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Social and Economic Status of Women in Slums: A geographical Study of Gaya City

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Abstract: ***Women in Indian slums face systemic challenges rooted in poverty, gender inequality, and social exclusion. This article examines their social and economic status through the lenses of education, employment, health, and empowerment. Drawing upon primary & secondary data and scholarly literature, the study highlights structural barriers and explores pathways for improvement through education, healthcare, and collective action.***

Key words: slum, face systemic challenges, status of women, gender inequality, women empowerment.

INTRODUCTION- Urban slums in India have expanded rapidly due to rural-to-urban migration, economic disparities, and inadequate housing policies. Women in these settlements are disproportionately affected by poverty, limited access to resources, and entrenched patriarchal norms. Their contributions to household survival are significant, yet their social and economic status remains marginalized. This paper seeks to analyse the conditions of women in Indian slums and identify structural barriers to their empowerment.

Aims & Objectives- The main objective of this study is to analyse and evaluate the status of women in Indian slums. Slums are the reality of urban settlements. It is obvious that the life of slum residents is very pitiable. But it is assumed that women life is more pitiable in comparison with male counterpart. This is a case study of Gaya Ji city of Bihar State which is the one of oldest existing urban settlement of the world.

Hypothesis- The study is based on following hypotheses:

1. Slum women are not in equal position regarding socio– economic status.
2. Slum women are ill-treated by their husband and other family members.
3. Slum women does more work and get less wage and respect.

Literature Review- Several studies have examined the socio-economic realities of women in Indian slums. Hunter David, R (1968) has made a study of problems of slums of New York city. In this Study he found many problems regarding slum women. Rambarran (2014) emphasizes that the caste system and patriarchal social structures significantly restrict women's opportunities in slum communities. His analysis highlights how urbanization has failed to dismantle traditional hierarchies, leaving women doubly disadvantaged by class and gender. Mukherjee (2024) applies an intersectional framework to explore how caste, class, and gender interact to shape women's human rights in slums. The study reveals that women often face compounded discrimination, limiting their access to education, healthcare, and political participation. Nagpal et al. (2025) provide empirical data from Lucknow slums, showing that women are concentrated in informal labour sectors with low wages and poor working conditions. Their findings underscore the economic vulnerability of women migrants who settle in urban slums for survival. Together, these studies demonstrate that women's marginalization in slums is not only economic but also deeply social, rooted in structural inequalities that perpetuate cycles of poverty and exclusion. Shamim Shadia and Luna Farhanaz (2015) has found pitiable condition of slum women of Dhaka. Pawar, D H and Mane Baishali (2013) in their research describe the condition of women in Kolhapur slum. Sarode Vijay, M (2010) has made an exclusive study on pregnant women of slums of Greater Mumbai. The research of Chavan Shivaji Rao, M (2002) was on Solapur city. The focus of his study was conflict among working women in slum.

Methodology- This article is based on primary data & review of secondary sources, including government reports, NGO publications, and peer-reviewed studies. Ten slums have been taken from various parts of the city for detailed study. Sample size is 15 to 20 percent. The analysis adopts an intersectional lens, considering how class and gender interact to shape women's experiences in slum environments.

Economic Status- The economic status of slum women is below than male slum dwellers. Average income of male slum dwellers is 15 to 18 thousand Rs. per month as per discussion with them. While the average monthly income of slum women is 5000 to 8000 Rs. 51.13percent women earn

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below 5000 Rs. Per month. 42.76 percent women earn 5000 to 8000 Rs. Per month. Only 5.47 percent women earn more than 8000 Rs. Monthly.

