WOMEN'S AUTONOMY, IDENTITY AND HEALTH ACCESS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY AMONG MUSLIM WOMEN IN THE OLD CITY OF HYDERABAD

Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

SWAPNA VASANTHAM

Centre for Social Medicine and Community Health
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi
India

2004

CENTRE OF SOCIAL MEDICINE & COMMUNITY HEALTH
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
New Delhi - 110 067

Date: 21/07/2004

CERTIFICATE

This dissertation entitled "**Women's Autonomy, Identity and Health Access: A Case Study Among Muslim Women in the Old City of Hyderabad**", is submitted in partial fulfilment of six credits for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy (M.Phil.) of this university. This dissertation has not been submitted for the award of any other degree of this university or any other university and is my original work.

Swapna Vasantham

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

Dr. Mohan Rao
(Supervisor)

Dr. Mohan Rao
Associate Professor
C S M H/S S
Jawaharlal Nehru University
NEW DELHI-110 067

Dr. RituPriya Mehrotra
(Chairperson)

Chairperson
Centre of ocial Medicine &
Community Health, SSS
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067

Acknowledgements

This work is not just the outcome of my individual effort. There are a lot of people whom I would like to convey my gratitude to, who helped me out in making my way to this success.

First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Mohan Rao, for the enormous support which he had given me during the various phases of my work, without which the work would not have taken this form. The amount of interest that he took to help me out in all my endeavours makes me feel extremely thankful to him.

I owe this work to my family. They have always been there for me, whatever task I have taken up. I am thankful to my parents and my sister for their constant encouragement. I would like to acknowledge my in-laws for being supportive all through the period of my dissertation work. And another constant support for me was my husband who has been very understanding and compassionate and had always stood by me.

I am indebted to the people of the organisation, COVA, who facilitated my visits to the field, without whose assistance this work would not have been possible. I am thankful to Dr. Ali Asghar, Ms. Noorjahan who had guided me in choosing the areas for data collection and Padma didi, Lakshmi didi, Ruksana didi and others who assisted me to the field at times. I am obliged to all the people in the field who were very cordial and received me very warmly. Without their cooperation this would not have taken this form.

The centre has given me the nicest of the work atmospheres, the place on the campus to which I feel most attached to. The most nostalgic of the moments, which I would hold with regard to JNU are the ones I had spent at the CSMCH. I am thankful to the entire faculty for making us feel so comfortable and for being there for us whenever we were in need of any kind of guidance. Thanks to Ms. Rastogi and Dinesh for very patiently providing us with all the required material.

Thanks to all my friends for all care and support which they had given me. I would like to acknowledge Saswatee, Tine, Mithun, Mitu and the entire batch for their concern. My special thanks to Srilakshmi, Mili, Samar, Sanjeev and Darashree for all the concern that they have had for me. The discussions which I had at length with them helped me in developing my work. Also among them is my friend from Hyderabad, Qurrat, with whom I used to have long hours of talk after my hectic field visits. All of them made my stay on the campus a memorable one.

Contents

Preface

The feminist scholar Sangari argues that women are not a monolithic homogenous group but that their lives "exist at the interface of caste and class inequality, especially since the description and management of gender and female sexuality is involved in the maintenance and reproduction of social inequality" – Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid.

This quote gives a feel of the lives of women, their vulnerability to various power structures and their existence as a whole. It shows their identity is subsumed into various other identities and she does not have an independent existence of her own. The focus of the study is to analyse the issues of these multiple identities that impinge on the lives of women and how they mould their lives influencing their autonomy and agency, thus their mobility- physical and social.

The first chapter begins with understanding autonomy and tracing the development of the concept from the times of the women's movement in the west, to recent times, through the various developments in the policy issues over the following decades. Further it goes on to establish the linkages between the concepts of autonomy, identity and accessibility, thus providing a theoretical framework for the study.

The second chapter is a brief introduction to the field, describing its physical location and further moves on to provide an analytical framework linking it up with issues of consolidation of group identity.

The third chapter is the analysis of the findings followed by a brief discussion and some tentative conclusions.

Autonomy, Identity and Accessibility

Autonomy is to be understood as 'having control over one's life and one's own body in relation to others, in this case males and with regard to the structures of the society' (Geertje Thomas a Nijeholt: 1994, cited in Gupta, A, pp: 24)[1]. In this definition, autonomy is seen as a goal for individual women to strive for, but at the same time it has a collective aspect as the struggle is not against individual men but against societal structures of patriarchy, thus working towards a collective goal of an ideal society (Gupta: 2000)[2]. Autonomy thus is the ability of an individual to act according to one's choice. But at the same time it is defined by the social milieu. There are various dimensions of autonomy, in terms of decision making capacity, freedom of choice in everyday activities, mobility etc. The concept of autonomy gained prominence in the context of reproductive rights, which was of immediate concern for women's rights activists of the late nineteenth century. The current chapter takes off from this context, further developing an understanding of the concepts of autonomy, identity and accessibility and analysing their influence on one another.

The perspectives on reproductive rights emphasise women's rights over their fertility as the ends and not just the means for health, population and development programs. It links the rights of the body and the person directly with social, political and economic rights- the enabling conditions. At the core of this concept lies the principle that even the most intimate areas of family, procreative and sexual life are ones where women's human rights to self-determination and equality must prevail (Petchesky: 1998)[3].

---

[1] Gupta, Agnihotri (2000): "*New Reproductive Technologies, Women's Health And Autonomy*", Sage, New Delhi.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Petchesky, R (1998): "Introduction" in Petchesky, R and Judd, K (ed) "*Negotiating Reproductive rights, Women's Perspectives Across Countries And Cultures*", International Reproductive Rights Action Group, Zed Books, London.

In the early 50's and 60's of the 20th century, at the beginning of the public debates on the issues of abortion and birth control, the emphasis was not on personal choice but on reforming the existing laws, which were outdated and oppressive. Right to abortion, which was then banned, was seen as important to improve women's status. Thus the personal and the social dimensions of reproductive rights are mutually dependent rather than being in conflict (Petchesky, R: 1998)[4]. It is a complex concept as it is determined at various levels by a range of factors and actors – the immediate family, the socialization process, the norms and values, the dominant ideologies and the policies of the state governed by these ideologies.

The concepts of women's autonomy, agency and rights have become more significant in the developmental debates, population specialists and policy makers since the International Conference on Population and Development, 1994, held at Cairo. The population strategies defined at this conference depended extensively upon attaining feminist aims. The program offers a rationale for this bias by asserting that "eliminating social, cultural, political and economic discrimination against women" is a "prerequisite" for "achieving" balance between population and available resources"(Hodgson and Watkins: 1997, pp: 470)[5].

The issue of decriminalising abortion and respecting women's reproductive rights received great attention. Equally important was the issue of social, economic, and political rights of women. The ICPD thus was significant that it distinguished itself from the earlier population conferences. The Bucharest document (United Nations 1974) called for the equal participation of women in the economic, social, and political life of their countries, and specially sought to increase women's education. The Mexico City document (United Nations 1984) noted that improving status of women was an important goal in and of itself, and that it would lower family size. In the Cairo document, the emphasis was that unless women's status was improved, lasting population stabilization was not possible. Women's autonomy and empowerment were seen as important for long lasting

---

[4]ibid.
5 Hodgson, Dennis and Watkins C.Susan (ed) (1997): "Feminists and Neo-Malthusians: Past and Present Alliances", *Polpulation and Development Review*, September, vol.23, no.3, pp.469-523.

population and development goals. And whereas in the earlier *documents the* emphasis was on fertility reduction, the ICPD stressed on population stabilization through women's empowerment and not through coercive methods of population control. Thus there was paradigm shift in the way these concepts were seen. Women, instead of being seen just as economic burdens, were recognised as social producers, as individual decision makers and active participants in the process of development. It signalled a move away from demographically driven population policies that "attribute poverty and environmental degradation to women's high fertility, and, in turn, women's high fertility to an absence of information and methods"(Petchesky, R 1998, pp:2)[6]. It thus brought the issues regarding reproduction and sexuality to sharp focus.

Though the concepts of women's autonomy, agency, and empowerment have been focussed here, there is an underlying Neo-Malthusian line of thought, which is evident from the emphasis on the controlling population. Women's autonomy and empowerment are not treated as ends, but means for achieving population stabilization. Thus the feminist critique of the program of action of the ICPD is that, it merely replaced population control with "population stabilization". And it was also argued that, reproductive choice, referred in the agenda was confined to a range of contraceptive devices that a "free" woman is supposed to be "empowered" to choose from (Rao: 2004)[7]. The declaration does not actually challenge the need for population policies but aims at restructuring the way in which these policies have been formulated. In spite of this critique, the ICPD can be seen as an achievement in a way that it emphasised these issues, because it was as a result of long years of struggle that these issues were brought to the fore in the debates at this political level.

Though the term "reproductive rights" has its origin in the western feminist movement, there were many indigenous movements in countries of Latin America, Africa and Asia, some influenced by the movement in the west and

---

[6] Petchesky,R, *op.cit.*

[7] Rao, Mohan (2004): "Cairo and After, Flip Flops on Population Policy", in Rao (ed), *"The Unheard Scream,Reproductive Health and Women's Lives in India"*, Zubaan, New Delhi.

others not so, which had women's issues on their agendas. There *were campaigns,* against the testing of the contraceptives among the women of the Third World, for women's rights, etc. (Petchesky: 1998)[8].

The feminist movement and the issues of autonomy and reproductive rights

Within the feminist movement, there were different views regarding the reproductive rights of women. Feminist movement in the west can be traced back to the late of 19th century, when women started fighting for equal rights. In those times this struggle was as a part of the wider struggle for liberty, equality and freedom and a necessary interdependence of women's movement and socialist movement was emphasized. The socialist feminists saw the unequal status of women being rooted in the capitalist system; their reproductive capacities they argued, helped sustain the capitalist system by producing labour. They thus saw the need for women's right to control their own bodies and access to birth control, which was then banned as one of the elements in their larger struggle for democratic rights which would be ushered in by socialism. It was in this context of the women's struggle that they favoured birth control.

But in the initial stage of the women's movement, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, birth control as an issue did not receive much emphasis. The emphasis here was on equal rights for women. The suffragists' main goal was to convince a substantial majority of male legislators that giving women the vote was a wise social policy. In the cultural climate of the early twentieth century, this could best be done by depicting women as strong upholders of traditional values whose presence in the voting booth would lend support for moral renewal. At this time not advancing rights agenda was thought to be the wisest feminist tactic. Thus the common ground for feminists of that day was that of suffrage and not women's right to control their reproduction, as it is today.

Margaret Sanger, an American nurse, forged the birth control movement in 1920s. It was led by middleclass women, aimed at procuring for doctors the legal right to

---

[8] Petchesky, R, op.cit.

distribute contraceptives to women. As it was difficult to gain political support, alliances were made with the Neo-Malthusians and the eugenics', based on the common ground, controlling births, though the underlying intentions differed. These alliances did undergo shifts over time, through different phases. In the initial phases it was the eugenics movement that was of greater utility for Sanger's birth control movement than her alliance with the Neo-Malthusians. Both the movements had the goal of increasing the access of the lower classes to birth control. "Eugenists thought themselves lucky to have an ally which could market birth control as a way to better health and wellbeing, not as a preventive for race degradation, and Sanger much appreciated the prestige and scientific credentials that eugenists brought to her cause of convincing the public of the need to legalize access to birth control" (Hodson and Watkins: 1997, pp: 477)[9]. Together they initiated the Birth Control movement in the early twentieth centuries.

The Neo-Malthusians' treated women's high fertility as the cause of poverty and raised alarm of a possible crisis, due to over population. And simultaneously they even put forward the notion that the poor breed more and so would consume more resources, thus causing a threat to the survival of the rich. This was not just the view regarding the poor of their country but across countries. And thus controlling women's fertility was thought to be an issue that needed immediate concern. The focus was soon on the populations of the Third World, apart from the disadvantaged groups of their own countries, as they were experiencing high growth rates of population. Although the Neo-Malthusian movement pointed to the link between numerous progeny and poverty, the eugenics movement with its interest in shaping population processes to achieve a desirable population composition was far more influential. And eugenics without birth control was considered as building a house on sands.

In the 1960s started the second wave of feminism. The revived feminist movement was a part of an efflorescence of "new social movements", such as the civil rights movement and the protests against the war in Vietnam. Liberal and radical feminists had distinct agendas, assessed the extent of women's subjugation

---

[9] Hodgson and Watkins, *op.cit.*

differently. Reproductive control fit well with the agendas of liberal feminists. Primarily concerned with domestic issues, their goal was to achieve equality for women in the workplace. They considered the support for birth control to be essential. It was in 1965 with the Supreme Court's decision over *Griswold v. Connecticut,* that finally married people were approved of constitutionally protected right to contraception. Eight years later the court in Roe v. Wade dramatically expanded birth control rights to include abortion (Hodgson and Watkins: 1997)[10].

In the decade following the Roe v. Wade the right to life movement emerged in the United States and gained political strength. It successfully lobbied for the ban of federal funding of abortions. The Equal Rights Amendment was not passed in a number of states. So defending a woman's right to abortion became the unified goal of the feminists. For the first time American feminism had a core agenda that focussed on a reproductive issue. The extended engagement with the Neo-Malthusians was made likely for the pursuit of this agenda in the international arena. The term "reproductive rights" began to be used, primarily in liberal feminist circles in Europe and United States, during the 1980s. The aim was to broaden the 1970s' demands for rights to safe and legal abortion to encompass women's rights to control their bodies in all matters of reproduction. It included access to contraception and also freedom from coercion.

The radical feminists suspected the intentions behind the population control strategies, though they were not opposed to the idea of birth control, as being targeted at the weaker sections of the population. The Neo-Malthusian movements' interest in lowering the fertility of the world's poor women of colour raised questions; black organisations viewed population control with suspicion, the more radical of them considered it a genocide. Over a period of time even the Third World leaders questioned the motives behind First World interest in controlling their women's fertility. During the World Population Conference at Bucharest in 1974, the third world leaders resisted, however, contending that "development is the best contraceptive," and that increasing first world economic

---

[ ] ibid.

7

development aid would be a more welcome population control strategy than simply supporting fertility control programs (Hodgson and Watkins: 1997)[11].

Women and development

At Bucharest the international body supported family planning, but the rationale was that of human rights rather than population control. Despite this kind of an affirmation regarding reproductive autonomy, during the next decade several countries, like India and China, initiated coercive fertility control campaigns. Forced vasectomies in India and one-child norm in China show the association with the Neo-Malthusian views.

Women's autonomy has always been narrowed down to the aspects of reproductive rights and choices. But the wider social and political needs of women and their development and awareness in the various spheres of life was never the prime concern. The emphasis has most often been the control of population. And the approaches to deal with the issue can be differentiated, in Sen's terms, into two- the "override" approach and the "collaborative" approach (Sen, A: 1994)[12]. The "override" view is termed so since in this view the family's personal decisions are overridden by some agency outside the family-typically by the government of the country in question (whether or not it has been pressed to do so by outside agencies). The "collaborative" view contrasts with this in that it relies not on real or economic restrictions but on rational decisions of women and men, based on expanded choices and enhanced security, and encouraged by open dialogue and extensive public discussions. The central political and ethical issue concerning the "override" approach does not lie in its insistence on the need for public policy but in the ways it significantly reduces the choices open to parents.

It was during this period that the women were brought on to the development agenda. The family planning programs were critiqued by the various women's rights activists and health groups for being anti-women and anti-poor. "Of all the

---

[11] Ibid.
[12] Sen, A (1994): "*Population: Delusion and Reality*",
http://finance.sauder.ubc.ca/~bhatta/ArticlesByAmartyaSen/amartya_sen_on_population.html

development, economic, environment or social policies devised by think tanks, implemented by governments and funded by multilateral agencies, population policies tend to be the only ones that primarily focus on women from the outset rather than subsequently tackling on gender-oriented amendments under pressure women's movement" (The Corner House: 2003, pp: 2)[13]. What was seen to be essential was a gender sensitive policy. They were demanding a broader approach for the concept of women's autonomy, which would integrate issues of abortion, contraception, child bearing and sexuality into a larger framework that emphasizes the transformation of state, social, demographic and economic development policies to incorporate women's social and economic rights. The development demanded by the women of South was different from the western paradigm of economic growth (Renu Khanna: 2002)[14]. Instead it was based on a sustainable, equity- oriented model. Southern women's concept of development ensures meeting the basic needs of all and better living standards of the disadvantaged populations. This concept of development recognises the health, well- being and security of people, especially the vulnerable – at home, in the work place, in the community, in the country and the world.

