

Mewat District: A Feminist Perspective

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ABSTRACT: The focus of the paper is on Mewat district of Haryana. The researcher has dealt with the district from a feminist perspective and the first part of the paper, giving the historical background of the district highlights the sex ratio of the region. The second part of the paper gives literacy indices particularly concentrating on the women's level of education. The next part of the paper gives health indices of the region to reflect the status of women of the region. The paper also illustrates various cases of violence that were reported in the district of Mewat, as per newspaper reports. The last part of the paper highlights violence against women as per National Crime Records Bureau. The researcher has argued that till the time women are confined to the private spheres and excluded from the public spheres, their status in the society cannot improve.

KEYWORDS: Education, health, sex ratio, violence, women

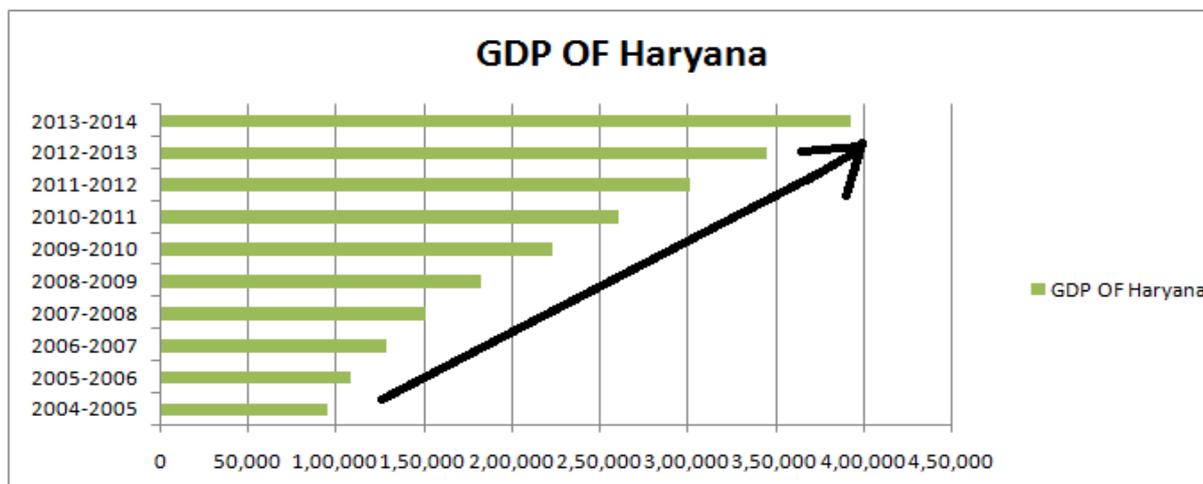
I. INTRODUCTION

As a feminist I recognise that women are excluded from the public sphere and ghettoised into the private sphere of the world. As Simone de Beauvoir said: The relation of the two sexes is not quite like that of two electrical poles for man represents both the positive and the neutral, whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting the criteria, without reciprocity. [1]. Women have thus been excluded from the making of what is considered as our culture. Patricia Hill Collin's said that groups unequal in power are correspondingly unequal in their ability to make their standpoint known to themselves and others. [2]. Also Dorothy Smith says: At the outset of inquiry, creates a space for an absent subject, and an absent experience, that is to be filled with the presence and spoken experience of actual women speaking of and in the actualities of their everyday worlds. [3]. This is the reason why I am so uneasy about women being excluded from the public spheres and this paper highlights the conditions of women in Mewat as a result of their exclusion from the public world.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION OF MEWAT DISTRICT

Mewat is one of the Haryana's most backward areas. This is, despite Haryana being one of the most prosperous states of the country and the farthest point is no more than 145 Km from the national capital, Delhi. The rising GDP of Haryana over the years gives us an indication of Haryana being a prosperous State as shown in Fig. 1.