Table No. 1

Monthly Income of Slum Women in Gaya

S.no.	Slum	<5000	5000-8000	8000>
1	Harijantoli Murli Hill	143	31	8
2	Harijantoli Kharkhura	62	28	7
3	Pitamaheswar Chamartoli	22	19	4
4	Harijantoli Ghughanitand	70	61	9
5	Harijantoli Imaliachak	17	18	6
6	Harijantoli Gandhinagar	57	59	5
7	Harijantoli Bhusunda, Balapar	107	139	8
8	Harijantoli Manpur Suryapokhar	60	70	8
9	Harijantoli Marhanpur	93	100	51
10	Singara Sthan	23	22	5
	Total Persons	**654**	**547**	**70**
	Percent	**51.13**	**42.76**	**5.47**

Source: Sample data collected & compiled by author

Beside this source of income of slum women are not prestigious. Survey has revealed that 49.83 percent slum women work as domestic help and 32.33 percent as a shop help. 10.33 percent women was found as rug picker. 5.41 percent women are engaged in multiple work.

Table No. 2

Source of Income of Slum Women in Gaya

S.no.	Slum	Maid	Shop Helper	vender	Rug picker	Begger	Multiple Work
1	Harijantoli Murli Hill	83	42	19	10	02	25
2	Harijantoli Kharkhura	05	26	16	00	00	02
3	Pitamaheswar Chamartoli	25	11	04	02	00	02
4	Harijantoli Ghughanitand	77	50	08	01	00	04
5	Harijantoli Imaliachak	19	11	06	01	00	03
6	Harijantoli Gandhinagar	59	26	10	04	00	03
7	Harijantoli Bhusunda, Balapar	140	86	19	02	00	07
8	Harijantoli Manpur Suryapokhar	62	43	22	01	00	10
9	Harijantoli Marhanpur	101	73	19	02	00	08
10	Singara Sthan	27	20	01	00	00	01
	Total Persons	**598**	**388**	**124**	**23**	**02**	**65**
	Per cent	**49.83**	**32.33**	**10.33**	**1.91**	**0.16**	**5.41**

Source: Sample data collected & compiled by author

Social Status- Survey reveals that the status of slum women in society and in family is not fair. Women face many problems in patriarchal society. They Face many physical and mental atrocities. Most of the atrocities are made by their own families and kins. In this research project 20.75 percent women are victim of mental torture by their husband and other family members. 35.51 percent women accept physical assault and 43.72 percent women face both physical and mental scold. It is a common phenomenon in the whole slums.

Table no.3

Physical & Mental Atrocity Against Slum Women Gaya City

S.no.	Slum	Mental	Physical	Both Mental & Physical
1	Harijantoli Murli Hill	60	81	15
2	Harijantoli Kharkhura	15	28	41
3	Pitamaheswar Chamartoli	7	12	21
4	Harijantoli Ghughanitand	21	39	79
5	Harijantoli Imaliachak	8	20	16
6	Harijantoli Gandhinagar	21	37	27

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7	Harijantoli Bhusunda, Balapar	36	98	100
8	Harijantoli Manpur Suryapokhar	21	39	50
9	Harijantoli Marhanpur	28	15	100
Take it10	**Singara Sthan**	**8**	**16**	**25**
	Total Persons	**225**	**385**	**474**
	Per cent	**20.75**	**35.51**	**43.72**

Source: Sample data collected & compiled by author

Health Status- Health of slum women is a neglected issue. It has been observed that there is lack of health consciousness. They never pay attention properly on their health. Even they don't take proper and balance food. That is why they bear many health problems. Table no. 4 reports that only 22.9 percent slum women take four-time food a day. 46.60 percent women have one time breakfast and two times meal a day and 31.30 percent women take only two-time meal a day. The food quality is not well. They have meal to fill the stomach only. When they fall ill, don't take it seriously. They become serious only in serious disease. 67.25 percent women accept that thy visit hospital when operational situation arise, only 2.75 percent women visit hospital on normal health problems.