As eminent economist Amartya Sen argues, " population problem is serious, certainly, but neither because of "the proportion between the natural increase of population and food" nor because of some impending apocalypse". Though there are reasons to worry about long term effects of population on growth on the environment, and there are reasons for concern about the adverse effects of high birth rates on quality of life especially of women, " with greater opportunities for education, reduction of mortality rates, improvement in economic security and greater participation of women in employment and in political action, fast reductions in birth rates can be expected to result through the decisions and actions of those whose lives depend on them" (Sen, A: 1994)[15].

---

[13] "A Decade After Cairo", Briefing 30: Women's Health in a Free Market Economy, The Corner House, June 2004.
[14] Khanna, R and Shiva, M (2002): "Introduction", in Khanna, R etal, *Towartds Comprehensive Women's Health Programmes and Policy*", SAHAJ, Gujarat.

[15] Sen, A, *op.cit.*

The ICPD was a turning point for these issues to be brought into the context of policy formulation. The ICPD Programme of Action defined "reproductive rights" as the right of women "to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so" (The Corner House: 2003, pp: 14)[16]. Yet it did not explain, as Rosalind Petchesky points out, how a woman can:

"avail herself of this right if she lacks the financial resources to pay for reproductive health services or the transport to get to them; if she is illiterate or given no information in a language she understands; if her workplace is contaminated with pollutants that have an adverse effect on pregnancy; or if she is harassed by parents, a husband or in-laws who will abuse or beat her if they find out she uses birth control." (Petchesky, R, cited in The Corner House, 2003, pp: 14)[17].

In order to ensure these rights to women, there is need for structural changes in the socio-economic and political context. Apart from safe and effective methods of contraception what women need are healthy working conditions, healthy conditions for child bearing, freedom from violence, disease free sexuality, food security, economic independence, and dignity and respect as human beings. The population policies, which are target driven, do not consider these as vital for women's empowerment and enhancing their autonomy.

In the process of development women have always been reduced to and seen only as consumers of social and economic goods rather than as producers and income-earners. This leads to loss of power and lowering of their status. This led to calls for 'integration' of women into development. It meant only drawing women into unpaid, lowly paid labour leading to further devaluation of their condition. The integration approach came in for criticism as the idea behind was that women were not economically active, nor participating in productive and reproductive work. It did not stem from the idea of improving their position, in fact it meant

---

[16] The Corner House, *op.cit*
[17] ibid.

that women had to fit into existing institutional structures which actually only worsened their situation (Gupta: 2000)[18].

Caroline Moser distinguishes five different approaches to women in development, more or less chronological, though sometimes overlapping. These are:

- Welfare approach – during the 1950s and 60s, when women were perceived mainly as beneficiaries in the development process.

- The equity approach – characteristic of the UN Decade for Women (1975-85). Within this the idea was to bridge the gap between women and men through specific measures within the existing structures

- The anti-poverty approach – this was related to the 'basic needs' strategy. Within this approach women's role as producers in the context of self-sufficiency was emphasized.

- The instrumental approach – based on the integration of women in the development process to strengthen the national economy. This was based on the mistaken premise that women could perform extra work without difficulty, that women's human resource had to be put to better use for national development.

- The empowerment approach – which was a reaction to the earlier approaches that did not take into account the historical power inequalities between into women and men in socio-economic and personal spheres. This approach is based on the view that structural inequalities between sexes can be overcome by strengthening the power base of women (Caroline Moser, cited in Gupta, 2000)[19].

What is evident in these approaches is that none of these approaches address the structural inequalities between the genders. They do not consider the importance of eliminating the gender discrimination that is very deeply rooted in the structures of the society. The Program of Action of the conferences like the ICPD, and others bring out strategies to be implemented in this direction, but the

---

[18] Gupta, Agnihotri , *op.cit.*
[19] Ibid.

responsibility is again left to the existing national and state governments, where the lack of political will is the main obstacle for no improvements in the situation.

Though the program of action of the ICPD emphasizes the concept of women's empowerment, the policies implemented in the following decade by the various Third World countries were detrimental to these concepts of autonomy and empowerment. This was the period of the world recession, which initially was thought to be temporary. The Third World debt crisis, paved the way for the international financial institutions like the World Bank and the IMF to set the agenda for economic policies throughout the world. The World Bank and the IMF took lead in funding these countries, for these countries to be able to build in their national economies to cope with the crisis. This made the debtor countries to abide by the policies of these institutions, as these were the terms and conditions against which the loans were granted. The policies were dominated by the neo-liberal thought, which encouraged the Third World countries to open their markets to the world competition. This was done through the various agreements and programmes- the signing of the WTO agreement, the implementation of the SAPs, to name a few.

These changes in the world scenario cannot be ignored while analysing the aspects of women's autonomy, as these have an enormous impact on women. The neo-liberal policies echoed the principles of laissez-faire; where in the role of the state in economic affairs was to be minimal. The debt crisis of the Third World was attributed to the state control over the economic relations. State was seen as constraining the growth of economic activities. So withdrawal of state support in the economic and welfare arenas was favoured. These cuts in the public sector led to extensive liberalisation of markets. Deregulation of labour markets, fragmentation of production processes, deindustrialization and new areas of export specialization have all generated an increased demand for low-paid, 'flexible' female labour (Afshar and Barrientos: 1999)[20]. Women's work is often insecure, temporary or part-time, with little protection and few fringe benefits. The removal

---

[20] Afshar, Haleh and Barrientos, Stephanie (eds.) (1999): " *Women, Globalization And Fragmentation In The Developing World* ", Macmillan Press Ltd., London.

of state regulations and changing production practices by large companies and trans-national corporations facilitated significant changes in the gender division of labour and increased fragmentation in the process of production. Female labour is increasingly integrated into the global production, but in a fragmented form with contradictory consequences. Women's integration perpetuates their marginalization as an essential element within the new global structures.

These changes happening in the economic front, there would be differential effects on men and women with respect to employment opportunities. As Krishnaraj sees it, there can simultaneously be four effects on women: retention in declining occupations, exclusion from new jobs, selective induction in some new lines and reorganizing production in the unorganised sector (Krishnaraj: 1998)[21].

In the export-oriented feminized sectors the entire wage structure may be dragged down. For example in Bangladesh, the wage levels in garment industries are generally lower than those in the rest of the manufacturing sector due to the absence of collective bargaining arrangements and social mechanisms for the enforcement of the national minimum wage (Bhattacharya and Rahman, 1998 cited in Razavi: 2000)[22].

Their implications for female poverty, status and fertility need analysis. Household based work for women may have little effect on fertility, factory work for young unmarried females may lower fertility and migration of males may cause female poverty.

Apart from the SAPs implemented with regard to the country's economy, the other arena of interest for these institutions was that of health. The World Bank's 1993 World Development Report, *Investing in Health*, the Bank's most comprehensive document regarding the health sector, openly advocated one limited and under-funded health care system for the poor, and another high-tech

[21] Krishnaraj,M (1998): " Gender Critique of Economic Theories of Population", in Krishnaraj, M etal, "*Gender Population And Development*",
[22] Razavi,S (2000): "Export Oriented Employment, Poverty and Gender: Contested Accoounts", in Razavi (ed), "*Gender Poverty and Well-being*", Blackwell Publications, Oxford, U.K.

one for those who can pay. It viewed health care not as a need, much less as a right, but as a demand, defined by consumers' ability and willingness to pay (Qadeer, cited in The Corner House: 2003)[23]. Simultaneously there was a shift from the universal, comprehensive primary health care approach, an achievement at the Alma Ata, 1978, to a selective primary health care, which meant a shift to the vertical health programmes. Thus the goal of Health For All was apparently no more on the agenda.

There was a shift in the World Bank's view regarding population and development. The issues of reproductive health and rights were brought to the centre stage. It stressed on enhancing gender equality and rejected the use of incentives and targets in family planning services. It stressed the need for comprehensive reproductive health services, not just provision of family planning methods. These were reflected in the programme of action of the ICPD. But in the following decade the World Bank proposed the introduction of cuts in the public sector investment. Apart from cutting the excesses in the economy, it also suggested the same for the health sector. Out-pocket-expenditure by individuals and families now account for more than half of health care spending in many countries. Families are going into debt, consuming less food or taking girls out of school. One of the most common causes of rural indebtedness is India is now the cost of medical care (Mackintosh, M, in The Corner House: 2003)[24]. Indeed the reduction in the state subsidies to welfare programmes would increase the cost of supporting many children and thus persuade families to adopt family planning. This would require the constitution of new kinds of families within which the notion of individual choice is paramount, calling for a shift from structural development and social equity to behavioural modifications and expanded contraceptive choice (Rao: 2004)[25]. More over putting reproductive health and rights at the centre of population policies has encouraged policy makers to think women only as wombs to the neglect of their wider economic and social roles, and of the conditions that could advance health for women.

---

[23] The Corner House, *op.cit.*

[24] ibid.
[25] Rao, *op.cit.*

Thus, the Cairo document, which welcomed measures of privatisation, and paid little heed to larger macro economic factors shaping health in the world and women's health in particular, undermined itself. It encourages the neo-liberal policies, which not only assume that woman are "outside of development and need to be brought in but it is grounded in a gender ideology, which is deeply and fundamentally exploitative of women's time/work and sexuality" (Corner House: 2003)[26]. Since women tend to be more economically disadvantaged than men in many countries, they also tend to suffer more from Structural Adjustment Programmes and the requirements of bilateral, regional and international neo-liberal trade agreements, such as those of the World Trade Organisation, that reduce their access to food, clean water, sanitation and a decent living.

Women's autonomy is a complex and relative concept. The parameters through which the degree of autonomy can be measured are difficult to determine. There cannot be any one to one relation that can be established between autonomy and elements such as education, employment, fertility etc. The terms 'freedom', 'choice' etc. that are used to define and access autonomy are relative and would further depend on the available alternatives.

When we look at the relationship between schooling and autonomy, the positive impact would be in terms of – ability to influence other's decisions, improve one's fall back position during distress, improve knowledge not necessarily by curriculum but by increasing receptivity to new information. But the education imparted through the existing system does not necessarily make women aware of their rights. More over it reproduces the dominant ideology, by spreading the images of ideal woman-hood. And if a woman needs to be aware of her rights, it is not just the elementary education that is required, but a higher degree, which again is a constraint (Basu: 1996)[27]. More-over frequently education may be encouraged and acquired as merely a status symbol, as a vehicle for woman's marriage and

---

[26] The Corner House, op.cit.
[27] Basu, A (1996): "Girls' Schooling, autonomy and Fertility Change: What do These Words Mean in south Asia", in Jeferry, Roger and Basu, Alka (eds.), *"Girl's Schooling, Women's Autonomy and Fertility Change in South Asia"*, Sage Publications, New Delhi.

employment and economic independence of women may not be encouraged in many cases.

The aspect of autonomy that is focussed in the policy context is in relation to fertility reduction. The belief is that by empowering women through improving their educational and employment levels, their fertility can be controlled. Thus controlling fertility is the end and women's empowerment is treated as a means to this end. Though the approach seems pro-women, it ignores the need to bring about real changes in the gender relations. While women's autonomy may help reduce fertility, reduced fertility need not necessarily imply any increase in autonomy. In Kerala, as Krishnaraj argues, fertility control has been achieved where most women have undergone tubectomies. But this is not to be seen as improving autonomy of women, as women were not provided with alternatives, wherein they could exercise their choice (Krishnaraj, M: 1998)[28].

Thus the socio-economic positioning of women in the society determines the agency, which they exercise as individuals. There are several socio-economic, political, cultural and legal constraints on women's autonomy. Here what becomes important is the issue of various identities, which these women experience and how women's autonomy is influenced by these multiple identities.

Women's autonomy and identity: The Indian context

At a point of time an individual would experience a set of identities, of gender, family, community, caste, class, ethnicity, nationality etc. As Zoya Hasan puts it, "Contending notions of collective identities may exist, one of which may become dominant at one time, while others at other time"(Hasan: 1994, pp: 15)[29]. A woman's identity is very much rooted in her gender and body becomes an important aspect in determining identity, for its reproductive capacities. It is not just an individual woman's identity that gets defined, constructed through her

---

[28] Krishnaraj, M, *op.cit.*
[29] Hasan, Z (1994): "Introduction: Contextualising Gender and identity in Contemporary India", in Hasan (ed), *"Forging Identities"*, Kali for Women, New Delhi.

body but the identities of the social groups to which these women belong to also is constructed on these lines. Her identity as an individual woman becomes constrained due to the various social circumstances in which she lives. The subordinated status of women, pervasive in all the societies, makes gender identity more or less cut across various other identities. But this is not to ignore or undermine the plurality of women's experiences.

Women in the South have difficulty in identifying with the concept of women as 'autonomous' beings, as the term is too narrowly perceived by southern societies as implying looking at women only as sexually autonomous beings, and more like men, or as individuals rather than also as members of a family/community (Gupta: 2000)[30]. More over these concepts are identified with the concept of 'feminism'. The words 'feminism' and 'feminist' have become emotive words that often evoke hostile reactions. Feminism is generally thought of as a recent phenomenon, rooted in western society, and people tend to overlook the fact that the word was in common usage in Europe and elsewhere in the 19th and early 20th centuries, to signify agitation on issues concerning women. The meaning of the word has now been expanded to mean an awareness of women's oppression and exploitation within the family, at work and in society and conscious action by women and men to change this situation. Feminism, in this definition, goes beyond movements for equality and emancipation, which agitate for equal rights and legal reforms to redress the prevailing discrimination against women (Jayawardena: 1994)[31].

The central tenet of radical feminism is that gender inequalities are the outcome of an autonomous system of patriarchy and that gender inequalities are the primary form of social inequality. They also argue that patriarchy is a universal system in which men dominate women. But it has been critiqued for failing to take sufficient account of the different forms that patriarchal relationships have taken in different societies, its tendency to discount the differences that exist in the experiences of

---

[30] Gupta, op.cit.

[31] Jayawardena, K (1994): "Feminism and Nationalism in The Third World", ASR Publications, Lahor, Pakistan.

women from different social classes (Abbott et.al, cited in Akerkar, S: 1995)[32]. Women cannot be treated as a uniform category. For this there is a need to understand that the category 'women' is an imaginary one. This way there would be a possibility of identifying the politics of difference in the construction of the category of 'women', and then look at the need for a plurality in the approaches to autonomy and empowerment. And the definition and understanding of these concepts should be rooted in the specific contexts in which women live. Until the local contexts and the ways in which women negotiate these concepts in their everyday lives are understood, one cannot assume what these issues mean to them. These concepts would have differing meanings for women according to their age, place in the life cycle, marital status, economic conditions, religious and ethnic identity or other social circumstances.

In the Indian context, the women's movement can be traced back to the period of the Indian national movement. The issue of women's emancipation in India under British rule was closely linked with two important movements: one, a political movement of challenge and resistance to imperialism, and the other, a social movement to reform traditional structures. The status of women has varied across different social entities of class, caste, religion and ethnicity. But the situation in general was that of subordination to the bounds of the patriarchal system. Whether a woman belonged to a peasant family or to a high caste family, she was the victim of a set of values that demanded implicit obedience to male domination, and to many other social practices that circumscribed her life (Jayawardena: 1994)[33].

There were attempts to emancipate women's position through the social reform movement. The issues that were addressed by this movement were that of child marriage, widow remarriage, women's education, sati, and etc. but the revealing aspect is the essential conservatism of what on the surface seemed like radical change. While encouraging female education, abolishing sati and mobilizing women for *satyagraha*, the movement gave the illusion of change while women

---

[32] Supriya, Akerkar (1995): "Theory and practice of women's movement in India: A discourse analysis", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Apr 29th,vol.30, no.17, pp: ws-2 – ws-22.
[33] Jayawardena, *op.cit.*

were kept within the structural confines of family and society. Revolutionary alternatives or radical social changes affecting women's lives did not become an essential part of the demands of the nationalist movement at any stage of the long struggle for independence, and a revolutionary feminist consciousness did not arise within the movement for national liberation (Jayawardena: 1994)[34].

