Chapter - I

INTRODUCTION

Modern times imply some sort of historical discontinuity, either a release from inherited patterns or loss/gain of various types. Nothing can be studied in isolation or in a vacuum. The social context forms a base that contains the roots of women's experience. Man produces and reproduces in nature. A creature and creator, after birth, man is dependent on human care to survive. Gradually one begins to learn and share culture. Dualities and paradoxes pervade one's life: instincts and culture, separateness and social links, individuality and universality. Bodily male or female, one possesses a part of the other in oneself. Order and chaos run parallel at an individual and societal level. Thus, human contact in culture becomes essential in creating another human being. The role of woman in this process is both demanding and distinct as she is the primary source of permeating care and culture in the family. However, there has been an international, national and local concern over the woman's changing roles and dwindling status both within and outside the family.
The last decade has witnessed much developmental activity to enhance the status of woman at a national and international level. Both individual and institutional studies concerning the women's problems and status were undertaken during the women's decade. To mention a few, viz. the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) examined questions relating to the rights and status of women in the context of changing social and economic conditions in the country. This report constructed a successful image of the status of women in India but the subjective dimension (experiential realm or internal reality of the mind reflected in the consciousness of individual social actors and meaning attached to it) i.e. of status remained as the neglected question. Thus, we decided to study the nature of status of women in Delhi.

People in the project Development Alternatives With Women for a New Era (DAWN) observed that the most promising events of the last decade are that women have come together in organizations, networks and movements. Even though women have organized themselves for change, ironically the prospects for peace and genuine human
and economic development are gloomier today than they were at the start of the Decade. If, after incredible economic, social, political, legal, educational and consciousness raising efforts, results show a deterioration of woman's status, then, we must look at the fundamental nature of woman's status and its adequate identification. Thus, we have attempted to understand the status-dynamism of women confining ourselves to an urban context.

In a complex, hierarchical and heterogenous country as India, status of women is affected by innumerable factors including caste, class, religion, family, region, education, age, production and reproduction. Generally speaking, women in India are seen as a deprived section of society compared to men. India still remains a male-dominated society whereas a woman belonging to every class and caste remains subjugated or oppressed but is not necessarily exploited.

How is the balance between structural continuity and structural change maintained or how are women
synthesizing tradition and modernity? In the presence of overt and covert conflicts, how a woman preserves her identity would be a part of our exploration.

Indian society's complexion is although predominantly Hindu, nonetheless, the contribution and impact of other religions and communities cannot be underestimated. We are aware of this pluralistic nature of Indian society with the complex of differences found within the caste, class, region, religion, family etc. but Hinduism does represent the dominant tendency of the mode of perception. The generalizations would be qualified wherever the situation would demand so.

This study becomes a combination of the theoretical context (i.e., the functional, dialectical and psycho-analytical perspectives) and the empirical nature of our research. While studying women, the following questions need to be considered:

(1) What is the distinction and the relationship between the inner and the outer change for women?
(2) Are the external or large-scale status changes an addition or a result of small scale changes inside a woman? The process which Indian urban women are passing through is that of the continuity and discontinuity of individual and societal values, e.g., the changes in the role of women in the private and the public sphere or coding and decoding the cultural myths.

(3) Are the external changes, which women are demanding or have achieved result from crises or abrupt events or has it been a gradual process of the unfolding of their social consciousness?

(4) What are the main causes of the woman's changing self and expectations along with the socio-economic changes?

(5) Be these changes small or large continuous or discontinuous but are these causes endogenous or exogeneous?

(6) Are these causes material or ideational? Finally, comes the problem of the directionality of the changes women are going through. Do we see any
meaningful sequence or a sense of history in the development of the status of women today? If so, what kind of course is it? Is it progressive or a regressive one?

(7) Above all, how does a woman resolve the problems of identity, alienation and the nature and direction of contradictions in the society?

