

TRADITIONAL VALUES AND LIFE STYLE CHANGES AMONG WOMEN IN AN URBAN SLUM OF LUCKNOW

Saumyata Pandey

Tradition has been a common and widely used theoretical term in the social sciences. During the past 20 years the term has attracted renewed interest, especially from anthropologists, ethnologists and historians. The title begins with the word 'traditional' and moves towards the idea of change. The present paper is based on my fieldwork in an urban slum of Lucknow focussing the changes that have crept into or have been adopted by women in these localities. The study examines and reflects the agents of change - migration, sanskritization, urbanisation and modern means of communication that are evidently visible in traditional values and life style of the women living in this slum. The importance of Hindu tradition is deeply rooted in India's caste system which plays a key role in organising society. The caste system though has not been eliminated as a whole but has been reduced in its role on the parameters of occupation and notions of purity and pollution. The fieldwork clearly shows how market forces are aggressively working even in these slums and among the not so educated women. Traditions like 'annaprasan' and in matrimonial ceremonies are either not at all practiced or have lost their essence in migrating from rural to urban areas, while festivals like 'karwa chauth' and 'navratri puja' which were never a part of their culture are increasingly gaining importance. The women in these areas have almost shed the practice of 'purdah pratha'. A radical change has appeared in food habits and clothing. An increasing craze of going to beauty parlours is quite noticeable. Though the impact of modern means of communication, globalisation and commercialisation have been rampant but these have also showed a positive influence by spreading awareness about family planning, health and hygiene and educating their kids to some extent.

Introduction

Culturally diverse and complex, with mainly rural, traditional and agrarian population, India is experiencing rapid urban growth and rural urban migration. It is a nation undergoing significant social, economic and political change, while at the same time struggling to maintain many of its tradition and customs. The shadows of a vibrant consumer society are taking shapes and urban population is exposed to massive change in life style, consumption habits and cultural conditioning.

Tradition

Tradition has been a common and widely used theoretical term in social sciences. In simple terms tradition is the accumulated heritage of culture i.e. the symbolic culture of group which provides a legitimacy and justification of social order. Tradition looks into the past, into the historic roots of present culture, the present social status quo. Tradition is a concept that answers the identity formation. We all

have several identities, we all belong to different social groups and most of those identifications are based on certain symbols certain traditions and certain mythologies. Tradition can be seen to perform particular social function e.g. articulation of identity, assertion of status and privilege. Seen from a prospective of change tradition may serve as powerful resource e.g. Mobilization of Groups (colonized, indigenous migration) or the legitimization of social inequality (caste, class, gender, ethnicity).

Tradition thus can be seen as the transmitted value and behavior of any community which has been persisting over a period of time. Traditions are respected, exemplified and referred to frequently.

According to Max Radin in Encyclopedia of social Sciences, "Strictly and properly speaking a tradition is not a mere observed fact like an existing custom, it is an idea which expresses a value judgment. A certain order or arrangement is held desirable. The maintenance of the tradition is assertion of this judgment. It produces in a nation or in a group, an exalted group consciousness and is therefore most effective in creating groups or in reestablishing them".

Traditions do not remain static, the old or previous traditions fade away and become extinct and new ones are adopted by a community in due course of time. External as well as internal factors both contribute to the changes in tradition. The various factors exercising key role in change of traditional values and life style can be enumerated as following;

- Migration
- Urbanization
- Globalization
- Modern Means of Communication

Migration

Various studies on rural urban migration and its causes encompass a vast spectrum of social, cultural and economic factors. One class of studies that long dominated policy planning in developing economies viewed migration in terms of increasing pressure of population on farmland. A deficiency of reproducible tangible capital exacerbates the problems of rural unemployment, under employment and poverty, thus pushing landless labour into. Another class of studies has assessed the impact of economic forces on migration in domestic terms of trade squeezing agriculture, diffusion of technology from developed world and flow of foreign capital into the urban infrastructure and into housing, power, transportation, and large scale manufacturing (Becker *et al.* 1986).

