

# Social and Cultural Determinants of Women's Status in India

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## ABSTRACT

India is among the countries where gender favoritism in all fields of life is perceptible. Women's rights are desecrated and subjugated. Moreover, women do not have their voice or independent attitude; even they are not given the right to fix on about their life. Persisting social and cultural norms of Indian society restricts women's mobility, their contribution in paid job and also divest them from their inherited property. It is general perception that nations cannot make notable progress in any fields of life until their women are subjugated and desecrated. Therefore, there is a need of empowering women for elevating their status as well as the status of their family, society and nation. Keeping in view, the importance of the issue, present study was conducted. Main objectives of the research were to determine the social status level of women in study area and to identify the social and cultural factors that influence women's social status especially in domestic area. For this rationale a sample of 550 married women of reproductive age (15-49) excluding widows and divorced were taken from Hyderabad, Telangana. Information regarding demography, household, area and other social and cultural variables was collected through a prearranged interview schedule. In order to understand the intricacy of the phenomenon of women's social status. Different statistical tools like t-test, chi square analysis, gamma statistic, Somer's d statistic, correlation, one way ANOVA, and multiple regression analysis, were used to systematically present the data collected, and to develop the relationship among the various descriptive variables and dependent variable (women's social status). In order to examine the causality of relationship between the variables, multiple-linear regression model was developed. The descriptive analysis indicated that majority of women had be short of of resources, their paid job participation was negligible, they were less educated as compared to their spouses, and had low level of consciousness about their rights. Their political interest and group involvement were not encouraging. They had less decision making capacity, less control over resources, less mobility and lower level of contribution in family discussions. In contrast, they had modest level of social networking and were receiving good assistance of their spouses in daily affairs. The analysis revealed that safe and protected future of women ensures their social status. Moreover the deduction based on bi-variate analysis indicated that greater part of variables included in the study were statistically connected with women's social status. However, regression analysis identified twelve variables for their significance control on women's social status. Among them type of family; family management; number of respondent's brothers; paid job participation of respondents; consciousness about the rights; social networking; spouse's cooperation; political participation; conjugal age; and respondent's education showed highly important influence on women social status. On the other hand variable; 'local level facilities' and quantity of 'dowry and assets received by the respondents from their parents showed important influence on women's social status. The inference of the research suggests vibrant change in female education can convey greater knowledge and self-esteem. This research also highlights the significance of active contribution of government and non-government groups for mobilizing and organizing women groups, and thereby increasing their awareness level, political curiosity, inbuilt skills and earning capabilities.

**Keywords:** Women, Social Status, Family, Education.

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## INTRODUCTION

For the past twenty years social status has become a popular dialogue in all meetings, seminars, symposiums and workshops concerning individual development and socio- economic progress of the country. In all the policies concerning fertility behavior and demographic changeover, child welfare, newborn mortality, economic development and poverty alleviation; women social status is used as one of the strategies by many international organizations including World Bank and the major UN agencies (Kabeer, 2001).

In a research, Dyson and Moore (2005) defined women social status as "The extent of a woman's access to communal and material resources within the family, society and the public". On the other hand Dixon-Mueller (2006) viewed

social status as "her influence or power within the family or society and the esteem commanded from the other members." All above mentioned definitions are related to women's authority to make decisions and utilization of their material and intellectual resources for betterment of their own and their intimates. Women's social status, women's autonomy, and gender equality are related terms (Roy and Niranjana, 2004). Women's status means their position within home and within society, relative to men.

### **Status of Women**

Despite their major share in the development of civilization, yet their status in most parts of the world is not equal to men and they are less privileged (Rahman and Naoroze, 2007). Women's fewer opportunities to acquire land, property, credit, education, skill and paid job hinder actually their status. Huge number of women lives in the South Asian region. Women living in Islamic world are facing more problems as they are facing in the rest of the world. They have limited access to the world outside their house. They are trapped in patriarchal system of families, headed by the males who are considered as custodians of women. Moreover, early marriages, honor killing and high fertility, less control over resources, lower level of education, restricted mobility, less participation in jobs and less freedom of choice are the common issues of the Muslim women (Kishor, 2000; Sidani, 2005).