At the time of independence, there was an attempt to build up a specific construction of India – India, which was an imagined community of millions of people. This attempt was challenged from many sides, by other movements by peasants, dalits, etc. These movements provided counter narratives for the nationalist movement. In this situation the creation of an imagined community was to be accompanied by a sense of history for this community. The women's question acquired a new dimension in this nationalist discourse since the nation's identity lay in its culture and specifically in its womanhood. Thus a selective construction of the past also established contexts for particular constructions of womanhood based on high caste women. It is within this framework of 'transformed womanhood' that women took part in the nationalist struggle. The nationalist struggle brought women out of their homes and was symbolic of the women's movement in the pre-independence times.

But there were simultaneously movements which provided counter discourses for this construction of womanhood. The anti-caste movement led by Phule, developed an image of womanhood based on identities and symbols of low caste dalits and peasants. Within this alternative framework women resisted their oppression and developed a new self-identity (Akerkar: 1995)[35]. This suggests that there are various perceptions about women's oppression and ways to overcome them. Thus, there cannot be merely one way of locating women's oppression in the Indian context.

---

[34] ibid.
[35] Akerkar, *op.cit.*

Women and Politics of Identity in India

By the end of 20th century, notions of sharply delineated and mutually opposed religious communities entered the political arena. The political self-image of the community as threatened and weakened was projected. So there were rigorous efforts to consolidate the identities. The inclusion of lower castes into the community was also a part of these efforts, not to lose numbers, as numbers would help in asserting identities. This kind of a militant Hindu chauvinism used women of their community as a political resource. " In this agenda the upper caste woman acquired a three fold importance – par excellence, the object of Muslim design, the personification of vulnerable community and Hindu nation" (Sarkar, T: 1999)[36]. Endangered woman has always been a political weapon for violent mobilization, which has been a tradition till this day.

The Hindu community was seen as dying because of Muslim out breeding. This led to the anxiety about the Hindu female body and its capacity for bearing strong and heroic sons, the protectors of the community. Women were to be taught the intentions of the new politics, so that they can teach it to their children. But women were not familiarised with the texts themselves (Sarkar: 1999)[37]. The conservative values always prevailed. Though women were accorded some form of agency, the traditional values of womanhood were more strongly grounded. What the nation wanted was good mothers, good wives, to carry forward the traditional and cultural values. "By bearing legitimate children for their husbands and their community, mothers preserve the 'racial' purity of the community. Through child rearing, mothers may hold prime responsibility for the crucial ideological role of transmitting the community's "authentic" culture"(Jeffery: 1999, p225)[38]. This could provide women with a kind of moral affirmation wherein women can derive a sense of social worth. Involvement in politicised religion may also enable women to work with others beyond the immediate family, and to develop self-confidence and a sense of empowerment.

---

[36] Sarkar, T (1999): "Women, Community and Nation: A Historical Trajectory for Hindu Identity Politics", in Jeffery et.al, "Resisting The Sacred and The Secular", Kali for Women, New Delhi.
[37] ibid.

[38] Jeferry, P (1999): "Agency Activism and Agendas", in Jeferry, P etal, "Resisting The Sacred And The Secular: Women's activism an Politicised Religion in South Asia", Kali for Women, New Delhi.

Societies, whose social values derive sanctity from and whose discourse of power is rooted in women's complete subjugation to men, tend to turn women into inanimate symbols or carriers of social honour, often even into embodiments of the sovereignty of the state (Agarwal, P: 1999)[39]. The construction of women as a symbol of national honour and sovereignty of the state becomes very clear in the Indian State's response to the problems of women abducted during the partition riots of 1947. The government's policies were formulated with a view to retrieve the 'national honour' and not with the perspective of woman as an individual who could have a say in her own destiny. The women who had been taken away by the 'other' community had to be brought back to their 'own' homeland- the concept of belonging and otherness were defined for women by the men of the respective countries. They themselves did not have a choice (Butalia, U: 2000)[40].

This construction of womanhood will have a limiting impact on the autonomy and identity of women of the respective communities. The individual identities get submerged with the identity of the community. Religious ideology and leadership legitimise the patriarchal practices. They play a crucial role in the construction of the identity of the minorities. With more specificity, commitments to the personal laws are seen to distinguish Muslims from others. This is designed to hegemonise the Muslim community through a set of common religious symbols. From the women's stand point the difficulty lies in constantly emphasising on the unity of community identity, defined in terms of family codes, which restricts the articulation of gender interests within the terms of reference set by a specific identity discourse: what ever rights they might have achieved are thus sacrificed at the cost of "Muslim Identity".

Muslims in India: Social-economic, Demographic Profile

Thirty five per cent of rural Muslims are landless, and in contrast twenty five per cent of Hindus are. Less than one of every ten teenaged Muslim girls goes to school, one of four adult Muslim women works. They are the minority within a

---
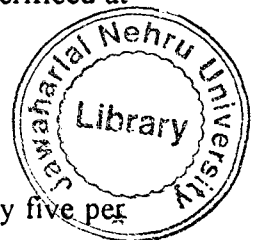
[39] Agarwal, P (1999): "Savarkar, Surat and Daraupadi: Legitimising Rape as a Political Weapon", in Sarkar, T etal, "*Women and The hindu Right*",

[40] Butalia, U (2000): "community, State and Gender: Some Reflections on the Partition of India", in Hasan, M (ed), "*inventing Boundaries, gender Politics and the Partition of India*", OUP, New Delhi.

21

minority. Forty nine per cent of Muslims are literate, as per a 1999 NCAER survey. Sixty per cent of urban Muslim women can't read and write. Four per cent of class tenth examinees are likely to be Muslim. A government report on minority uplift in 1993 made a crucial point: "at the elementary level the participation of Muslims in schooling is closer to their proportion of the population, however, this decreases at the higher level of schooling as well as for professional courses". Some argue that the problem lies with the community desire to "opt out" from the "main stream". This gives the assumption that Muslims prefer to educate from their community run schools alone. But statistics show that even in Muslim managed educational institutions the number of non-Muslim students rises up as one goes up the learning curve. At the primary level, the number of non-Muslim in a Muslim-run school is 3.7 per cent. By middle school, it goes up to 15.1 per cent, by high school to 36.7 per cent. In colleges run by Muslim trusts, the community finds itself in a minority: a massive 59 per cent of the students are non-Muslim.

The reassertion of Muslim identity in India needs to be seen in both the Indian and the international contexts. Certain factors are common to all the caste and community groups while some are specific to each caste and community group. And neither is this reassertion a purely religious or ethnic phenomenon nor is it purely economic and political in nature. Hindu and Muslim masses were far more integrated both culturally and linguistically, and their sense of a separate identity was far more diffused. Their religious identities were also not very sharply defined, especially in rural and semi-rural areas. Many of their cultural symbols, including their modes of dressing, lifecycle rituals were very similar.

The identity of the minority community is always put to question and their loyalty to the state is expected to be proved each time there is a situation of communal flare up. During the partition time, a section of the Hindu nationalist press in India observed that Pakistan was on its way to establishing an 'ekjatiya rashtra', (literally a one-nation nation), and lamented that India might never be able to achieve the same kind of 'untity' and in the post partition period in India, the question remained as to whether a Muslim can really be an Indian (Pandey, G:

2001)[41]. The instances in India and abroad, in the post '9/11' attacks, are evidences of this kind of a situation where in a community is marked as being aggressive, fundamentalist and treated on par with a terrorist out-fit. This kind of distrust, with which the community is treated, results in the aggravated beleaguered feelings and feelings of being under seize, under constant threat from the majority.

In the politically heated atmosphere when identities are getting consolidated, communal identities cut across the gender identity. For their reproductive capacities women are seen as the transmitters of group values and traditions. When group identity becomes intensified and when there is a feeling of defensiveness, women are controlled, as women are seen as communities and nations personified. In the aftermath of the riots, women don not have a separate existence away from their communal identity. They are not left with a common platform apart from that of the community, where legal issues can be seen on a common platform. Women are constituted in and through communal identity, and conversely, community is constituted in and through women's gender identity (Kapur, R and Cossman, B: , in Sarkar, T and Butalia, U)[42]. Thus women's place in the home and in the family is lauded. The ideologically constructed figures are that of woman as a wife and a mother. That is why it is thought to be necessary to establish an appropriate role for women. And women's dress and behaviour become so important to be defined. This is the case with Indian Muslims, where in the spread of the Hindutva ideology, viewing Muslims as 'the other', Muslim women experience more constraints on their personal behaviour and social mobility. As KPM.Basheer, in his study on the Muslim community of Malappuram notices, in the post Babri Masjid scenario, the community responded with an attempt to "go back to the Muslim roots and traditions" in order to strengthen the communal identity. Strictly following the "Muslim way of life", was a direct reaction of a community feeling increasingly beleaguered. While

---

[41] Pandey, G (2001): "Citizenship and Difference: The Muslim Question in India", in Mushirul hasan (ed) "The Unfinished Agenda: Nation Building in South asia", Manohar Publications, New Delhi.
[42] Kapur, R and Cossman, B (1995): "Communalising Gender and Engendering Communities: Women, Legal Discourse and the Saffron Agenda", in Sarkar, T atal, "Woman and The Hindu Right". Kali for Women, New Delhi.

more and more men began attending the Friday group prayers at the masjid, and more and more young men now took to sporting beards and caps, women were pressured to wear the purdah. Purdah has since been identified as "the Muslim woman's dress" though Keralan Muslim women had rarely worn it before (Basheer, KPM: 2004)[43].

The coming up of the Islamic-English schools in places like Bombay is also a way of asserting religious and communal identity. This is as a result of the discrimination that these communities face. The kind of hostile feelings between the communities are on a high due to the recurrence of instances of communal conflict.

The debates on the uniform civil code also show this kind of an effort to consolidate identity. As the community could not retain its specific identity in any other realm, the reform of personal laws is strongly opposed as to retain power at least in this arena. Accepting a uniform civil code is seen as giving into the majority's ideology. One reason for the opposition, fro within the community, for reform of personal laws is that this would relax the control, which men of the community would have on their women, another being the sense of defeat as against the dominant community. Controlling women of the community is a means to preserve the cultural identity. The Shah Bano case, which derived much attention, was not much about the individual woman's autonomy and rights, as it was about the secular nature of the state and the rights of the community to preserve its own autonomy and identity. (Hasan Zoya: 1994)[44].

The intensification of communalism, accompanied by the increased use of religious idiom and symbols in civil society by the Hindu right wing, has strengthened the tendency to delineate and highlight the contours and salient features of minority identity. In the case of Muslims, it finds expression in maintaining the status quo on personal law, defending places of worship and promoting Urdu. The role of government is central to many of these debates. In

---

[43] Basheer, KPM, (2004): "The Gulf Wife Syndrome", in Rao (ed), "*The Unheard Scream*", Zubaan, New Delhi.
[44] Hasan, Z, *Op.cit.*

24

the case of the Supreme Court judgement on Shah Bano's plea for maintenance, the government assumed that the ulema and the Muslim political leadership represented in the All India Muslim Personal Law Board, were the sole arbiters of Muslim interests. Liberal and progressive views within the community were ignored, allowing the ulema to appropriate the task of defining the overarching concerns and interests of Muslims. It was not acknowledged that the interpretations by the ulema were neither final nor irrevocable; there were other trends of thought, other interpretations which the government chose to disregard. Part of the reason why this was so was because the government itself shared the underlying assumption that there exists a clear equation between law and community identity. In such case there is no place for the understanding that community identity is itself to be understood as a function of social and material circumstances (Akil Bilgrami: 1993, in Hasan Zoya: 1994)[45].

Development and Issues of Group Identity

Communal conflict in a changing and developing society is often caused by renegotiating of inter-communal status. It is also caused by economic and social factors which apparently pit communities against each other, especially the process of globalization and the implementation of the neo-liberal policies, leading to trade liberalisation and deregulation of markets has led to sharpening of community identities. When a section of population lags behind in the process or is marginalized, it tends to adhere more to its religious and ethnic identities (Engineer, A: 1995)[46].

In India, the Muslims were by and large left out in the process of development which created a large middle class comprising primarily upper caste Hindus. The consequences of this maladjustment or losing out in the process of development are very complex. On the one hand, the community which loses out, finds no incentive to modernise and clings much more severely to its primordial identity. On the other, this produces a reaction among other communities, especially the

---

[45] ibid.
[46] Engineer, A (1995): "*Lifting The Veil: Communal Violence and Communal Harmony in Contemporary India*", Sangam Books, Hyderabad.

majority community. The minority community is perceived as 'fanatical' and highly 'communal' for stressing its primordial identity.

The majority community, on the other hand, raises slogans of its own religion being in danger and spreads propaganda among members of its own community that they must consolidate their ranks, promote their own unity in order to meet the threat of minority aggression against them. In the Indian case, the RSS, the VHP and other similar organisations have been carrying on propaganda of this kind very systematically. It has its effects on the members of the majority community. These fights are carried on under some symbols. The Shah Bano case and the Ramjanambhoomi-Babri masjid agitation provide such symbols (Engineer, A: 1995)[47].

Another dimension of the development process is that the transformation of the social structure hurts medieval traditions and religious practices. This creates psychological stress. It also hits collective values and encourages individualisation. Thus there begins to grow a sense of alienation. This psychological stress is sought to be compensated by emphasising a revival of religious primordial traditions. This is why one witnesses the growing trend towards fundamentalism in various countries.

Identity, Autonomy and Accessibility

As has been discussed in the previous sections, these identities are constructed categories, which get reconstructed and reconstituted according to the social circumstances. Identity determines an individual's being and belonging. This in turn determines one's social positioning and thus has an enormous impact on the autonomy, social opportunities and accessibility to services.

Women are key to the *izzat* (honour) of their families, and casting slurs on another man's womenfolk or subjecting them to sexual harassment are means through which males compete for dominance. Women regularly experience

---

Ibid.

controls over their mobility and demeanour that structure their experiences of the world beyond their homes, including their access to state services such as health, schooling and employment. The Jeffery's study conducted in four districts of Bijnor district (U.P) shows the impact which communal identity has over the autonomy and accessibility of individuals and more crucially on women of the community. In the four villages the situation studied shows that despite scarcity of resources, there is a difference in the accessibility to resources between communities. It was seen that only about thirty percent of the primary school age children were attending state primary school and roughly forty percent were attending no school at all. Facilities in the state primary schools are meagre, teachers are often not regular in their attendance and teaching is sporadic. Panchayats, which are wealthy and are well connected with land holding groups, are most able to bid for government support, for instance, by donating land on which a school can be built. Within villages such groups vie for schools to be located within their own controlled space. Generally few Muslim villages or Muslim or scheduled caste muhallas in large multicaste villages have government primary schools. Where they do exist, they are smaller, have fewer teachers and serve a larger population. This communal bias affects accessibility and thereby school attendance. Children straying into territory dominated by other castes or communities feel vulnerable to physical attacks. The presence of dalit students in all the government schools in the research area show that such considerations do not prevent their attendance. But that is not the case with the Muslim community. The low levels of Muslim attendance suggest much stronger inhibitions for Muslim children. The location of schools also has gender implications because of gender differences in mobility. For girls any public space apart from home is a foreign territory. Unless accompanied by a male member of the family, a girl may be fair game for sexual harassment by boys from not just the other community but also their own community (Jeffery, p and Jeffery, R: 1999)[48].

The influence of the identity issues on the accessibility will lead to a further lowering of the socio-economic status of the community. Due to the

---

[48] Jeffery, p and Jefery, R (1999): " Gender, Community and the Local State in Bijnor", in Sarkar etal, *op.cit.*

27

discrimination, which the members of the oppressed community experience, there would be enormous hurdles in for example, attaining higher educational levels. And the minimum education which they attain will not equip them with the required skills to get into higher professional employment levels, thus pushing them back into informal sector. The study in the district of Bijnor shows this kind of an attitude held by the local Muslim community as against the dominant group, the Jats. Data also reveals the minuscule inclusion of Muslims in formal sector employment both in the private and public sectors.

When issues of identity have such a deep influence on the community as a whole, the impact of them on the women of these communities can be profound. Thus while looking at autonomy these wider issues provide the context in which it gets defined and exercised.

