

URBAN HOMELESSNESS OF WOMEN AND URBAN MARGINALITY: SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

This conceptual paper views that a woman's access to land and control over the condition of homelessness has considerably mitigated due to withdrawal of services from the public sphere resulting in "advanced marginality" (Feldman, L.2004). This evidences the fact that women constitute one of the most vulnerable groups worst affected by homelessness owing to extreme levels of urban poverty. The disadvantaged positioning of women due to urban poverty in the society is studied from a Marxist Feminist perspective. The invisibility of increasing urban homelessness of women in urban cities of India is explored using the theoretical views of Marx and C. Wright Mills to interpret how 'urban marginalization of women' is maintained by the condition of homelessness.

Keyword: *Advanced Marginality, Urban Poverty, Urban Marginalization, Marxist Feminist, C. Wright Mills*

1.INTRODUCTION:

The study of urban social relations is increasingly becoming complex due to massive changes in the urban social structure. The rise in affluence of populations flowing into gentrifying neighbourhoods, co-existence of poverty-stricken homeless populations has brought inequalities of urban living to light. The social vulnerability of categories and identity formations due to urban inequalities namely 'poor', 'homeless', 'wanderer', 'marginalized' have increasingly become contingent on social variables of gender, age, caste, class, religion and re-structuring of the urban spaces. This paper situates homelessness within the framework of urban marginality. Moreover, the precarity of homelessness raises much concerns within the context of advanced urban marginality, femininity and masculinity in urban spaces.

The purpose of this article is to situate urban homelessness of women as urban marginality from different theoretical perspectives.

2.LITERATURE REVIEW:

Loic Wacquant's urban marginality discusses its characterisation and emergence in the post-fordist era of the West. Post-fordism is characterized by a dominant market articulation based on the premise that homogenous markets increasingly became highly differentiated based on the scope of production indicating the paradigm shift from Fordism to Post-Fordism in the West. The point of reference here is to highlight Wacquant's argument that refutes poverty as a collective pathology for which poor are themselves to blame.

Urban poverty is a result of macro-economic transformations such as rise in unemployment and increasing flexibility in new service sectors. Loic Wacquant's advanced urban marginality and its consequences within the Western city is identified during the close of the 20th century. Advanced marginality is a result of the dual-occupational structure comprising of the primary and secondary labour market, global economic re-structuring and spread of technology.

Many labels have been used to designate urban marginality in US, UK, Netherlands, Germany, Northern Italy, France, Belgium and Nordic countries such as 'underclass', 'new poverty', 'exclusion'. (Loic Wacquant, 1999).

The prominent signs of urban marginality in the metropolis of the West is underemployment, homelessness, unemployment among older workers due to technology advancements, xenophobia and hostility towards poor. Homelessness is an indicator of structural failures in an economy. Studies indicate that poverty is an aspect of social inequality and social stratification. In the case of homelessness, we find that there is an inter-generational transmission of poverty and social immobility where the same people and same groups perpetually live at the bottom (D'Souza, 1979).

In understanding urban homelessness and integrating it with gender dimension, it is important to note that urban homeless women face higher vulnerability than men for access to resources and services and engagement in public sphere. Though, Loic Wacquant's urban marginality is based on the dynamics of first world countries, this paper attempts to discuss urban and advanced marginality in the developing and developed urban cities of India after nearly two decades of its conceptualization.

The malice of urban poverty in Indian cities is a result of the emergence of secondary labour market comprising of semi-skilled labour and privatization of social goods. The basic premise of urban marginality in this paper revolves around the co-existence of extremes (urban rich and urban homeless poor) in the urban cities of India. This identification is similar to Hamburg, the richest city in Europe sporting highest number of millionaires and also populations dependent on public services and subsidy; New York city houses the largest number of upper class and also the homeless destitutes (Mollenkopf and Castells, 1991).

The diversification of labour market results in the increase of highly professional jobs due to increase in technology resulting in mutation of wage labour work. Mutation of wage labour occurs due to replacement of labour with computer machines and also cheap immigrant labour (Rifkin,1995). This accelerates the social conditions of urban poverty indicating 'new marginality'.

Homelessness, as advanced urban marginality denotes not just deprivation of urban spaces of livelihood rather it indicates the loss of identity. Loss of identity is a manifestation of social vulnerability. Multiple variables intersect with each other in denoting the social vulnerability of the homeless people. Homeless women's vulnerability is based on both individual and societal levels. Homelessness at both the individual and societal levels is socially constructed. At the individual level, ascribed traits and personal characteristics define the nature of homelessness. At the societal level, factors such as years of homelessness, dependency and occupation, location, family ties, social causes and risk factors of homelessness are taken into account.