Women are lagged behind in all important fields of life. Gender division in labor is widespread. Women engage themselves in household work most of the time and despite long hours of household work their work is not appreciated. They also have to face number of problems and become the victims of harmful social customs. Males' domination is prevalent. Women have not independent decision even in the matters regarding their personal life (Habib, 2012). All above discussion refers to the view point that over all status of women in India is not satisfactory. Above discussions indicate that women are facing problems all over the world especially in the developing world.

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

Women's social status is not just the popular dialogue of the development agencies, government and non-government organizations rather it is a strategy for well being of individual, family, community and nation. The main significance of the study is to analyze the women's social status in India which is needed for rapid achievement of other Millennium Development Goals such as: reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, achieving universal primary education, combating HIV/AIDS and reducing poverty (Kabeer, 2003). Secondly, for improving the status of women a lot of research work is needed to explore the factors that can bring rapid improvement in the status of women. The present study is an attempt to explore the various social and cultural determinants of the women's social status that can be used as guide line for the policy concerned and future researchers of this field.

### **OBJECTIVES OF STUDY**

The primary objective here is to examine the demographic, social and economic condition of women and their families. The other objectives are to measure the social status level of women in domestic sphere; to identify the socio-cultural and economic factors influencing women's social status; and to develop viable strategy to address the issue of women's social status.

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Literature review provides knowledge and guideline to researchers regarding their research topic. It depicts the previous published work of scholars and researchers in the related field (Sekaram, 2011:37). The present review is an attempt to encircle the socio- cultural determinants and other essential aspects of women's social status indicated in previous studies, conducted in various parts of the world. This literature is reviewed, under various captions, as follow:

#### **Women's Social status: Concept and Measurement**

Women's social status is a broader area of study. Each concerned researcher attempted to explain it according to his/her own perspective. However, there is consensus among them to some extent. Likewise various researchers measure women's social status, keeping in view the nature of study and region. Main focus of this section is on reviews of different social scientists, pertaining to women's social status in domestic sphere.

#### **Reviews on social and cultural determinants of women's social status**

There are number of socio-cultural and demographic factors that have influence on women's social status. Reviews regarding these factors are presented in this section.

#### **Education of women**

It is assumed that educational attainment helps the women to be empowered by building money earning capability among them, developing confidence to face challenges, enhancing ability to make decisions regarding themselves and their intimates. All these things lead women to social status. However, some studies reveal that educated women still

have to face many obstacles that restrict their processes of social status. Review of literature regarding influence of education on women's social status is presented below.

A study was conducted by Sridevi (2005) on post graduate teachers in Chennai. It was found that result supported the hypothesis that higher level of education leads to higher level of social status. Likewise, Ahmad and Sultan (2004) revealed that education was found strong predictor of women's social status and other related dependant variables. However, this result was based on one way analysis of variance technique rather than multivariate regression analysis which is commonly used approach for multivariate analysis.

#### **Women's age**

Mostofa et al. (2008) in their study in Bangladesh revealed that women under 20 years of age had less social status than the women who were between the ages 40-44. Authors further argued that older women had better understanding and closer relation with their husband because they had more chances to communicate with their husband on various issues that increased with the age. In this regard Tareque et al. (2007) stated that younger wives in Bangladesh were kept under strict control of their husbands as compared to elder wives. Eventually tight control of husbands on young wives restricts their freedom of movement as well as confines their freedom of choices.

#### **Women's job involvement**

In an analysis, Roy and Niranjana (2004) noticed greater autonomy among those who were involved in gainful economic activity. Batliwala (2008) argued that women's economic dependence was the main reason of their powerlessness and it was assumed that economically productive women can improve their position in various aspects of life. Therefore planner should develop strategies that improve women's position as worker by providing them supportive environment. In a cross country study, Heaton et al. (2005) indicated that in Nicaragua, employment was most important variable in promoting women's autonomy.

