

URBANIZATION AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AN OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The paper explores the impact of urbanization on the empowerment of women. Urbanization is the process of concentration of population in a particular territory. Post independence, growth of science and technology as well as industries became the major reasons behind urbanization. More and more people started moving towards the industrial areas in search of employment. Urbanization has facilitated better living standards and overall development of nation. The major impact of urbanization happened in the life style of women. Women empowerment in India is heavily dependent on geographical location. Rural areas are more prone to gender based division of work, roles and responsibilities as well as the mind set towards domestic violence. Access to increased information in urban areas makes women experience with more power within, feelings to freedom, strength, self identity and increases in levels of confidence and self –esteem leading to greater self actualization. This also enables women to have more voice in the community affairs.

KEYWORDS: Urbanization, Women Empowerment, Self Esteem, Self Actualization

INTRODUCTION

Urban area is a place having high population and high people density. Urbanization is the process of population shift from rural areas to urban areas. It's a phenomenon of more and more people leave villages and start live in cities. Urban areas are created and developed by urbanization. Therefore in broader ways urbanization can be defined as the transformation of land for the purpose of residential, commercial, industrial and transportation. Urbanization occurs globally and it is a process which was present even in very ancient days. It is found that urbanization happens more rapidly in developing countries. India is one of the major countries, which experiences the phenomenon more rapidly. India is a country with majority of people reside in rural areas and depend on agriculture for their livelihood. The factors like employment, healthcare, education opportunities, availability of food and entertainment which improves the quality work life of people are the major factors leading to urbanization.

The Ancient Days

The process of urbanization was happening even in very ancient days. The urban culture of the Bronze Age found in Harappa was a path-breaking discovery (R.S Sharma, 2007 p.74 “Harappan Culture: Bronze Age Urbanization in the Indus Valley”). There were clear evidence of people moving to the areas for more material facilities of life. The benefits of urbanization in ancient India were viewed as the development on the contemporary life:

- They helped in the development of organized commerce and facilitated the exchange system.
- It improved the means of tax collection.
- It helped in making the savings easy.
- It led to the emergence of a specialized class of money-lenders and money-investors (setti-gahapati) (Indian history for UPSC, history4upsc.blogspot.com).

Urbanization in India mainly caused after independence. Post independence, India faced poverty, unemployment and economic crisis due to the decline from the contributions of agricultural sector. This was the time when the government focused more on science and technology for the development of the country. This focus promoted urbanization in a large scale during those periods.

The New Era

Eleventh Five year plan focused more on urbanization for the economic development. This was followed by the industrial revolution and the growth of private sector which heavily boosted the process. The increased job openings attracted the people from rural areas to urban areas. People started migrating to these areas heavily. Evidencing this, the census shows an increase of population residing in urban areas from 11.4% in 1901 to 28.53% in 2001 reaching at 31.16% according to the 2011 census (Business Standard (2012). "Victims of urbanisation: India, Indonesia and China", Datta, Pranati(2012). "Urbanisation in India")

The agricultural income is always susceptible due to various factors like drought, flood etc. Rural areas always suffer from poverty due to these natural calamities. Also in the modern world, not only industries but also other kind of businesses involved with huge exchange of money and which provide more jobs are highly concentrated in urban areas. These factors have become yet other reasons for growing urbanization which is seen today.

Impact of Urbanization on Surroundings

Urbanization helps in speedy growth of nation. As the density of people increases, amenities like schools, hospitals and other infrastructure facilities become enhanced quickly. Transportation is another area which acquires rapid development. Enormous improvement in employment, healthcare, education opportunities, availability of food and entertainment also takes place due to urbanization.

Along with all these, the process negatively effects the environment as the number of people residing in an urban area is massive. Due to increased infrastructure using cement and bricks, urban areas remain hot even at night. Increased people density and industrialization degrades the air quality. Excessive noise is another cause of air pollution. Urbanization effects adversely the quality of water too. Rapid development make hindrance to the river channels, which leads to flooding. Problems of waster disposals are yet another major issue in the urban areas. Problems of overpopulation results in accommodation problems and slums. The major issue is to integrate land- and water use planning to provide food and water security (UNEP 1999).

Effects of Urbanization on People

Urbanization makes a major impact on social, political and economical life of people. In villages the relationships are closely knit. Family system dominates these areas and the life of all men and women merged in family life. Because of

the high cost of living, the system of joint families was abolished in the urban areas and nuclear families came into the picture. This ended up with highly monotonous life and impersonal relationships. The concept of neighborhood and community living are almost absent which results in increased stress. With unplanned and unstructured conditions urbanization ends up as a real mess.

With all these negative sides, urbanization can yield positive effects if it is restricted to a desirable limits. The sophisticated technologies, medical facilities, improved communication and better infrastructure can provide people with more comforts. The literacy ratio has been raised incredibly as more education facilities are available. There can be a tremendous improvement in the overall of standard of living of the society.