Though the overall rural-urban migration rates have been much lower compared to the historical experience of present day developed nations, migration from rural areas to cities in India has been rapid inspite of lack of a rural urban continuum

perceived in terms of both economic and cultural factors (Sundaram 1989; Mitra 1992). This may be due to a concentration of activities in large cities that give rise to agglomeration economies, particularly in manufacturing industry where industrial zones together with a combination of infrastructure and institutions play crucial roles in development of industrial agglomerations (Kuchiki 2005). On the whole the pull factors in large cities in the face of push factors in rural areas have propelling effects on rural populations. Further social networks help population mobility across space by supplying information to potential rural migrants about job availability at the destination.

Migration being an important agent in bringing changes in traditional values, the present study examines the same among women in an urban slum in Lucknow. It examines the impact on traditional values and lifestyle with rise in migration.

Migration is usually considered an economic phenomenon but it also creates a cultural phenomenon in both homeland and land of destination. Many relationships are torn apart. The folk culture represented by *nautanki*, folk songs and folk paintings which hold a place of importance in homeland are either reduced in terms of importance and essence or are shed all together in the process of rural urban migration.

The process of rural urban migration in a developing county has manifested itself in formation of urban slums to a large extent due to high incidence of poverty and inadequate facilities of organizing and rehabilitating the poor and displaced.

The women residing in the urban slum have poorer life style, fewer opportunities but a larger family. They struggle to provide their family the basic necessities living in an unofficial squatter neighborhood crowded, dirty and unsanitary conditions. All they have is a poorly constructed shack. A large number of family members adjust in small place. They mostly draw water from a single shared tap. Most of these women being either uneducated or have rudimentary education are unskilled labourers and hence are working as domestic maids. Some also stitch and do embroidery but are able to earn a meager amount of Rs 20/- to 30/- a day.

Urbanization

Urbanization is an index of transformation from traditional rural economies to modern industrial ones. It is progressive concentration of population in urban unit (Davis 1965). Urbanization can be explained as a process of switch from spread out human settlement to one of the concentration in urban centers. It is a infinite process through which nation pass as they evolve from agrarian to industrial economy. The phenomenon of squatter settlements has to be seen as a stage is the process of urbanization in the developing country like India. Cities are the end product of the socio – economic processes operating at the societal level thus are a part of the fundamental changes in the society that accompany socio-economic

development and modernization. The cities, irrespective of their size, and collective services, such as health, education, cultural, technological, commercial or industrial services and thus act as focal points of development opportunities. Economic Industrial and service sector development during the last three and a half decade have resulted in urbanizing large segments of the population.

Majority of the rural migrants move to the cities not only for the new opportunities they offer but also to escape from the limitations of their traditional and conservative conditions. (Davis and Golden 1954).

It is evident that the new groups, who come to the city to seek entry in the development process, create a new type of residential settlement in contradiction to that of existing urban groups. As the new groups are mostly constituted of low Income group of rural migrants they accept whatever accommodation possible or those which can be procured on low cost on open spaces. A very noticeable aspect of these settlements is their consideration of proximity to the work places.

Among a large stream of problems is these urban slums, poverty remains one with persistent relevance. Urban poverty has revealed itself most evidently through urban slums, accommodating people who normally live below poverty line although these are not only areas inhabited by the poor. Slums in the cities have been found to be invariably inhabited by poorest of the poor, those at the bottom of social hierarchy and also engaged in dirty occupations.

Urbanization is increasing at a rapid rate as a whole while the health services, employment opportunities and social services are not increasing correspondingly. As such, life style of many households staying in these areas starts deteriorating leading some times the youth to become anti social elements.

Rapid urbanization has lead to alarming deterioration in the quality of life. Various infrastructural deficiencies , poor sanitation and solid waste disposal , water shortage, polluted natural water resources, water logging, frequent epidemics, inadequate health care, depletion of green areas , lack of support for social and economic development of disadvantaged in turn leading to proliferation of slums . The aggregate impact of distress is specially deliberating for the urban poor living in slums.

