

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

UMI

A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor MI 48106-1346 USA
313/761-4700 800/521-0600

PREVIEW

REGIONAL VARIATIONS IN THE
STATUS AND WELL-BEING OF
WOMEN IN INDIA

by

Sangeeta Badal

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Geography

Under the Supervision of Professor Robert H. Stoddard

Lincoln, Nebraska

August, 1998

UMI Number: 9908462

PREVIEW

UMI Microform 9908462
Copyright 1998, by UMI Company. All rights reserved.

**This microform edition is protected against unauthorized
copying under Title 17, United States Code.**

UMI
300 North Zeeb Road
Ann Arbor, MI 48103

DISSERTATION TITLE

REGIONAL VARIATIONS IN THE WELL-BEING AND

STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIA

BY

SANGEETA BADAL

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:

APPROVED

DATE

Robert H. Stoddard AUG. 3, 1998
Signature

ROBERT H. STODDARD
Typed Name

J. Clark Archer AUG. 3, 1998
Signature

J. CLARK ARCHER
Typed Name

David J. Wishart AUG. 3, 1998
Signature

DAVID WISHART
Typed Name

Robert Hitchcock (RS) AUG. 3, 1998
Signature

ROBERT HITCHCOCK
Typed Name

Signature

Typed Name

Signature

Typed Name



REGIONAL VARIATIONS IN THE
STATUS AND WELL-BEING OF
WOMEN IN INDIA

Sangeeta Badal, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 1998

Advisor: Prof. Robert H. Stoddard

Most studies on women's status focus on *status* as a unitary construct and search for a universal explanation of the low status of women. Recognizing the inadequacies of such research the present study focuses on the multi-dimensionality of the concept and argues that the complexity of the phenomena makes it necessary to conceptualize status broadly in terms of its economic, social, and political dimensions. The contrasting performance of specific states/districts on each dimension clearly indicates that the dynamic and variable nature of women's status cannot be captured by any one dimension.

Further, a structural approach is used to analyze the regional variations in women's position in India across each dimension because such a framework, stressing economic context and socio-cultural factors, reveals the complex and multilayered nature of the processes that affect women's position. It is observed that women's status is affected by kinship structures, development levels, and social stratification, which vary over space and time individually and in interaction with each other. It is this variation that leads to differences in women's position from one region of India to another.

The findings of the study suggest that it is important to recognize the mutual

interdependence of gender relations, development levels, and social stratification without underestimating the full significance of each in Indian society. In some cases kinship patterns interact with economic development to produce major spatial variations in women's status, and in others, it is the development levels and social stratification that has the greatest influence. For instance, kinship structures appear to be the most powerful factor in affecting women's economic status, while the social dimension of women's status is greatly affected by the varying development levels. And finally, political socialization appears to have the largest impact on women's political status. This reiterates not only the independence of these dimensions but also the important role of 'place' in the constitution of gender differences in India.

PREVIEW

Acknowledgements

This research would not have been completed without the support, encouragement, and intellectual insights of my doctoral committee, friends, and colleagues. I am grateful to my advisor, Dr. Robert H. Stoddard, for all his personal and professional mentoring over the last few years. He offered incredible insight into the history and geography of India. Stimulating discussions with him helped me to better articulate the theoretical framework for my research. A very special thanks to Dr. J. Clark Archer for guiding me through the difficult and sometimes frustrating path of quantitative analysis. His thoughtful guidance, critical analysis, and provocative comments on many drafts of this work helped improve this research. I appreciate Dr. David Wishart's intellectual and moral support throughout my stay in the graduate school and his thoughtful comments on this thesis. My work has also been heavily influenced by Dr. Robert Hitchcock, who offered courses which led me to think about gender issues in development.

I also wish to thank Dr. Douglas Amedeo for his wit and wisdom, which helped me through crises and kept my spirits up. I am indebted to reference librarian Kevin Spradlin (presently at Oklahoma State, Stillwater) for acquiring the mapping software for this research and Linda Roos, at the Computer Resource Center, for helping me figure out the statistical problems. The staff of Inter-Library Loan office were extraordinarily efficient in locating hard-to-get data sources for India. I would also like to thank the Association of American Geographers for the *Robert D. Hodson and Paul Voras Ph.D. Dissertation Grant*. Thanks also to Patrick Guiberson for his assistance in producing the figures and tables for this research.

This work would never have been possible without the constant support of my parents, Shyama and M. P. Bharadwaj, who have raised our son Nishant all the years that my husband and I have been in graduate school. Many thanks to both of them for all their love and support. Also I wish to thank my husband, Vijay, for his continuous support, encouragement, advice, and thoughtful comments, which helped me through many crises and kept me focussed on my work. I dedicate this work to my husband, my parents, and our son Nishant.