Thus any study on autonomy and the agency of women is to be placed in the context in which women live. In other words, the everyday life experiences of women should be studied, along with the constraints that shape them. The present study is an attempt to analyse the impact of the various identities, that women experience, on the autonomy of women, considering their everyday experiences within the broader socio-political scenario. It is to look at autonomy not just in the sphere of reproduction, but giving centrality to the element of individual autonomy in the wider social context.

discrimination, which the members of the oppressed community experience, there would be enormous hurdles in for example, attaining higher educational levels. And the minimum education which they attain will not equip them with the required skills to get into higher professional employment levels, thus pushing them back into informal sector. The study in the district of Bijnor shows this kind of an attitude held by the local Muslim community as against the dominant group, the Jats. Data also reveals the minuscule inclusion of Muslims in formal sector employment both in the private and public sectors.

When issues of identity have such a deep influence on the community as a whole, the impact of them on the women of these communities can be profound. Thus while looking at autonomy these wider issues provide the context in which it gets defined and exercised.

Thus any study on autonomy and the agency of women is to be placed in the context in which women live. In other words, the everyday life experiences of women should be studied, along with the constraints that shape them. The present study is an attempt to analyse the impact of the various identities, that women experience, on the autonomy of women, considering their everyday experiences within the broader socio-political scenario. It is to look at autonomy not just in the sphere of reproduction, but giving centrality to the element of individual autonomy in the wider social context.

Chapter two

Physical, Social Space And Consolidation Of Identity

The focus of the study is the impact of identity issues on women's autonomy and the sample taken is Muslim women. The study was conducted in the Old City of Hyderabad where the Muslim population is concentrated. It was conducted in five different communities in the area. Three were solely Muslim communities and two were mixed communities. It is an ethnographic study based on narratives and interactions with the members of the community. The sampling used was purposive. Respondents were chosen using the snowball technique. The sample consisted of seventeen respondents and their families.

The study obviously has limitations. In the first place, it is a small qualitative study. The observations made in the course of the study and conclusions drawn therefore cannot obviously be generalized. The sample size is neither large enough nor representative. Furthermore, even if I had a large sample randomly selected I do not believe I would have understood the complexities of the situation entirely. And not necessarily because I' am a Hindu woman. Respondents from different socio-economic background could not be chosen due to constraints in accessibility. Thus the sample is not representative of the Muslim community belonging to the study area as a whole. It is not a comparative study of communities in any aspect. Access to the community was possible through an NGO working in the area. This was one of the reasons for not being able to have respondents from different backgrounds, as access was confined to the localities in which the NGO was functioning.

The issues of construction of identity may not have come out clearly from the narratives. Women's social interactions are very limited, as their mobility is very constrained, especially in the case of Muslim women. Further, at the time of the field work, the atmosphere was communally surcharged. This both restricted access to the area, and no doubt introduced more barriers than under more "normal" circumstances, if indeed these exist in the area.

A Brief Note about History of Hyderabad

The city of Hyderabad, capital of Andhra Pradesh, is the fifth largest city in India Hyderabad was founded on the River Musi five miles east of Golconda, in 1591-92 by the Shia King of Golconda, Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah. In the 16th century the city grew to accommodate the population spilling over from Golconda, the flourishing capital of the Qutb Shahi rulers. Many buildings sprang up along the River Musi, as the city gradually grew.

It is famous for its beautiful monuments, palaces, minarets, bazaars, hills and lakes. It is perched on the top of the Deccan Plateau, 1776ft., above sea level, and sprawls over an area of 100 Sq. miles. A multitude of influences have shaped the character of the city. Its palaces and buildings, houses and tenements, gardens and streets have a history and an architectural individuality of their own, which makes Hyderabad a city of enchantment.

The Qutb Shahi dynasty founded the Kingdom of Golconda, one of the five kingdoms that emerged after the break up of the Bahamani Kingdom. The Qutb Shahis ruled the Deccan for almost 171 years. All the seven rulers were patrons of learning and were great builders. They contributed to the growth and development of Indo-Persian and Indo-Islamic literature and culture in Hyderabad. During the Qutb Shahi reign Golconda became one of the leading markets in the world of diamonds, pearls, spices, steel for arms, and also printed fabric. It was known throughout the world not only for its riches, but also for its cosmopolitanism, its learning and sophistication. It was a place, par exemplar, of the fruitful mixing of communities, enriching all of them, even as a syncretic Hindu-Muslim culture evolved. Merchants from all over the world came to settle here, as trade flourished, and Hyderabad came to be known as yet another pearl in the Orient. More than symbolically, the Kohinoor diamond, was mined at Golconda and belonged originally to the Kingdom of Hyderabad. It is of course now the jewel in the British crown.

The glory of the Golconda kingdom ended in 1687, after a valiant struggle. Aurangzeb, the last great Mughal ruler, captured Golconda after a siege that lasted eight months. Abul Hasan Tana Shah, the last king of Golconda, was imprisoned at Daulatabad, where he died after twelve years in captivity.

With the conquest of the Deccan, Aurangzeb succeeded in expanding the Mughal Empire to cover almost the entire sub-continent. However, after his death in 1707, the Empire rapidly declined.

At that time, the Deccan was administered by a Subedar or viceroy of the Mughal Emperor. Mir Quamaruddin, the Governor of the Deccan, who bore the title of Nizam-ul-Mulk Feroze Jung Asif Jah, declared his independence from Mughal rule in 1724. He thus became the first Nizam and the founder of the Asif Jahi dynasty.

Asif Jah I continued to maintain Aurangabad, which had been founded by the Mughal rulers as the capital of his new state. In 1769, Nizam Ali Khan Asif Jah II, shifted the capital to Hyderabad. The seven Nizam's of the Asif Jahi dynasty ruled the Deccan for nearly 224 years, right up to 1948.

During the Asif Jahi period, Persian, Urdu, Telugu and Marathi developed simultaneously. The highest official positions were given to deserving persons irrespective of their religion. Persian was the official language up to 1893 and then Urdu up to 1948.

When the British and the French spread their hold over the country, the Nizam soon won their friendship without bequeathing his power. The title "Faithful Ally of the British Government" was bestowed on Nizam VII. The British stationed a Resident at Hyderabad, but the state continued to be ruled by the Nizam.

The rule of the seven Nizam's saw the growth of Hyderabad both culturally and economically. Huge reservoirs, like the Nizam Sagar, Tungabadra, Osman Sagar, Himayath Sagar, and others were built. Survey work on Nagarjuna Sagar had also begun during this time[49].

Hyderabad, under the Nizam's, was the largest princely state in India. Area wise it was as big as England and Scotland put together. The State had its own currency, mint, railways, and postal system.

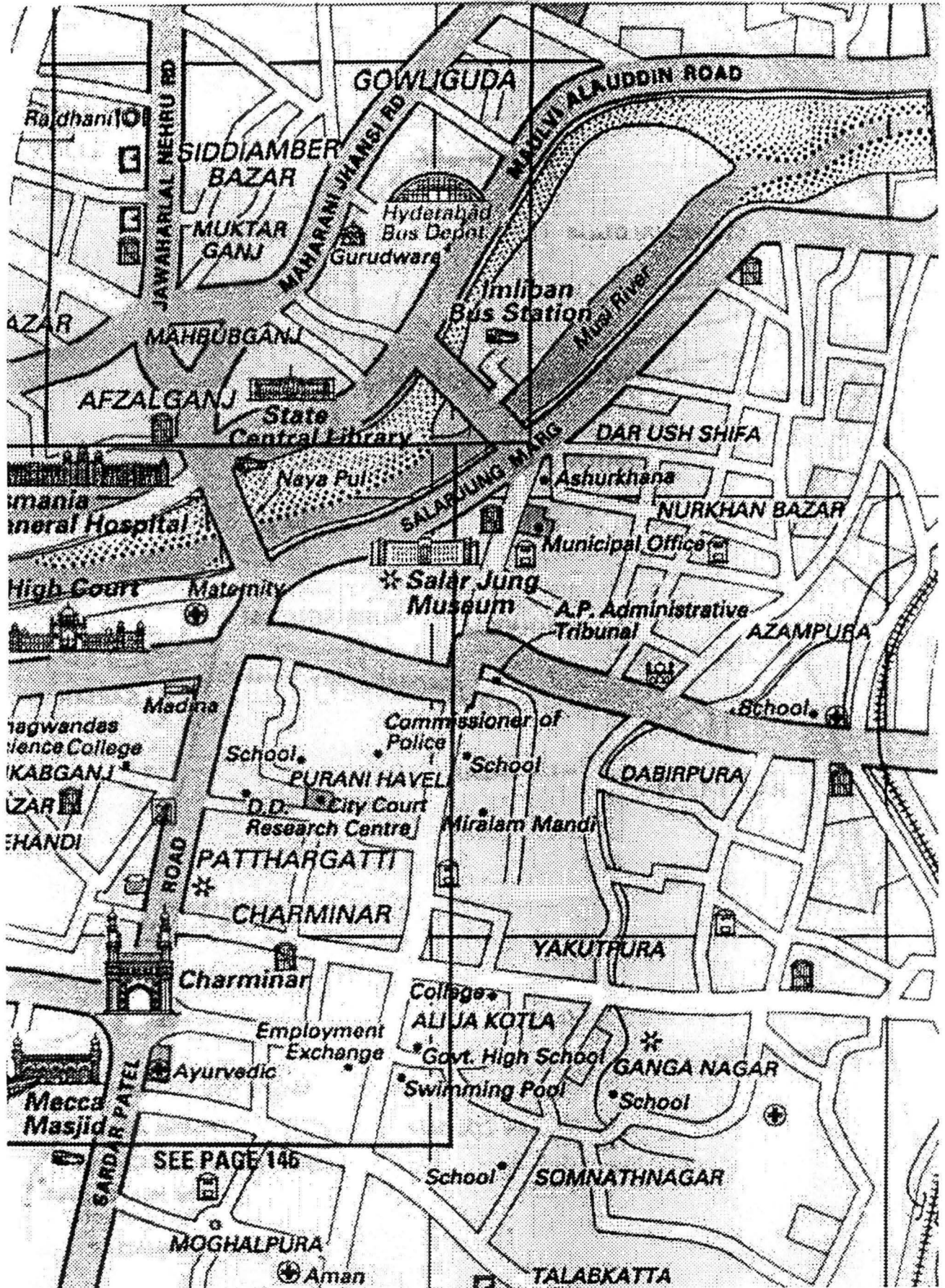’ Alikhan, Raza, “*Hyderabad, A City in History*”, www.hyderabad.co.uk.

Soon after India gained independence, Hyderabad State merged with the Union of India. On November 1, 1956 the map of India was redrawn into linguistic states, and Hyderabad became the capital of Andhra Pradesh.

Hyderabad over these periods of rule by different dynasties has acquired a culture of its own. It attracted people from different linguistic provinces.

The Old City of Hyderabad

The city of Hyderabad can be roughly divided into four parts: The area south of the Musi, the original Hyderabad, is what is referred to as the Old City or shehar (city) by the populace. It is also called the 'walled city'. Its nucleus is the Charminar, a famed landmark and the symbol of the city. The Charminar is an imposing monument, which reflects the glory of the Qutub Shahi dynasty. It is surrounded by bazaars, overcrowded and carries with it the flavor of Hyderabad. The new city is the rest of the city of Hyderabad stretching on the northern bank of Musi. The third part is the original contonement area of the British, later developed into the present-day Secunderabad. The fourth part comprises the old Golconda area, which is increasingly merging with the expanding metropolis of Hyderabad.

The Old City is physically cut off from the rest of the city, by the river Musi. It is the purana and the naya pul, which connect the two parts of the city - the old and the new. This part of the city was earlier surrounded by a wall, traces of which still remain. This was first damaged by the Musi river flood of 1908. The remaining parts were pulled down for traffic improvements. This part of the city, as the name walled city suggests, is a world in itself for the resident population. It is a self-sufficient physical body, with all the civic amenities needed to cater to the needs of its people. As it was the original city centre during the ancient days, it has retained these features. This leaves the people from this part of the city confined to it physically, as scope for a need to venture out is constrained. It has public institutions like hospitals, schools and colleges etc. There are two public hospitals- the Osmania Government General Hospital, the Charminar Hospital and many private nursing homes and dispensaries. There are both English and Urdu

KEY TO MAPS

Scale: 1 : 220,000 (1 cm - 2.2 Km)

Jidimetla Tank

To Metlak

To Nizamabad

To Siddipet

BOLARAM

JIDIMETLA

Bombay

KUKATPALLI

N.H.No.7

150 •Rashtrapati 151
ALWAL   Nilayam

SAINIKPURI

148   149

154   155 152
BOWANPALLI   RAMAKRISHNAPURAM

N.H.No.9

147
BALANAGAR   BOWANPALLI BAZAR

SAFILGUDA

BOLARUM ROAD

MAULA A

156   157

N.H.No.7

SANAT
NAGAR

LAKSHMINAGAR

158   159 160
JBS   MALKAJIGIRI

MAULA ALI ROAD

To Kazi

BEGUMPET S.P. ROAD

NEHRUNAGAR

SECUNDERABAD LALAPET

JUBILEE HILLS

161
AMIRPET

PRAKASH
NAGAR

162 Sanjivayya Park 163

•Secunderabad R.S.

SITAPHALMANDI   TARNAKA

PANJAGUTTA

Husain Sagar

164   165 184 IICT

BANJARA HILLS

NIMS

Buddha
Statue

MUSHIRABAD

•CCMB

Raj Bhavan

170   171

KHAIRTABAD

•Indira Park

Osmania
University

University Road

HAKIMPET

Secretariat•

168   169

VIDYANAGAR

To Warang

•Shankar Math

UPP

LAKDIKAPUL

Birla Mandir

HIMAYATNAGAR

166   167
NALLAKUNTA

Tombs 173

Legislative Assembly

L.B.
Stadium

AMBARPET

2

MEHDIPATNAM

NAMPALLY

Hyderabad R.S.

Golconda
Fort

174   175

LANGAR
HOUSE

ABIDS

Kachiguda R.S.

Musi River

HYDERABAD KACHIGUDA

176   177

CBS•

•Race Course

Osmania Hospital

MALAKPET

DILSUKHNAGAR

KARVAN

AFZALGANJ

178   179

High Court

Salarjung
Museum

CHANCHALGUDA

SAIDABAD SARURNAGAR

182   183

Mecca Masjid

Charminar

N.H.No.9 To Vijayawa

KISHANBAGH

Zoo

180   181
SHALIBANDA

•mayat
Sagar

Mir Alam Tank

Falaknuma
Palace

To Bangalore

N.H.No.7

To Nagarjuna Sagar

medium schools and colleges, and Madarsahs catering to the population belonging to different communities.

Today, the Old City is bursting at its seams with people and traffic. The main thoroughfare is Patthargatti -a Street, a locality, or both? Hard to say, but named after the stone-lined buildings on either side of the road. Pearls literally line this famed avenue. It boasts of dozens of shops offering a staggering variety of pearls. But it is not only pearls that the Old City has to offer. It is a fantastic bazaar, with numerous wares. Generations of Hyderabadis, visitors and tourists have come here to look for silks and saris, brocades, itars and perfumes, silver ware, jewelry, velvet, tobacco, caps and handmade slippers. And they have been served by the descendants of families that have carried on the business generation after generation. Ancient links have been established that bind shops and customers. Apart from these various marketable commodities, the place is famous for its range of delicacies. Thus the place still has a rich culture from the Nizam times.

What, of course it lacks are accoutrements of a new city or a planned city. It lacks the centres of manufacture, public limited factories, for example, are located in other parts of Hyderabad, as indeed is the new growth of industry- the IT industry. There is also a severe lack of civic amenities in this part of the city. It is extremely congested with narrow lanes and bylanes. Many localities still have the mud lanes; very few areas have the cemented lanes. During the rainy season these bastis are in a very bad state due to water stagnation. In the year 2000, when Hyderabad was flood affected, these bastis being in the low lying areas, were badly affected. The water supply and sewerage in most of the areas are below standards. It is over crowded and this part of the city attracts more migrant population as it provides them with affordable accommodation. Thus it is the hub of activities from the most happening marketing transactions to a well-rooted underworld.

The Socio-Demographic Profile

The Old City comprises of about 356 bastis. Some of them are mixed communities and some are communities of particular caste or religious groups. These localities are crowded and very congested. The streets are narrow and

houses constructed in little spaces. The streets were well maintained. As per the residents, these were the developments made by the present municipal corporation and were a result of the repeated demands by the residents.

