85.3	48.1	67.8	18.5	86.3	51.9	73.8	82.0	VH
10	Baloapir	16.17	21.1	33.3	32.1	25.0	31.6	58.3	40.0	75.0	22.9	29.5	L
11	Khojwa	44.4	57.9	40.5	40.9	42.6	59.2	50.0	49.7	66.7	41.2	49.8	M
12	Durgakund	72.2	94.1	88.9	100.0	66.7	97.0	33.3	69.1	44.4	90.3	90.1	VH
13	Bangalitola	64.0	83.4	76.0	84.2	64.0	92.8	8.0	98.5	48.0	82.4	88.3	VH
14	Sunderpur	76.7	100.0	76.6	85.0	60.0	86.5	6.7	100.0	40.0	100.0	94.3	VH
15	Karaundi	20.0	26.1	31.6	30.0	45.0	63.0	60.0	38.0	85.0	0.9	31.6	L
16	Sigra	58.6	76.4	79.3	88.3	50.0	70.8	17.2	87.8	53.0	71.4	78.9	H
17	Bhelupur	64.0	83.4	69.3	76.1	57.0	81.8	24.0	79.9	50.0	78.0	79.8	H
18	Kamachha	76.7	100.0	78.3	87.1	50.0	70.8	20.0	84.5	70.0	37.6	76.0	H

Source: Based on Personal Survey 2008-09

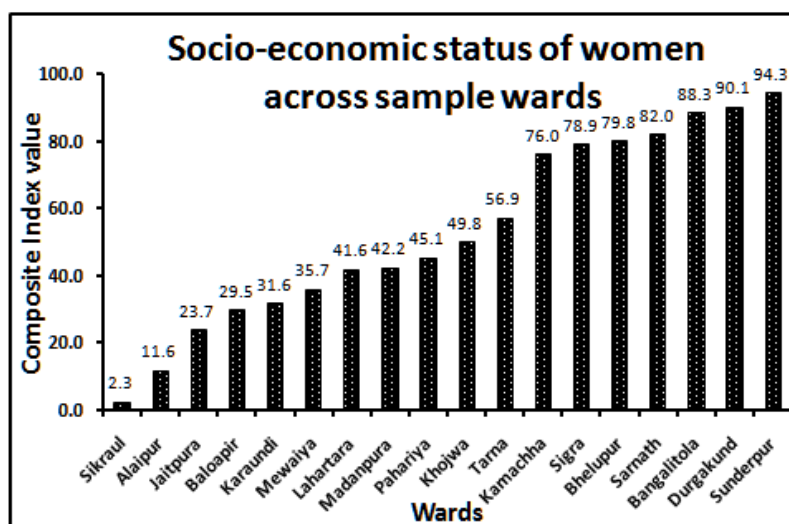


Fig. No. 7

Women’s empowerment is an important test for gender development issues. The importance of empowerment lies in choices, roles and responsibilities handled by women. Understanding a woman’s choice and her responsibility for the family and society are very crucial. The notion of empowerment emphasizes individual self sufficiency and independence in all the decisions of the family and society. It is very important to provide the choices and responsibilities of women who are situated at home and their workplaces. To understand this issue it is important to study the prevailing socio-economic structure of the households. Women have

personal interest, choices, and views but the injustice of the gendered social structure hinder in achieving the development goal.

Now a day women are the prime targets of programmes to make them visible in mainstream of development. This is not surprising since women are one who handle all the activities of households but once we talk about decision making her participation is very less. Actually typically have little autonomy living under the control of first their fathers, then their husbands, and finally their sons (Chatterjee, 1990; Desai, 1996; Horowitz and Kishwar, 1985)

An understanding of the status and empowerment of women in society and within their households is thus critical to promoting change in autonomy and behaviour, especially in patriarchal societies (Dyson & Moore, 1983; Basu, 1996).

In the present study the determinants of women's empowerment in the study area have been assessed through participation in decision regarding finance matters, reproductive matters, freedom of movement, and giving vote.

