CHAPTER V

SOCIAL CLASS AND STATUS OF WOMEN

The status of women in Delhi cannot be understood in terms of contemporary statistics alone, but it can be analysed in terms of the meaning assigned to the attributes or variables by the respondents concerned. It is difficult to connect specific behaviour pattern with a specific variable. Social class is not simply an association of variables like income, occupation, education, family background etc., but it is viewed as a dynamic element in determining status perceptions. Ascriptive factors like sex, family of origin, religion and caste still determine 'life-chances'. Not that achievement oriented activity does not affect the position in the social structure but the interconnections between variables becomes more important. Thus, for us the objective factors cannot be divorced from their subjective context. Objective factors such as education, employment, property, control over material and social resources, rights and privileges etc. explain the objective dimension of status but cannot explain the subjective context which emphasizes
the internal reality of the mind; the experimental dimension and meaning attached to it by individuals. Our data, therefore, focuses on what could be measured rather than the precise measurement of the status of women.

The following status-situations emerged from our study:

(1) An objectivity high status synchronizing with a subjectively high status experience.

(2) An objectively high status coinciding with a subjectively low status experience.

(3) An objectively low status synchronizing with a subjectively low status experience.

(4) An objectively low status coinciding with a subjectively high status experience.

(5) The notion of internal and external status comes into being: gain in the external status could imply a loss in the internal realm and the gain in
the internal status could imply a loss in the external realm.

(6) Status cannot be viewed in absolute terms, i.e., an overall high status doesn't necessarily imply a high status in all spheres or an overall low status doesn't necessarily mean a low status in all spheres.

(7) Status compensation principle occurs, i.e. a low status in one sphere gets compensated by a high status in another sphere or vice versa. In other words, evolution and devolution go hand in hand.

(8) Status-fluctuation prevails and it depends on the experience of time and space both at an individual and societal level.

In the forthcoming chapters we shall substantiate the above points by means of various examples, and observe their applicability.
High Status: Experience in General

Ten percent of the respondents experienced a high status. Most of them were women belonging to the upper castes. A few cases of Christian and Sikh women figured as well. Age variation was from late twenties to late forties and all of them were married. With a few exceptions, all of them came under the upper (Rs. 2501 and above) and upper-middle (between Rs. 1501-2500) income category. Few women were highly educated and were also engaged in some jobs. In fact, most of them were housewives. 3.5 percent lived in joint families with an average of six members and 6.5 percent in nuclear families. They had an average of two children. Decision making power regarding the domestic expenditure, education, health and marriage of children was with both the husband and the wife. Most of these women had a traditional outlook towards life in that they were strongly rooted in religion. Different sets of norms were followed in the raising of sons and daughters (Emphasis was given to a son's education, career, health food, and freedom). Permission to move around had to be sought from the husband or elders in
the family even though they had the freedom of movement. These women, however, felt oppressed both by men and women within the family. For instance the husbands were perceived as dominating, whereas, mothers-in-law as authoritarian. (Specific examples are given in the subsequent chapters). Generally speaking, these women were supportive in nature.

Low Status: Experience in General

Table 1: Discrepancy Score

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjective percentage</th>
<th>Objectively High Status</th>
<th>Objectively Low Status</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WEHS = 10 (Women experiencing high status)</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WELS = 90 (Women experiencing low status)</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total =</td>
<td>56.5%</td>
<td>43.5%</td>
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</table>

Objectively speaking, even though many women enjoyed a high status in the urban context, yet they reported of experiencing an overall low status in their given social structure. 90 percent of our respondents
consisting of women from various religions, castes and classes showed a discrepancy score between the objective and subjective dimension of status. 24 per cent are illiterate, 34 per cent are educated up to the secondary level and 32 per cent are educated up to college-level and above. Their age range is between 20 and 60 years and most of them are married with an average of three children, although the number of children ranged from 1 to 2 per family. 5 per cent of these respondents are unmarried; 72.5 per cent are married; 2.5 per cent divorced women and 10 per cent are widows.

22 per cent of these women are employed, 2.5 per cent are unemployed; 55.5 per cent are housewives; 5 per cent are unpaid workers and 5 per cent are students.

The household work namely cooking, cleaning, washing and shopping was shared by the family members, daughters-in-law and the servants. Both the husband and the wife participated in decision-making process regarding the expenditure on household matters such as the education, health and marriage of children. Many
women enjoyed freedom of movement but had to seek permission from elders in the family. Generally speaking, traditional norms and values were emphasized by them regarding social roles a few exceptions of course.

