

Making Indian Cities Gender Sensitive: Empowering Women in Urban Public Space for Ascending India

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ARTICLE DETAILS

Article History

Published Online: 10 January 2019

Keywords

development, decision making, empowerment, gender sensitive, inclusive, urbanisation

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ABSTRACT

The city making and the safety of women have remained a major concern for urban policy makers. With large number of women migrating from rural to urban, engaging in both formal and informal sectors of work, changes in socio-economic and psycho-cultural environment of Indians in era of modernisation and globalisation have influenced the role of women in public space allowing them to attain a new and diverse role. However the core issue, yet unanswered, is women's empowerment in the city making and their right to the city. The article looks into the speedy growth of cities as symbolic of rising India and how they are able to accommodate the needs of women. The gender as concept today has been broadened to include not just men and women but also transgender but my focus in the article will be on the women in particular as a social construct. It will examine the government policies that emphasise on the gender inclusion in decision making, municipalities and urban development to make the cities gender sensitive. The institutionalisation of local governance, participation of women in management of the urban public spaces is the unexplored domain which otherwise can ensure gender mainstreaming. The article looks at the ways in which democratic governance can be revitalised at city level and will provide recommendations for a balanced urban development that will stop violence against women and secure dignity. As India ascends to become global power, it is essential to emphasise on the role played by the women, who can and have contributed to the growth of nations, its cities and societies. Women's empowerment is vital for a country to progress and cities become a site of empowerment and disempowerment which needs to be studied.

1. Introduction:

The idea of empowerment is embedded in the concept of power, whether it is personal, professional, economic and political which ensures moving away from the position of powerlessness, vulnerability to that of power. Collective and organised crimes such as gang rapes, sexual exploitation, kidnapping, trafficking of girls, sexual harassment, acid attacks have always occupied the headlines of the news. Empowering the women, making them safe both in private and public space has been the motive of the government which can help women to access the public spaces, participate in the decision making. Mainstreaming the gender in urban development enables women's right to the city and easy mobility in the urban space thereby making them gender inclusive with their active participation in realising the larger vision of the nation to fulfil the sustainable development goals. The city when gender sensitive displays the diversity of the society responding equally to the needs and requirement of both the sexes and since women view the city differently promoting sustainable and equitable urban development is important. A constructive march in making our cities safer was taken by UNICEF, UN-Habitat and UN Women in 2011, when they launched 'Safe and Friendly Cities for All,' a five-year agenda focussed on making women experience a safer public space in neighbourhood while their quality of living is also improved. Therefore the urban development needs to keep a balance with needs of every section of society so that they can contribute largely to the growth of the city.

Methodologically the article analyses the concept of empowerment in the globalised era and the necessity of engendering the city to make it inclusive and participatory. The article has looked into the various policies undertaken by the international organisations, state governments in India and the central government schemes to educate the people that can help to make the cities gender sensitive. Lack of sufficient data makes it difficult to conduct a quantitative study of the safety scenario in the cities but the reference to the various NGOs, news papers, articles, reports from National Crime Records Bureau help to undertake a qualitative study of the safety and empowerment of women in urban space and sensitisation of the duty bearers. The article has made a theoretical study of the concepts while delving into the present situation and has provided recommendations to attain the goal of inclusive and gender sensitive city.

2. Understanding the concept of empowerment:

At the backdrop of modernisation, economic globalisation and fast urbanisation, Indian women are frequently migrating to the cities for better life and opportunities. Cities become a site of empowerment for women since they get exposure to education, become economically independent, socially and politically aware. Women's empowerment is a fashionable subject of discussion and policy making today in both urban and rural India. Women's empowerment in literal sense means improvement of the position of the women and recognition of the role of women in the society's power structure. However

the regular media reports of rapes, molestation, eve teasing, dowry deaths, acid attacks and sexual harassment cases shocks the country about the status of women in India. Sad reality of women's empowerment in India is that there is a huge gap between the constitutional promises and the real world. The freedom and decision making power even though enjoyed by urban women are more compared to rural women, the vulnerability of women remain the same everywhere. Looking at the government policies the efforts seem to be very promising but they are often limited to ideas, hardly implemented due to several hurdles.