The houses are not properly ventilated. Most of the families were either joint families or extended ones. Very few were nuclear families. Houses were over crowded with an average individual family size of six persons. Three or in some cases even more families were living in the same house. Most people owned the houses they were living in. They were here since two generations or more.

Coming to its religious composition, a large Shia population is concentrated in a few pockets in the Old City. There are also Iranians who run their prosperous tea restaurants who also belong to this faith. A number of the Shias continued to occupy high positions under the Sunni Asaf-Jahis. The Nizam maintained a fairly large army well into the mid nineteenth century (53,504 men in 1851) consisting of Arabs, Africans, Marathas, Sikhs, Pathans, lodhas, Turks, Abyssinians and Deccanis. All these communities settled in different parts of the Old City. Right from her early days Hyderabad developed as an important trade centre of among other commodities, pearls and diamonds. These attracted many businessmen, Hindu and Muslim especially from the western India. Thus Hyderabad has a sizeable concentration of Marwaris in the Old City, as also the Muslim merchant community of Khojas, Bohras and the Menons. Apart from them there are Maharastrians, Kannadigas and Telugus from the three linguistic provinces of former Hyderabad state settled in various parts of the Old City. Lately a number of slums have come up, of mostly rural immigrants mainly from lower castes and classes. A number of Muslims have also drifted into the city from the erstwhile jagirdari estates and other occupations from the districts, into these slums.

Hyderabad thus has a considerable Muslim population. This population is not evenly distributed across the city. Muslims are concentrated in the Old City area. The Hindus and Muslims together make up ninety-five per cent of Hyderabad's population. This was so in 1931, as it is today. But the proportion of Muslims has slowly declined since 1948, and that of Hindus has gone up, with the proportion becoming stable by about 1971. In 1941 the Muslims comprised about fifty-one

per cent and the Hindus roughly forty-four per cent of the total population. By 1971 this had been reversed. Now the Hindus make up fifty-two per cent and the Muslims forty-three per cent of the population. But what is more important than the relative proportions of the Hindu and a Muslim population is its spatial spread. Muslims are overwhelmingly concentrated in the poorer Old City, where they are seventy-one per cent as against twenty-eight per cent Hindus. In the more prosperous new city areas, the Muslim percentage goes down to thirty-eight per cent and that of Hindus up to sixty-one per cent. As one, moves to Secunderabad, the proportion of Muslims goes further down to fourteen per cent and that of Hindus up to seventy-one per cent. Christians are negligible in both areas of Hyderabad, being below one per cent, but in Secunderabad they are about eleven per cent of the population.

The distribution of population across the city gives the picture that the communities are mutually segregated. This segregation is not very sharp but still noticeable. This favours the consolidation of identities on community lines. The confinement of a section of population to a particular geographical location results from the lack of opportunities outside that location and also a lack of amicable atmosphere. This together with the political situation creates an environment leading to communal polarization.

The Political Scenario and History of Communal Violence in the City

An understanding of communalism and related violence should develop a broad view of the concept, by looking at the political dimensions and not narrowing it down to the religious elements. Such deeper analysis of the situation in Hyderabad requires an overview of the state of party politics in the city and chronology of instances of riots, showing the extreme situations of polarization, in the then existing socio-political scenario.

The city of Hyderabad experienced communal riots for the first time in the year 1978. It started with the Ramizabee rape case. The case was about a Muslim woman and her husband belonging to the old city, who were caught by the police while returning late and taken to custody for an enquiry. The husband was allowed

to leave but the wife was kept in custody and raped by the police officials before being released the following day. The protest movement against it was converted into a major communal riot. In this riot an almost equal number of Hindus and Muslims were killed. During this period Mr.Chenna Reddy, of the Congress, was the Chief Minister. And also it was he who started the practice of addressing the Ganesh procession. Communal riots were of course a way of settling political scores, with the RSS and the Muslim fundamentalist groups being both more or less equally responsible. It is from that time that communal riots became almost an annual feature in Hyderabad until 1984, when the Telugu Desam came to power. It was the Old City, which was mainly affected. The tension in the Old City became so acute that for a number of days it would remain under curfew- so much so, that in 1983, most of the missionary schools in the new city decided to stop admitting students from the Old City because they could not attend school during curfew. In 1984 NT Rama Rao came to power and there was a comparative lull in communal violence until 1990. As the BJP was supporting the TDP it could not afford to instigate violence (Engineer, A: 1995)[50].

The two major communal parties are the TDP-BJP coalition and the Majlis. The Majlis does not get much support from the original Hyderabadi Muslims. They are against its militant postures. But the Majlis derives more support from the Muslims who have migrated from Maharastra and Karnataka. Naturally, the migrants feel less secure in the new place and therefore, are in greater need of communal postures than the original inhabitants. They feel more secure by expressing their religious zeal. The Majlis has been instigating mainly these Muslims who have come from other places and settled down in Hyderabad (Engineer,A: 1995)[51].

There is a marked difference in the nature of communal riots over a period of time. Between 7 December and 20 December 1990, communal riots broke out in and around Hyderabad. Their intensity was greatest in the old areas on the south

[50]Engineer, A (1995): "*Lifting the Veil: Communal Violence and Communal Harmony in Contemporary India*", Sangam Books, Hyderabad.

[51] Ibid.

side of the city. The riots left over 150 people dead. Many more were injured, about 300 of them very seriously. These riots were preceded by communal killings of a sporadic nature from 10 October 1990 to the end of that month. When looked at against the present day violence and the background of intermittent riots in Hyderabad since 1978, some new features marked the 1990 riots. Firstly the killing of Muslims was more or less, evenly spread over the entire period of rioting, where as about a three-quarters of the Hindu victims were killed on 8 December, the second day of the rioting. Second the attacks on Muslim property are assumed to have taken a different form in these riots. It was noticed that earlier houses and shops used to be the usual targets. Though these remained the targets in the 1990 riots, the attacks on growing commercial ventures of the emerging Muslim entrepreneurs were said to be extensive and systematic. And a third new feature observed was that the riots spread to new parts of the city for the first time and the Muslim gentry and the middle classes were targets of attack. The development suggests that the socio-economic causes –like property, unemployment, urban congestion, slums and so on- normally associated with communal riots, were no more the only basis of riots in the new space. It suggests that economic and social pressures that lie behind the riots now were closely intertwined with political factors.

Social Development and Communal Tensions

The consequences of this maladjustment or losing out in the process of development are very complex. On the one hand, the community that loses out finds no incentive to modernize and clings much more severely to its primordial identity. On the other, this produces a reaction among other communities, especially the majority community. The minority community is perceived as 'fanatical' and highly 'communal' for stressing its primordial identity.

A bird's eye view of the communal situation in the country at large would facilitate situating the analysis of the situation in Hyderabad in the larger context of nation-wide communal politics with which it frequently gets tied up, as it did in the case of the Babri Masjid issue. The presence of Hindu and Muslim communal organizations raged against each other is centrally responsible for the escalation of

37

communal ill will and conflict all over the country. The spread of organised Hindu communalism is likely to strengthen tendencies towards the political unification of Muslim communities in India. Muslims in India are scattered in diverse ethnocultural and linguistic regions in the country and at micro level the surrounding Hindu ethos has made imperceptible yet deep inroads among Muslims. What provides a basic impetus to the political unification of Muslims around a common discourse is the regularity of riots and the constant feeling of being discriminated against and unwanted in the society. These feelings unite them just as untouchability unites Dalits or gender humiliation unites women. This was the situation during instances like the Shah Bano case, Babri Masjid tragedy and the Godrah carnage. Communal disturbances, wherever they occur become a part of community's consciousness everywhere as they are much more news items. It is this shared perception that gives rise to a sense of being a pan-Indian community.

Muslims in Hyderabad, which was a Muslim-ruled State till September 1948, suffered a very rapid and visible decline within a decade or so after it became a part of the Indian Union. In 1985, there were only 4.4 per cent Muslims out of a total of 294 IAS officers in Andhra Pradesh and only two per cent of a total of 143 IPS officers. In a survey of rickshaw-drivers conducted in 1962, it was found that near about three quarters of the total 16,7000 rickshaw-drivers in the city were Muslims. This in itself is not unusual. What is notable, is that most of these people had not been employed in this work for long: 28.2 per cent of the rickshaw drivers were ex-employees of the Nizam state, 10.2 per cent had been unskilled workers, 5.9 per cent retail traders, and another 14.5 per cent casual workers. That is a total of 67.5 per cent of these Muslim rickshaw-drivers were gainfully employed only a few years earlier. This also gets reflected in the fact that forty-seven per cent of these people were found literate[52].

Muslims are mostly involved in the informal sector jobs. The women of the community most often take-up bangle making and *zardosi* work. It is not only

---

[52] "A Socio-Economic Survey Of Rickshaw-Drivers In Hyderabad", The Indian Institute of Economy, Hyderabad, 1962.

women who are involved in this; both men and women do it. This is the household based job. Even children join their parents in doing this. They get contracts from the shop owners in the Charminar shopping area.

The urban ghetto conditions, brought about by structural changes, are also to some extent responsible for communal tensions. Various religious and ehtnic groups are forced into high density localities with minimum or no amenities. Often there are fights between individuals belonging to different communities over these basic amenities or lack of them, which may often assume a communal form. Two studies conducted in Hyderabad and Ahmedabad clarified this. The study on the inner city of Hyderabad clearly pointed out that high population density, total lack of basic amenities, the structure of the walled city with its narrow lanes and bylanes, make it ripe for communal tensions to erupt.

According to a survey conducted by the Hyderabad Urban Development Authority in 1980, twenty-five per cent Muslims as against ten per cent Hindus were living in 'depressed areas' or slums. In fact there was a general decline in the living conditions of the poor; according to the same survey, the number of houses with piped water supply had gone down from fifty-four per cent to forty-five per cent between 1967 and 1980 in congested Muslim localities in the Old City. This partly indicates why the Majlis has been able to mobilise the Muslims on a communal basis and why lower class Muslims' anger gets easily deflected into violence (Muneer Ahmad Khan: 1980 cited in Alam, J: 1993)[53].

A large number of Hindus too are coming into the city. A few are construction workers from Warangal and Nalgonda districts who happen to belong to the scheduled castes. The BJP tried to win over them in the same way as the Majlis tried to woo Muslim migrants. Due to these migrations it is estimated that between

---

[53] Alam, Javeed (1993): "The Changing Grounds Of Communal Mobilization: The Majlis-E-Ittehad-Ul-Muslimeen And The Muslims Of Hyderabad", in Gyanendra Pandey (ed.), *Hindus And Others: The Question Of Identity In India Today*, Viking, Penguin Books, New Delhi.

1956 and 1984 there was a distress sale of properties worth Rs.50 crores in the Old City (Engineer: 1995)[54].

The rising tempo of communal violence in Hyderabad is a mix of a certain kind of politics with a certain kind of religion. One cannot help agreeing with Prabha Dixit's understanding of communalism as " a political doctrine, which makes use of religious-cultural differences to achieve political ends"(Dixit, Prabha: 1974)[55].

Physical Location and Identity Consolidation

As mentioned, a major proportion of the Muslim population is concentrated in the Old City of Hyderabad. The geographical location of this part of the city shows that it is separated from the rest of the city. The Musi river divides the Old City and the new city into two distinct geographical locations. Few aspects can be seen as responsible for the confinement of the resident population to this physical location and further influencing identity formation.

The physical space, in which the individual lives, to a certain extent, defines their interactions. In case of the residents of the Old City, this physical space gets constrained. The physical mobility of individuals facilitates exposure to new domains beyond the world they live in. This provides for the exploration of new opportunities and thus exercising of choices. But when the community feels beleaguered and discriminated against it gets confined to their own spaces. This delimits their opportunities, interactions and choices.

This is evident from the narratives from the field. " We never feel the need to go to the new city. When we get everything in the nearby market place why will we go to such far distances?", " We do not know anybody in that part of the city. We have always been here and all our relatives stay in the nearby bastis in this Old City area. We have nothing to do in the new city". Since a minimum of two generations these people have been residing in the bastis surrounding the

---

[54] Engineer, op.cit.

[55] Dixit, Prabha (1994): "Communalism a struggle for power", Orient longman, Hyderabad.

40

Charminar area. Thus their interactions are confined to this physical boundary. This shows that there is rigidity in the maintenance of the group identity. With in the bastis, the interaction among the members of the different communities occurs only if the community is a mixed one.

The Old City being the nerve centre for communal tensions is viewed as an unsafe locality. It is so much a riot prone area that nobody knows when there would be a bout of violence. Any minor incident can turn out to be a communal riot. In the Old City, fear holds the key. "We aren't even sure whether our children or family members will return home safely once they venture out. Anything can happen anytime here and even a petty quarrel can result in a riot", says one of the respondents from Falaknuma (a locality in the Old City area of Hyderabad). The atmosphere most of the time is tense. In a few localities, which are thought to be more sensitive, police pressure is prominently visible all the time. During the regular Friday prayers at the Mecca Masjid, arrangements are made for more security near the Charminar junction and certain crucial localities. In these places the mobility of the residents is very restricted. With police forces on the streets all the time the residents would not be free even to walk in the streets. The police instead of making people secure, make them feel more insecure, more afraid to venture out, more watched, more controlled.

Muslims from this part of the city are seen with suspicion. "People of our age group from other parts of the city often fear to visit this part," Thus there is a ghettoisation of the community in this part of the city. The situation here gets very tense during instances of communal violence. Following every instance of riot, curfew is announced in this part of the city and life here comes to a stand still during this period. Shops, schools and other institutions are closed. This part of the city is completely cut off from the rest of the city, due to lack of any means of transport during such instances. As we noted earlier the situation is so bad that schools in the new city were refusing to take students from the Old City areas, as they would miss a lot of attendance.

In the month of Ramzaan, the traffic from the rest of the city is not allowed into this area during the holy Namaaz times. This is diverted from the other side of the

riverbanks. This is to avoid any untoward incident that may be ignited into a riot. Access to the area during this period becomes extremely difficult and risky. This is the situation during any sensitive periods like the Babri Masjid demolition day, the Ganesh utsav and so on.

The economic condition of the people shows there is a vicious circle of poverty that restricts opportunities. This further leads to hopelessness, a sense of being beleaguered, with no other recourse but that of a communal identity to make claims on an uncaring if not hostile State. The population of this area is of a mixed character. There is a tiny rich business class, a small educated class and a large mass of poor people who depend on the informal economy. They all depend on the local market area for temporary jobs. They are involved in petty business and home based employment as well. Basically it is a poor economy.

These conditions cause a vicious circle of poverty. Due to poverty these families cannot invest more in education of their children. Education after the basic schooling is not seen as feasible. What they feel is that education, if has to provide for a living, should be till a higher level, in order to withstand the present competitive levels. This is thought to be unaffordable expenditure. Thus even boys do not show much interest in education, as it would not immediately fetch them a job. So they prefer getting into petty business or join their fathers in assisting them in their business once they reach fourteen or fifteen years. Thus this way they get into the informal sector employment and the cycle continues.

This results in they being side-lined from the mainstream. This would result in feelings of being marginalized and simultaneously of being over taken by the dominant group. This results in a move by the community or group back to the "roots" often imagined so as to retain their identity, not loosing it to the dominant group. These are broadly the reasons for the strong sense of identity that gets developed among the people of the Old City. These aspects are of prime importance while considering the issues of identity consolidation.

Physical Mobility and Women's Autonomy

The physical boundary seems more rigid for women, as their mobility is more restricted. Women are not allowed to go out on their own. They are to be accompanied by a male member of the family. These restrictions on mobility would delimit their access to physical spaces beyond their household and immediate community. This constrains their autonomy. As their exposure to the opportunities is limited, the choices which they can make are meagre.

In case of the women in the study, their access to physical spaces is very limited. This is not entirely to be narrowed down to the religious beliefs. Usually, Muslim women's experiences are set apart from the general experiences of women as a community viewing it as a consequence of their rigidity to religious doctrines. But basing a study of Muslim women merely on Islamic injunctions would be absurd. The elements of strictly defined physical boundaries, the views of an outsider regarding the community, the economic and social conditions that are prevailing act as important factors impinging on the life circumstances of the individuals.

When the community itself feels beleaguered and being under seige, the immediate impact would be on the women of the community as the culture and honour of the community are seen as rooted in their women. There is an effort to reassert the identity of the community with a fear of loosing out to the dominant group. This is often through severe restrictions on women's mobility, their attire and behaviour.

