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The ‘Changing Status’ of Women w.r.t. Gentrified Urban Spaces of Mumbai

Dr. Deepali Bhide

Assistant Professor,

Department of Geography,

D.G. Ruparel College

(Affiliated to University of Mumbai),

Mahim, Mumbai-400016.

Email Id: deepali.bhide@ruparel.edu

ORCID Id: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8959-2126>

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Abstract

Reinforcement of inequality and rise in human conflict across society, culture, political economy and gender relations is a characteristic feature of globalisation which is an apparent process of development. This inequality becomes more evident in a globalising city like Mumbai because the capitalist expansion within Mumbai has been defragmented and worrisome. Girangaon in Mumbai (spread over E, F and G wards within MCGM- Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai) is a case reflecting a similar inconsistency because this is a core area which has been undergoing so called urban renewal since the closure of cotton textile mills since 1980s. More livelihood opportunities in Mumbai have been created in the informal tertiary sector as compared to the formal traditional occupations. Urban poverty, income disparities and deprivations are issues which remain unaddressed. Women who are

an important part of the urban economy and who remain behind the veils when it comes to assessment and calculation of real income are not left behind from this brunt. The present paper therefore is an attempt to understand the participation and contribution of women in Mumbai's economy. It also tries to study whether there has been any change in the socio-economic status of women from Girangaon especially with two important processes- closure of mills and the initiation of gentrification. For this purpose a questionnaire survey was conducted in Girangaon and the collected data has been analysed qualitatively to understand the dynamics of capital and gender relations.

Keywords: Geography, Gender, Globalisation, Relationship, Gentrification

"In the end, if the system still 'works' it is because women guarantee unpaid transportation ..., because they repair their homes, because they make meals when there are no canteens, because they spend more time shopping around, because they look after others' children when there are no nurseries, and because they offer 'free entertainment' to the producers when there is a social vacuum and an absence of cultural creativity. If these women who 'do nothing' ever stopped to do 'only that', the whole urban structure as we know it would become completely incapable of maintaining its functions" (Castells, 1978, pages 177-178).

Geography, globalisation and gender are very much linked to each other (McDowell, L 1999:1) and more pertinently in the post-globalisation period. The specific aim of feminist geography has been to investigate, make visible and challenge the relationships between gender divisions and spatial divisions, to uncover their mutual constitution and problematise their apparent naturalness (McDowell, L 1999:12). Geography thus plays an important role while studying gender relations because there are enormous variations between and within nations in the extent of women's subordination and relative autonomy, and correspondingly in male power and domination (McDowell, L 1999:12).

Globalisation has become a part of the geographical discourse because the very evolution and development of globalisation rests on the spatial reorganisation of the economic activities (Banerjee-Guha, 2002). Globalisation brought with it 'flexibility' in the movement of foreign capital, innovation, information, technology and culture. The third world cities were the chosen destinations of globalisation. A city like Mumbai also has been receiving the 'biased' benefits of globalisation because of its differential placement in the 'World Urban Order'. The old urban landscape of Mumbai has been dismantled and a new restructuring and massive upgradation of infrastructure has been introduced through improved transport and communication services (Bandra-Worli Sea Link, the Metro rail project), water supply, electricity and finance (Karmarkar, 2010) under the disguise of modernisation and public welfare.

However, these discordant benefits spilled by globalisation have been accessed by only a specific section of the society. Globalisation further made processes rigid for certain sections of the society reinforcing immobility and marginalisation. One such section forming half of humanity and which has remained behind the veils are the 'women'. Women have

been on the margins of any society due to the 'patriarchal' control and processes like globalisation have further emphasised their 'marginalisation'. Women have been the drivers of the household and the economy too. But have been deprived from the benefits at all levels which their 'better halves' enjoy. Hence this study conducted in Girangaon has focussed on the change if any in the socio-economic status of women and brought in the forefront a number of conventional issues like education, security, job opportunities available for women. It is also an attempt to understand the participation and contribution by women in the urban economy. The paper also tries to study whether there has been any change in the socio-economic status of women from Girangaon especially with two important processes- closure of mills and the initiation of gentrification. Needless to say it is an attempt to perceive whether women enjoy any 'space' in a global city like Mumbai.

For the present paper Girangaon was selected because it was the heart of old Mumbai city and is also the area which has been directly affected by the urban restructuring policies for Mumbai. For the present paper both secondary and primary data have been utilised. The basic information for Girangaon about the size of the population, density, sex ratio etc has been collected from the Census Reports - 2001. Primary data was collected with the help of a questionnaire survey conducted in Girangaon. Fifty samples were collected from the study area with the help of quota sampling method. Survey was undertaken for both earning as well as non-earning women with an equal weightage to both groups. Data has been analysed qualitatively and quantitatively to understand the change in status of women if any in Girangaon.