Both men and other women were a source of suppression within the family structure. Many of these women were influential - they liked to influence others by their ideas and values. However, most of them emerged as supportive women. Rarely did we come across individualized women. These women experienced a low status, nonetheless, they were not powerless within and outside the family.

"Problem Consciousness"

Women experiencing a high status (WEHS) expressed their complaints about restriction to their movement, mothers-in-law, health, sexual problems, work and economic issues and value clashes within the family. (These are discussed in detail later in the chapter and elsewhere).
Women experiencing a low status (WELS) faced and reported problems concerning: health, in-laws, economic situation, work, children's education, freedom of movement restrictions, lack of access to education, emotional exploitation and deprivation, sexuality, beating and domination by husbands, relatives, value-clashes, property matters, discrimination at work place, security issues, ill-treatment by women mistresses and inadequate remuneration for their work.

Although women identified and were aware of these social and personal problems, yet nothing was crystallized in their localities or any exact measures taken for amelioration or eradication of the undesirable conditions. Instead, a verbal protest was expressed casually.
Comparative Chart of WEHS and WELS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Women experiencing high status</th>
<th>Women experiencing low status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WEHS = 10%</td>
<td>WELS = 90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. **Income:**

1) Lower class
   - Below Rs. 500: -
   - Middle class
     - 501 - 1500: 4
     - Upper-middle class
       - 1501 - 2500: 4.5
     - Upper class
       - Rs. 2501 and above: 1.5

2. **Occupation:**

1) House wives: 8
2) Employed: 2
3) Unemployed: -
4) Unpaid workers: -
5) Students: -
3. **Education**

i) Illiterate  
   2  
   24

ii) Secondary level  
    3.5  
    34

iii) College level and above  
    4.5  
    32

4. **Family**

i) Nuclear  
   7.5  
   72.5

ii) Joint  
    2.5  
    17.5

**Discussion**

The various experiential features of women in Delhi form the basis of our study with family and community as its social context.

**Income:**

In trying to classify women under income groups, family income was considered than merely including the earnings from their employment. This was done since individual earnings ignore income from capital, social-
security benefits, legacies, fringe-benefits etc. One is aware that the consumption pattern, housing and life-style, and the size of the family are relevant for assessment of the family income. However, it has not been included here. Stability of income is as important as the amount. In our study, we could not find income as a sole unifying factor. In fact, the various income groups were quite heterogenous. Heterogeneity also existed within the limits of the same income category.

4 percent of WEHS came in the middle class; 4.5 in the upper middle class; and 1.5 per cent were from the upper class. Here, the following case illustrates the incongruity regarding high status and low income:

Case NO. 7

She resides in Safdarjung Development Area. Belonging to an upper caste, joint family, she has two children and her mother-in-law stays with their family. She is twenty seven years old, married and educated up to the secondary. She is a housewife and the family income is Rs. 900 per month. Therefore, she does all
the housework including cooking, cleaning, washing serving etc. Regarding the household expenditure on food, clothing, education, health and social matters, both she and her husband decide together. She seeks permission from her husband whenever she has to move out. Traditional in outlook, she is very supportive towards the family. However, her daughter won't be allowed to move as freely as her son. Both her husband and mother-in-law were oppressive in the sense that they imposed their life-style on her. Even though she was facing severe economic constraints, yet she expressed the feeling of having a high status.

25.5 per cent of WELS are in the lower class; 28.5 per cent are in the middle class, 24.5 per cent are in the upper-middle class and 11.5 per cent are in the upper class. Here we see that the following cases illustrate the experience of low status even when they belonged to the upper class:

"Case - 199:"

She is sixty seven years old and comes from an upper caste, joint family in West End. The family
Income is Rs. 4000/- per month. She is illiterate, married and has two children. She is a housewife who supervises the servants while they do the housework. Both she and her husband decide regarding the household matter. Traditional in outlook, she has the freedom of movement but doesn't choose to go out. She experienced oppression from both husband and the in-laws, especially the mother-in-law in the sense that they were very dominating. Major problems she faces are those of health, security and economic constraints, despite her well-to-do family background.