The Multiple Exclusion Homelessness observes that many factors intersect in the lives of people who are homeless, such as housing and withdrawal of support systems and services from public sphere. (Bowpitt et al. 2011a, p.3; see also Brown et al. 2011; Cornes et al. 2011; Dwyer et al. 2011; Fitzpatrick et al. 2012). Multiple homelessness exclusion is identified by the following factors namely extreme homelessness or sleeping rough on streets, roads; thriving on street culture activities such as begging, looting and sex work.

Homeless women experience economic marginalisation (Watson with Austerberry, 1986). In Chennai, an urban city particularly, economic marginalization is extended and maintained inter-generationally as several families live on the same piece of pavement for nearly 80 years or longer.(Harsh Mander,2013).

Urban homeless women undergo battering and intimate partner violence. They also experience abuse from other men on the streets. They are pre-dominantly victimized through physical abuse when partners and other men are drunk (Shivani Cahudhury,2014)

Urban homeless women on the other hand also construct their femininity. Femininity denotes images of femaleness, the degree and ways in which one identifies as feminine. The social construction of femininity of urban homeless women is significant in the light of internalized patriarchy visibly embedded in the social and cultural construction of women's roles in urban spaces of poverty (Watson,1984). Women are the worst affected because of urban poverty and face double jeopardy of being poor and being a woman. Irrespective of the location, women are the worst affected from poverty and gender related deprivations (Masika et al., 1997; Razavi 2000)

Though women are made vulnerable due to the inter-play of socio-economic variables, women living on the streets and in thatched shelters continue to negotiate for their needs and power with partners, other men, employers and social networks to establish their subsistence and livelihood. The disadvantages faced by homeless women in cities does not necessarily incapacitate and deprive their agency to effect radical change. (Neale,1997). Migrant women are also worst affected by urban poverty.

Hondagneu Sotelo (1994) points out that gendered settlements have been neglected in migration literature. Men's roles and masculinity are seen as central to mobilizing work, acquiring urban spaces for living, providing security for women living rough. However, women living rough on the streets have begun to assert their identities through bargaining and negotiation power. Both, migrant and original inhabitants of urban spaces living rough on the streets have started to discover their sense of power and have begun to challenge the prescriptive identities of '*homeless dependent women*'. This illustrates how women who have been culturally and historically muted into categories of '*man*' and '*woman*' has ideologically begun to contest, re-construct, revisit and re-negotiate these power imbalances through the shift in their perspectives.

Kossoudji and Ranney (1984) discovered that labour market condition has dynamically penetrated poor women's lifestyles and images. Fussel's (2000) work also pointed out that Mexican women in Tijuana are already perceived—and perceive themselves—as supplemental earners. This witnesses the emerging identities of homeless urban women amidst all forms of vulnerability.

3.THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES:

A city is conceptualized as a growth machine with a desire of growth where even split local elites agree in common. This growth imperative is the driving force of city as a growth machine. The term '*growth*' is identified with several indicators such as '*high population density*' and increase in urban area population due to '*in-migration*'; '*financial activity*' and '*intensive land development*'. The '*growth syndrome*' fuelled by the associated events bears liabilities of various forms. The intensive land development accelerates the rates of rent, urban-spatial problems, environmental crises and traffic congestions to name a few. Though it is not certain that '*growth*' produces '*social pathologies*'. The city as a growth machine bears '*new marginality*' (see Loic Wacquant,1999). Homelessness among women is one form of rising urban social pathology that requires detailed analyses from different dimensions. (Rodgers, Scott,2009)

3.1Marxist Feminist and Elite Perspective:

The following expression of Marx aptly illustrates urban poverty as a social construct, a relative concept as follows:

'A house may be large or small; as long as the surrounding houses are equally small it satisfies all social demands for a dwelling. But let a palace arise beside the little house, and it shrinks from a little house to a hut... and however high it may shoot up in the course of civilisation, if the neighbouring palace grows to an equal or even greater extent, the occupant of the relatively small house will feel more and more uncomfortable, dissatisfied and cramped within its four walls'. (Marx,1849).

This illustrates that inhabitants of mud hut settlements, thatched roof, informal shelters, bricolage shelters co-existing alongside urban affluence can also be considered as homeless.