A Brief Introduction and History of Girangaon:

The word 'Girangaon' has its origin in the Marathi language. 'Girani' means a mill and 'gaon' is a village. Hence this can be termed as a 'colony of mills'. Girangaon located in the heart of the city spreads over five wards of the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM) viz; E, F (North), F (South), G (North) and G (South) occupying a geographical area of 53 Sq. Km.

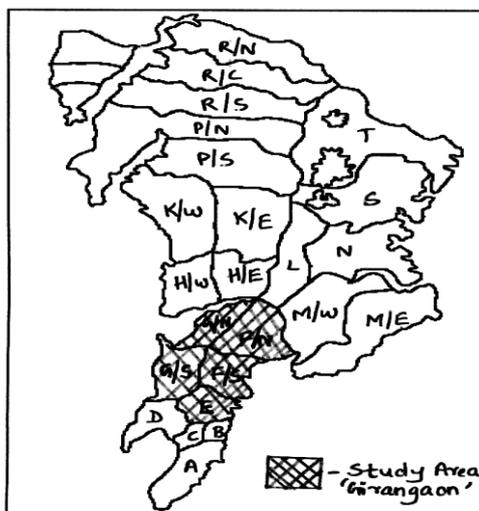


Fig. 1: Girangaon (map not to scale)

It is centrally located in terms of services available in Mumbai. Girangaon also possesses a very high population density being located in the old 'Central Business District' of Mumbai. Once a hub of cotton textile mills, Girangaon in post 1990s has been dominated by high-rise towers, shopping malls and bowling alleys indicating the transformation of the old C.B.D. with the closure of cotton textile mills (since 1980s).

History states that in late 1970s erstwhile Bombay's cotton textile mills employed 2, 50, 000 workers which recorded the largest workforce in one industry in a single city anywhere in the world (D'monte, D. 2006: 13). There were about 58 mills in Mumbai (status as in September 2006) occupying a total geographical area of 600 acres in the centre of the island city (D'monte, D. 2006: 8). Each mill on an average occupied 10-12 acres of land (Adarkar, N. in D'monte, 2006: 84). Initially, most of the labour employed in the mills came from parts of Konkan (Raigad, Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg districts). This migrant labour was accommodated in the typical low cost housing structures called as '*chawls*'. Poor availability of basic facilities like toilets and water supply have not dismayed majority of the people from leaving the city centre and moving into the distant suburbs.

By 1970s and '80s for diverse reasons, the mills began losing money and the government had either to subsidise their continuation or certify them as "sick mills" and take them over (D'monte, 2006: 18). These developments led to a strike which lasted for 18 months and was recorded as one of the largest and longest in the world history. It resulted in the dismissal of 100,000 workers and culminated into the closure and decline of the cotton mills. Helpless workers lost the right to oppose the owners. Many mills started outsourcing their work to powerlooms (in Bhiwandi and other areas) (D'monte, 2006:13).

The closure of mills in Mumbai and the introduction of the neo-liberal policies by the Government of India in 1990s brought in the fore front some new issues. Mumbai city in general and Girangaon in particular - once a focus of the industrial employment experienced a sea of changes in the employment structure. The city has seen a definite transition from a manufacturing centre to a service sector economy leading to casualisation of labour, contracting and subcontracting of labour, lengthening of working hours, etc (EFI Solar Foundation, Mumbai, 2006: 22). The share of the manufacturing sector declined from 44 percent to 39 percent by 1991 while the share of service sector increased proportionately in the same period (Human Development Report, Mumbai, 2009: 51). Entertainment, Real Estate Development, Tourism, Finance, Automobile Garages, etc are the new sources of employment (Human Development Report, Mumbai, 2009: 51).

A study done by PUKAR (2009-2010) observed that with the closure of mills, lot of male labour force lost a very crucial source of employment. They neither could be easily absorbed in other occupations because their skills became redundant for new occupations. This reflects the marginalisation of mill workers. Majority of them remained 'economically idle' and took rescue in addictions like smoking and drinking. Few of them got absorbed in the unorganised sector as taxi drivers, security guards, etc. increasing the burden on women who then came in the forefront in search of employment. Many of these former mill workers have become lethargic and have developed a pessimistic attitude towards life.

Status of Women in Girangaon:

Mumbai's status as a global city is an illusion so is the status of Mumbai's women. For the world, women in Mumbai are well dressed, modern, bold, social and earning (Human Development Report, Mumbai, 2009: 134). But the survey narrated a different story about access to public and private space for women in Girangaon.

Sixty percent of the respondents belong to an age group of 45-60 years and belong to an income group of less than Rupees Ten Thousand per month. 70 percent of the samples are headed by the 'husband'. In 91 percent cases the house is owned by the 'husband' and remaining nine percent by the 'father in law'. In 90 percent cases the area of the house is less than 250 Sq. Ft. 81 percent respondents said that their houses have an attached bathroom and a common toilet facility reflecting access to space by the family members and a marginal access of space to the females of a household.