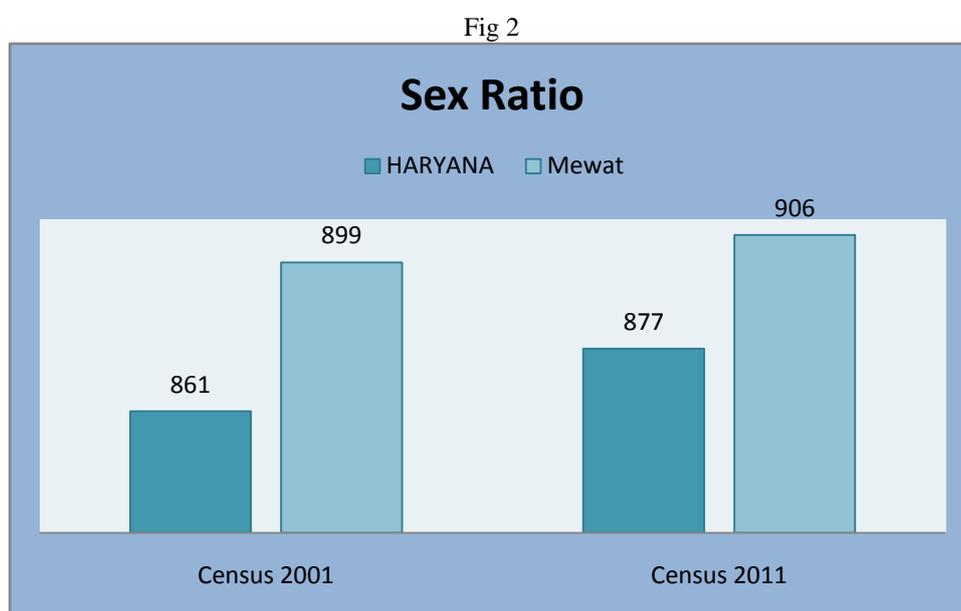
Fig. 1



But at the same time, there are districts like Mewat that has a high level of poverty incidences, as per Census 2001, where 62 percent of rural households are below the poverty line, as compared with only 37 percent of the whole State Haryana. Mewat is located in India within the triangle formed by Delhi, Agra and Jaipur. Beginning approximately 64 km south-west of Delhi, its fluctuating boundaries are now estimated to extend 112 km north to south and 80 km west to east between latitude of 26 and 30 degrees north and longitude of 76 degrees east. Mewat is a district carved from Gurgaon recently in the year 2005. It is predominantly rural with a few small towns. Khan (2011) in *History of Mewat: An Outline* elaborates that Mewat is a cultural region rather than an administrative unit. He says that it was a mountainous area with jungles large enough where rulers of Delhi used to go for tiger hunting. [4]. Before 1526 the area of Mewat was a political entity when Babar divided the area into three parts and distributed them to three different persons, one of them being his son, Humayun. In 1947, at the time of participation of India, the area of Mewat lay in three political units, two princely states, Bhartpur and Alwar of Rajputana, and the district of Gurgaon in the province of Punjab. As per Khan no book has been written which contains an authentic history of Mewat.

III. SEX RATIO IN MEWAT

The ratio of women and men in a population is one of the most critical indicators of gender equality. In Mewat, there are 906 females per 1000 males as compared to 940 females per 1000 males in India as per Census 2011. The figure 2 shows the sex ratio as per reports of Census 2001 and Census 2011. This is indicative of greater importance given to males over that of females in Mewat.



The need is to look at the skewed sex ratio of the district. It reflects the status of the girl within the family. By and large, she is seen as a burden. The clear reasons for this are social structures and patriarchal mindsets.

IV. EDUCATION

The female literacy rate is 24.26% in Mewat. The average literacy rate of Mewat in 2011 was 56.10 % compared to 43.50 % of 2001, and male and female literacy rates were 73 % and 37.60 % respectively. Lack of access to education among women in the district means that a large number of women do not have the opportunity to realize their potential. Women in Mewat are often denied this essential right to education. Though young girls are sent to the traditional institutions of education in like the Madrasas, but these are generally closed segregated spaces. A study by B. K. Panda [5] was found that lack of security was the major hindrance in the education of girls.