Table no.4
Food Frequency of Slum Women Gaya City

S.no.	Slum	Two Times	Three Times	Four times
1	Harijantoli Murli Hill	99	143	68
2	Harijantoli Kharkhura	32	46	22
3	Pitamaheswar Chamartoli	15	22	10
4	Harijantoli Ghughanitand	49	70	33
5	Harijantoli Imaliachak	16	24	11
6	Harijantoli Gandhinagar	44	64	30
7	Harijantoli Bhusunda, Balapar	83	119	57
8	Harijantoli Manpur Suryapokhar	44	64	30
9	Harijantoli Marhanpur	65	94	45
10	**Singara Sthan**	**05**	**27**	**13**
	Total Persons	**452**	**673**	**319**
	Per cent	**31.30**	**46.60**	**22.09**

Source: Sample data collected & compiled by author

When operations are needed, they go to hospital. 67.26 percent slum women go to government hospital. Rest patients go to private hospital. Although these private hospitals are not in good condition. Usually for normal disease they consult to quacks. Even for pregnancy and delivery thy have service of traditional untrained midwifes.

Table no.5
Slum Women – Access to Hospital Gaya City

S.no.	Slum	SeriousIllness	Normal Illness	For Operations
1	Harijantoli Murli Hill	93	09	208
2	Harijantoli Kharkhura	30	03	67
3	Pitamaheswar Chamartoli	14	01	32
4	Harijantoli Ghughanitand	46	04	102
5	Harijantoli Imaliachak	15	01	35
6	Harijantoli Gandhinagar	41	04	93
7	Harijantoli Bhusunda, Balapar	78	07	174
8	Harijantoli Manpur Suryapokhar	41	04	93
9	Harijantoli Marhanpur	61	06	137
10	Singara Sthan	18	01	39
	Total Persons	**437**	**40**	**980**
	Percent	**29.99**	**2.75**	**67.26**

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Source: Sample data collected & compiled by author

Status of Education- Government thrust is for development of education. Priority is to promote literacy among poor citizens. But slum women are not fulfilling this dream. Table no.6 show that 25.15 percent slum women are illiterate in present time. 49.54 percent slum women had primary education only. Due to drop out only 18.18 percent slum women got secondary education. 7.10 percent slum women found graduates in the study area. No trace is found of other types of education in this study area.

Table No.6

Status of Education of Slum Women in Gaya

S.no.	Slum	Illiterate	Primary	Secondary	Graduate	Others
1	Harijantoli Murli Hill	90	139	59	03	
2	Harijantoli Kharkhura	33	41	17	09	
3	Pitamaheswar Chamartoli	10	26	08	04	
4	Harijantoli Ghughanitand	35	79	25	13	
5	Harijantoli Imaliachak	11	27	08	04	
6	Harijantoli Gandhinagar	35	67	23	12	
7	Harijantoli Bhusunda, Balapar	63	120	54	22	
8	Harijantoli Manpur Suryapokhar	29	73	23	12	
9	Harijantoli Marhanpur	43	108	34	18	
10	Singara Sthan	12	31	10	05	
	Total Persons	**361**	**711**	**261**	**102**	
	Per cent	**25.15**	**49.54**	**18.18**	**7.10**	

Source: Sample data collected & compiled by author

Findings-

- **Social Context:** Patriarchal norms reinforce early marriage, high dropout rates among girls, and restricted decision-making power.
- **Economic Status:** Employment is concentrated in informal labour with low wages and no social security.
- **Education:** Literacy rates remain below national averages, with high dropout rates among girls.
- **Health:** Poor sanitation, maternal health risks, and malnutrition are widespread.
- **Empowerment:** Women face domestic violence and limited political participation, though self-help groups offer some empowerment.

Discussion- The findings reveal that women in Indian slums are central to household survival yet remain marginalized in social, economic, and political spheres. Their exclusion is not merely a product of poverty but also of structural inequalities embedded in caste and gender hierarchies. Empowerment initiatives must therefore address multiple dimensions simultaneously-education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and legal protections.

Conclusion- Women in Indian slums embody resilience in the face of adversity, yet their social and economic status remains precarious. Policy interventions should prioritize:

- Expanding educational opportunities for girls.
- Providing accessible healthcare, particularly maternal and child health services.
- Strengthening vocational training and employment opportunities.
- Supporting women-led collectives and self-help groups to enhance agency and bargaining power.
- There is a need to counsel her for enhancing moral to fight against atrocities.
- Improving the status of women in slums is not only a matter of social justice but also essential for sustainable urban development.

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