Case - 35:

She is a Sikh living in Hauz Khas, has done her graduation and is 51 years old. She is a housewife whose family income exceeds Rs. 4000/- per month. She has two children who are settled separately. At present she lives with her husband alone. Work is done by servants at home and household decisions are shared by both the husband and the wife. She is quite liberal, enjoys freedom of movement and has raised her son and daughter on equal terms. She felt that women oppressed men and other women. In her case, she
dominates her husband. She had a very unsatisfactory relationship with her husband sexually and emotionally. On the whole, she expressed having a low status despite her stylish background. She was a beautiful woman who felt she had an unimpressive husband and was never allowed to work in her youth. She was strongly against arranged marriage and appeared to be highly influential and individualized (i.e. enjoyed personal space and time) to a certain extent.

Thus, here we see that the objective and the subjective dimensions of status do not necessarily coincide.

**OCCUPATION:**

In our study, it became difficult to know what made a woman's occupation exciting, valued and personally fulfilling and what made another a boring, frustrating and a waste of time.

8 per cent of WEHS are housewives and 2 per cent are employed. Whereas 22 percent of WELS are employed,
2.5 per cent are unemployed, 55.5 per cent are housewives, 5 per cent are unpaid workers and 5 per cent are students.

Depending on the nature of their occupation, women developed a sense of identity and authority accordingly e.g. a housewife had a different basis for wielding power compared to a doctor. On the whole, social network becomes very crucial for their survival for maintaining power structures through interpersonal relations and creating changes in the social sphere.

Woman's work in India, though usually invisible, sustains the household economy and subsidizes the profit, leisure and higher standards of living enjoyed by man. This may or may not result in economic and social control over their lives in the sense that they may or may not have a right over their earnings and time.

An examination of work histories and patterns reveal that many women work because of economic necessity and stop working temporarily when household responsibilities such as child bearing or taking care
of the sick are impossible to co-ordinate with work expectations. Some women minimize conflict between work and home by taking part-time or home-based work. When asked about the meaning of work, respondents tended to associate work with self-esteem, accomplishment and independence on the one hand and conflict, strain and crisis on the other hand. Housewives rarely reported of being lonely as motherhood and family obligations remained their priority. However, many of them wished they could go and work outside their homes. Working women often complained of low pay, bad hours, boring work, high pressure, environmental hazards, transport problems etc.

Generally speaking, women pointed out the enhancement of economic status and job satisfaction when they choose to work. Managing a career and a family comes forth as a major issue. Various reasons for work, such as boredom, search for fulfillment, economic necessity, nature of work, extra-income for family and supporting the family viz. the female headed households, were given, depending on their class background.
Part-Time or Home-Based Workers

The situation of part-time workers is rather grim. These women are deprived of employee benefits, retirement pensions, health insurance, training and promotion that are available to full time workers. The working conditions for these women are not congenial and are subject to the employer's discretion. The following case is such an example:

Case No. 40:

She is thirty years old, married, educated upto secondary and belongs to an upper caste, nuclear family in R.K. Puram. She is a mother of two children and her family income is Rs. 1400 per month. She does all the house-work by herself but the husband does not appreciate it. He does not even give his salary regularly. So, she does part-time work for an export firm and brings the work of embroidering dresses at home. Besides going out to get work she is not allowed to move by herself. Generally, she complained of her economic problem and wanted equal rights with her husband. He does not care for her and on top of it she
doesn't have any permanent work. Her firm does not provide any employee benefits or health insurance, which makes her feel insecure.

**Professional Women**

Professional women do enjoy holding prestigious and well-paid jobs in the market. Although a small minority formed a part of our sample, yet, their own social network formations became clear. Generally speaking, within the professions, women mentioned of not occupying the top positions, because of various constraints, e.g., the following cases, thus, project the sacrifice involved in professions by women in their lives.

**Case 196:**

She is sixty seven years old, married, has one son and lives at West End in a well-to-do, upper caste family. Mostly she is alone with her son as her husband keeps travelling often. She is a doctor by profession and worked in the early part of her life. At her place
of work, she felt oppressed by other women colleagues and the competition amongst the colleagues depressed her. She has domestic servants and has freedom to move around by herself. The only regret in her life was that she had to give up her practice as her husband demanded her time and support in the family. Eventually, she has ended up being a frustrated housewife. To preserve her family a very high price was paid by her.