In Heidegger's view, man is that creature who questions himself about the meaning of his being. In the existentialist Marxist language, man, a historic being, wonders about the meaning of history, not as to the direction in which it is evolving, but rather the significance it presents to the very people who make it or live it. Thus arises the women's question of what are they making and what are they living?

Speaking about women, V. Majumdar, very aptly refers to the report of the committee on the Status of Indian Women that though women do not constitute a minority numerically, they are acquiring the features of one by the inequality of class, status and political
Further, demographic trends, with growing differentials between men and women in mortality, access to health care and medical services, literacy, educational and vocational training, and accelerated decline in employment provide an indisputable evidence of steady decline in the value of women in society. Middle class women workers create an illusion of progress, hiding the shrinking roles of the majority. Prostitution, and traffic in women, the commercial use of females for career and business promotion, all point to the growing use of women as commodities.

The traditional Indian woman is a typical one who knows no acceptable alternative role for herself than that of wife - mother and the mark of her success as a person is in her living, thriving children observes, Mandelbaum. Though education of women in the urban areas is significantly associated with smaller family size and has raised the age at marriage, it has not brought about any radical change in the traditional pattern of behaviour.

It is interesting to note that women, even today, in the urban setting, are used as vehicles for display
of wealth and status. The new entrants to the middle class and the upper middle class who are traditional women are the victims.

Women in India, today, are aspiring to participate fully in the decision making process at all levels of society. "There is concentration of women in female occupations like teaching, nursing, social work, stenography - all of which have a low status and remuneration."

Concept of Status: Women are creating an ear for the kind of symphony they want to hear. Their problem is that of what is present and what is absent. A high or low status of a woman does not guarantee that her life would be devoid of suffering or happiness since status seems to be both subjective and objective, and relative but not absolute.

Moreover, the status enhancement and deterioration process occurs simultaneously e.g., profit for one would mean loss to the other at the same time or gain in one aspect would lead to the loss in another, e.g., the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law syndrome or a high
educational status may imply a low maternal status. This is also related to the status compensation principle, i.e. how the loss of status in one sphere is compensated by gain in another sphere. Since it is a multi-layered and multi-dimensional concept status increase in one sphere implies a status decrease in another sphere.

Status is a complex concept and concepts have their own lives, that they grow, can be understood only if the concepts are not separated from the experience to which they give expression. Alienated concept separated from reality is transformed into an artifact of man's mind. Thus, an ideology usurps the place of underlying reality within the human being and history then becomes the history of concrete real men who are producers of their ideas. A concept never adequately expresses the experience it refers to. It points to it, but it is not it. It is, as the Zen Buddhists say, "the finger that points to the moon - it is not the moon". The same applies to the concept of status.

The words status and role have been used interchangeably, because status defines who a person is,
whereas, role defines what such a person is expected to do. According to Linton, a status is marked off by the fact that expectations for social actors are organized around it. [7] Ascribed and achieved status are classified and their associated roles are age, sex, family position, occupation and group membership. Person and status become an independent level of analysis because first, two persons with different characters will behave in a similar fashion if they have the same status. Second, even though two persons have the same character or similar motives, their conduct will vary if they have different statuses. Third, even if two persons with similar character structure are found in two different statuses, their conduct will invariably vary, e.g., an authoritarian daughter may not be an authoritarian mother. Then, everyone has more than one status. The word status is an abstract concept and thus, cannot explain behaviour but can only indicate, thereby, it is reduced to a static rather than a dynamic concept.

Merton mentions about a set of statuses: if a single subject status is in a role-set, and a set of subject statuses of a single person is a status set;
and a set of statuses through time is a status sequence. Status sets, role sets, and status sequences can be distinguished from status characteristics. Status, used as a property of actors, i.e. as a status characteristic as well as a unit of social system, becomes a dynamic concept. Each action implies a status and each status an action. However, "status ambiguity" becomes a theoretical problem. If every actor has more than one status, the attitudes of any two statuses may be either compatible or incompatible in their demands on the self and the other. Thus, confusion would prevail in selecting which status for their interaction. Such ambiguity is a source of strain and discomfort and generally one tries to get out of it or changes it.