V. HEALTH PROFILE

Maternal health care package of antenatal care is the main programme of NRHM to strengthen RCH care. ANC provided by a doctor, an ANM or other health professional comprises of physical checks, checking the position and the growth of foetus and giving TT injection at periodic intervals during the time of pregnancy. At least three check-ups are expected to complete the course of ANC to safeguard women from pregnancy related complications. Institutional delivery and post-natal care in a health facility is promoted in NRHM

through the Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) to prevent maternal deaths. The coverage of ANC was highest in Rohtak district (96.6 percent) and lowest in Mewat (54.2 percent) as per District Level Household Survey 3 Report. The DLHS 3 report too stated that in Mewat, a lowest 1.9 percent and in Gurgaon and Rohtak districts a highest 27.5 percent of women have received full ANC as the DLHS 3 report says. The initiation of breastfeeding within one hour of birth was least practiced among women in Mewat (7.5 percent). The coverage of full immunization of children is below 50 percent in Mewat (11 percent). Contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR) for any method is below 30 percent. It is the lowest in Mewat (27.9 percent). In other districts of Haryana, female sterilization ranges between 40-50 percent and in Mewat it is only 12.7 percent. The use of condoms is least (2.9 percent) in Mewat. The unmet need for contraceptive is 35.4 percent in Mewat, the highest amongst the districts. Among currently married women the unmet need for spacing was lowest (2.7 percent) in Kurukshetra and highest (13.3 percent) was in Mewat. In Mewat district, women have least heard about HIV/AIDS. Women in Mewat are often denied their reproductive rights. Limited reproductive rights, coupled with poor reproductive healthcare facilities, leads to poor maternal health. Maternal Mortality Rate in Mewat is 275 as compared to 212 in India as per Census Reports. Early marriage is the main reason for the negative impact on women's reproductive health. 48.5% of girls get married before the age of 18 as found in a study by Grover (2004).

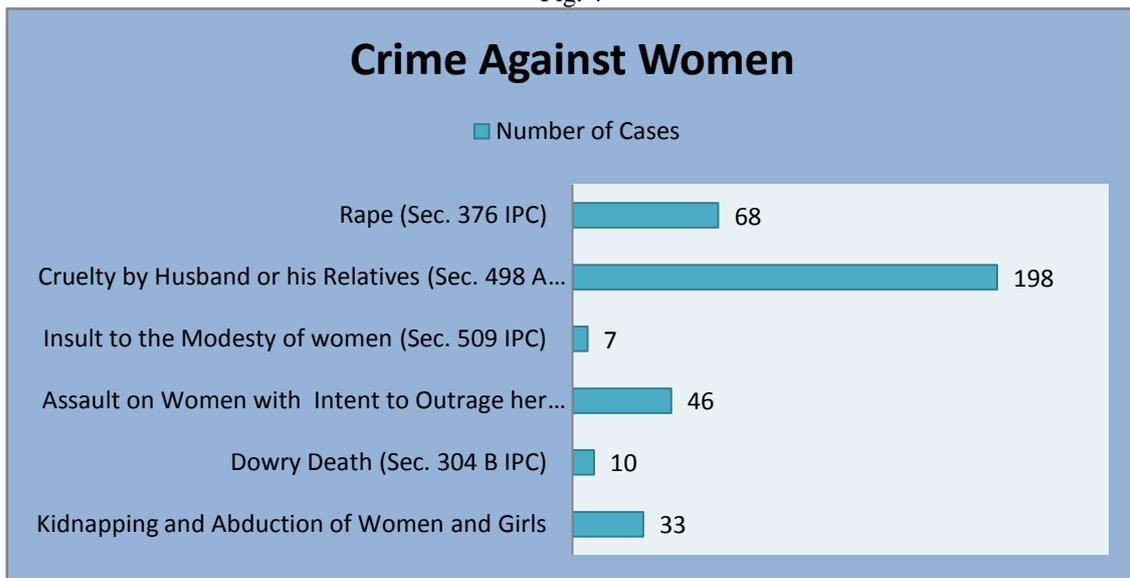
In the study by Population Research Centre, Panjab University, Chandigarh (2004), Condom Oral Pill Outlets in Mewat, a survey was done in the regions of Ferozepur Jhirka and Farukh Nagar where the population is predominantly Hindu, which is closer to Delhi and more developed. It was found that the women in the region were eager to learn and attend Reproductive Child Health (RCH) camps, bring their children to camps, and send children to school and so on. But the development efforts are either lacking or not up to the mark. It was also found that women took contraceptives not only for themselves but for their husbands too. It was also found in the study that there were signs of backwardness in Muslim dominated communities. [6]. Reena Singh (2001) in *Reaching the Marginalised Group: A study of RCH Outreach Services in Mewat Region* said that women in Mewat region are not aware of the importance of immunizing their children nor are they aware of any family planning methods. [7]. They want to curtail their family size but do not know how it can be done. The burden of limiting the family size falls on the women and males never discuss about family planning with their spouse. It has been observed in the study that whenever an immunization clinical sessions or a health camp is held in their area women show eagerness in wanting to know the ways and means of limiting the family size as they are ignorant of it.