#### **Family type**

Social status is considered to be influenced by the type of family. It is commonly perceived that women belonging to nuclear families have relatively more choices in their life to practice rather than the women who belongs to a joint family. Roy and Niranjana (2004) said that presence of in-laws in a family lower down level of married women's autonomy. Sridevi (2005) explained that in joint family most of the decision were made by older family members. Income was also usually shared by many individuals.

#### **Social networking**

Women's social network or non-family group affiliation have some influence on women's social status. Social networking provides women a window of opportunities to discuss their issues and to work out their solution. In this connection, Cochran (2007) argued that social networking and support groups were prerequisite for individuals to enhance their social status. In other words neighborhoods, churches, religious groups and voluntary associations provide platform for empowering individuals. In this regard Fone et al. (2007) indicated in a study that deprivation of income was associated with poor mental health status.

#### **Dowry and property given by parents to their daughters**

Ahmad (2006) reported that dowry payments were usually made as a compensation for poor marriage market qualities like beauty, education etc. In fact larger amount of dowry brought by the women may not be helpful in empowering women; however, this can be considered as exceptional case because most of the researchers explored positive association between dowry, property and women's social status. Tisdell (2002) argued that relatively fewer assets of women as compared to men and their restricted exchange entitlement was one of the reasons of their poverty. Such restriction on women's ability to inherit or own property reduces their economic assets and commonly the women with fewer assets cannot be considered as empowered.

#### **Women's awareness about their rights**

Musokotwana and Siwata (2001) argued that social status of women can be ensured, by increasing awareness of the women about their rights. Furthermore, awareness rising can be helpful in controlling environment. Thus, knowledge of women about their rights is an important predictor of women social status. Collins (2000) mentioned that 'power' deals with ideology, culture, and consciousness. Therefore, without awareness women will continue to support their own subordination and also that of other groups.

#### **Political participation**

Women's Political Participation Program in Nepal, Andrews (2011) stated that the program proved helpful in increasing women's awareness and skill to transform their personal issues into public concern. Political participation also enabled women to influence the policy that facilitated them to involve in political process more effectively.

#### **Religious tendency**

Offenhauer (2005) stated that recent studies on religion, does not confirm the relationship between religion and

condition of women. Further, most of the researchers consider economic structure, social values and strategies of nations as important determinants of women's status. It is obvious that following the religious practices is not enough for women's social status. For this purpose knowledge about religion is also necessary for women in order to protect them from exploitation of men in the name of religion and to understand the difference between religious obligations and cultural rituals.

#### Urban / rural area and local level facilities

Kabeer (2001) argued that context or locality explains variation in women autonomy. It was concluded that, women agency (ability) is largely shaped by social context rather than individual characteristics. Roy and Niranjana (2004) explored that urban women enjoy more freedom than the rural women. Siddique (2012) in a study in Bangladesh found that women in urban areas had more opportunities for education and job and also found less opposition for girls' education as compared to the rural area.

#### Husband's cooperation

Cooperation of husbands is vital for empowering women because it is assumed that husbands' cooperation set supportive atmosphere for wives to achieve good status in household. Although insufficient literature was found regarding the influence of husband's cooperation on women's social status; however, some relevant literature is presented below.

#### Household status

Household status is commonly perceived as strong predictor of good education, provider of good media exposure and better awareness. In a study based on Indian National Family Health Survey (NFHS-2) conducted during 2012-99; Yesudian (2004) argued that status of household does not directly influence the women social status. However, it was assumed that household status provides means of social status such as education and mass media.

#### Media exposure

How a radio and television can bring social change? In this regard, Ali and Sultan (2011) suggested that radio and television can create awareness among women about their rights and bring gender equality through dramas and other interesting programs.

#### Willingness for change

Government efforts and contribution of NGOs is necessary to empower women. However, without active participation of women, all the efforts of Government or NGOs cannot bring sufficient change in women's status. Cheston and Kuhn (2002) stated that self esteem and confidence of women do not lead to social status directly, rather enhance their ability, and contribute to their willingness for change in their status of subordination that helped them to be empowered.