Migration of women:

76 percent of the respondents are migrants and 90 percent out of them have come to Girangaon because of marriage. Labour migration in Girangaon has been a highly gendered process which gets reflected from the negative sex-ratio of the population. Men being the conventional bread earners women are 'associated migrants' (Agarwal 2006; Seth 2001).

Table 1: Distribution of Sex-ratio in Girangaon: (1981-2001)

Ward	Name	1981	2001	Differential sex ratio 1981-2001
E	Byculla	681	755	681-776= +95
F/N	Matunga	800	791	800-791= -9
F/S	Parel	720	831	720-831= +111
G/N	Dadar	795	807	795-822= +27
G/S	Elphinstone	663	760	663-760= +97

Source: Census of India 2001.

Marriage:

Marriage as a social custom in India in general and in the life of an Indian woman in particular plays a significant role. It all begins with one's identity in society. 71 percent of respondents said that their first name was changed after marriage and surname was changed in case of 86 percent of the respondents. 71 percent of the respondents do not own any maternal property. 71 percent got married between 18-25 years of age and also experienced the birth of the first child in the same age group.

Health:

Health is one aspect of life which women tend to ignore or is less significant. 43 percent of respondents do not visit a doctor for common illness and prefer self medication or go without treatment and 29 percent have not done their health check up for many years. Use of family planning techniques is not a priority for many of them (57%) and wherever it has been used, the responsibility has been borne by the woman (19%). However awareness about health is very poor in the society in general and all the respondents said that neither the woman nor the husband underwent a medical check up before their marriage was fixed.

Security:

91 percent of them have not experienced any kind of stalking or abuse by men and thus do not use any mechanism or weapons for self protection. This could be because of the age group and also because women are groomed from a young age to ignore such acts by men and should not be openly discussed in the society.

Literacy:

Literacy is another indicator which helps to understand the accessibility to education. 42 percent of the respondents have studied upto matriculation. 10 percent of the respondents are illiterate and only 10 percent have completed graduation. The women respondents emphasised an urge that if better education was available to them they could have got a better employment opportunity.

Employment generation is another indicator which reflects a lot about the region's development process. Women in Girangaon carry a dual burden of being a 'home-maker' and a 'bread earner' but under the purview of patriarchy. 60 percent of the earning women respondents are employed in the 'informal tertiary sector' as domestic servants, packers, etc on an average getting a salary of less than Rupees Five Thousand per month. All have taken up job for support to the family.

Mobility of women:

Forty percent of respondents stated that they do not go out of the home even for some day to day activities like buying groceries, taking children to school etc. 67 percent spend more than five hours every day on domestic chores and all of them are located in the kitchen reflecting on the fact that women's space is restricted to the home.

The financial dependence continues more prominently for the non-earning women because 82 percent have a 'joint bank account' and 91 percent do not own any insurance policy. Similarly 64 percent do not have any savings in their name. Although earning women are to some extent independent in deciding about their job (100%), expenditure (70%) and investments (40%). Sixty percent of them have an insurance policy.

Awareness:

However, hegemonistic approach very well suits and controls the status of women in Girangaon, where the vital decisions of life like education of children, use of family planning techniques, how many children to have, investments, etc are taken by the husband and the wife has no or very little say in it.

The Constitution of India, the Fundamental Rights, the Fundamental Duties and the Directive Principles of State Policy guarantee 'gender equality'. The National Policy for Empowerment of Women was implemented in 2001. From the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78) onwards women's issues have been given emphasis in the developmental programmes. However, from the study area none of the women respondents answered that they are aware of any policies meant for upliftment of women at the national, state or municipal level. This observation leaves some loose links i.e. the basic awareness about the rights of women itself is missing then are the benefits of these policies and programmes really reaching the target group?

Table 3: Sharing of Spaces and Places in Girangaon:

The Masculine	The Feminine (At home)	The Feminine (At workplace)
Private	Private	Public and Private
Inside	Inside	Inside and Outside
Home	Home	Home and Work
Consumption	Reproduction	Production and Reproduction
Leisure	Leisure	Work
Independence	Dependence	(Dependent)Partial Independence
Power	Lack of power	Partial power

Adapted from: (McDowell, L 1999:12)

Finally to conclude, women do have differential access to space and place in Girangaon (Raju, S. and Lahiri-Dutta, K. 2011: 2). These variations in the spaces and places are a part of the socio-economic constitution of gender (McDowell, L 1999:12). In the post-globalisation era, both men and women in Girangaon have been marginalised. Although women got an opportunity to utilise the public space but the access has been a forced one under the purview of patriarchy. However these women still have a hope in their eyes that someday things will change for better and their daughters will enjoy access altogether to a different space.

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