However Singh (2001) revealed that the female worker does not have enough time to explain them about different methods of contraception and to answer queries of women and remove misconception. [8]. The interesting thing is to see how women of the region look at themselves and their health experiences. There is a culture of silence. The fact that women are 'silent' needs to be looked at minutely. One needs to see what women are doing and not saying. After all, not all of us have the option to speak out. Everywhere, women bear a dual burden and this is reflected in healthcare practices. The survival of the household depends on women. She will not utter a word about her ill health, unless and until it becomes physically impossible for her to carry on. It is basically her socialisation that does not permit her to speak, but when she does speak the family ignores. Firstly she herself delays attention towards her health and later her family's responses are delayed. Let's take violence against women as another example of low status of women of Mewat District. I am talking here not just about domestic violence but general violence, the violence caused by quarrel, the ruining of one's home, the damaging of one's confidence. Violence against women is an instrument of war and it has wide implications on health.

VI. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN MEWAT

Although the Constitution of India guarantees equal rights for all, women continue to face violence and hence their denial of basic rights. As elaborated by Godyal and Makhija (2011) in *Empowering Rural Meo-Muslim Women in Mewat: Experiences and Challenges*, the level of women empowerment is low in Mewat. The culture of Meo-Muslims is traditional and patriarchal, and women are generally perceived as inferior to men. Therefore, women face inequity in almost all spheres of life in the region. They have restricted mobility and their access to resources and services such as health, education, employment is limited.

Fig. 4



The fig. 4 shows the number of registered cases of various crimes that exist in Mewat as per National Crime Records Bureau 2014. As elaborated in the study, *A Cultured Silence: Domestic Violence* the author says that those committing violence are not made responsible for their actions. Generally women don't leave and stay on because of family and social pressures. She does not have a secure place to go and fears parents, friends and family. Family members would not keep her for long or even force her to go back. She does not have adequate financial resources to manage alone. Religious and cultural beliefs force her to stay with an abusive husband. Being a pre dominant Muslim society, females are usually given a status secondary to men. Purdah is a common practice and the customs are largely traditional in nature. Females are usually confined to the four walls and are not vested with much economic and social independence. Girls are usually socialized in a way that they are conditioned to consider themselves as subordinate to men. Individual initiative and the power of one's agency are qualities not instilled in females and they are encouraged to be dependent in terms of taking any decision related to them. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) in its report has recorded rampant large-scale trafficking of girls from other states into Haryana where they are held as bonded labourers and forced into marriages. Such girls are nicknamed Paro (of Devdas fame) in the villages of Haryana, particularly in Mewat area. The girls are forced to marry against their will and are sold at price that varies according to their age, beauty and virginity. The UN report has blamed Haryana's fast declining female sex ratio for large-scale trafficking of girls from other states. The report, "Current Status of Victim Service Providers and Criminal Justice Actors in India on Anti-Human Trafficking-2013, states that there is large-scale trafficking of girls from the North-East. These girls are being brought to Haryana for forced marriage and bonded labour.