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theoretical framework is also considered as an important factor of research process. It provides a solid base for explaining a specific phenomenon and helps the researchers to confirm their empirical research work. Present study has its roots in feminist theories because these theories also link various explanatory variables of the study to the status of the women. Liberal, Marxist, Radical, and Social feminism are being discussed in this section.

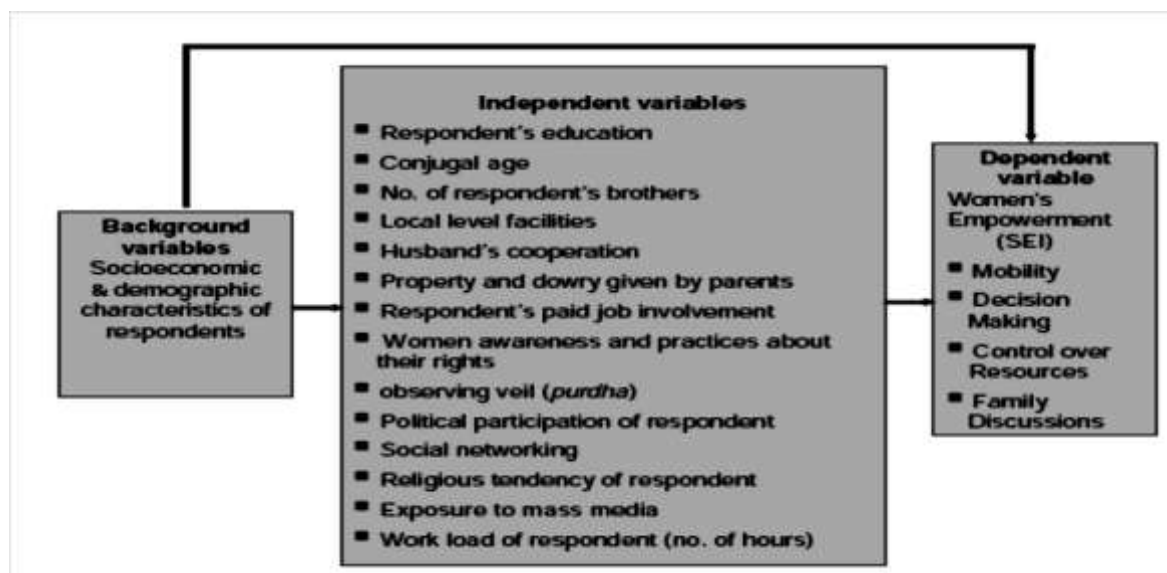


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework



Women's social status means their abilities to make choices (Kabeer, 2001). These choices can be achieved by resources, agency, awareness rising, and social inclusion. In other words, social status is ability as well as a process of capacity building that helps individuals, or groups to make their choices possible. The review of literature identifies number of socio-cultural factors that have their direct or indirect influence on women's social status at household level, these factors are; type of family, family headship, women's education, age, household status, local level facilities, paid job involvement, religious tendency, observing veil, dowry and property received by the women from their parents, exposure to mass media, awareness about the rights, political participation, husband's cooperation and willingness for change. Present study has its roots in feminist theories. The liberal feminist argued that development of political and legal channels, generation of equal economic opportunities for women, education and awareness are essential for reducing gender gap.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In present study correlation design was used. In this design collected data are used for developing casual relationship among the variables (Nachmias and Nachmias, 2011:125). In order to explore more detailed information and the factors which remain unrevealed during quantitative analysis, qualitative data were also collected. These data/information were collected through key informant interviews technique. It is a useful technique which provides more useful and in-depth knowledge in less time and limited cost.

The present study was conducted in few selected areas in and around Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh. All married women of reproductive age (15-49) excluding widows and divorced living in and around Hyderabad constitute the population for the present study. As this study is designed to assess the women's social status in domestic sphere, so sampling units or units of analysis or respondents for this study are all married women of reproductive age (15-49), excluding widows and divorced.

In present study multistage random sampling technique was used, because it is an appropriate technique for drawing sample from large population with limited time and cost. In this regard Roscoe (1975) and Abranovic (2009) suggested that sample should not be less than thirty or more than 500 respondents. It was decided to take a sample size of 550 respondents for the present study.