As shown in the table 2 in case of purchasing cloths, saving money, attending social ceremonies, deciding the share of expenditure, investing in policies, reproductive matters and voting the position of Hindu women is more empowered in comparison to Muslim. It reflects the religious group behaviour in society as well as in their households. Social group composition also reflects that general and SC/ST women have more autonomy to take decision regarding purchasing cloths, to attend social ceremonies, to save money, to decide share of expenditure, and reproductive matters. Where as better autonomy of general group women have been found to invest in policies with respect to other social group may be due to women of this section are more employed in better professions. The highly significant test of education and decision making shows that a society make a better picture with help of education as a tool. Based on occupation wise distribution of decision making of women reveals through data that working women have better asses to resources and freedom to select her choices into different sphere of life.

Table: 2 Religion, Education and Occupation wise distribution of respondent according to participation in decision making on various family matters

Religion	Regular participation of respondents in decision making on various family matters													
	To purchase cloths		To save money		To attend social ceremonies		To decide share of expenditure		To invest in policies		Reproductive matters		To vote	
Hindu	230	59.2	142	32.6	91	20.9	123	28.3	40	9.2	25	6.0	145	74.7
Muslim	33	20.0	18	10.9	10	6.1	17	10.3	05	3.0	01	0.7	49	25.3
Total	263	43.8	160	26.7	101	16.8	140	23.3	45	7.5	26	4.6	194	32.3
	Chi sq. = 77.25, df=4, P <0.001		Chi sq. = 75.67, df=4, P <0.001		Chi sq.=58.15, df=4, p < .001		Chi sq= 83.03, df=4, P<0.001		Chi sq= 50.98, df= 4, P<0.001		Chi sq= 58.85, df= 4, P<0.001		Chi sq.= 64.5, df= 16, P<0.01	
Social Group														
General	150	56.6	95	35.8	53	20.0	77	29.1	29	10.9	16	6.2	95	49.0
OBC	81	31.2	45	17.3	31	11.9	44	16.9	15	5.8	06	2.5	80	41.2
SC/ST	32	42.7	20	26.7	17	22.7	19	25.3	01	1.3	04	5.8	19	9.8
	Chi sq. = 59.73, df=8, P <0.001		Chi. sq.= 50.9, df=8, P<0.001		Chi sq.= 39.25, df=8, P<0.001		Chi sq.= 51.08, df= 8,P <0.001		Chi sq.=44.8, df= 8, P <0.001		Chi sq= 38.27, df= 8, P<0.001		Chi sq.= 67.5, df= 16, P<0.01	
Education														
Illiterate	13	14.1	7	7.6	06	6.5	5	5.4	0	0.0	1	1.2	22	11.3
PH-HS	74	29.8	35	14.1	18	7.3	30	12.1	8	3.2	5	2.1	63	32.5
>HS	176	67.7	118	45.2	77	29.6	105	40.4	37	14.2	20	8.1	109	56.2
	Chi sq. = 146.14, df=8, P <0.001		Chi. sq.= 143.54, df=8, P<0.001		Chi sq.= 92.29, df=8, P<0.001		Chi sq.= 150.55, df= 8,P <0.001		Chi sq.=159.39, df= 8, P <0.001		Chi sq= 146.41, df= 8, P<0.001		Chi sq.= 76.4, df= 16, P<0.01	