VII. IMPORTANT CASES IN THE REGION OF MEWAT

Following are some instances of newspaper reporting of violence against women and honour crimes and in the region:

Case 1: There is a village called Sudaka in the Mewat district of Haryana, where an 18-year-old, Maimun, was forced to marry her cousin Aijaz from another village by her own family. This was done to protect their izzat (honour), which was compromised by Maimun's runaway marriage with Idris, a man from her own village. Because she dared to assert her choice, Aijaz and his friends gang raped Maimun on her wedding night. They slashed her with a knife from neck to navel and left her on the roadside to die. Her parents filed a case against Idris, and the police gave a khap punishment to his parents. When Maimun and Idris came to the National Commission of Women, women at the NCW were moved to tears when she opened her shirt to show them where the knife had torn her. NCW drove to Sudaka village in Taodo tehsil. There, they were confronted by a hostile mob of villagers, who dragged Maimun out of the government vehicle. The Haryana police stood around, not moving a muscle to prevent this. The NCW team returned empty-handed, having lost the girl to the crowd and with no justice delivered. [8].

Case 2: The girl was raped for the first time on June 15 last year, when she was still a minor. After making the MMS clip the accused continued raping her and threatened her to make it public. The last time she was raped was on December 24. The accused had blackmailed the victim. On December 26, one of them uploaded the MMS clip on internet. An FIR was lodged against three under section 376G, 506 and 66A, 67B of IT act. [9].

Case 3: Notorious for crime against women, Mewat was put to shame yet again as a minor was raped in Bhapawali village on January 17. It took the victim time to muster courage and report the incident following which the accused, Hakam, was arrested. The police said the 14-year-old victim had gone to make dung cakes near the village when Hakam reached there and allegedly raped her after dragging her to a nearby hill. Hakam left the victim there and fled after committing the crime. The girl reached home and informed her family. The incident was reported to police who got the girl's medical examination done which confirmed the rape. [10].

Case 4: "A molki is generally a discarded member of the family who though married to her buyer has no legal rights as she is never considered a wife. While this marriage has no legitimacy, it is a great aid for traffickers who avoid being accused of prostitution or trafficking. Mewat has turned into a transit point for the largest market for girls," says Shafiq R Khan, director, Empower People, an NGO fighting against bride-trafficking in the state. While local panchayats and even the police allegedly turn a blind eye to this custom, communes like 'Paro' run by Empower People, are full of such sad tales. [11].

Case 5: Case studies in the article: Sanjida had excitedly looked forward to getting clicked in front of the 'Lal Qila' when she set out on a Delhi tour from Assam with her aunt in 2008, but fate had something else in store for her. Then 16, she was sold to a man in Delhi who further sold her to man from Mewat and she became a molki (the bought one). [12].

Case 6: Hamidan was abducted from Asam in 1995 at the age of 12. She was brought to Mewat and was sold 10 times as molki, her last buyer being a 68 year-old man with eight children. She had four of her own. She was rescued by the NGO after a local panchayat found her lying in a critical condition.

Case 7: Tabassum of Kolkata was sold to a man in Nuh of Mewat in 2008. Brutality was in store for her. Running on the street and wailing with pain, she lost her first child as soon as it was delivered as it died after falling on the street. She soon lost her memory and the birth of her second child was meaningless to her.