3.2Marxist Feminist Analysis:

A systematic theoretical analysis is required to understand urban homelessness of women from both traditional and contemporary Marxist feminist perspective. This perspective characterizes women's relation to the economic system

and assertion of her identity establishing the '*question of women's right to fair and equitable housing standards*'. Capitalism draws both men and women into wage labour.

Contemporary Marxists discuss how women's everyday lives reproduce capitalism. Even housework seen as unpaid labour of women reproduce capitalism through production of surplus value. House work transforms the body of the woman into a work-machine which is the fundamental basis of capitalism.

The institutionalization of capitalist patriarchy introduces the social position of women in the society. Homeless women contribute to the production of surplus value through cheap and unpaid labour by obliging to the standards of wage payment offered by the corporate elites in the real-estate industry. Though homeless, women living rough on the streets continue to expend physical energy and emotional labour in everyday lives in housework as well.

3.3 Power Elite Perspective:

Embracing the theoretical rhetoric of '*Power Elite*' of C.W Mills, the homeless women's rights in question is described based on the interests of the growing corporates in the real-estate industry who hire housing contractors and engineers to build small and large-scale projects with banks as support systems who lend loans. The important question of wage labour of homeless women, pay-gap between homeless men and women in construction wage labour, housing rights of the homeless are made by the business elite. The business elite has protected itself from protests of the civil society and generation of public opinion through the acquisition of the media power.

3.4 Homeless Women and Advanced Urban Marginality: Intersectionality Perspective

The homeless women's identity intersects with various factors such as special category, marital status, occupation and years of homelessness thereby indicating the multiple forms of jeopardy (disadvantaged positioning) of women. The contribution of the homeless women in maintaining the economy of the domestic sphere through their labour is made 'invisible' due to Capitalist patriarchy. Homeless Women's occupation in a male-dominated job indicates how women's femininity is socially constructed by the corporatist elites and men to re-inforce the vulnerability of a woman's body. The body of a woman is captured within the dimensions of social vulnerability in order to maintain the secondary status quo of women to men. Both these factors of marital status (labour of women in domestic sphere) and occupation (gendered pay gap in unorganized sector) brings to light the multiple forms of discrimination faced by women using intersectional perspective from the margins.

3.5 Homeless Women and Urban Marginalized Spaces

"What is it like to be a woman living in the streets of an urban city?" This conceptual paper draws the point that women also act as agencies of change negotiating power within families and work spaces to control their means of livelihood. Viewed thus at one level are expressions of women's agency recognizing multiplicities of discrimination; at another level a struggle for gender equality and social construction of femininity within the urban spaces where advanced marginality exists. The future directions of affirmative action lie in recognizing the '*resilience of homeless women in urban marginalized spaces*' rather than embarking on the '*invisibility of urban homelessness of women*'.

4. CONCLUSION:

4.1 The Discourse on Housing Rights: Urban Homelessness of Women

Discourses on urban homelessness requires an understanding that views homelessness as not merely a social problem. Drawing connections from Leonard Feldman's work on homeless population's rights that insists on a strong move away from the dichotomy of those '*with homes*' and '*without homes*'; the urgent need of the hour is to integrate gender sensitive housing policy into the India's urban development framework to balance the rising social pathos of urban homelessness among women.

The most pertinent question that has to be raised is that homeless women living rough on the street pavements, market corridors, railway stations, informal settlements, thatched roofs, community shelters have a basic right to physical infrastructural access for example street lights; water supply and provisioning of urinal and bathing facilities. Street lights can mitigate crimes against homeless women; access to water supply; urinal and bathing facilities reduces the time spent by women in fetching water from the sources or finding an ideal place to defecate or bathe. It reduces the homeless women's expenditure of physical and emotional energy; reduces illness; provides more time on 'self' and minimizes the reproduction of labour within domestic sphere.

Proposals for gender neutral physical infrastructure to homeless women is the first step to improvisations in gender sensitive interventions being planned, budgeted, implemented and monitored. Urban policy that reduces poverty and making urban spaces more integrative and equitable should be framed. Equitable cities must be planned grounded on gender perspectives where women's needs with a focus on homeless women's needs are included fully in the planning of urban spaces where development, safety and security issues of women are addressed. 'Housing for all' and 'Equitable cities' doesn't necessarily mean 'elimination of homelessness or elimination of homeless people'.

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