In the case of Hyderabad there is a noticeable change in the restrictions over the attire of Muslim women. They feel that there is an increased emphasis on the wearing of burqah. At the same time the fact that more women being seen in burqah can be acknowledged as more women coming out from their homes, where in their access to physical spaces is increasing.

But the aspect to be considered is that either of the cases does not exactly show to be having a positive impact on the autonomy of these women. This is because, the extended physical space is again defined according to the felt need for asserting

43

the community's identity. There is an acknowledgement of the fact that the social and economic backwardness of the community is a threat to the identity of the community. The need for development is realised. For this reason women's education is encouraged. But this is only the basic education that is being encouraged and not the autonomy of women in real terms, as their employment is not encouraged. This is evident from the narratives discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Three

Social Mobility and Identity

In the present study the effort was to study the impact that multiple identities have on the autonomy and agency of women. The previous chapter gives a picture of the socio-demographic profile of Old City of Hyderabad and the economic conditions prevailing in the area under study. This is the background with which the construction of identity and thus the impact on the autonomy and agency of these women through an analysis of their freedom of mobility and access to public spaces.

The study of the autonomy of Muslim women must take into account three key elements: (1) the extent to which they are affected by the economic, social and political conditions in India; (2) the status and role of women in general in India; and (3) the influence of Islam (Lateef: 1990)[56]. In other words, the study examines the manner and extent to which the status of Muslim women is affected by being Indian, being Muslim and being women. The factors have a bearing on the attitudes, practices and capacity of Muslim women to assimilate and adapt to social changes in India. All three factors are interdependent in the context in which they are being applied.

For the development of the individual identity, first there is a need for the realization of the self. Secondly, the circumstances or the social context in which one lives should provide for the achievement of the self-actualization. The social positioning of individuals shapes the identity formation of individuals. Thus the identity of being and belonging is at the family, the community and the wider societal level. For this there is a need for individuals to be able to act as autonomous individuals and unless there is self-realization there would not be a

---

[56] Lateef, Shahida (1990): *"Muslim Women in India, Political and Private Realities-1890s – 1980s"*, Kali for Women, New Delhi.

possibility of an individual being autonomous. In this mobility becomes an important aspect.

In the case of women, more often than not, the frame of reference is the family and the community. Their identity is defined through the male members of the family. The identity of being oneself usually gets submerged into the identity of the family and the immediate social setting, the caste. At a wider social level the gender identity is cut across by the identity of the community. This is more so in situations of crisis. For women, then, it is a constant negotiation and renegotiation with the power structures for retaining her individual space. In this process they exercise a certain agency which again is to be understood within the social context in which women act. Here arises the need for autonomy in the social and economic spheres. Education, employment, the choices that an woman can exercise with regard to these various issues would become important factors for developments in this direction. The present study is to see how these multiple identities impinge on women's lives constraining their social mobility.

Education

Three explanations have been offered to account for the educational backwardness of Muslims in India. The first asserts that Muslims are behind in modern education because of their rigid adherence to traditional religious values. According to this school of thought, the absence of a clear line of demarcation between secular and religious spheres of life results in the creation of a set of ethos antithetical to the benefits of modern education. As a result of this ethos, Muslims tend to place greater emphasis on sending their children to madarsahs, the traditional religious schools, instead of sending them to institutions imparting modern education. The underlying cause for the preference of madarsahs over modern schools is said to be the fear that Muslim children would turn atheist or at least irreligious if they attend secular or missionary schools. One of the implications of this argument is that the Muslims are themselves to be blamed for their low level of education, as it is the consequence of their inhibition against the

acquisition of secular, it is said, knowledge originating from western countries. Thus the root cause for the Muslim educational backwardness can be located in the religious traditionalism of the Muslim community itself and the retrogressive outlook of its religious establishment, as per this school of thought. Not surprisingly this school of thought is widely subscribed to by Hindu communal organizations, and finds wide resonance in all sectors of the media dominated by Hindu upper castes (NKSingh, cited in omar khalidi, 1995)[57].

The more likely explanation of course is that the responsibility for Muslim educational backwardness lies in the state and the larger Indian society. This is to say that the backwardness is consequence of a policy of deliberate neglect of the community by the state, exemplified by recurring discrimination against Muslim educational institutions in financial and legal matters or administrative obstruction (NKSingh, cited in omar khalidi, 1995)[58].

The third explanation concerns the problem of biased textbooks and the cultural environment of the schools perceived to be responsible for inculcating Hindu culture among Muslim pupils, which tends to keep them away from schools. A primary school mathematics text book has a question: "if 15 kar sevaks (Hindu volunteers) demolish the Babri Masjid in 300 days, how many kar sevaks will it take to demolish the mosque in 15 days?"[59].

While all these reasons have contributed for the educational backwardness of Muslims, the primary reason for lack of Muslim interest in education must be sought in the economic condition of the community, but this cannot be seen in isolation. All the above mentioned causes form a vicious circle. Most Muslims in India today consist of working classes, the agricultural laborers in rural areas, and artisans and craftsmen and other daily wage earners in urban areas (Khalidi: 1995)[60]. To this strata education has limited appeal due to various reasons. Education is an activity which requires a sizeable investment of time, energy and

---

[57] Khalidi, Omar (1995): "*Indian Muslims Since Independence*", Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi.
[58] Ibid.
[59] ibid.
60 ibid

resources. Long-term investment in education is of little attraction to people seeking immediate pay-off. The lack of interest in education is also true of the Muslim artisan class, as it feels that formal education leads to nothing more than a clerical position, and on the other hand if their children learn their craft, they are likely to earn significantly more than a clerical position. In this class, there does not appear to be much difference from their Hindu counterparts.

This being the picture at the national level, can also be found even in the slums of the old city of Hyderabad. Large sections of Muslim masses here are involved in the informal sector jobs. Most of them are daily wage labourers, rickshaw pullers, auto drivers etc. or are employed temporarily in small hotels and shops in the old city area itself. A few, own petty businesses. Other commonly found occupations are bangle making (*Lac* bangles studded with stones) and *zardosi* work, for which Hyderabad is famous. Men, women and children are almost equally involved in this occupation. This is the home-based work which most of the families in these mohallas take up. Education for children is encouraged, but higher education is seen as an economic burden. Children are educated till high school or intermediate level. After that parents find it difficult to afford further studies for their children. Boys drop out from school at an earlier stage than girls do. Boys show much interest in taking up temporary jobs, so that they can assist their father in running the family.

The case is different with girls. They show greater interest in education, but the parents don not support this. Two reasons can be seen for this attitude towards female education:

As among the middle and lower middle classes of Hindus, there is great emphasis placed on "settling" a daughter. Settlement for girls is obviously only seen in terms of marriage. With increasing dowry, parents incur huge expenditures in marrying their daughters. off. And as higher education is beyond their affordability, spending for both marriage and education of female children is seen as a double burden by the parents. Thus, although girls show more interest in education, they are nor encouraged.

Another reason is the restricted social mobility of girls. Women are constrained from moving out freely. Though this is a problem faced by women across communities and cultures, there are certain problems specific to religions and communities. Among Muslims women are more secluded. Once girls attain puberty they are not allowed to go outside their homes unless accompanied by a male member of the family, either brother or father. Any social space beyond their homes is seen as alien. Education beyond high school is thought to be an unnecessary expenditure, as later they would not be allowed to work outside. In some cases where girls are not allowed to go to school, they are taught arabi at home. They have to read Quran sharif five times a day, for which they have to learn arabi. Female tutors are engaged at home who come and teach them.

There is a change in the attitude towards female education over a period of time. Even uneducated mothers of this generation prefer to get their daughters educated. They realize the importance of education in today's world and even see the need for girls to be economically independent. But they find it difficult to negotiate these views with their husbands. *Respondent Kadija of the old city of Hyderabad is 35 years old and is a housewife. She is educated till fourth standard and can read Arabi. She takes up bangle making contracts. She has four children- three daughters and one son. Two elder daughters passed their SSLC. The eldest daughter was not allowed to continue with her studies. She was at home, helping her mother. Her sister, who is younger to her also finished her tenth standard in the following year and was made to discontinue her studies. Further education was considered a burden and her husband didn't like to send them to college, as it was not considered safe to send girls to far off places unaccompanied by a male or elder member of the family. Later she could convince her husband to send both the daughters to a vocational training institute to learn tailoring. This was allowed as the institute was in the near by locality and they would go with other girls from the mohalla. She feels bad that though her daughters were doing well in their studies she could not succeed in giving them higher education. She says that dowry has gone high these days and it would be difficult to afford for both their education and marriage. And she is even disappointed that they are not given enough freedom to go out to institutions in far off localities, thus constraining their opportunities. When asked if they would be allowed to work, she said that the*

chances are limited. Their father would not allow them to work outside. In the future it depends on their husbands, if they would be allowed to work and earn. She said, "We women can't decide anything for ourselves, we have to depend on the male members of the family".

Thus what seemed interesting is that though education of female children is seen as essential, it is only till basic schooling and not further. Higher education for girls is not encouraged for various reasons such as, restrictions on mobility, notions regarding family's izzat, affordability and in consideration of marriage expenses.

A study conducted among Muslim women in the city of Hyderabad by Syed Mehdi Husssain also shows higher education among Muslim women is confined mainly to upper and middle income groups, while those from poorer and lower middle classes are denied such facilities, with the increasing cost of education. And it is also observed that English is more popular than Urdu among Muslim women as the medium of instruction (Hussain,SM: 1995)[61]. This supports the observations made in the course of the present study too.

Due to lack of economic independence women's decision-making power in various issues gets constrained. The experiences of women show the limited spaces within which they have to negotiate their views. Though this is the case with women in general, specific to the women of this study, this is influenced by the wider social milieu. Though there is a noticeable trend that shows an increase in the number of literate women in the community, there is again a restriction on they being economically independent. So it is like moving two steps forward and one step backward. This shows a constant effort in negotiating spaces and identities.

---

[61] Hussain, SM (1995): "Muslim Women and Higher Education, A Case Study of Hyderabad", in Engineer, A (ed) *Problems of Muslim Women in India,* Orient Longman, Hyderabad.

Employment

Muslims as a community have lagged back in the process of development. The reasons having been discussed in the previous chapters at length, the same trend can be seen in the area under study. The majority of them concentrated in the poorly developed Old City, and involved in the informal sector jobs, shows the poorer state of their living conditions. The Old City still has the ancient day's traditional activities being carried out as the core business activities. The key business district still is the market place surrounding the monument of Charminar, with the flavor of the olden days. Most of the population from this part of the city is dependent on this market center. Apart from this they work as drivers and rickshaw pullers. A few go to over seas in hope of a better income. The developments in the rest of the city of Hyderabad do not benefit much of the population here in terms of providing an everyday living. The development of the Information Technology industry does not usher much benefits on these masses. Due to lack of educational qualifications these youth cannot dream of finding place in the corporate world. Thus Muslims continue to be engaged in uncertain, and insecure forms of employment, with family labor continuing to play a important role in artisanal occupations that they remain stuck in, and are being increasingly being pushed back into. This kills the initiative among the youth to go for higher education. Adding to this is the communal polarization of Muslims, which would further push them back into the existing structures.

The overall lack of employment opportunities and the ghettoisation of Muslims as a whole severely impinges on women's lives, and thus their educational and employment opportunities. Women, in most cases, are not allowed to work outside their homes. Though they undergo training in activities like tailoring and embroidery, they are not permitted to got out to work, and certainly not outside their own mohallas. Women take up home based employment such as bangle making, tailoring and embroidery. Women take up contracts from the shopkeepers in the local market and earn a fixed amount per units produced. At times the whole family is involved in these jobs, or it is just the women who are into this while the men are in other kinds of casual or temporary employment.

Employment of women outside their homes is considered as a dishonor to the family. It is the responsibility of the male members of the family to earn and run the house. Women are expected to carry the burden of domestic work. Even in terms of household employment, the kind of jobs chosen are to be in accordance with the interests of the husbands and other male members, keeping in view that it should not affect the family's *izzat*.

Ameena is 27 years old (All names are false in order to preserve anonymity of the respondents). She has four children, - three girls and one boy, the youngest three – years old. Her husband, who was an autorickshaw driver abandoned her and disappeared after she delivered the fourth child. The police could not register a case against him, as he did not have a permanent residential address. Now she lives with her parents, in a joint family where her four brothers and one younger sister live. She feels that she would be an added burden to her parents and brothers, because her father is a retired grade four employee in the Osmania government general hospital and brothers are now getting married. She wants to work and earn a living for herself and educate her children. But her brothers don't allow her to do so. Having only studied up to fourth class, she regrets that she can't find any job. When an NGO working in the locality was providing home based work, by giving them contracts for making papads, her brothers did not allow her to take it up. She was told that they would take the responsibility of her and her children and if she does go for such jobs, others would look down on them saying that they are making the women of their family work. Her employment was considered as a dishonor to the family. She says she feels helpless and is worried about her children's future as she realizes that it would be difficult for her brothers to provide good education for her children. She is very keen to educate her children so that her daughters are not like her; but does not know how she will do it.

Many respondents expressed similar feelings of distress and disappointment. The roles of women are very rigidly defined within the households. Due to lack of basic education, women feel helpless in times of need. Only occupations such as teaching are treated as being respectable for women. But these women, given their educational background, cannot obtain such jobs. The women of the next

generation who are educated till their intermediate level are able to convince their parents to join as teachers in the community schools established in the mohallas by the NGOs working in these localities.

Twenty-one year old Ayesha, is a teacher in the play school started by the voluntary organization called COVA. She is the fifth among six siblings. She has two elder brothers who are married and who studied till tenth standard. They were not interested to study further, though they were allowed to do so, since they were anxious to start earning. They also felt what is the point in wasting money in more education when there are no jobs to be had for Muslims. They took up small jobs in an electrical shop. Two elder sisters are married. Ayesha is an intermediate pass. She wanted to study further, but was not allowed to, partly because of the expense, and partly because her parents felt there was no use in educating girls. Now she is working as a play schoolteacher. Her younger sister, however, is in her graduation and she is also teaching in a madarsah. She says, " as teaching is seen as a respectable job, we are allowed to work. Or else it would have been difficult to convince our parents. They always expect that only sons should take up the family responsibility and daughters should not involve in this. They will never encourage us to continue with our jobs. Though we say that times have changed, girls are always discriminated against. "

All these constraints have profound implications not to mention demographic ones. One area of demographic concern is of course age at marriage. This aspect is of prime concern for demographers and population policy specialists, whose aim is population control or stabilization. For achieving this stabilization, increasing age at marriage is considered one of the important factors. And the belief is that this could be made possible by generating awareness regarding the physical and psychological effects, which this has on the health of a woman. But there are several social factors that determine the age at marriage in a particular community.

Age at marriage

There is a noticeable change in the age at marriage. From the observations made in the field, and the perception of the respondents, the average age at marriage is twenty to twenty-one. Though education of girls is not encouraged beyond intermediate level, they are not married off at early ages. In the previous generations women were married once they attained their puberty. But now these mothers say that it would be too early for a girl to get married at such a tender age, as it would be difficult for them to cope with married life. But marriages are strictly arranged. Young women are not given much choice to decide about their life partners. Most often they are just informed of the decision of the elders.

One reason for the increase in the age at marriage may be the increase in the amount of dowry. Indeed this was stated by several women I spoke to. As among Hindus, dowry "rates" are going up among Muslims – although strictly Muslims are not expected to pay dowry. Parents are thus finding it difficult to find eligible partners for their daughters. So getting all the daughters married would take more time. Thus age at marriage is moving higher.

The rise in the age at marriage does not seem to actually empower these women or increase their autonomy. Because though they are married at a later age, they are neither encouraged to study further or take up any employment. This ways the age at marriage does not seem to be an indicator of women's autonomy.

Abeda, a 19-year-old girl, is a 11th standard pass and her elder sister also finished her intermediate. They were not allowed to study further. She was at home for a year and later convinced her parents and started working as a teacher in the play school in their mohalla. Her brothers, elder to her just passed their seventh standard and are working in an electronics shop. She says her father never forced them to get married. Till date their marriage issue was not discussed at home. She feels that probably it is difficult for their parents to find eligible matches for them, as they would have to spend huge amounts for dowry. She wants to work and earn a living for herself where in she would not be a burden for them.