Gender sensitisation becomes crucial to address various safety issues faced by women in public arenas as well as at home. The steady rise in violence against women in urban areas creates a pertinent question in our minds: Are women really empowered? The waves of modernisation and liberalisation have touched the urban locales of India but there is an undercurrent of neglect, isolation, vulnerability, inaccessibility and lack of power of women in social and public life. This vulnerable position manifests poor representation in governance, lesser importance to gender issues leading to the exposure to wider discrimination in fields of negotiation and bargaining. The sense of powerlessness is visible and felt when the women and girls face constant challenges of protecting themselves and struggling for their status in day to day life. The city often fails to provide the right to space and fulfil the dreams which it promises. Urban growth and development cannot be full-fledged if one vital section of the society cannot experience equal benefit of the growth. The issues of women's safety, social security, inclusion become vital part of the rising developmental graph which we show to the world. The reports and documents presented by *Gender Inclusive Cities (GIC)*, *Women in Cities International (WCI)* aims to comprehend the gender inequality, suppression, violence and social insecurity to which women are subjected. It is evident that the public spaces are dominated by the men in our society which also increases the risks of violence and insensitivity towards women stepping outside the domestic domain. In this context it is important to understand and re evaluate the idea of women's empowerment and the need to create gender sensitive urban society to cherish the productivity and development of cities.

Theorising empowerment:

"No city can be smart and sustainable if half of its population is not safe and lives in fear of violence," as pointed out by Laxmi Puri UN Women Deputy Executive Director, while addressing the audience in "Safe Cities for Women and Girls – Implementation Essentials", programme in 2015. Women's experiences are the best judge of whether they feel empowered. Empowerment does not necessarily have same implication for all widely, it touches the life of women differently, with varied meanings and interpretations attached to it. With the recognition of the role of women in the economic development and decision making spheres, the concept of women's empowerment has become a popular concept of discussion. The idea of women's empowerment as a vital issue got a genuine push in the Beijing conference and the post 1990s era saw a tremendous effort towards women's empowerment, equality and development. The term

"empowerment" refers to the concern and awareness about their interests, participation in decision making process, economic avenues that provide equal opportunities without restrictions. Contextualising the term empowerment it is important to understand power. As Rowland (1997 in Rehman 2013) writes that power can be understood in four main ways: power "over" which means control or domination; power "to" concept identifies the generative or productive sense of power which are either in terms of manipulation or resistance; in power "with" looks at the group handling the problem together; power "within" captures the uniqueness that exists in every individual.

Empowerment encapsulates the changes in the prevailing social order and makeover so that every individual can have equal access to decision making power. He looks at three dimensions of empowerment: "personal" capacity and confidence development of the person and raising the voice against oppression; "rational" enhances the ability to inspire the nature of relationship and decisions which are made within; "collective" involves the political structures and the collective action, cooperation rather than competition (Rowland 1997). According to Friedman (1992) in Rehman (2013), there are three kinds of power prevailing: political (policy changes), social (society coming forward for the change), psychological (self confidence, increased self respect and self esteem). When we talk about women being empowered it works at all three levels and not simply at the political junction. A woman must be able to take decision about her life without inhibitions, demands the state to make changes in the existing social and the legal structure for further improvement in the position of women in the society. It also means making her choices and ability to influence the choice of family and society in totality. In *Just So Many Docile Bodies? Feminism and Panopticonism*, Foucault outlines the self surveillance to which women are subjected and his thesis on 'Panopticonism' refers to "there is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze..." (Foucault 1972-77 in Deveaux 1994:225). The Foucauldian analysis looks at the impacts of power on bodies, which he termed as the "docile-bodies" and the explained concept of "biopower," referring to state regulation of the population that looks at the state exercise of power in a disguised manner.