Women and children in the slums are most affected as they continuously manage their daily lives and chores in decaying environment. Unlike men and children, women more often remain in these surroundings slogging and sweating whole day. She is ignorant about many things including how to guide her children. She needs guidance and proper education. There is no privacy in her home. The problems get complicated due to urban living conditions specifically due to pull factor. The children in slums suffer neglect from parental care. There is absence of any adequate program to equip her for employment opportunities. Unaided and unguided she suffers, shattering the entire dream of upliftment socially and economically.

Modernization

The advent of modernization has brought about a series of major changes in the social structure. Modernization is an interactive process of economic growth and social change. The process of modernization is related to industrialization, urbanization, high standards of living.

S.C. Dube (1958) says that “an attractive feature of the concept was that it showed an apparent concern for the cultural sensitivities of both the elites and masses” The concept of modernization recognized the strength of roots; It did not pose any overt threat to cultural identity of the people aspiring for rapid change.

Contemporary Indian society is striving to adopt modernization for economic growth and social change. One of its strongest influences has been the awakening of women’s consciousness. With rapid economic development and advent of women’s movement the changing status of women received much attention. The role of women began to change from the submissive, dependent and child bearing traditional women to modern, demanding equal rights sovereignty and independence. The impact of modernization has been significant. On one hand it has opened up economic opportunities in some areas on the other it has led to decline in traditional sources of income for women as those engaged in the production of handmade and homemade items. In the agriculture the introduction of new technology has severely hampered the participation of family work force, displaced small producers and interrupted traditional systems of production between the roles of two sexes in the family. Women have experienced difficulty in acquiring access to credit improved technologies and increased services. As a result, women’s productivity has generally remained at a low level and they have failed to improve upon their status and position.

Globalization

Globalization is the new buzzword that has dominated the world. The frontiers of state with increased reliance on the market economy Globalization has brought in new opportunities to developing countries. The focus of globalization in developing countries not only includes opening of world trade , development of advanced means of communication , international importance of MNC’s, Population migration and more generally increased mobility of persons, goods , capital , data and ideas but also infectious diseases, pollution and wider income gaps.

Globalization has also dealt blows to traditional rural economy where despite patriarchy women had space. Globalised pushes for cash crops and high end technologies have attacked food security for the entire family and the national economy. The widely reported suicides by Indian farmers involve not the poorest, but well-to-do farmers who took bank loans to fund cash crop production and were ruined when global competition and overproduction led to plummeting prices and failure to repay loans.

For women, the impact of globalization has been uneven. A small layer have gained work opportunity in terms of newly emerging forms of employment, especially in the IT, service and food-processing sectors, but the semi-/unskilled ones have lost control over their natural resources (land, water forest etc), as well as in traditional industries, resulting in the loss of traditional livelihood and sustainability. Gender is not a homogeneous category, but is intersected by class, caste, community and ethnicity, and impacted by age, ideology and sexual preference.

In the informal sector women workers have neither contracts nor social security, and have low wages and unhygienic working conditions. Poverty, lack of medical insurance, and forced overtime and the culture of self-denial often make health the first casualty. Women suffer from malnutrition, chronic anemia, TB, respiratory problems, pelvic inflammatory disease, severe cases of dehydration and miscarriages are common. The lack of income security for women in the informal sector also means children's lack of access to education. As a result the children also get pushed into the informal sector themselves.

The worst off among all the unorganized sector women are the women employed across urban India as domestic maids living in slums.

Mass Media and Communication

The impact of mass media and communication in India is very significant and is clearly apparent. The easy access to means of communication and mass media has paved way to modernization and social change. Being an important factor in the process of development the mass media not only serves as the media of intimation and entertainment but also as an agent of social change and pass new ideas and information. The reach and access of such modern technology is producing mixed and varied effects. While On one hand it has surfaced as a very strong means of propagating information to all sectors on the other it has filled the minds with desire of acquiring more and more. The various television programs and commercials have created a great market even with in the slums, women being a promising consumer. It has brought a remarkable change in lifestyle of people.

Despite slums being a place of rampant poverty there is a noticeable consumption of various products like toothpaste, hair oil, shampoo, and cosmetics which earlier remained prohibited on account of weak economic conditions and lack of knowledge. The accessibility and use of mobile phones is quite visible among the uneducated women living in slums.