Case 143:

She is a lawyer, aged thirty three years and is a housewife now. She belongs to an upper caste, nuclear family, residing in Safdarjang Development Area. She is married and a mother of two children. The family income is Rs. 2000 per month. She has a servant to help her in the household work. Although her husband has given her the freedom to go out by herself but does not allow her to practise her profession. She felt that her husband was very possessive and suppressed her professional growth. For the sake of children and family she was not allowed to work.
Case 113:

She is thirty two years old, married, a post-graduate and belongs to an upper caste, nuclear family. She lives in Usha Niketan. formerly she was an Indian Administrative Officer but works as a social worker now. Her family income is Rs. 1900 per month. She had an inter-caste marriage and has no children or rather emphasized not having children at all. She felt that there was an invisible barrier in the promotion and progress of professional women. Since she was not satisfied with her former job, she chose to go in for developmental work in the rural areas. Even though men or women in her family did not oppress her, yet she experienced a low status, which could be because of some inner reasons.

The above cases indicate the gain and loss of status at an internal or external level as well as the discrepancy between the objective and subjective perceptions.

The cases of professional women reaching the top positions, however, proved to be the victims of the
Queen Bee syndrome, i.e. they made sure that no other women would be allowed to reach their positions. This is probably so because they feel threatened by the "sameness" of another woman and professional jealousy takes hold of them.

Women teachers, doctors, lawyers, bureaucrats, writers and journalists in our sample emphasized the social organization aspect of their workplace, where access to rewards and benefits work through personal sponsorship system. Within their network, using social skills and social relation with one's peers and mentors produced job opportunities, promotion and status.

Clerks

Women clerical workers complained about the temporary nature of their services, low wages, little control over their work and minimal social relationships with co-workers. Their status was dependent upon the boss. Many women resented the fact of providing non-material rewards such as emotional intimacy and praise for their bosses. The following case is a typical instance.
Case 197

She is thirty years old, married, educated up to higher secondary and lives at Safdarjung Development Area in a joint family. She comes from an upper caste family with seven members. Her mother-in-law, sister-in-law and brother-in-law live with the family along with her two children. The family income is Rs. 1300 per month. Most of the household work is done by mother-in-law and the sister-in-law. At times she also helps them. Even though she is working as a stenographer, yet she seemed to be a traditional woman who complained about her boss's behaviour. Generally, she said, that women clerks and typists were at the mercy of their bosses. She earned more than her husband but still he dominated her and she resented it.

Industrial Women Workers

Widows from the lower strata mostly constituted this group of workers. Most of the female-headed households consisted of industrial women workers in our study.
Generally speaking, these women informed us about the unemployment situation. They were working in Birla textile factories at Malka Ganj, Delhi. Compared to men, they earned less, had poor working and living conditions, few chances of advancement and faced discriminatory behaviour of their bosses. For example, Case 31 complained of how she had to go to the boss's house and please his wife by doing the household chores for no wage at all. She had to pay this price to ensure the permanancy of her job in the factory. Some other cases, e.g., Case 72 and 82, mentioned about how the bosses demanded sexual accessibility from them. The labour unions did not provide them with much protection. Most of them suffered from nutritional deficiencies and hardly have any provisions for health care.

Migrant Labour and Agricultural Workers

Construction workers and agricultural women workers in and around Delhi generally have seasonal employment. These women spoke of their jobs being physically very taxing and their ill-health prevented
them from working consistently. Working conditions were poor with low wages and all the house-work responsibility fell on them. Apparently, these women were very aggressive and strong and had plenty of complaints. They denied sexual access to irresponsible husbands who would drink and beat them up. The cause or the consequence became difficult to determine here.

Case No. 74

She is an agricultural labourer living in a hut at Chattarpur, near Mehrauli. She is thirty five years old, illiterate, lives in a joint family of seven members and earns Rs. 200 per month. She is separated from her husband and is therefore, the head of the family now. She does all the housework herself including cooking, cleaning and washing. She enjoys freedom of movement and does not feel that other men or women can oppress her. Even her husband, who was dominating her sexually was rejected when he started beating her up. Thus, one day she turned him out as he offered no material support. However, she complained about the lack of accessibility of regular work and education for her daughters. She sounded angry and unhappy about her status.
Sometimes the women would beat up men too, e.g., case no. 73, who after taking years of beating from her husband finally gave it back to him with a broom-stick. since that day he learnt to behave himself. These women were less dependent on their husbands. The question of equal wages did not apply to these women because the nature of their work varied. Daughters helped their mothers and therefore had to forego their education even if the opportunity existed. Survival was the only goal for which they worked.