Contextualising empowerment:

However from the prism of real world the idea of empowerment does not function the way it appears in theory. Empowerment often suffers from western ethnocentric bias and this reminds us that not all women from all kinds of society and state are the same. A woman as a section of society is not a homogenous group. Hence the concept of empowerment in practice should be in context of place, culture, ethnicity and nature of state and society. Women's empowerment must not be excluded from the male section of the society. The men in every society plays an important role when it comes to empowering the women and any feminist discourse, women's organisation needs to include men in order to make men gender sensitive. Women's empowerment is not a monopoly of women but a mobilisation of both men and women for a healthy progress in the society. The concept of feminism,

gender is not about isolation of men and women since any kind of alienation can have adverse consequences.

Gender equality is about both attitudinal and structural changes. Women's empowerment also requires empowering women economically and reducing the burden of economic dependency usually on male members. Empowerment of women actually refers to break the hierarchical relations and pave a way for egalitarian society based on collaboration and cooperation rather than conflict and competition. It fosters a balanced relationship between two sexes and rearrangement of power in social, economic and political. This balance in the society and redistribution of power calls for a gender sensitisation of men also. He also looks at the "bio-politics of population" or "bio power" which explains the transformation in state sovereign's power over its subjects emphasises more on population management, education, birth rate. This concept reveals the state control over bodies and decision of womenfolk through coercive social and medical practices. Nancy Harstock(1994) critically looks at Foucauldian idea of power and exclaims, "Echoing Fraser's criticism, she states that for Foucault, "power is everywhere and ultimately nowhere" and that "domination, viewed from above, is more likely to appear as equality." As an antidote to this distortion, she suggests that feminists need to "develop an account of the world which treats our perspectives not as subjugated or disruptive knowledge, but as primary and constitutive of the real world."(Hartstock, in Deveaux, 1994: 232-34). Feminist theory in contrast to Foucault's work looks decisively at the issue of freedom concerning women's reaction to structural inequality and patriarchal violence. Comprehensive understanding of power and its effects requires an enquiry into women's experience freedom and obstacles to freedom. Re-evaluating Foucauldian viewpoint of power and domination of women, the feminists would read it differently: it seeks to prevent the stagnant paradigm of "docile bodies" by realising their relationship with their bodies as a manifestation of social edifice and their own responses as well as negotiation of cultural ideals. It also helps to reject of Foucault's power assertion in relationship and instead look at the various sources of disempowerment and oppression. It would take the issue of women's empowerment and their ability for autonomy and freedom to flourish (Deveaux, 1994). Empowerment is no longer about just adding women in the decision making bodies it is about engaging women in city planning, local governments that can help providing services to urban poor through networking, community based development approach that helps in communicating and negotiating their rights.

3. Integrating women, city and development:

Urban public spaces even today are dominated by men in our patriarchal society even though women are moving out for jobs, education and daily requirements. Urban development needs to be gender sensitive and women friendly in order to be safe and healthy. Urban development based on gender enables in promotion of cities that will perceive men and women equally. Cities are never same for everyone and definitely women see and experience the city differently from that of men. Thus integrating women, city and development become crucial for fostering a sustainable and equitable urban development in India. As Falu(2009) in her account of

Women's Right To The City, articulates that the women's right to reside in a more equitable, sensitive, democratic and inclusive cities is essential for a nation, to progress and it is the responsibility of both the national and local governments to acknowledge and accommodate the requirements and experiences of women in the fast emerging globalized cities. Saskia Sassen (1991, 2002), one of the renowned urban sociologists pointed that 17 out of the 20 largest cities in the world are from the Global South or the developing countries. She laments that the urban growth has failed to develop the infrastructure which are required for rapid growth and urbanisation often goes in an unplanned manner unable to address the needs of all sections of society. The fact that increasing suburbanisation and metropolitanization, are adjunct to the growing gap between rich and the poor, unemployed and homeless, slums and sky rise buildings which are common features of cities in the global south and unfortunately the poorest of them all are women who are deprived of social security, access to basic amenities if we look around the slums and urban squatter settlements.