For the purpose of quantitative analysis, data were collected through well organized interview schedule consisted of both close end and open ended questions regarding the research objectives. The questions of the interview schedule were discussed with supervisory committee and the experts of the relevant field in order to ensure the content validity of the interview schedule.

The results of this study were also verified by comparing the means of summative social status index (SEI) between the categories of the variables through analysis of variance technique and t- distribution. The multivariate analysis was carried out by using all the potential variables in the linear regression analysis. For this purpose stepwise regression procedure was applied that picks the significant variables from all the variables used in the analysis. The analysis was made by using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 15. Variable wise results, based on quantitative data are presented in the succeeding paragraphs.

## DATA ANALYSIS

### Type of family

Univariate analysis signified that 44.4% of household were living in Nuclear family system and 55.6% of the household were living in joint families. It was found that Mean of SEI (summative social status index) was comparatively high (31.53) for those respondents who live in nuclear families and was low (23.89) for the respondents who live in joint families. The difference between mean was found highly significant through t- distribution. This test clearly indicated that women living in joint family system were less empowered as compared to the women living in nuclear family system. This relation was also confirmed on the basis of chi-square distribution which indicated highly significant association between women's social status and type of families. This association indicated that women's social status changed with the change in type of family. When type of family was nuclear, women were more empowered while in joint family system women were less empowered. This bivariate analysis provided sufficient ground to include this variable in regression model. Highly significant value of regression coefficient (2.540) with  $p=0.001$  for this variable indicated that change in type of family brought a considerable change in women's social status. Keeping in view all these evidences it was concluded that "Type of Family" is a strong predictor of women's social status.

### Family headship

It was found in the study that 61.1% of the families were being headed by the husbands of respondents and remaining 38.9% of household were being headed by the other household members such as father in-law, mother in-law or brother in-law. In bivariate analysis, chi-square test for association revealed highly significant association between

family headship and women's social status. This inference was further verified by comparing the means of SEI of women belonged to the households being headed by husbands and the women belonged to the households being headed by the others family members. This comparison indicated that women living in household being headed by their husbands had greater mean score of SEI (28.18) while the women living in the household being headed by others had smaller mean score of SEI (19.22). This difference was also found highly significant through t-distribution. The bivariate analysis led to conclude that women were more empowered when they were living in households being headed by their husbands than the women who were living in the households being headed by others. For confirmation of causality of the relationship, this variable was also included in multivariate analysis. Estimated regression coefficient ( $b=3.777$ ) was found highly significant ( $p=0.002$ ). This inference confirmed that family headship had strong influence on women's social status.

#### **Respondent's conjugal age or length of marital life**

Univariate analysis indicated that 25.8% of respondents had their conjugal age (length of their marital life) 5 years or below, 25.1% of respondents had their conjugal age between 6 to 10 years, majority of respondents (30.7%) had their conjugal age between 11 to 20 years and remaining 18.4 percent of the respondents had their conjugal age 21 years and above. Test for association between variable 'conjugal age' and women's social status indicated highly significant positive association. In other words social status increased with the increase in conjugal age. This result was further confirmed by comparing the means of SEI in all four categories of age which revealed that mean of SEI was low (19.87) when the length of marital life was five years or less; and mean of SEI was high (35.60) when the length of marital life was 21 years or more. Multivariate analysis also indicated highly significant value of regression coefficient i.e. 0.662 at  $p<0.001$ . All these inferences indicated that increase in length of marital life caused an increase in women's social status. On the basis of above result one can conclude that length of marital age played a central role in empowering women.