**Domestic Maid-Servants**

The domestic labourers were among the lowest paid women workers. Although inadequately paid, domestic work is generally available for incoming groups of immigrant women, illiterate or semi-literate women and women with little choice of work. These women are at the mercy of individual women employers, who are unlikely to provide health or paid sick leave besides treating them in an inhuman manner. Caste discrimination is the maximum here and its high visibility proves the rigid caste consciousness of urban women, whether educated or belonging to the upper
castes. These women, however, had the advantage of negotiating their own work schedules but they paid the price in terms of low wages and little job security. Case number 58 illustrates their conditions.

Case No. 58

She is thirty years old and works as a sweeper in Jama Masjid area. She is a muslim, illiterate and married. Her husband is a sick man and she is a mother of four children. All the housework including cooking, cleaning and washing is done by her. She earns Rs. 150 per month. Her family migrated from East Pakistan before Bangladesh was formed. She is over-worked and also suffers from ill-health but is forced to work to support her family.

All in all, women workers did experience a different prestige, income and authority system compared to men. Obviously, there are sex differences in earnings. The women's low earnings have adverse consequences for their economic well-being. Female-headed households experience poverty in the lower sections of the Indian society whereas women in the
upper class female headed households experience matriarchal authority and control. Caste, religion, marital status and age, we found, makes the experience of poverty very averse. Many of the poor were older women who, when young, had their prior economic status. Women in the lower strata, like men, when unemployed go through the economic hardship. Without major changes in the social and economic value placed on older persons in the section of our society, these women inevitably more towards impoverishment and also experience psychological differences of being perceived unproductive.

Housewives

Women's unpaid labour includes housewife's work which has for long gone unrecognized as work. On the one hand, respondents valued being a housewife as a desirable goal for women and, on the other hand, housework was seen as drudgery and menial labour. No matter what the class background of women, for most of the house-wives, house-work is time-consuming as well as physically and psychologically demanding. The repetitiveness of their tasks proves to be frustrating
at times. Many educated housewives complained of their boredom as they were not allowed to work for cultural or family background reasons. Housewives had their health problems in abundance not that the working women didn't go through them but, somehow, with housewives health issues tend to get magnified.

Generally speaking, the housewives didn't find their role to be an oppressive one for many of them found their housework both creative and autonomous, especially when compared to the jobs women occupy in the market. Routinization and monotomy applied to men's work too as reported by Case 89. She is 36 years old and comes from an upper caste, joint family with six members. She is married, has three children, is a post-graduate and lived in the IIT Area Delhi. Her family income is Rs. 2500 per month. She has stopped working because of her ill-health and finds outside work very taxing.

Eight per cent of of WEHS in our sample are housewives, whereas, only 2 per cent are working women. On the other hand, 55.5 per cent of WELS are housewives and only 22 per cent are employed workers. For
instance, the following cases reveal how a combination of different factors gives rise to the experience of a high or low status rather than merely the occupation of housewife.

Case 142:

She is 36 years old and is beautiful. She is a housewife, belongs to an upper caste nuclear family, and has three children. She falls in the middle class and lives in Hauz Khas. She is a double M.A. but is still traditional in outlook. She has domestic help at home and feels oppressed by her mother-in-law even when she is living separately. For instance, the mother-in-law makes unreasonable economic demands and keeps watch over her activities. On the whole, she enjoys a high status in her family and feels she has strong motherhood accomplishments as she is a mother of three children.

Case 25:

She is a housewife and is a graduate. She belongs to the Nair community, an upper caste in Kerala. Now she resides in R.K. Puram, South Delhi and comes from
the middle class. She has a nuclear family and three children. Household work is done by her and decisions regarding household expenditure is taken by both her and her husband. She has no freedom of movement and is a very traditional woman. She raises her children with different value patterns and feels women oppress women whereas men are sympathetic. She is totally a family-oriented woman who plays a supportive role in her family. The cause of Nair women's respect in the family is because they have rights over property, according to her. However, on the whole she felt she had a low status, because she was not allowed to move out of the house.

Our data reveals that cultural, sexual, economic, educational, political and family experience could combine together in order to make housewives undergo low or high status situations.

The gender based division of labour in household work is evident when we glance at our data. Tasks like cooking, washing, cleaning, ironing, sewing, knitting, care of children, etc. were generally performed by housewives. whereas, external tasks like shopping,
etc. are either shared or exclusively done by the male members.