David Harvey (2008), in his idea the 'right to the city' claims that the idea appear to be a chimera because all do not have the similar access to the symbolic and material resources of the city in the egalitarian way, nor it manages to transform itself according to their wishes and concern. Public space even today presents itself as masculine and the access to the space by women where they can exercise their citizenship, rights that also allows restructuring the societal norms regarding women going out of their homes. The aggression and violence against women are not just about crime but a symbol of the subjugation of their bodies where women become victims of rapes, molestation, and sexual harassment. There is also a cultural internalisation in patriarchal societies that public space is masculine thereby preventing women to come out at time not socially acceptable often restricted to return home by sunset in most of the places including cities. As the cities provide opportunities for women to work and move out of the domestic sphere, the safety of women ensures that they can use and explore the city fearlessly that allows them to develop individually. With liberalisation and globalisation, the Indian cities have reshaped the spaces to accommodate rapid urbanisation Delhi-NCR, Mumbai and its slums, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Chennai, all in the tier1 are key examples of cluttered urbanisation giving us alarming rise in the rate of urban poor. The projects such as Multi-City gender Inclusive Cities under Women in Cities International (WICI) aims to grasp the dimensions of gender inequality in terms of poverty, discrimination. The urban planning in India tries to bring in gender friendly changes such as well lit bus stops, pavements, frequent autos and buses as well as mobile security bikes that help to reach out to the safety of women as we get globalised and rise the ladder of economic growth.

Gender mainstreaming: Not merely adding women:

Conceptualising "Mainstreaming" is about incorporating gender into aspect of developmental programming such as policy making, dialogue, legislation, institutions, resource allocations and its use, planning, implementation and monitoring. The concept is no longer about adding women or gender equality component into existing agenda, rather it is a

transformative idea whereby the unequal social and institutional structure can be transformed for better policy making and act as a complementary strategy to promote full participation of women at all layers of decision-making. In 1997, the United Nations Economic And Social Council (ECOSOC), defined gender mainstreaming as "Mainstreaming a gender perspective as a process of accessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels. It is strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women as well as men an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal of mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality"(www.womenwelfare.org).

In India the process had started taking shape when JNNURM moved towards gender mainstreaming the requirements of women while developing the urban infrastructure by recognising the rights of women to the housing and tenure, amenities such as safe drinking water, sanitation as well as economic and social security. The City Development Plans (CDP) and Detailed Project Reports (DPR) need to be monitored and reviewed using gender based approach thereby bringing gender mainstreaming in the projects. It needs to be understood that women are not homogenous groups as it varies with age, working women, college and university goers, housewives who are trying to balance multiple roles. Poor women in urban slums experience an unequal access to resources, facing the burden of poverty and insecurity, sexual harassment, molestation and victims of exploitation which are escalated with informality of work and lack of legal knowledge. The Indian cities also accommodate a significant number of single women living all by themselves due to their professional commitments and travel alone as per needs. The urban development aims to represent the ways to upgrade the city infrastructure and not consider them to be gender neutral and thereby respond to divergent groups so that they can handle domestic and outside works which need to be incorporated in local urban governance ensuring active participation of women. There is "Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces for Women and Girls" in Jaipur that has demonstrated that street harassment against women and girls are happening commonly in public spaces particularly in public transport which are heavily crowded, isolated streets during night such as touching, obscene acts, verbal abuse, physical attacks, lewd comments, stalking. Delhi which was tagged as the most unsafe city and the rape capital has reported the rape cases has not seen a rise in 2018 and it has been recorded 2043 cases against 2059 in 2017 as per the Delhi commissioner Amulya Pattnaik. The Delhi Police had undertaken several initiatives to make women safer in the city by incorporating self defence programmes, there were 1419 training programmes in educational institutions, popularisation of Himmat Plus app, help line numbers and "Sashakti" the police women empowerment projects where female personnel were given training. So when women are considered to be an important segment in the developmental process and not merely a

presence it strengthens the society, the public space and the nation as a whole.