The support of all my friends was invaluable. The continued support of my very special and close friend Beth Ritter was much needed during this long journey through graduate school. She and her husband, Alan Osborn, made Lincoln, Nebraska, a “home away from home” for both my husband and I. It would be impossible ever to convey our gratitude adequately for everything that they have done for us. I would also like to thank Sally Stoddard for including my husband and I in their family get-togethers, and Rich and Laura Saltzman for their friendship through all my days at the graduate school.

PREVIEW

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Scope of the Project	1
Theoretical Considerations	3
The Methodological Issues	11
Literature Review	13
Organization of the Study	16

CHAPTER 2

MEASURING THE POSITION OF WOMEN: THE STATUS-OF-WOMEN INDEX

Introduction	19
The Search for an Index	20
Data and Methodology	23
Findings	33
The Economic Dimension	33
The Political Dimension	37
The Social Dimension	40
Conclusion	42

CHAPTER 3

THE ECONOMIC STATUS OF WOMEN

Introduction	44
Background	46

Data and Methodology	48
Findings	55
Geographical Patterns of Female Labor Force Participation	71
Urban-Rural Differential	77
The Geographical Variations (Urban and Rural)	83
Conclusion	85

CHAPTER 4

THE SOCIAL STATUS OF WOMEN

Introduction	90
Background	92
Data and Methodology	93
Findings	97
The Geographical Patterns of Female Literacy	113
Urban-Rural Differential	122
The Geographical Variations (Urban and Rural)	129
Conclusion	131

CHAPTER 5

THE POLITICAL STATUS OF WOMEN

Introduction	133
Background	135
Data and Methodology	138
Findings	142
Geographical Pattern of Female Voting	157

Conclusion	164
CHAPTER 6	
CONCLUSIONS	167
Summary of Findings and Policy Implications	168
Conclusion	178
APPENDIX 1: MAPS	180
APPENDIX 2: PROCEDURE OF CALCULATIONS	215
BIBLIOGRAPHY	217

PREVIEW

List of Figures

CHAPTER 2

Figure 2-1: Status Dimensions	24
Figure 2-2: Univariate Relationships Between Individual Variables	25
Figure 2-3: Percent Variance Attributable to Each Factor	27
Figure 2-4: Factor Correlation Matrix (from Oblimin Rotation)	28
Figure 2-5: Rotated Factor Matrix	29
Figure 2-6: Factor Scores	31
Figure 2-7: State Values on Three Dimensions	32

CHAPTER 3

Figure 3-1: Average Female Labor Force Participation Rate by Regions: 1981 ..	56
Figure 3-2: Bivariate Correlations (all India)	57
Figure 3-3: Female Labor Force Participation and Muslim Population	59
Figure 3-4: Female Labor Force Participation and Agricultural Productivity ...	59
Figure 3-5: Female Labor Force Participation and Urbanization Levels	60
Figure 3-6: Female Labor Force Participation and Area Under Rice	60
Figure 3-7: Regression Coefficients for the Effects of Each Explanatory Variable on Female Labor Force Participation in India: 1981	62
Figure 3-8: Regression Coefficients for the Effects of Explanatory Variables on Female Labor Force Participation in India: 1981	63
Figure 3-9: Male and Female Labor Force Participation Rate	65
Figure 3-10: Test for Heteroscedasticity	65
Figure 3-11: Collinearity Diagnostics	68
Figure 3-12: Standardized Regression Coefficients: Model 4 (all India)	69

Figure 3-13: Bivariate Correlations (Rural India)	79
Figure 3-14: Bivariate Correlations (Urban India)	79
Figure 3-15: Regression Coefficients for the Effects of Explanatory Variables on Female Labor Force Participation in Rural India: 1981	81
Figure 3-16: Regression Coefficients for the Effects of Explanatory Variables on Female Labor Force Participation in Urban India: 1981	82
Figure 3-17: Standardized Regression Coefficients: Model 4 (Rural and Urban India)	82