This factor of increase in the age at marriage is seen as favouring the demographic policies, as this would reduce the fertility rate by reducing the fecundity period. This trend is further attributed to the increase in the awareness, and the factors such as the ones discussed above are ignored. It is for this reason that women's education is emphasised in the policies. This reduces women's autonomy to the area of reproductive behaviour, failing to address the wider societal issues rooted in the existing social structures.

The rise in the age at marriage, is of course one side of the picture. Others, however, felt differently. They feel that marrying off the daughters is a responsibility. *Forty-five years old Ghasia Begum is a widow. She teaches arabi to girls in the same locality. She has to go to their homes to teach as girls are not sent to tuition outside. She says, "even in earlier days we were restricted from going out and were not allowed to go out with out a burqah. But these days as the instances of harassment have gone high the restrictions on women are even more. Girls have to be given in safe hands as soon as possible. This is the immediate responsibility of the parents once the girl attains puberty. As times are not good for women in terms of safety and security, girls should be married off as early as possible". She does not allow her daughters to go to school on their own. She herself, most of the time, would drop her daughters at school and pick them in the evening. She said that people who are rich could afford to arrange for rickshaws to pick and drop their daughters from school. But poor people like them, who go by walk, have to accompany their children to school. As it gets difficult gradually to take this responsibility, their further education is not encouraged.*

What has been observed during the study was that there are severe inhibitions on the access to public spaces by the women of the community. The social mobility of the community and more particularly the women is very restricted. These constraints are due to the impingement of different identities at different levels, and the power exercised at these levels in a patriarchal set-up. It is of being woman, being a Muslim, in the respective Nation/State, and further belonging to a lower socio-economic background.

Social Mobility

In the previous chapter physical spaces and consolidation of identities, it has been discussed as to what makes a community be confined to a particular location. When the community itself is so much confined geographically and socially, women's mobility is even more limited. Women are not allowed to go out side their homes unaccompanied by a member of the family. Once girls attain puberty, they are not allowed to go out on their own. They have to be accompanied by a male member of the family or an elderly woman. This is one reason for high rates of dropouts among female children from school and low employment rates among women of the community.

Attire is considered another important aspect for women, in maintaining the family's dignity. Women are not allowed to go out without wearing a *burqah*. Once girls attain puberty, it is a compulsion on them to wear a burqah. For an outsider, burqah or hijab would seem to be constraining the mobility of these women. But women hold different views regarding this. It is seen in various ways: as providing a sense of identity in terms of a sense of belonging to a community, freedom to move out, an identity of being an individual by improving accessibility, a sense of security, etc. One of the respondents, when asked about their views regarding this dressing, replied back saying, " *else how do you differentiate between a Hindu and a Muslim?*" This shows that it gives them a sense of belonging and is seen as a marker of identity of the community.

Women, also feel secure wearing a burqah, as men cannnot letch at them. They feel this way they can avoid the male gaze and so can move out freely. This is seen as a means to increase their mobility and access to public spaces. *Thirty-four year old Shabnam is a mother of three children. She is learning tailoring in the workshop run by an NGO. She says she feels very comfortable wearing a burqah, as nobody in the locality can recognize her when she is going out. Though she does not believe in wearing it for the sake of religion, she is comfortable, as she does not become conspicuous. As not many women go out for work, those few who go would be in everybody's attention and this kind of dressing would avoid any such attention. But she says she will not ask her daughters to wear it.*

These being the views of the individual respondents, there is a noticeable change among the Muslim women population of Hyderabad. In the recent times there are more women seen in the city wearing burqah (Alam, Aniket: 2003)[62]. This may be a positive sign showing that more Muslim women are moving outside their homes for education and employment. This would show the rise in the levels of autonomy and empowerment. This being a positive aspect the other side of the situation may be that of asserting religious and communal identities, which are being more actively consolidated in the recent years. The trend noticed in Kerala, where in the post Babri Masjid demolition period more Muslim men started attending the Friday prayers and women were forced to wear hijab that was actually not their regular dressing, may be relevant to the situation in Hyderabad.

Women here almost without exception say that earlier wearing a burqah was not compulsory. It was a women's wish and comfort that decided the matter. But these days they feel it is being more emphasized. The reason behind this for them is the increasing cases of eve teasing and harassment. One of the respondents said, *"times have changed. Earlier men never used to look at other women. But these days they shamelessly letch at them. So a burqah becomes necessary these days."*

The social interactions are more or less confined to the bastis to which one belongs. Beyond this social ties are usually limited to the close family relations. If not in a mixed community the interactions between the different communities is very limited. The social world of women is more often confined to the neighbourhood. Without the consent of the male members of the family the women are not allowed to go out on their own. If it is necessary to go out for any reason, they have to be accompanied by a member of the family or some women from the neighbourhood. Mobility of young girls and unmarried girls is especially restricted. They have to depend on elders for anything needed. Except for the immediate neighbourhood they are not permitted to visit anybody or move around with friends. Their world comprises of the family and the school.

---

[62] Alam, A (2003) : " On A March To Modernity", The Hindu, April 17th.

Fourteen-year-old Yasmin was made to discontinue her studies when she was in her sixth standard. Her father didn't allow her to study further. They are four sisters and two brothers. They studied in a Urdu medium school. It was the same with her other sisters too. But she says that, her brothers were free to decide whether they wanted to study or not and they are not restricted from going anywhere. She said she wanted to become a teacher or a doctor, and her dreams were only about her education, which did not come true. Now she cooks for the family and has learnt putting mehendi for hands during celebrations. She does this for her pleasure only to her immediate people and not to earn out of it. She loves to watch movies but is not allowed to go to any.

Restricted social mobility for women due to various reasons would result in limited social opportunities and access to public spaces for women. It is not just gender identity but poverty, religion and communal identities play a role in establishing various constraints over the lives of these individuals.

Health access

The confinement of the population of this part of the city to this physical location is true even in the case of the access to health care. The locality has three government hospitals and quite a few private clinics and RMPs. The Osmania General Hospital is the popular hospital in this part of the city. Most of the respondents go to this institution. This is an established institution. But it is extremely crowded with patients mostly from this part of the city.

The old city of Hyderabad is devoid of any multi-speciality corporate hospitals. There are a reasonable number of private clinics and nursing homes. But the kind of corporate institutions, for which Hyderabad is also famous for apart from its IT-industry, are not established in this area. The reasons for this may be the physical space that would not provide for these structures and also the economy. Most of the people here being poor cannot afford heavy expenses on health care.

Most of the respondents preferred going to public hospitals for reasons of affordability. They felt that private hospitals charged more even for the minor ailments. But they said it was a time consuming process to get the treatment from a government hospital. There would be long queues and they have to spend more time waiting for their turn. But it is due to their financial compulsion. *"if you have to go to a private clinic, the treatment charges are too high, which we cannot afford. So even if we have to spend more time standing in queues we go to the government hospital"*, says a respondent.

A study conducted by Sheela Prasad and Sumathi Nayar in the Old City of Hyderabad shows that Muslim women are more vulnerable to coercion and suspicion by the state health system. They argue that the backlash of such an attitude by the state is that a number of Muslim women avoid using government health facilities as they feel they are not treated well and are forced to accept sterilization if they have more than three children. But the present study's findings differ in this regard. In the course of the interaction with the women of the community they did not have complaints of this nature. They complained about the time taking process due to over crowdedness and lack of proper maintenance. But none of the respondents had experienced coercion in terms of sterilization or discrimination based on communal lines in other aspects. The sample of the study being too small, conclusions on these issues are not drawn.

Except for one respondent, others had all their deliveries done in the public hospitals. Only respondent had two of her deliveries at home, out of five. Rest of the deliveries were done in the hospital. For her first delivery she was afraid of going to a hospital. But for the third delivery she did not have enough time to go to the hospital.

Accessing a hospital from these interior localities seemed difficult. The means of transport is only a manual rickshaw from most bastis and after a certain distance an auto rickshaw. Very few areas had the local bus service. Some of the bastis were in the vicinity of the hospitals.

Women can go to either male or female doctors for any general ailment. But for problems related to reproductive health, women go only to a female gynecologist. This is because women don't feel comfortable with male doctors when they have to express such complaints. If the need arises women can go to the hospital on their own, with the help of other women either of their family or from the neighborhood. It is not necessary that only men of the family should accompany them. In terms of their access to health services, respondents said they need not take permission if there is urgency. They can just inform their husbands and go with any of the family members or neighbours. If it is needy the husbands themselves accompany them. The question regarding the priority given to women's health, received different responses. One respondent said, "*if we are not keeping well, we are taken to the hospital as early as possible. Even we are humans. They do realize our needs*". Another response sounded interesting, "*if we fall ill, they find it difficult to manage with the entire household work. So soon we are taken for treatment*". It shows that it is women's labour that mattered.

One advantage of the joint family system, according to the respondents, is that when women fall sick they have other women folk who take care and carry on with the household core activities. This ways the burden gets divided and there is family support in times of need.

Heavy expenses on health are difficult to manage for these families from a low economic background. They go into debts, borrowing from the relatives. As majority are in informal sector occupations, there is no means of having a social security in terms of health or medical insurances. Thus they incur huge debts. Some women, who are part of the self-help group run by the NGO working in the locality, save money through the community banking system. This money is used at such times. This shows that the savings, which women make, are not usually used for their own purposes, but usually for the needs of the family.

Health access focused in this study is not to be seen just in terms of bodily health of individuals. It is about health in a wider social sense, health as complete physical social and mental wee being of an individual. Health considered in this sense derives from the way of life and the living conditions of individuals. Thus

the issues discussed above, of social mobility, levels of education, employment, agency-exercised etc., give a picture of the various constraints in the everyday life of these women. These constraints are a result of the social positioning of these individuals, where in the issues of construction and articulation of identities in everyday lives becomes important. This cannot be attributed to one particular form, but is the crossing over of identities forming a power grid. This interplay of power relations determines the social positioning and thus the accessibility.

Family Planning and Contraception

The identity that is attributed to the community and the way the community is seen as a monolith has its impact on the various aspects of the women's lives. Muslim women are seen as the breeders of population. This is the view held against the entire community, seen as a unified whole. The variations across regions and social class are ignored here.

Earlier if women underwent tubectomy, they were not allowed to pray. They were treated as non-believers of Islam. The religious heads did not encourage pregnancy termination and contraceptive use, although Islam does not forbid temporary methods of contraception. Children were thought to be god's gift and it was thought that the creator would provide for every individual. But gradually women started using contraceptives and indeed tubectomies. This was of course because women desperately want to control their fertility. That others were doing so, also encouraged them. There was also increasing awareness about availability of various family planning methods. This awareness was due to media to some extent and also due to the activities of various community based organizations.

The change over a period of time is evident from the responses of women from different ages. There is a decline in the number of children per couple, from one generation to the other. Women now in their fifties had five or more children. They could not decide to themselves to get a tubectomy done. They had to go according to the wishes of their in-laws and their husbands.

In the next generation women were exposed to the availability of contraceptives. There are cases where women used contraceptives like pills and copper-T for certain period of time. Later they underwent tubectomy. Again, this seems to be a pattern remarkably similar to that among Hindus. Though they had to face some resistance from the family, women either with the support of the husband or with the help of other women could take such steps.

In the present generation, more children are considered an economic burden. This change is as a result of the realization that education of children is important. In the current times the cost of living has gone high and providing for the basic needs of the family would be more of a burden. Education is considered very essential for children, that too education in the English medium.

The use of contraception is not very prevalent. The reasons for this are more in terms of the impact on health than based on religious beliefs. Women complain of various side effects due to the use of contraceptives. They prefer terminal methods to temporary contraceptives. The individual women cannot take decisions regarding these reproductive issues. Women don't have that autonomy. It is only with the consent of the family members (especially the mother-in-law and the husband), that women can opt for these methods. As most of these women live in joint families, such issues become things of debate in the family. One impression we get from the study is that fertility control decisions rest not only with women, but also to a large extent the family has a role to play. But there were also cases wherein women have taken decisions to control their fertility despite likely family opposition by not confiding in their in-laws but seeking support from the women in the neighborhood or immediate family circle. This has been the observation made by other studies done in this part of the city. As noticed by Sheela Prasad and Sumati Nair in their study on fertility control among Muslim women in Hyderabad, it becomes important to point out that women would like to control their fertility and have fewer pregnancies, and inspite of pressures from their

husband and the family, they do manage to negotiate with their fertility within their constraints (Prasad and Nair: 1998)[63].

All the respondents had opted for either temporary or permanent contraception on their own will. None of them complained about coercion in this aspect. The information regarding these techniques is generally passed on from one woman to the other in the neighbourhood circles. The women who had used temporary contraception complained of side effects. And if the method is convenient then -other women also go for it, if not women do not prefer trying it any more. If the temporary methods do not suit, women opt for permanent termination method. One respondent said, "*after bearing three children I used pills for one year. But that did not suit me. I could not breast feed my younger child due to that. So I stopped using them. But I was not told about the side effects. After I stopped using them, I conceived again. After that delivery my husband and me decided and I got the tubectomy done*". Another respondent said, "*I heard, using a copper-T would cause excess bleeding. I was told about it by my sister-in-law. She had used it and it did not suit her. So I directly got the tubectomy done after I delivered my third child*". These women surely complained about the lack of information regarding the side effects of contraceptives, by the medical personnel.

The study did not comprise of the population from different classes of the same community. But there is a notable class difference in the use of contraceptive methods. Poor Muslim women- like their counterparts in other religions- did not prefer using spacing methods, had three to four children and the got sterilized. For the poor of any community, fertility control means use of a permanent method, as they cannot afford the expense and side effects of temporary methods. As one woman argued: " if anything happens to our health after using a spacing method, then what do we do? We cannot afford the treatment". The family size of a poor Muslim woman shows a decline from the earlier generation and now averages around two or three children.

---

[63] Prasad, S and Nair, S (1998): "Fertility Control and Muslim Women in Hyderabad", in *Reproductive Health In India's Primary Health Care*, Centre of Social Medicine and Community health, School of Social Sciences,JNU, New Delhi.

The lower middle class women tend to have larger families than the poor, the reason being the economic security. The upper middle class and the rich among whom are more educated Muslim women of Hyderabad practice spacing methods (Prasad and Nair: 1998)[64].

Though the domain of fertility is not solely controlled by women, women do exercise their agency in achieving what they want. They may not protest and may appear to be passive sufferers but they do attempt to control repeated fertility in subtle ways. Some women wanted to control fertility to avoid the burden of repeated pregnancies and some for economic reasons, as more children would be an economic burden. Of course, this is not to treat these views in isolation of one another. In some cases though the family did not agree for the use of terminal methods, women went ahead with the process. As one respondent says, " *it is we who have to take the pain of bearing children and bringing them up. How does a man understand the amount of pain we undergo during each pregnancy. For this reason, though my husband and mother-in-law were not happy with my decision for tubectomy, I went and got it done after my seventh delivery. I wanted to get it done after the third pregnancy itself. But they did not allow me. This time I did not wait for their permission. My neighbour accompanied me*". Therefore in understanding fertility control one needs to be sensitive to the socio-economic reality that women live in.

The agency that women exercise needs to be considered in the context in which women live in. Within the context and the resources available to women, the choices that they can afford to take have to be analyzed. Women are not always passive victims of the existing system. They do take part as active agents- as agents of change.

The decisions taken would not always be breaking away form the existing system. There is a need for a support system for women. Thus whatever decision women take is within the existing structures but it is a constant process towards change. It

---

[64] Ibid.

is not always the achievements that should be counted upon, the effort in the direction is of immediate concern and that is to be recognized. The outcome depends on the various factors, which would facilitate or constrain the possible achievements. But that is not to ignore that there is a certain amount of agency that these women exercise. This is evident from the study where in women are in a constant negotiation with the social context, to retain their spaces.

In Hyderabad during the riots in 1990, Muslim women from the old city area came out of their homes and formed a human chain in the Charminar area to avoid the intensification of the riots. This was in response to the call given by the NGO working in the area. And these women succeeded in controlling the riot situation. But agency is not always to be equated with political activism. Though political activism can be one of the aspects, it itself is not the whole concept about.