Transportation and shopping proves to be time-consuming. Medical problems, repairs in the house from taps to the television have become routine work. Child care means more work for mothers today, especially if they are educated. Mothers spend their afternoons assisting their children do school homework.

Thus, men generally had single and narrowly specialized roles, whereas, women were having multiple roles. Women had a very crucial contribution in extending and strengthening the kinship and friendship network. Developing social skills in handling human relationships emerged as a primary concern for most of the housewives.

The respondents had an average of two to three children – the range being 1 to 12. The working mother were never completely free of guilt, no matter whatever help they had whether from the mother-in-law, servants or creches. Paradoxically, an ideology of family was adhered to or at least expressed by working women more
than by the housewives. Women in ordinary and part-time jobs felt more guilty compared to the professional elite. However, despite the guilt associated with leaving their children at home and dilemmas of their changed roles, very few women regretted of having careers. In fact, often they tried to justify their course of action.

We have found that the integration of women on equal terms into the productive process could be a necessary but not a sufficient condition for equality and liberation. Even when men were found to participate in the reproductive process, it did not necessarily create a situation of equality and liberation. This shows that an apparently equal division of labour might lead to other social imbalances, e.g., we had case number 139 of a professional woman journalist whose husband's work base was at home. They were in their fifties, came from the upper caste, and class, nuclear family in Safdarjung Development Area. The man shared all the internal household work, including the care of the children to taking care of the guests plus performed all the public tasks. In this case, the woman certainly was more
dominating. This, however, resulted in the under-performance of the man professionally and economically. Not only that even the children's professional performance was adversely affected since they were not consistent in their job commitments. Children's failure was a major source of worry for the successful mother.

Hence, the problem of striking a balance is there, whereas; generally the tendency is to go to either extremes. In the aggregate, women going out to work has made little difference to the domestic expectations in the family. Nevertheless, this seen positively, demonstrates the increased capacity of women to be more dynamic.

**Education**

During the decade 1971 to 1981, female literacy rate improved from 18.7 per cent to 24.82 per cent. Moreover, when the rapid increase in the size of the illiterate population during the same period is taken into consideration, the slowing process becomes a cause for concern. The total number of illiterate women
increased from 215.3 million in 1971 to 2411.6 million in 1981.

In our sample, 26 per cent women are illiterate, who came from different class, caste and religious backgrounds. 38.5 per cent had education upto the secondary level and 35.5 per cent are educated upto the college level and above.

2 per cent of WEHS were illiterate, 3.5 per cent had education upto secondary level and 4.5 per cent were educated upto college level and above.

24 per cent WELS were illiterate women, 34 percent had secondary level education and 32 per cent were educated upto college level and above.

There wasn't any evidence of the breaking up of the joint family with the increase of education. 3.5 per cent of WEHS lived in joint families whereas 23.5 per cent of WELS were part of a joint family.

Higher education, if on the one hand enhanced the status, it, on the other hand, created problems of
maladjustment in the family and increased the age of marriage. Illiterate women in our sample desired to educate their daughters so that they could be self-supporting and would be a source of income for the family. In the upper classes, education was not necessarily linked up with work. for many it becomes a qualification for marriage.

In our study, WEHS are even illiterate and WELS are very highly educated including the professionals, viz. the following cases illustrate the above point and also the status-compensation principle.

Case 105:

She is illiterate, aged 60 years, belongs to an upper caste, joint family. Coming from an upper-middle class, she lives in Vasant Vihar, South Delhi. She has domestic help and shares the household decisions with her husband. Traditional in outlook she doesn't use the freedom of movement given to her. She has undergone a healthy sexual relationship with her husband but feels that men and women both are oppressive. Even though she is not educated she
has been reading Bengali novels especially by Sharat Chandra. They depict this phenomena clearly, according to her. She doesn't feel that lack of education has prevented her from having a high status.

Case 150:

She is a post-graduate, aged 25 years. She is married, comes from the upper-middle class and belongs to a Jain, nuclear family. She has one child and is a traditional woman. The servant helps her in doing the housework. Both she and her husband decide about the household matters. She thinks that both men and women are oppressive, because they try to impose their ideas and values. She is facing problems with her mother-in-law as she is not allowed to work and has value clashes with her. Thus, she felt having a low status.

Women's education brought about changes in the family and marriage expectations. Professional women faced competition in and outside the family and tended to under-perform sometimes as their husbands felt threatened by their success and became aggressive.
If educated professional women complained of having normative doubts about themselves, the educated housewives didn't always feel that they had made the right choice.