CHAPTER 4

Figure 4-1: Average Female Literacy by Regions: 1981	98
Figure 4-2: Bivariate Correlations (all India)	99
Figure 4-3: Female Literacy and Scheduled Tribe Population	101
Figure 4-4: Female Literacy and Muslim Population	101
Figure 4-5: Regression Coefficients for the Effects of Each Explanatory Variable on Female Literacy in India: 1981	103
Figure 4-6: Regression Coefficients for the Effects of Explanatory Variables on Female Literacy in India: 1981	104
Figure 4-7: Male and Female Literacy	107
Figure 4-8: Test for Heteroscedasticity	107
Figure 4-9: Collinearity Diagnostics	109
Figure 4-10: Standardized Regression Coefficients: Model 4 (all India)	111
Figure 4-11: Bivariate Correlations (Rural India)	124
Figure 4-12: Bivariate Correlations (Urban India)	124
Figure 4-13: Regression Coefficients for the Effects of Explanatory Variables on Female Literacy in Rural India: 1981	126

Figure 4-14: Regression Coefficients for the Effects of Explanatory Variables on Female Literacy in Urban India: 1981	127
---	-----

Figure 4-15: Standardized Regression Coefficients: Model 4 (Rural and Urban India)	129
--	-----

CHAPTER 5

Figure 5-1: Average Female Voter Participation by Regions: 1977-1980	143
--	-----

Figure 5-2: Bivariate Correlations	144
--	-----

Figure 5-3: Female Voter Participation and Muslim Population	146
--	-----

Figure 5-4: Female Voter Participation and Urban Population	146
---	-----

Figure 5-5: Female Voter Participation and Physical Accessibility	146
---	-----

Figure 5-6: Regression Coefficients for the Effects of Each Explanatory Variable on Female Voter Participation in India: 1977-1980	148
--	-----

Figure 5-7: Regression Coefficients for the Effects of Explanatory Variables on Female Voter Participation in India: 1977-1980	150
--	-----

Figure 5-8: Male and Female Voter Participation	153
---	-----

Figure 5-9: Standardized Regression Estimates	155
---	-----

PREVIEW

List of Maps

Map 1: Administrative Divisions: India - States	180
Map 2a: Administrative Divisions North & East India: Districts 1981	181
Map 2b: Administrative Divisions South India: Districts 1981	182
Map 3a: Selected Cities & Regions of India: Cities	185
Map 3b: Selected Cities & Regions of India: Regions	186
Map 4: Economic Status of Women: 1991	187
Map 5: Political Status of Women: 1991	188
Map 6: Social Status of Women: 1991	189
Map 7: Population Below Poverty Line: 1987-88	190
Map 8: Female Labor Force Participation Rate: 1981	191
Map 9: Female Literacy Rate: 1981	192
Map 10: Female Voter Participation: 1977-1980	193
Map 11: Females Married Under 19 Years of Age: 1981	194
Map 12: Female Migration: 1981	195
Map 13: Fertility Rate: 1981	196
Map 14: Juvenile Sex-Ratio: 1981	197
Map 15: Agricultural Product per Farm Worker: 1981	198
Map 16: Urban Population: 1981	199
Map 17: Male Labor Force Participation Rate: 1981	200
Map 18: Males in Non-Agricultural Work Force: 1981	201
Map 19: Male Literacy: 1981	202

Map 20: Scheduled Caste Population: 1981	203
Map 21: Scheduled Tribe Population: 1981	204
Map 22: Muslim population: 1981	205
Map 23: Area Devoted to Rice: 1981	206
Map 24: Male Voter Participation: 1977-1980	207
Map 25: Physical Accessibility: Election Years 1977-1980	208
Map 26: Difference in Rural and Urban Female Work Participation: 1981	209
Map 27: Rural Scheduled Caste Population: 1981	210
Map 28: Urban Scheduled Caste Population: 1981	211
Map 29: Difference in Rural and Urban Female Literacy: 1981	212
Map 30: Rural Scheduled Tribe Population: 1981	213
Map 31: Urban Scheduled Tribe Population: 1981	214

PREVIEW

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Scope of the Project

The declaration of the *International Women's Year* by United Nations in 1975 and subsequently the *Women's Decade* in 1975-85 focused world attention on issues of sexual inequality. It was realized that :

throughout the world, the poorest people in the community are predominantly women and their dependent children. Women, on the whole, often work for no pay at all and, if they are paid, they usually earn far less than men. Two-thirds of the illiterate people in the world are women.

Women face increasing levels of violence, because of their gender....

Eugenia Piza Lopez, Coordinator, Oxfam Gender and Development Unit, 1993.

By the end of the *Women's Decade* a considerable body of literature had built up documenting the unequal status of women in relation to men, but little change, if any, could be seen in the overwhelming subordination of women throughout the world. A need for providing a theoretical framework to the issue of women's oppression, which was constructed differently in different cultural settings, led to a rethinking of the issues of gender inequality instead of accepting gender roles as natural and essential (Forbes 1996). New issues emerged in feminist studies and new methods were developed to explore the links between social processes and spatial patterns.