II

The present paper is based on my fieldwork in an urban slum *Bastauli* located in Indira Nagar, Lucknow. It has more than hundred households comprising families mainly of schedule castes and a few upper caste people. The women of upper

castes are mainly those who have been deserted by husband or family and are left with no hope going back to villages. The houses built are illegal occupancy of land by those who migrated from village either due to being landless or had uneconomic land holding. The locality is crowded with wide open dirty drains and unsanitary conditions. The conditions of water supply and toilets are severely poor. All the families manage water from common public hand pump.

Dynamics of Caste

The present study reveals significantly that the migration from rural to urban areas have diluted the caste hierarchy to a great extent. Though the membership of caste is still determined by birth but caste no longer seems to be in a position to impose rigorous restrictions especially in freedom to choose occupation. Caste is no longer homogenous in occupation. Most of the women living in this locality are either domestic maids washing utensils and cleaning houses and cooking food. Caste though a limiting factor is not a determining factor. The main reason which is noticeable behind pursuing such profession is lack of skills and illiteracy. This could be evidently proved as some women are sweeping drains and cleaning toilets though they have not been into such a profession in their village.

It is important to mention here that the upper caste women living in these slums preferably try to get into cooking of food to earn a living rather than washing utensils and cleaning, but in situations where they failed to procure such jobs they have taken up ritually impure occupations.

The impact of urbanization, industrialization and modernization has exercised an amazing flexibility and adaptability. It is a very observable fact that women from upper caste are also increasingly getting involved in professions like massage parlor, manicures and pedicures etc. These facts bear a clear testimony of occupational mobility including movement from ritually pure to ritually impure occupations.

There is a sharp decline in *Jajmani* system. Women have been an important part of this system in rural areas. The increasing of market forces, political process and technological process has made *Jajmani* system defunct and seriously affected inter-caste relations. But on the contrary the ritual component of *Jajmani* system is still in operation to some extent. It is so as the upper caste living in urban areas, who still have strong connection with rural areas try to follow *Jajmani* norms while living in cities.

Religious Tradition, Customs, Festivals

Women have been an important agent in carrying on traditions, but a radical change is quite observable due to varied reasons in age old customs and traditions. Family economy has played a major role in continuation, modification and shedding of various traditions.

Meeting both the ends is already a difficult task for marginalized poor people migrating to cities, therefore carrying on with their traditions and customs in same ostentation is nearly becoming a burden. In moving from villages to cities while some traditions are left behind, some are modified and many new adapted.

The first and foremost thing noticeable is *Purdah Pratha*. While in villages women had an obligation to cover their heads and veil their faces in *ghunghat*, those migrating to cities do not follow it. Though the old age women do cover their heads, but not to the extent as it is being followed in villages.

The tradition of 'Teknonymy' is also vanishing. The women residing in villages did not call their husbands by name but those coming to cities show a change. Women in this urban slum though do not call them by name but do not hesitate to tell the name of their husband when asked.

Several *sanskars* like *namakaran*, *annaprashan*, *kaanchedan* and *patipoojan* have reduced to mere symbolic value being followed in some cases and have become extinct in others. Such traditions which in villages were very important aspects of religious life have diminished both in observation and importance.

Anaprashan is performed in the sixth month of child. It is when the child started intake of solid food. *Mantras* were recited and offerings were made. A resident of *Bastauli* told that "in village *anaprasan* used to be an occasion of great family celebration but in cities we some how manage it for the name sake as a symbolic continuation due to scarcity of time and resources".

Similarly *namakaran* related to naming the child and *Paatipoojan* referred to a ritual performed when the child was to start formal education. Performing all these traditions on one hand used to be important and sacred in religious terms, on the other hand strengthened social solidarity, interdependence and perpetuation of *jajmani* system. Though *Mundan* still holds importance even today but ceremonious display of the rituals and vivaciousness of celebration is over shadowed due to financial constraints. An important thing which remained a remarkable feature among all these celebrations was singing of folk songs by women gathering in the villages, has minimized to a great extent. Women living in the slum revealed that in almost all the religious ceremonies *naun*() and *dhobin*(washer women) held a place of importance which is no more the same. In all the traditions an important ritual *dholak pooja* i.e. worshipping of *dholak* after various traditional ceremonies has become almost extinct

Festivals like *Karwa Chauth* and *Navratri Pooja* which were not a part of the culture in their homeland have increasingly gained a place of importance while living in cities. Women in villages had no such festival of *Karwa Chauth*. This festival owes its popularity to media, modern means of communication and strong market forces. The easy accessibility to television even in slum areas has been an important reason behind glamorizing such festivals. On the other hand there are

many such festivals, occasions and fasts which were observed by women according to *tithi* (Hindi dates) have been left while migrating to urban areas.