#### **Education**

It was found that 38.9% of respondents had less than or equal to 5 years of schooling. The majority of respondent (48.0%) have 6 to 12 years of schooling and only 13.1% of respondents had 13 or more years of schooling. The association between education and women's social status was found highly significant on the basis of Somers'd, gamma, and correlation coefficient. Positive value of Somers'd indicated that with increase in education, women's social status also increased. Same result was also depicted, when means of SEI were compared in categories of education. The data indicated that mean for lower level of education was low i.e. 25.37 and mean for higher level of education was high i.e. 32.82. Multivariate analysis also indicated that education had highly significant ( $p<0.001$ ) influence on women social status with regression coefficient equals to 2.428. All above stated statistics indicated that women's social status increased with the increase in education. The reason for the increase in social status with the increase in education is obvious that education provides awareness, confidence and knowledge to the women that help them to decide about their lives and the lives of their intimates.

#### **Local level facilities**

The data on local level facilities was collected on the basis of perceptions of respondents. In this connection 41.6% of the respondents perceived that facilities at local level were poor, 34.9% perceived that facilities at local level were average and remaining 23.5% thought that facilities at local level were good in their area. Association of "local level facilities" and women's social status was also found significant through Somers'd and other statistics. Positive association indicated that good facilities at local level provided opportunities to women for social status.

#### **Paid job involvement**

Univariate analysis regarding women's paid job indicated that only 8% of the women were engaged in paid job and 92% were housewives. Strong association between paid job involvement and women's social status was observed through chi square test for association. This association was further confirmed on the basis of comparison of mean of SEI which indicated that respondents, who were involved in paid job, showed greater mean score of SEI i.e. 39.11 while the respondents who were not involved in paid job showed lower mean score of SEI i.e. 26.25. This difference between means was found highly significant on the basis of t-distribution. In multivariate analysis women's involvement in paid job also showed highly significant value of regression coefficient i.e. 7.138 with  $p<0.001$ . So there were sufficient evidences to say that involvement in paid job was a determinant of women's social status. Therefore, study concluded that women's paid job is necessary condition for reducing women's economic dependency and for empowering them.

#### **Dowry and property received by the respondents from their parents**

Study found that 62.9% of respondent received lower level of dowry from their parents, 28.2% of the respondent received moderate level of dowry and only 8.9% of the respondents received high amount of dowry from their parents. It was also found that only 5.1% of the respondents received property from their parents. The index variable "dowry and property" showed highly positive association with women's social status through Somer's d and gamma statistic. This positive association indicated that respondents who received greater amount of dowry and property had greater social status as compared to the respondents who received smaller amount of dowry.

### Social networking

It was found that only 3.6% of the respondents were involved in women's groups and organizations. Moreover, 36.7% of respondents had lower level of social networking, 53.6% of the respondents had medium level of social networking and only 9.6% of the respondents had higher level of social networking. On the basis of Somer's d and gamma statistic it was found that index variable 'social networking' was highly associated with women's social status. The positive association indicated that increase in level of social networking caused an increase in women's social status. This relation was also verified by comparing the means of SEI among the categories of the variable which indicated that mean of SEI was low i.e. 23.93 for lower level of social networking and mean score of SEI was high i.e. 33.69 for higher level of social networking. The difference between means was found significant on the basis of analysis of variance technique. Multivariate analysis also indicated significant influence of social networking on women's social status. All these statistics indicated that social networking was a strong predictor of women's social status.

### Political participation

Political awareness among women is low in socio-cultural scenario of Hyderabad. It was found that majority of respondents (66.7%) had lower level of political participation; and only 5.6% of the respondents had higher level of political participation. Index variable, political participation, also showed highly significant positive association with women's social status. In other words, increased political participation leads women towards higher level of social status. Same result was observed through comparison of mean score of SEI in the categories of the variable (low, medium and high). Statistics indicate that political participation gives women awareness and knowledge and sense of collective action that helps them to raise their voices and their vocal attitude helps them to be empowered.

### Awareness about the rights

It was also found that most of the respondents were unaware of their rights and the practices of these rights were also limited. The data exposed that majority of respondents (73.5%) had lower level of awareness about their rights and practices of these rights and 5.7% of the respondents had higher level of awareness and practices of their rights. It was found that "awareness and practices of rights" variable was strongly associated with women's social status on the basis of Somer's d and gamma statistic. This positive association indicated that increase in awareness caused an increase in women's social status. This result was further verified by comparing means of SEI by applying analysis of variance technique that indicated highly significant difference between the means of SEI in the categories of the variable i.e. 25.82 for lower level of awareness and 36.09 for higher level of awareness. Multivariate analysis was also used to see the influence of index variable "awareness about women's right" on the women's social status. When women have knowledge of these rights they attempt to acquire these rights and their attempts forward them towards social status.