Though gender bias exists in every country, nowhere is this inequality more evident than in some South Asian countries, with India being one of them. Dowry deaths, cases of amniocentesis and abortions in the quest of male children, and low ratio of females to males in the Indian population are just some indicators of the low valuation and

relative neglect of the health and well-being of women in the country. The present study is an effort to understand the gender inequality in India and explore the causes for variations in women's status from one part of the country to another.

India, like many other third world nations, has been following the development model which focuses mainly on the generation of economic growth, with the belief that rapid industrialization and structural transformation would eventually spread the benefits of growth throughout the various strata of society. But despite the growth in GNP figures, the country continues to suffer both economically and socially, and the social costs are being borne by the most disadvantaged and backward sections of the society. Among the disadvantaged groups women are considered as major sufferers (Corbridge 1991; Dreze and Sen 1995; Bennett 1992).

On the one hand, national statistics indicate that literacy levels for women have increased in the last two decades, more and more women are joining the paid labor force, and life expectancy for women has increased in India. But, on the other hand, numerous academic studies, U.N. reports, and official documents of Government of India look beyond these *absolute* gains for women and demonstrate the inequitable and sometimes widening gaps between men and women in life expectancy, economic activity, literacy and education, access to health care, and political voice. The United Nation's *Human Development Report 1991* (United Nations 1991:31) states that families in India's rural Panjab spend more than twice as much on the medical care of male infants than on female infants. Women typically work up to 15 hours more per week in rural India than men. The official 1981 census shows that, of the rural working age population, only 16 percent of

women were economically active compared with 53 percent of men (Bennett 1992).

Is the persistence of female-male gaps in human development in India indicative of the low status assigned to women in that cultural setting? Are the various gender ideologies rooted in the different kinship structures, leading to a subordinate status of women in India? Does economic development interact with kinship patterns to produce spatial variations in gender relations in India? Do these structural processes affect women's status differently in different parts of India? In other words, does 'place' play a role in the constitution of gender differences in India?

The purpose of this research will be to address these and other related questions, and to assess the impact of cultural, social, and economic processes on the well-being and status of women in India.

Theoretical Considerations

Feminist academicians, both inside and outside Geography, have focused on the subordination of women and tried to explore the basis for women's inferior status. Such an understanding, it is believed, is essential as it would lay the guidelines for what needs to be done to achieve a society where gender ceases to be a defining factor (Rubin 1976, rpt. 1990). Drawing inspiration from the women's movement in the 1960s, the earlier feminist studies used the "add and stir" strategy to make women visible. Under this phase, which has been called Liberal Feminism or Feminist Empiricism (Harding 1986), feminist work focussed on the gender roles rather than gender relations and explained women's subordination in the social system in relation to their roles as housewives or mothers

(Johnston et.al. 1994). Following this largely empirical tradition, the early feminist geographical research aimed to portray spatial variations in women's status around the world by taking up extensive mapping exercises (see Literature Review). Counting women was, and continues to be, an important part of geographical research (McLafferty and Preston 1991) with a goal of producing a "less biased description of the world by including women" (Mattingly and Falconer-Al-Hindi 1995:429).

In the 1970s, moving beyond this documentation of women's lives, feminist analyses sought to uncover the theoretical basis of women's subordination. Taking its cue from the Marxian thought, Socialist Feminism evolved as a "major paradigm in feminist thought and strategy" (Philipson and Hansen 1990). The two most conspicuous theoretical approaches that have held sway over many socialist feminists to this date are: "the dual systems theory" and the "sex/gender system". The dual systems approach focuses on two autonomous systems: the system of male domination, often termed as *patriarchy*, and the system of mode of production, in most cases *capitalism*, that interact to lead to women's subordination and oppression (Young 1980; Philipson and Hansen 1990). According to Zillah Eisenstein (1977, rpt. 1990:134),

the mutual dependence of patriarchy and capitalism assumes not only the malleability of patriarchy to the needs of capital but also the malleability of capital to the needs of patriarchy. ...When one states that capitalism needs patriarchy in order to operate efficiently, one is really noting that male supremacy, as a system of sexual hierarchy, supplies capitalism (and systems previous to it) with the necessary order and control; this patriarchal system of control is necessary to the smooth functioning of the society and the economic system and hence should not be undermined.