4. Gender inclusive and sensitive city: recommendations

As India becomes a constructive player in the global economy and as a responsible actor in fulfilling the Sustainable Developmental Goals shows India's precedence in the economic, social and diplomatic fields, making women stronger and visible in each sector is the key to the growth and development that we cherish. The idea of smart cities initiated assertively by Prime Minister Modi thereby also delves into making the cities participatory and accessible to all and thereby gender inclusive cities become fundamentally crucial here. They will help to show the diversities of society the varied problems, obstacle faced by them and one approach to eliminate a major obstacle in women's right to life with dignity is sanitation and access to toilets. The move undertaken by Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and the making of public toilets have enabled society to realise the health hazard and assaults, insecurities which women have to face while venturing out and the gendered planning can incorporate the differences in the way of viewing the cities while policy making to prevent social exclusion. With the pro active role of government launching Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, there is a progressive move to provide toilets and proper sanitation which will allow women to live in dignity and respect. Access to water facilities, health care, transport make women more productive. The encouragement to open bank account will also be a step forward to make open more confident and participatory in financial matters that also enable them to function as an individual.

Women must also take part in local governance and voice their claims in the society thereby making the local urban governance democratic, participatory and transparent and the participation of women politics has yet not shown a very encouraging picture. Local bodies are the big platform to participate in political field and address the gender issues, urban planning and development. India sees a higher rate of women rural urban migrants either in prospects of job, education or marriage. Gender sensitive urban local bodies with rising women participation in public spaces will also help them address the women related issues pertaining to safety, housing, collaterals, financing, and disaster management. There should be proper dissemination of information and awareness at the all the levels of local, national and global. Women need to be connected and stay informed in order to realize their rights and must be educate about the legal protections in order to fight for their rights. Moreover gender sensitive cities need to address that the changes are not just at the level of policy formulation but also at the societal as well as community levels to make them sensitive to the discrimination. The urban infrastructure by upgrading the technology has tried to provide help-lines to address the safety of women, installation of street lighting to prevent dark stretches that make crime easier and the police play a crucial role in the society to ensure the security to reduce the crimes against women. Increasing online submission of complaints, sensitivity towards women, recruiting more of women police officers can make the process women friendly and eradicate the fear to reach the police when required and in the process having responsive legal as well as

security framework women will be encouraged to access the public space safely. Increasing pedestrian activity and bringing shops, café, restaurants to increase the community interaction that can also help prevent isolated and secluded spaces as hangout spots for alcoholics, drug addicts and rapists. Previously we had social interaction with children playing on streets; people chatting across balconies, streets, tea shops but with gated communities the public visibility of chatting with neighbours have become a past and socialisation has got transformed into Facebook, Whatsapp, malls.

Moreover the public transport can play a major role in gendering the city by making them safer and reachable, accessible technologically installing new app to track the buses, cabs and autos about their arrival and departure by proper Wi-Fi connection; installation of CCTV cameras, GPRS in autos and buses, announcement of next stops in buses can help the women and visually impaired women to travel alone e.g. in Kerala there are pink buses which are exclusively meant for women, the motivation to use shared bicycles in many cities including New Delhi have made the travel less dependent on waiting for buses and autos. In 2004, Safe Delhi campaign was undertaken by Jagori, women's resource centre in New Delhi to combat violence against women at public space and create awareness amongst public through films, posters, marches (www.jagori.org). Steps have been undertaken at international level such as by UNICEF, UN Habitat and UN Women, 2011 that launched 'Safe and Friendly

Cities for All' to promote an integrated approach for crime prevention. The *New Urban Agenda* that was launched at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) also aims at the participatory and gender responsive attempt to design, plan and implement policies in urban context.

5. Conclusion

Gendering the urban development and active participation of women along with civil society, national and international institutions help to build inclusive cities. India today has been actively striving towards fulfilling the sustainable development goals that can help to improvise the situation to realize larger vision. Gender sensitive cities as a concept need to be explored to enable a safe city which can help to display the diversity within the society, increase women's workability and mobility. As a part of SDG the inclusive cities help to overcome all kinds of diversities that are based on age, race, ethnicity or sexual orientation thereby preventing violence, discrimination. Empowering women for the rising India helps us to be the pathway for other countries in South Asia which are discriminatory towards women to the focus on gendering the city. Gender sensitivity and the women friendly safety helps us to reach a destination that helps to change the attitudes and mindsets of our society and also helps the government to fulfill the schemes which are aimed to advance the needs of women, develop an environment for equal opportunities.

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