Festival of *Teej*, which heralds the beginning of monsoon season which was an important festival of Rajasthan, is now celebrated ostentatiously in many parts of Northern India. *Teej* is celebrated in the month of *Shravan*. At the time of *Teej*, certain rituals and customs are followed by women so as to be blessed by Goddess *Parvati*. Married women return back to their parent's house to celebrate the festival of *Teej*. It is considered very auspicious for married and engaged women to receive *Teej* gifts from their parents-in-law and to be parents-in-law. Future in-laws of engaged girls gift them gifts which consists of *henna*, *lac* bangles, a special *laheria* dress and *ghewar* (sweetdish).

Applying *henna* to one's hands and feet is a special tradition of *Teej*. It is said, "The darker the henna, the more a woman is loved by her husband and in-laws". Women wear colorful clothes and adorn jewelry at the time of *Teej*. Most prominent colors of *Teej* is green. Another important ritual is to worship *Nyagrodha* tree or *Vat Vriksha*. Women tie swings to the *Vat Vriksha*. Women both married and unmarried observe *Teej* fast in which they do not even take a sip of water. They keep a 24-hour long fast as it is believed that the invocation of *Parvati's* blessings on this day results in continued marital bliss. Though, such an extravagant celebration of *Teej* is no more observed but rural migrants have adapted *Teej* to a great extent.

The festival of *Gudiya* which was among one of the most popular festivals of rural India is diminishing its importance with migration. In villages on this day the young girls of the village make *Gudiya* (dolls) and young boys beat them with sticks. *Sewain* is prepared on this day and *Pucca* food is eaten. Though the tradition of beating *Gudiya* (dolls) has almost been dropped but *Sewain* is still made along with *Pucca* food.

Enactment of *Ramleela* has been replaced by *Navratri Pooja*. *Durga* or *Navratri Pooja* mainly a festival of West Bengal is now celebrated far and wide in Uttar Pradesh. Some of the women observe a full nine days fast, put *Kalash*, go to temples and worship goddess *Durga*.

Significantly '*Tona*' Black Magic and such other beliefs which were very prevalent in villages, though have not evaporated but are not so much visible due to lack of accessibility to its performer.

Women in these slum admit that large family, meager income, time crisis all together have severely hampered the cultural traditions, religious performances and festivals.

Family, Marriage and Kinship

There have been marked and varied changes in the institutions like family, marriage and kinship. Migration has devastating effect on joint family system. Families residing in slum though large but are more of nuclear type.

Such a change has also affected other functions of family like child rearing and caring. The disintegration of joint family has overburdened the women with lot many chores which, while living in joint family were divided among other family members. Now she has to look after her children, do all her household chores go out to work and many of them even have to do outside work. Disintegration of joint family has also influenced kinship ties to a great extent. Kinship ties which dominated the rural scenario have diluted due to migration, lack of leisure and heterogeneity in outlook.

Marriage has also changed a lot in ritual performance and ceremonies. *Jaimaal*, which was not a part of marriage in the rural areas but is now practiced, where bride and bridegroom exchange garlands in presence of all the family members. This change is largely due to imitation and with a desire to rise in social hierarchy.

Women say that in their villages the groom and their kins do not come with *barat* but it's the bride and her family who go to groom's place. There has been a tradition called *Paany Pooji* where 5 utensils other such things according to ones status were given to groom and was prominent tradition of marriage. They told that marriage in these villages was an affair not less than three days but now it does not exceeds more than a day.