Women exercise their agency in their everyday lives. Their every day world though comprising of the family and the immediate community, there are a lot of instances at which women act as agents of change. With in the family the power flows along the patriarchal lines of the male members of the family and then the elder women and later the younger women. At these various women play multiple roles and these do overlap in many contexts. Thus women experience shifting trends in having autonomy and exercising agency. This varies according to the age, marital status etc.

Consent to patriarchy does provide women with some agency. The role of women in the various political movements, wherein most of the times their empowerment and autonomy are not encouraged in a truly healthy manner, does provide women with a certain form of agency. But their complete autonomy is not favoured. The focus is further shifted to much stronger gender roles for women. In such cases the emphasis goes beyond the individual women's exercise of agency. It is seen at the level of the community and the nation. Here individual women are reified as communities and nations personified.

This leads to the construction of identity a woman's identity that subsumes her gender identity and even at times even her caste and class identity. Thus during

extreme conditions of communal polarization women apart from their community, do not have a common platform on which they can put forward their legal demands.

Conclusions

Confronting Issues

The issues of autonomy and agency of women have received much attention in the recent decades. It has been acknowledged that the ability of women to act as decision makers and as active agents in the social processes is crucial for the dynamic promotion of social transformation. These are the features that figure in the women's movement.

Even in the discourse of public health these aspects have gained prime focus. Women's well-being is seen as a being determined by the structural constructions of gender in the society. Gender inequalities are seen as rooted in the women's reproductive capacities at the individual level and in the existing structures at the wider societal level. It is these factors that shape women's identity. To encounter these the enhancement of autonomy and the agency of women are seen as essential. Aspects of women's agency and well-being are mutually complementary in nature.

As women's identity is said to be rooted in her reproductive capabilities, this sphere of women's health has received much attention in the policy context. In the initial phase it was the concern of the demographers to control and stabilise fertility to be able to combat the so-called threat of population explosion. Gradually over a period of time there were even greater threats to human existence. These were related to the sexually transmitted diseases. Thus the concept of women's sexuality is much debated today in the age of AIDS. Women's health has become an important component of the public health policy.

In the health and the population policies, what is striking is that the emphasis is solely on the reproductive aspect of women's health. The approach is very instrumental in nature as women's wellbeing, instead of being seen as an end in itself, is seen as a means for achieving an end, population stabilization. Due consideration is not given to the over all development of autonomy and enhancement of agency of women.

The key to the empowerment and autonomy in the policy context is seen in terms of providing for the education and the employment of women. This is then in the interests of the demographers to reduce the fertility, as it has been acknowledged that the solution to the "population problem" requires an educated and informed mass of clients who would be receptive to the use of contraceptive methods. It is this area of women's health that acquired attention. And autonomy and agency are seen in the context of reproductive rights and choices.

But the meanings, which these issues hold for the women in their everyday lives is ignored. The various factors such as education, employment, etc do not individually contribute to these issues. They act as facilitators but do not provide entirely for their enhancement. This way it is seen in vacuum. The issues under focus would be taken away from the context and studied in isolation. But the importance of the wider social context in which these are rooted, is ignored.

" with greater opportunities for education, reduction of mortality rates, improvement in economic security and greater participation of women in employment and in political action, fast reductions in birth rates can be expected to result through the decisions and actions of those whose lives depend on them" (Sen, A: 1994)[65].

The emphasis here is on reduction of population by empowering women through these various facilitators. But they are treated as the sufficient factors and not just the necessary factors. The matters of prime concern for the enhancement of women's autonomy and agency are not considered. It is not even analysed if fertility is the major problem that needs immediate concern for these women.

As seen in the course of the study, there are various constraints on women's lives, at various levels. They range from the social, political, economic, legal, cultural and so on. And the power of patriarchy mediates between these levels. And at these various levels there are multiple identities, which women confront. These identities are not constant categories. They are constructed, thus get reconstituted with time, place and context. All these factors determine the identity, which would

[65]Sen, A (1994): "Population: Delusion and Reality",
http://finance.sauder.ubc.ca/~bhatta/ArticlesByAmartyaSen/amartya_sen_on_population.html

be dominant at a particular time and in the given context. Ignoring this aspect, treating women, as a monolith and generalising their experiences would not serve the cause. The study was an effort to view the issues of identity, autonomy and agency in this wider social context.

By narrowing down the concept of autonomy to the reproductive arena and drawing a linear relation relationship between various factors and autonomy leads to a lack of complete understanding of the concept. Schrijvers, has mentioned few criteria for autonomy. They are: access to resources such as land, capital, labour and information so as to be able to be in a position to earn a livelihood; the possibility of looking after one's own interests by taking part as equal partners in political decision-making at all levels; having control over one's own body and sexuality, which is to include the right and ability to decide oneself about procreation; and respect for women, including self respect (Schrijvers: 1983, in Gupta, A: 2000, pp: 25)[66]. To this Cisca Pijpers, added a fifth criterion, 'The freedom to take part in all forms of social interaction'. This is the right to mobility (Pijpers: 1993, in Gupta, A: 2000, pp: 25)[67].

Thus autonomy is a much broader concept. It cannot be confined to one particular arena of one's life. These various aspects are interrelated. Uncoupling the various elements is likely to reduce autonomy to separate partial territories, so that the holistic character of the concept is lost. Another essential element for women's autonomy a need for an egalitarian society. Autonomy is a very relative concept. The extent to which women can resist the exercise of power by the various structures of society is central to the analysis.

Various studies have been done on autonomy of women analysing linear relationship between autonomy and one of its indicators. The study by Shireen Jejeebhoy and John Cleland on maternal schooling and fertility in South Asia shows that there exists an inverse relationship between education and the total fertility rate at the national level in all the countries of the region and in almost every setting in South Asia, women with less than completed primary education

---

[66] Gupta, A, *op.cit.*
[67] ibid.

can hardly be distinguished from uneducated women; women with more than primary education, marry later and want fewer children (Jejeebhoy and Cleland: 1996)[68]. What these studies focus is to show the relation between these indicators like education and the fertility behaviour with a view that education by generating awareness and more negotiating space would lead to higher autonomy and thus influencing fertility in an inverse manner. Whether education leads to lower rates of fertility or not being one issue, what needs attention is that lower fertility does not necessarily mean more autonomy. Because what follows from the definitions of autonomy is that reproduction and sexuality are just one of the aspects of the whole concept of autonomy and do not by themselves determine levels of autonomy. And reproductive choices themselves are determined by the social context and a range of actors from family to state that have a role to play in this domain: the social values about girls, the notions about womanhood, the national policies regarding family welfare and so on.

Thus emphasising solely on the aspect of reproduction and sexuality will lead to a narrow understanding of the concept. Autonomy should be understood in the wider social context where in the various social and other factors interplay. As Nirula and Morgan point out, context operates in the lives of individuals as the sum total of institutional arrangements- one cannot pull apart the different elements of the institutional context and measure their separate effect: 'The context specifies appropriate goals and the means for achieving them. Such a role for context does not deny individual agency but stresses how context constrains rationality for all local actors' (Nirula and Morgan: 1996, in Kabeer, N, pp: 36)[69]. Thus it may be said that what is often treated as having a cause and effect relationship in the literature may in fact be products of the underlying social context. The individual's autonomy and the agency that they exercise depend upon the resources which they have access to, within the social setting in which they live. It is within this setting that they negotiate their spaces, which again is a constant, ongoing process.

---

[68] Cleland, J and Jejeebhoy, S (1996): "Maternal Schooling and Fertility: Evidence from Censuses and Surverys", in Jeferry Roger and Basu, A (ed), *op.cit.*
[69]Kabeer, n, *Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment*, Institute of Developmental Studies, Sussex.

The present study was an effort to develop an understanding of the implications which the various constraints have for women's lives and how these influence the autonomy and the agency of women. Within the various constraints the emphasis was on the role of multiple identities in shaping women's everyday lives. In recent times identities have become more communitarian. This is the trend noticed all over the world. And women, often being seen as the representatives of the community's honour and carriers of its traditions and values, are more vulnerable to the various detrimental influences which these consolidating identities have on individuals' everyday lives.

This becomes evident in situations of conflict, when the boundaries get more clearly defined leading to the construction of the notions of 'us' and the 'other'. And humiliating the women of the other community is seen as a means to show -the enemy their place. From a minor conflict between groups to major wars, this is the recurring phenomenon. Rape in all these instances is being used as a political weapon.

The women in countries experiencing conflicts for a prolonged period- civil wars or external aggression- are doubly exploited. From within the community they are exploited by their own men and by men from the other community. The Vietnam war, situation in the Balkans, in the United States occupied Iraq, the experiences of Tutsis, situation in Kashmir and the North-Eastern borders of India, are some of the situations that are evidences of these extreme situations wherein conflicting identities impinge on to women's lives.

These being the most extreme situations where in gender identity gets subsumed into the broader identities of Community, Nation and State, constraining the autonomy and agency of women, the study was focussed on the much subtle ways of interplay of power relations at various levels of identity formation, in controlling women's autonomy in their everyday lives. It shows the complexity of the concepts of autonomy and agency, determined by the social context of the subjects.

Bibliography

Abraham, Trisha (ed.) (2002): *"Women and The Politics of Violence"*, Har-Anand Publications, New Delhi.

Afshar, Haleh and Barrientos, Stephanie (eds.) (1999): " *Women, Globalization And Fragmentation In The Developing World"*, Macmillan Press Ltd., London.

Ahmad, Riaz (2002): "Gujarat violence: meaning and implications", *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol.38, no.20, May 18th, pp. 1870-73.

Alam, Javeed (1993): "The Changing Grounds Of Communal Mobilization: The Majlis-E-Ittehad-Ul-Muslimeen And The Muslims Of Hyderabad", in Gyanendra Pandey (ed.), *"Hindus And Others: The Question Of Identity In India Today"*, Viking, Penguin Books, New Delhi.

Allen, Douglas (ed.)(1993): *"Religion and Political Conflict in South Asia"*, OUP, New Delhi.

Bahrgava, Rajeev (2000): "History, Nation and Community: Reflections on Nationalist historiography of India and Pakistan", *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol.35, no.4, Jan 22nd, pp.193-200.

Butalia, U (1993): "Community, State and Gender: on women's agency during partition", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Review of Women's Studies, Apr 24th.

Chakrabarthy, B (ed.) (2003): *"Communal Identity in India: Its Construction and articulation in The Twentieth Century"*, OUP, New Delhi.

Chatterjee, Partha (1994): "Secularism and Toleration", *EPW*, vol.29, no.28, July 9th, pp.1768-91.

Correa, Sonia (1994): *"Population and Reproductive Rights, Feminist Perspectives From The South"*, Kali for Women, New Delhi.

Dietrich, Gabriele (1992): *"Reflections on The Women's Movement in India, Religion Ecology Development"*, Horizon India Books, New Delhi.

Dixit Prabha (1994): *"Communalism A Struggle for Power"*, Orient Longman, Hyderabad.

Engineer, A (1995): *"Lifting the Veil: Communal Violence and Communal Harmony in contemporary India"*, Sangam Books, Hyderabad.

Engineer, A (ed.)(1995): *"Problems of Muslim Women in India"*, Orient Longman, Hyderabad.

Gupta, Agnihotri (2000): *"New Reproductive Technologies, Women's Health And Autonomy: Freedom or Dependency"*, Sage Publications, New Delhi.

Gupta, Charu (2002): "Anxieties of Hindu Right in everyday realm", *EPW*, vol.37, no.3, Jan 19th, pp.198-200.

Hartmann, Betsy (1995): *"Reproductive Rights and Wrongs, The Global Politics Of Population Control "*, South End Press, Boston.

Hasan, Mushirul (ed.) (2000): *"Inventing Boundaries: Gender, Politics And The Partition of India"*, OUP, New Delhi.

Hasan, Mushirul and Nakazato, Nariaki (eds.)(2001): "*The Unfinished Agenda: Nation Buildingin South Asia*", Manohar Publications, New Delhi.

Hasan, Zoya (ed.) (1994): "*Forging Identities: Gender, Communities and The State*", Kali for Women, New Delhi.

Hodgson, Dennis and Watkins C.Susan (eds.0 (1997): "Feminists and Neo-Malthusians: Past and Present Alliances", *Polpulation and Development Review*, September, vol.23, no.3, pp.469-523.

Jayawardena, K (1994): "*Feminism and Nationalism in The Third World*", ASR Publications, Lahor, Pakistan.

Jeferry, Roger and Basu, Alka (eds.) (1996): "*Girl's Schooling, Women's Autonomy and Fertility Change in South Asia*", Sage Publications, New Delhi.

Jeffery, Patricia and Basu, Amrita (Eds.)(1999): "*Resisting the sacred and the secular: women's activism and politicized religion in South Asia*", Kali For women, New Delhi.

Kabeer Naila, "*Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the measurement of Women's Empowerment*", Institute of Developmental Studies, Sussex.

Khalidi, Omar (1995): "*Indian Muslims Since Independence*", Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi.

Krishnaraj Maithreyi, Sudarshan M.Ratna and Shariff Abusaleh (eds.)(1998): "*Gender, Population and Development*", OUP, New Delhi.

Lateef, Shahida (1990): "*Muslim Women in India, Political and Private Realities-1890s – 1980s*", Kali for Women, New Delhi.

Menon, Nivedita (2002): "Surviving Gujarat 2002", *EPW*, vol.37, no.27, July 6th, pp.2676-78.

Moghadam, V (1994): "*Identity Politics and Women, Cultural Reassertions and Feminisms in International Perspective*", West View Press, Oxford.

Narang, A.S (2002): "Ethnic Conflicts and Minority Rights", *EPW*, vol.37, no.27, July 6th, pp.2696-99.

Pachauri, Saroj (ed.) (1999): "*Implementing A Reproductive Health Agenda In India: The Beginning*", Population Council, New Delhi.

Pandey, Gyanendra (1997): "Community and violence: recalling partition", *EPW*, vol.32, no.32, Aug 9th, pp.2037-52.

Pandey, Gyanendra(ed.) (1993): "*Hindus and Others: The question of Identity in India Today*", Viking Penguin Books, New Delhi.

Petchesky, Rosalind (2001): "Phantom Towers: Reflections on The Battle Between Global Capitalism and Fundamentalist Terrorism", *EPW*, vol.36, no.43, pp.4115-4120.

Petchesky, Rosalind and Judd, Karen (ed) (1998): "*Negotiating Reproductive Rights: Women's Perspectives Across Countries And Cultures*", Zed Books, London.

Presser, B.Harriet (1979): "Demography, Feminism and The Science-Policy Nexus", *Population and Development Review*, Vol.33, no.3, pp.295-331.

Rao, M (2004): "*From Population Control to Reproductive Health- Malthusian Arithmetic*", Sage Publications, New Delhi.

Rao, Mohan (ed.) (2004): "*The Unheard Scream: Reproductive Health and Women's Lives in India*", Zubaan, New Delhi.

Razavi, Shahra (ed.) (2000): "*Gender Poverty and Wellbeing*", Blackwell Publications Ltd., Oxford.

Sangari, Kumkum and Vaid, S (1989): "*Recasting Women, Essays in Colonial History*", Kali for Women, New Delhi.

Sarkar, T and Butalia, U (1995): "*Women and The Hindu Right: a Collection of essays*", Kali for Women, New Delhi.

Sarkar, Tanika (2000): "*Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: community, religion and cultural Nationalism*", permanent black, New Delhi.

Sarkar, Tanika (2002): "Semiotics of terror: Muslim children, women in Hindu Rashtra", *EPW*, vol.37, no.28, July 13th, pp. 2872-2876.

Sen, Amartya (2000): "*Development As Freedom*", OUP, New Delhi.

Sen, Gita, Germain, Andrienne and Lincoln, Chen (ed) (1994): "*Population Policies Reconsidered: Health, Empowerment and Rights*", Harvard School of Public Health, Boston.

Sen, Gita, Goorge Asha, Ostilin, Piroska (ed) (2002): " *Engendering International Health: The Challenge Of Equity* ", MIT.

Sharma, Usha (2001): *"Women's Emancipation: Rights vs. Population Control"*, Authorspress, Delhi.

Supriya, Akerkar (1995): "Theory and practice of women's movement in India: A discourse analysis", *EPW*, Vol.30, No.17, Apr 29th.

Thapan, Meenakshi (ed.)(1997): *"Embodiment: Essays on Gender and Identity"*, OUP, New Delhi.

"A Decade After Cairo: Women's Health in a Free Market Economy", The Corner House Publication, 2003.