However, esteem, respect and prestige are other connotations of status. Opportunities to improve status are always seized. When status is threatened, its loss is resisted, e.g. a newly poor would be more aggressive towards the poor. Sociological approach emphasizes what the society expects of an individual occupying a given status and implies that any status is functionally defined by the role attached to it.
Psychological conceptualization emphasizes the internal reality of the mind, i.e. the subjective aspect. Weber defined social status as a claim to positive and negative privilege with respect to social prestige based on one or more of the following: (i) mode of living; (ii) education and training, and (iii) birth or occupation. Thus, viewing the dimensions of status objectively, Mukherjee concludes:

1. Status conceived as individual resources (education, employment, health and socio-metric status, property etc.).

2. Status reflected in the range of choices available as compared with men in the same society and control over material, social and environmental resources.

3. Status defined in terms of rights and privileges.

4. Status reflected in the responsibility of the position held, both formal and unwritten or expected ones.
Along with status, we also have to see its related concept of "role distance" and "sociological ambivalence". According to Goffman, this concept refers to the gap between role obligation and role performance and to the ability of the actor to blend the concrete demands of immediate situations with elements derived from a wider repertoire of internalized attitudes. This is also known as the actors social creativity in the pre-defined situations he finds himself in.

Women and Status

Not only do scholars disagree about what the role of woman relative to men is in the world, but also about the reasons for the various patterns that exist. Some scholars present a picture of male domination of women stemming from the evolutionary adaptations of early human beings to a way of life based on hunting and war-fare, with the genetically imprinted male-domiance continuing to shape the relations between the sexes today. Others see a period that gave rise to a reaction of men and their subjugation of women, a subjugation that is still with us today. Some have
seen the forces of industrialism and other forms of modernization producing improvements in the lot of women relative to men, while others have seen in these same forces, the further degradation of women.

It is interesting to see how does the status of women in one area of social life, e.g. religion, political, economic, domestic or sexual relate to their status in other areas. Our aim is to understand variations in the status of women, no matter where they could be found.

Urban Women

The urban woman organizes her behaviour to deal with the problematical nature of her daily life getting to work, waiting for goods and services, avoiding stress, threat, physical danger and disease, communicating with others, and preserving privacy, if required. In Delhi, distance between home and place of work, living in polluted air and transport problems create sufficient tension for them. The dynamics of socio-economic needs and exchanges, of relationships, of physical security on streets and home are some of
the common place transactions, events and experiences that call for decision making regularly. A typical sign of an urban culture is that no order can be assumed in other peoples behaviour which lends predictability and regularity to the flow of events in which a woman is an active participant. Generally the crisis in the quality of urban life is much talked about, i.e.,

(1) Role-jumping potential e.g. from caste to class in the urban area which sometimes leads to normlessness and gives a sense of being lost.

(2) Continual erosion of family control.

(3) Relatively unhealthy ecological environment.

(4) "Enlargement of Scales". "This enlargement of scales can be seen in various domains: in the magnitudes of personal travel, in the magnitudes of trade and of industrial production; in the magnitudes of participation in the routines for political legitimation, say in elections for legislatures, and so forth."
Threat of violence is a vicarious experience, suffered by a relatively limited few, yet felt by many women. These problems are more specific to the urban middle class and the poor. This is so because these women are living at the level of subsistence urbanization, i.e. they have the bare necessities and sometimes not even those for survival in the urban environment.

Delhi

Delhi, after the end of the colonial era, has been struggling to join the ranks of the prosperous, powerful and modern cities. Delhi's history is the story of a quiet place becoming alive and it is important to observe the character of the developing reality of Delhi before we study the people inhabiting it.