Case 8: "I am from Bengal and never could guess that my aunt would sell me off. I was a teen then. I was sold four times to different men and every purchase brought new horrors in my life. I was brought to the NGO and offered marriage with Akhtar. I took the chance and it worked. It is tough to be a woman in the world but for molki there is no world," says 29-year-old Mariyam as she cuddles the youngest of her three children.

Case 9 :Mewat-based khap attacked, boycotted and tried to break the marriage of a police officer-cum-champion wrestler from the Reserve Battalion, Bhondsi, who married within same gotra but as per Muslim tradition (to avoid complications). Despite legal action against them, his family still lives under constant threat.

Case 10: Being in the police is no guarantee for a safe passage against the diktat of the caste panchayats, the self-styled custodians of law in the heart of rural North India. The gruesome incidents of 'honour killings' and the verdict of a caste panchayat have forced Haryana police constable Ikhlq and his wife Anjum to seek police protection. Both belong to Tawdu village in Mewat, 35 km from Gurgaon, which is predominantly a Muslim area.

Case 11: A 21-year-old girl bravely fought with the road Romeos who allegedly tried to molest her at gun point in Tawdu area of Mewat district on Monday. The incident took place in Khori village when the victim, along with her mother and younger sister, was returning back to her home from somewhere else. In the broad daylight, two bike-borne men passed derogatory comments at the victim and forcefully tried to pull her on the vehicle. When she resisted, the two goons threatened her at the gun point and hit in her head with the gun. They called some more accomplices to get control over the girl but seeing the passersby coming to the rescue of the victim, they ran away. The courageous girl denied to give in and caught one of the accused so tightly that he couldn't escape. The victim then dragged him to a nearby police station and registered a case against him. [13]. These incidents are all cases of violation of one kind or the other and they take place in the context of unequal power relations and oppressive ideologies.

VIII. CONCLUSION

My argument is that we need to ask ourselves whether these experiences of oppression are the only interest of women and not men. It becomes important to understand the nuisances of the violence which women experience. Women are subject to violence simply because they are expected to be sexually available. Protesting women are the most disliked, and their daring and acts of disobedience incite anger. In this context, it is important to understand the power and authority wielded by men in their homes. The need is to think thoroughly the gendered nature of the systemic violence directed against women. I'll restrict my comments here to verbal insults, always sexualised. Sexual insults hurled at women have to do with their sexual and reproductive lives and functions. From a feminist perspective, an important thing to learn is the realisation that mere enactments of more laws to address specific women's rights need to be backed by rules of proper implementation.

Further, despite feminist opposition to population control policies, the service rules of various organisations, including state governments, deny maternity benefits to women who already have two living children. While the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 itself does not state anything about the number of times women can avail benefits under the rule, the service rules of organisations incorporating the Government of India's population control policies have taken precedence over the Maternity Benefit Act, to the detriment of women workers. Taking into account the programmes and schemes launched in the region of Mewat by government it could be said that these are not up to the mark and needs redress. The scheme like Rashtriya Janani Suraksha Yojna has remained unsuccessful in changing things for the women in Mewat. However, the lack of healthcare specialists has led to the unsuccessful implementation of the scheme. Various schemes have been implemented for institutional deliveries but still data and various studies show that people rely on Dais and home delivery which lead to maternal mortality. Present study will try to find out the reasons for community behaviour and put forth suggestions to the Govt for proper implementation of these schemes/programmes. Numerous challenges remain in the implementations of these programs in the villages. Despite IRRAD's sustained efforts towards women empowerment women continue to accept male supremacy. No study reflects the impetus behind the poor condition of women. The bottom line of the argument is that none of our present policies come anywhere close to that of gender transformation in the true sense of the term. There is a need to re-look into the geneses of the crimes committed against women of the region. Social and cultural factors contributing to the continuing low status of women in the region need to be captured. An important question need to be addressed as to why honour lies in the bodies of women and why a woman is always made an object to take revenge upon. Most often such revenge is taken by making an acid attack or through gang rape as witnessed in most news from the region.

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