Occupation														
Workers	154	68.1	130	57.5	95	42.6	120	53.1	42	18.6	24	12.2	96	49.5
Home workers	109	29.1	160	8.0	06	1.6	20	5.3	03	0.8	2	0.5	98	50.5
	Chi sq. = 90.21, df=4, P<0.001		Chi sq.= 187.5, df= 4, P<0.001		Chi sq.= 169.8, df= 4, P<0.001		Chi sq.=189.88, df= 4, P<0.001		Chi sq.=136.46, df= 4, P<0.001		Chi sq.= 154.1, df= 4, P<0.001		Chi sq.= 23.4, df= 16, P<0.01	
Socio-economic Status														
Very Low	14	20.0	8	11.4	2	2.9	7	10.0	1	1.4	2	3.2	17	8.8
Low	84	36.4	152	22.5	22	9.5	37	16.0	9	3.9	5	2.4	74	38.1
Moderate	65	46.1	39	27.5	30	21.3	34	24.1	13	9.2	5	3.8	53	27.3
High	37	63.8	22	37.9	20	34.5	25	43.1	10	17.2	5	8.6	24	12.4
Very High	63	63.0	39	39.0	27	27.0	37	37.0	12	12.0	9	9.0	26	13.4
	Chi sq. = 107.84, df=16, P<0.001		Chi sq.= 75.92, df= 16, P<0.001		Chi sq.= 76.09, df= 16, P<0.001		Chi sq.= 87.87, df= 16, P<0.001		Chi sq.= 63.46, df= 16, P<0.001		Chi sq.= 77.13, df= 16, P<0.001		Chi sq.= 38.77, df= 16, P<0.01	

Source: Based on Personal Survey 2008-09

PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING ACROSS SAMPLE WARDS

The 73rd Amendment to our constitution in 1993 and the Women’s Reservation bill 2010, are major steps, basically aimed at giving more political space to the women and ensure their active participation in the development process. While reservation in Panchayats or Parliament is important, the real challenge is to ensure that women are involved in the decision making process at home, and in the society. The challenge will be to develop their capacity so that they can perform their roles properly. But more than half-a-century after independence, shackles remain tightly bound around women’s feet. It begins at birth as the evidence of female foeticide and gender bias in the richer states of Punjab, Delhi, Haryana shows sparing neither the villager nor the urban sophisticate. The government and non government sectors have both been pushing ahead with programmes aimed at imparting education to women, giving them better health care, providing them with means of livelihood and opportunities to participate in the decision making process at home and in the society. Fig.6 reflects the decision making of women on various spheres of her day to day activities across sample wards. More than half of the respondents in wards like Sarnath, Baloapir, Durgakund, Bangalitola, Sigra and Bhelupur are used to take decision regarding to purchase cloths. Poor participation rate is found in Sikraul (12.5 per cent), Lahartara (11.4 per cent), Karaundi (10 per cent), and Alaipura (7.7 per cent). Regarding economy based decisions over all very poor participation of women is reflected through the maps in wards like Lahartata, Alaipura, Sikraul, Baloapir, Khojwa and Karaundi. Matters related with reproduction overall women participation is not satisfactory as depicted in map 4.11. Even decision regarding to attend social ceremonies is also in a controlled way which reflect their accessibility in society. Women belong from wards as Sunderpur (53.3 per cent), Sigra (34.5 per cent), Bhelupur (27 per cent), Sarnath (29.6 per cent), and Bangalitola (26 per cent) reflect comparatively better picture from remaining wards. Though percentage share of political participation is better but it does mean that they are well aware of political processes. There is need to more women representation in political participation.

Spatial Variation In Socio- Economic Status Of Women And Their Participation In Decision Making