They also revealed that the tradition of *Gauna* has also been done away with, probably because of lesser prevalence of child marriages. In *Gauna* after marriage, the girl does not go with her husband. She continues to live with her parents. The marriage is not consummated for many years. When the girl and the boy attain maturity, *Gauna* is held. It is only after *Gauna* that the girl can meet her husband. The marriage is consummated only after *Gauna*. Dowry has not been a prevalent custom of marriages in village, but in urban areas even in low caste it has become prevalent to a large extent. Legal Divorce is also surfacing as an important feature in these urban slums. The concept of single women was bleakly seen in rural areas but in urban slums women when deserted are working and living independently.

Life Style Changes

Due to various reasons like modernization, financial constraints and time crisis women living in the urban slum have left many such household chores which once have been very important part of their daily routines. Grinding of spices, wheat and looking after cattle have no more remained a part of their daily lives. They say that it has been years that they haven't used *Chakki*(grinding wheel). Even they buy the spices directly from market to use. *Hookah* which was quite prevalent in villages, more among the elderly women is almost extinct.

While *mela*, *nautanki*, puppet shows and folk songs have lost their importance malls, cinema halls have gained importance as a mode of entertainment.

An increasing craze of going to beauty parlors is a peculiar change quite noticeable. Women living in slums have become conscious of their looks. Increased

use of cosmetics though substandard due to lack of money is very apparent. Tooth Paste, Shampoo, cold creams and similar items have replaced the use of traditional products like *datoon and* mustard oil. This change has largely been due to Television Programs and flooding commercials. Globalization, commercialization and increasing competition has made it possible for women living in such areas to access modern gadgets.

Urbanization, Modernization and imitation have also brought a marked change in clothing and food habits. While women in rural areas mostly wear *sari* with *palla* on their head or *ghunghat*, those migrating to cities have started wearing *salwar suits*. The young girls even wear western outfits like jeans etc.

Eating food in *chauka* which was followed by upper caste in village is also not practiced due to dilution in notions of ritual purity and pollution.

Awareness level has increased remarkably. Women in these areas have become aware of family planning methods, though are not much to their help due to son preference and lack of autonomy. Son preference still continues with the same vigor as in villages. Women have become aware and keen about educating their children. They have better knowledge of health and hygiene.

A significant fact noticed in this locality is that women are quite aware about rights, privileges and laws made for them. They know about APL, BPL *ration* cards, old age pensions and many such government schemes floated for them from time to time. They know that the legal age to get their daughter married is 18 and marrying them before this age a legal offence. All these facts revealed that women organizations working in slums have also played an important role in bringing about a change.

Despite many changes of varied types patriarchy still dominates the lives of the women. They are still subordinated to patriarchal set up and lack cultural and social autonomy. Though some minor shift is noticeable due to economic constraints and growing awareness but it cannot be said that women hold a rightful place. On the contrary aspiration to be equal to the upper caste has eroded the cultural autonomy of the lower caste in the sense that the blind imitation of upper caste has resulted in loss of their identity.

References

- Becker, C. M., Mills E. S. and Williamson, J. G. (1986). Modeling Indian Migration and City Growth, 1960-2000. *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 35(1): 1-33.
- Davis, K. (1965). The Urbanization of Human Population. *Scientific American* 213(3): 41-53.
- Davis, K, and Golden, H. H. (1954). Urbanization and Development in Pre-industrial Areas. *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 3(1): 6-26.
- Dube, S. C. (1958). *India's Changing Village*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Kuchiki, A. (2005). Theory of a Flow Chart Approach to Industrial Cluster Policy, Discussion Paper No. 36, Discussion Paper Series, Institute of Developing Economies.

- Mitra, A. (1992). Urban Poverty: A Rural Spill-over. In *Indian Economic Review*. V. Pandit and Suresh D. Tendulkar eds. Special No. in Memory of S. Chakravarty.
- Sundaraman, K. (1989). Agriculture Industry Inter-relations: Issues of Migration World Congress of the International Economic Association, 1986. In Vol.3 Proceedings: *Balance between Industry and Agriculture in Economic Development, Manpower and Transfer*. S. Chakravarty ed., London: Macmillan.