The sites, situations and degrees of foreign influence in the case of India's largest cities vary widely. However, many similarities in urban phenomena are derivable in spite of such diverse characteristics.
In Delhi, the most noticeable feature is the combination of very high population density in relatively small areas and relatively low population density over other large areas. New Delhi accentuates this phenomenon. Along with this, Delhi is surrounded by areas of temporary settlement. Transportation 'mix' continues to complicate the commuting pattern. In old city context, where distances are not great, there is an efficiency in cheap, slow-moving transport, i.e. the rickshaw. Longer distance and larger bulk movements are correspondingly forced into major streets. The land use in Delhi is industrial, commercial and residential. The most important feature of residential development is the great range in population density. Gross densities in Delhi, e.g., range from an average of 13.16 persons per acre in New Delhi to an average of 213.34 persons per acre in Old Delhi. Delhi has accommodated the influx of population incidental to Partition and later accentuated by the continuing flood of immigrants from rural areas.

It has been observed that migrants come to the urban areas with an overlay of rural traditions and established ways of doing things, loyalty and
obligation patterns, economic arrangements and systems of constraints in channels of communication which do not readily die in the urban context. Thus, the migrant's position in the new urban context involves responses to his old culture, conflicts and tensions with the new and quite different urban context and roles. However, mere physical presence in an urban area does not necessarily have implications for an individual's participation in urban life. Sometimes, people restrict their contacts and a self-imposed segregation may be found which derives from the fact that many people around them have come from different geographic areas or different cultures. Sometimes, the residential sorting out and clustering of people from diverse origins leads to the emergence of 'quarters' or settlement populated entirely or almost entirely by people from a particular background.

Family is one of the most significant institutions in the urban areas of the developing countries. In city, there is a continual erosion of family control over its individual members. Women in particular tend to find their position, roles, and activities intensively modified by the urban environment. The
legal and economic changes in their relationships with other members of their family are most pronounced. Furthermore, women could become economic liabilities in the urban areas. There is a likelihood of an intensification of conjugal relationships. The hospitality obligations undergo a tremendous change. It is interesting to note that an individual may associate himself with one class socially and be limited to another class economically, i.e. interact only in work situations. Religion and education in the urban areas has an impact on the urban women's behaviour patterns, eventhough secularization has made inroads on religion, viz. whether the religious practice is a private or a public affair and whether women are undereducated or are educated unemployables.

Generally speaking, city appeals because of its variety, eventfulness, possibility of choice and the stimulation of an intense atmosphere that many individuals find a desirable background to their lives. Where face to face contacts are important, the city offers unparalleled possibilities. Large numbers of people, high population density, heterogeneity of population and anonymity all form the part of women's
experience in the metropolis. Thus, the city is a situation demanding adaptability from individuals.

In the urban areas, women are indulging in the phenomenon of accretion of statuses, though motherhood still remains the primary choice. The oppressed women tend to be unaware of their oppression or they overlook it. However, their self-awareness may lead to the resolution of issues at an individual level but not necessarily at a societal level.

Thus, to conclude, for our purpose, the lower or higher status is situationally a variable concept. Shifting context may lead to change in the self-perception of the status. Hence, elements of situationality define the relative value inherent in the dynamics of status.

So, we bring focus on the theme of status-dynamism in the introductory chapter. The subsequent chapters are organized around the combination of theoretical and the empirical context of our research. Chapter two views women and society in general, whereas, chapter three deals with the specificity of women in the Indian
society. An outline of the study forms the forth chapter. Chapter five describes and discusses the nexus between social class and status of Indian women. Under social class, we examine income, occupation, education and family determining the experience of a high or a low status. Chapter six deals with the factor of religion, under which caste is included, to understand the status variation. In Chapter seven, we bring forth how motherhood and sexuality propels woman's status. Finally, chapter eight concludes this exploration.