Education, our study reveals, is not necessarily a source of identity for Indian women. In many cases, it created friction, identity problems and under or over employment problems. Moreover, education did not always break the cultural values regarding the conventional feminine roles and, at times, the educated women used religious values to validate or legitimize their accepted roles.

Family

Our study unfolds a pro-family ideology held by the respondents. Family in itself becomes a value in Indian society even though women had plenty of reasons to break up their family. Whether a woman came from a joint family or a nuclear family, she perceived family as her reference point. Very few cases talked about themselves without the context of family.
2.5 per cent of WEHS came from joint families and 7.5 per cent from nuclear families. 17.5 per cent of WELS had joint families whereas 72.5 per cent came from nuclear families.

Generally speaking, marriage imposed a strenuous socialization upon women as their social set-up and life-style changed. The family proved to be a protective institution but at the same time it was not devoid of interpersonal strain as women often had to adjust to the husband's needs, wishes or his narcissistic indulgences. In the lower and middle classes, abuse, beatings and extra-marital affairs were put up with for the sake of children. However, in the lower class, women even abandoned their men if they failed to provide. Thus, mother/children bond becomes a priority and conjugal relations gain secondary importance. An intensification of mother/child bond takes place in cases where the husband has extra-marital relationships. This probably explains partially why mothers in India invest emotionally more in their sons. However, we also had cases of women who didn't want to be quoted but who opted out for other relationships either within or outside the family, e.g.
Case 121 is somewhat similar to such cases. She is thirty nine years old, married and a graduate. She is a section officer in a bank and belongs to a nuclear family at R.K. Puram. She belongs to the Nair community - a caste from Kerala and earns Rs. 1500 per month, whereas, her husband gets a complex about it as he also earns the same amount. She has to seek permission from him to go out even with her children. She gets beatings very often and is having a highly unsatisfactory sexual life with her husband. Thus, generally, women desist from separating in order to avoid having fatherless children.

The mother-in-law/sister-in-law/daughter-in-law syndrome perpetuated a permanent sphere of discordance constituting a structured strain. Whereas, unstructured strain manifested in the behavioural and role unpredictability of the family members. (This is explained in detail in Chapter VII).

Patriarchy in an orthodox family seems more authoritarian compared to the modern indulgent patriarchy. Thus, husband's absence was not always a source of frustration. Many women described their
husbands as strict and authoritarian. On the contrary, in cases where the women were more authoritarian men never dared to challenge their authority. This phenomena appeared where there was a wide age gap between the husband and the wife, viz. case 95: She is in her fifties, married, educated up to the secondary and lives in a nuclear family at Vasant Vihar. She belongs to the Sikh community. She had a stern look, was very religious and dominated all the family members as well as the servants. the husband, much older than her, looked very timid compared to her. Thus, younger wives tended to have more authority and their domination was accepted by the husbands.

Patriarchy in India with its conjugal aloofness, at times, was not in conflict with the domestic matriarchy of women. Survival values prevailed generally in the family rather than the individualistic values. Traditional notion of the domestic hierarchy and authority helps in the functioning and stability of the family units. Given a choice, many women living in joint families would continue living so since they don't have to worry about their children when they are away to work. In a few cases, women didn't mind having
co-wives even, viz. we had case no. 6, who was a Muslim woman in her thirties. She made the husband's former wife do all the domestic work and take care of the children while she went and worked for the family. The husband was sick, therefore, couldn't provide economic support for either of the wives.

In the upper strata, women's need to have family and work was a personal choice. It was strongly influenced by living standards and personal qualifications or interests. Education and skills have increased the desire in women to work, but still there are innumerable instances of educated and professional women giving up their work for family, marriage or cultural reasons.

Indian women face restrictions outside the family concerning men-women interaction. For many cases it was almost prohibited to mix with male members outside the family. Some women from the middle class, even today, refused to take their husband's name. Husband was addressed as son's father. The traditional cultural emphasis probably lay more on fatherhood rather than selfhood.
Family keeps women in a double-bind situation where the family not only oppresses but also provides women support and protection. To most women the family context provides the terms of reference within which means and mode of survival or personal progress must be worked out. A gap between the promise and the reality of family life becomes obvious in our data. Anyway, alternative family forms are yet being conceived by women who have questioned the institution of family.