Though this "vast theoretical synthesis" (Ehrenreich 1984, rpt. 1990:268) provided many

socialist feminists with a theory that combined the two traditions, Marxism and Feminism, it soon became apparent that this dualistic theory failed to really show how these systems reinforced each other to be a source of women's oppression (Philipson and Hansen 1990:18-19). The dual system theory focused on the sexual division of labor between the men and women, suggesting that women's unpaid labor in the home was essential for the maintenance of the patriarchal-capitalist structure (Morgen 1990; Ehrenreich 1984, rpt.1990), and it is this issue of men's control over women's labor in connivance with capitalism that is the cause of their oppression (Young 1980). But this explanation seems obsolete in today's reality where more and more women are joining the labor force (Philipson and Hansen 1990; Ehrenreich 1984, rpt.1990). As Ehrenreich (1984, rpt.1990:272) explains,

If women's work were as essential to the status quo as socialist-feminist theory argued, capitalism would have been seriously weakened by this withdrawal of women's labor (from home). Yet no one is arguing, for example, that the decline of American productivity is due to unironed shirts and cold breakfasts. Nor has any sector of capital come forth and offered to restore the male family wage so that women can get back to their housework.

Hence, this goes to show that the genesis of women's oppression does not lie in the analysis of capitalism or the patriarchy/capitalism link that the dual system theorists proposed. It was felt that in their efforts to create a mega-theory the socialist feminists had created a "functional fantasy" (i.e. patriarchy functions to reinforce capitalism, and capitalism functions to support patriarchy) (Van Allen 1984, rpt.1990:293) which narrowly conceives of all social relations as falling under the overarching system of

economic production (Young 1980; Rubin 1976, rpt. 1990). It unduly problematizes the issues of family, procreation, and sexuality and labels them as 'modes of reproduction', isomorphic to the Marxist 'modes of production', attempting to make women central to the Marxist categories of thought and strategy.

Moreover, the dual systems approach takes an ahistoric view of patriarchy, suggesting that the "law of the father" -- i.e. patriarchy -- has operated in a historically uniform manner universally (Mitchell 1974), keeping the spheres of women's and men's lives separate to "protect the sexual hierarchy of society" (Eisenstein 1979:25). The criticism of this viewpoint has been twofold: a) the separation of the spheres into the 'public' and the 'private' is a form of gender relations peculiar to capitalist industrialization and thus should not be taken as a transhistoric truth (Young 1980; Philipson and Hansen 1990), and b) projecting the existence of patriarchy universally fails to take into consideration those societies where different forms of kinship and gender hierarchies have been present (Rubin 1976, rpt. 1990). For instance, large parts of society in the south Indian state of Kerala have a matrilineal organization.

The dissatisfaction with the purely economic explanations of women's subordination and the ahistorical and undifferentiating character of the dual systems theory led anthropologist Gayle Rubin (1976, rpt. 1990) to search for women's subordinate status in the myriad of kinship structures, which vary over space and time, and produce equally variable gender systems in which people of that society operate. Using the works of Claude Levi-Strauss and Sigmund Freud as the conceptual tools, she builds the "descriptions of the part of social life that is the locus of the oppression of women" and

defines it as the "sex/gender system" (Rubin 1976, rpt. 1990:74). According to her, the society transforms the biological distinction between male and female into gendered identities "who in turn reproduce their society's particular sex/gender system" (Philipson and Hansen 1990). Gender ideologies are rooted in the kinship structures which are the "observable and empirical forms of sex/gender systems" (Rubin 1976, rpt. 1990:82) as can be seen in the marriage systems, the ownership rights to property, or terms of descent. These are just some of the mechanisms of the gender system by which particular conventions of the gender differences are produced and maintained. Rubin expands on Levi-Strauss's (1969) work to incorporate a theory of women's subordination in the marriage systems where the women are exchanged as gift¹ between the two groups of men. Such an exchange of women creates a wide network of relations. But due to its very nature it is the men who are the beneficiaries of such exchanges. As Rubin (1976, rpt. 1990:86) points out :

If it is the women who are being transacted, then it is the men who give and take them who are linked, the women being a conduit of a relationship rather than a partner to it..... And it is the partners, not the presents, upon whom reciprocal exchange confers its quasi-magical power of social linkage.

This, then, is the origin of women's subordination which is perpetuated through kinship structures. Support for this argument can be found in Jamison's study of ancient India (1996:207) where she explains marriage to be the "fundamental exchange relation... linking the males of the Aryan community in both horizontal and vertical bonds". The

¹ Gift-exchange was one of the most important features in the primitive societies. It was a way to create social links between the members of different groups and held societies together in the absence of any "specialized government institutions" (Levi-Strauss 1969).