Urbanization and Quality of Life

Urbanization can have a great impact on the quality work life of people. With more and more industries and businesses coming in there is a better scope of career opportunities, whereas unemployment level is high in rural areas. One can choose from countless career options he has. With the increased transportation facilities, the mobility of the people increases, hence conveyance factor becomes easy and less costly. Medical services are yet another service area where modern hi-tech improvements are available in urban areas. Enhanced communication facilities like cell phones etc adds to the safety and security of life. Entertainment options like clubs and societies are more in urban areas. This helps to reduce the monotony and stress. These types of basic or professional services cannot be found in rural areas.

Urbanization and Women

Women are the class of the society which enjoys the benefits of urbanization the most. In rural areas women are still treated like home makers and baby sitters. They are supposed to take care of all domestic duties. None of their aspirations are given any importance and they live to fulfill the wishes of others in the family. Moreover poverty, isolation, lack of education, economic dependence, inadequate access to health care makes their life miserable. Spouse abuse and maternity related health issues are more in rural areas.

Urbanization made tremendous change in these conditions. The exposure to educational opportunities opened new vistas, increased awareness and raised aspirations for personal growth. Easy access to health services reduced the health related issues among them.

Today, most of the women in urban areas are much educated, that they can find their own livelihood without depending on others. Economic independence brought in a remarkable change in their lives.

Along with the exposure to educational opportunities and raised aspirations, increased cost of life is another reason, which forced women to work outside. In urban areas all the amenities like water, power, accommodation, entertainment etc are provided on payment. This makes it very difficult to lead a family life with single income and the situation compelled the women to be a part of the earning members in the family.

Women Empowerment through Urbanization

Modern and increased transportation facilities make working women's life easy in urban cities. Most of urban women use their own vehicles or have a very convenient public transport system. With all their household chaos, these improved conveyance facilities assist them in fulfilling their career and personal requirements more effectively.

Even today, the "urban-men" take little responsibility of older parents, young or sick children. The faster growth

of modern communication amenities in urban places help women in finding a career sitting at home looking after all their so-called “women” responsibilities.

Most of the women drop working after having children. But as the children grow up and start going to school, they again think of having a career. Increased living cost and loneliness act as an encouraging aspect for women thinking of a second career. Since urban area provide a numerous career opportunities, it becomes easy for the women to find a second career along with managing their family.

At this stage of proceeding for a second career, women may need additional qualifications. Because of the existence of various kinds of education providers in cities, it is easier for the them to access additional educational qualification.

The hardest part working women face is to find time for shopping for personal as well as family requirements. In cities, the shopping malls are present even in late evenings. Door-step service providers are another kind of service which is only available in urban areas. With these improved systems the difficulty of finding time for shopping can pass up. Online shopping is yet another modern invention which most of the urban women depend on since the delivery of goods is faster in urban areas.

Urban areas offer a number of entertainment prospects for women. Women clubs and associations are very prevalent in cities. They make available women gathering occasionally. Through these socialization processes they can improve the contacts which again assist them in leading a better life. These organizations usually organize various classes and seminars beneficial to women. These types of meetings make women aware of a lot of issues related to health and general life. These activities aid in relieving the stress the working women carries along and they can have a general understanding about the current scenario.

Work life – Personal life balance is another issue faced by women. A successful professional woman is expected to be a successful home maker too. All the household works like cleaning, cooking etc are primarily supposed to be the women tasks. In older days, lot of female workers to help in domestic work was available in rural area. The situation has changed now. Today it is easy to get the domestic workers in urban areas due to high payment and better working conditions. This condition primarily helps the urban working women. They can avail the services of domestic workers on hourly basis too. A lot of agencies are engaged in providing with domestic workers. Also there are cleaning agencies that turn up with all cleaning equipments and these agencies can be used to have a thorough cleaning of house once in a while.

Owing to the growth of these kinds of service providers in urban areas, the number of working women increases on a regular basis. The result of these circumstances is a class of empowered and satisfied women. Increased information dissemination characteristics of urban society help them escape from exploitation.

Impact on Society

The process of urbanization not only brings in tangible developments but also produces a vast range of demographic changes. It causes a lot of socio-economic transformation in the society. A class of women having a high self esteem is a result of this. The empowering process can lead to broader development outcomes, even women participation in local government processes and so on. The urban society can enjoy the fruits of it as women can be equipped with her multiple role as citizens, housewives, mother, contributor to family income, builder of new society and builder of nation.

CONCLUSIONS

Thus if properly managed, the process of urban development provides the key to overall regional and national development. Cities are the place where money, services and wealth are centralized. The expansion and growth of cities facilitates development of both Internal and International Trade. Expansion of other economic activities in the cities facilitates faster increases in wealth and economic development. More importantly, urbanization is in the forefront of the demographic transition. It ensures the proactive involvement of women, changing social norms and anchoring with wider movements of social change. Thus in the case of Women Empowerment, Urbanization stands in the head position even if the process has various negative aspects which if effectively managed can be passed up.

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