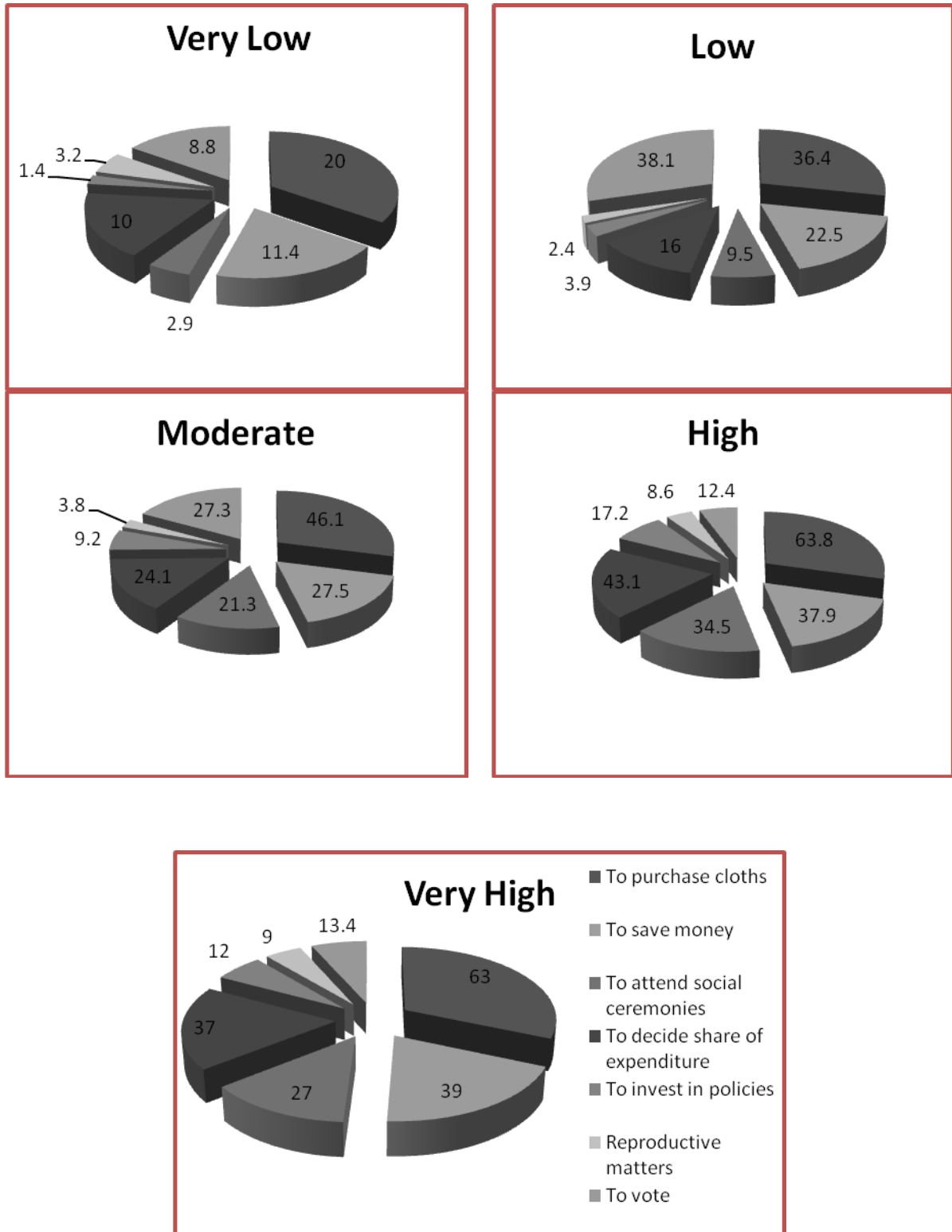


Fig. 8

CONCLUSION

Thus it is the division of roles and responsibilities in a society that shapes the identities of both men and women. It is a fact that work shapes the social identity and status of women also. The social norm is a traditional mode and the expected behaviour of the wider society including schools and work which culture both men and women. As we can find these ideologies are based in favour of men. Gender inequalities are very often controlled by symbolic modes as expressed in religion and ritual which become powerful modes to retain the status quo. This is so because they are central to production and to reproduction. It is vainless to argue that men do not control the sphere of women's life in the way of grandfather, father, father-in-law, husband, son and grandson. By and large this social notion of work pattern reflects the biased gender inequalities where men are in power and women have been exploited by the former.

It is important to realize that there is significant variation in the degree of socio-economic development among the regions. Hence it is not feasible to develop a single model for empowering Indian women or a single blue print of state policies. Therefore regional specific women empowerment strategies such as incorporation of gender issues topics in school text books, identification of targets according to micro level regional analysis, awareness campaign, improved accessibility towards resources, higher educational attainment, and free gender bias atmosphere need to be developed to make her status comfortable in the society.

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