### Husband's cooperation

Husband's cooperation is also a necessary condition for women's social status. It was found that majority of respondents (47.3%) received good cooperation from their husbands, 45.8% of the respondents received moderate level of cooperation while 6.9% of the respondents received lower level of cooperation from their husbands. Bivariate analysis indicated that index variable "Husband's Cooperation" was also highly associated with women's social status on the basis of Somer's d and gamma statistic. In other words, these inferences indicated that women who received good cooperation of their husbands were more empowered as compared to the women who received poor cooperation from their husbands. This result was also verified by analysis of variance technique that indicated highly significant difference between the means of SEI in categories of the variable i.e. mean score of SEI for respondents who received good cooperation was 28.71 and the mean was 22.32 for the women who received poor cooperation from their husbands. Multivariate analysis also indicated highly significant influence of husbands' cooperation on women's social status with regression coefficient 0.370 and  $p < 0.001$ . All these evidences provided solid ground to conclude that husbands' cooperation was a strong predictor of women's social status. The rationale of this relation can be attributed to the fact that good cooperation of husbands provides confidence and strength to the women that lead them towards social status.

**Table 1: Influence of various socio-cultural variables on women's social status: A multiple linear regression analysis**

Independent variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	$b_i$	Std. Error	$B_i$		
Family headship ( $X_1$ )	3.777	1.217	0.096	3.103	0.002
No. of respondents' brothers ( $X_2$ )	2.057	0.711	0.120	3.949	0.000
Paid job involvement ( $X_3$ )	7.138	1.362	0.164	5.241	0.000

Awareness about the rights (X <sub>4</sub> )	7.138	0.231	<b>0.117</b>	<b>3.559</b>	<b>0.000</b>
Social networking (X <sub>5</sub> )	0.823	0.198	<b>0.110</b>	<b>3.565</b>	<b>0.000</b>
Husband's cooperation (X <sub>6</sub> )	0.706	0.097	<b>0.119</b>	<b>3.793</b>	<b>0.000</b>
Political participation (X <sub>7</sub> )	0.370	0.194	<b>0.115</b>	<b>3.490</b>	<b>0.001</b>
Conjugal age (X <sub>8</sub> )	0.675	0.049	<b>0.443</b>	<b>12.627</b>	<b>0.000</b>
Local level facilities (X <sub>9</sub> )	0.186	0.086	<b>0.170</b>	<b>2.166</b>	<b>0.031</b>
Education (X <sub>10</sub> )	2.428	0.654	<b>0.138</b>	<b>3.714</b>	<b>0.000</b>
Dowry and Property (X <sub>11</sub> )	0.109	0.045	<b>0.085</b>	<b>2.436</b>	<b>0.015</b>
Type of family (X <sub>12</sub> )	2.540	0.769	<b>0.107</b>	<b>3.303</b>	<b>0.001</b>

Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = 0.516

F = 46.095, Sig. at p < 0.001

## CONCLUSIONS

Study also found that women's social status was also directly or indirectly influenced by the locality of the household. The study revealed that women living in the areas with full amenities of life were more empowered than the women living in the areas with scarcity of these amenities. These findings led to the conclusion that socio-economic developments of the area positively influenced the women's social status. The qualitative analysis also exposed that women's physical and economic security within their home and outside their home was essential for their social status. Study indicated that insecure future and vulnerable position of women within home hindered their journey towards social status. Furthermore, quantitative analysis found that husband's cooperation was a source of social status for women. These findings also ensured that cooperation of husband secured women's position within household that led them towards social status. Similarly quantitative analysis also showed that women's paid job lessened their economic dependency and provided them safe future which ultimately enhanced their social status. On the basis of above mentioned findings it was concluded that more secure the economic future of women greater will be the social status. Study also revealed that amount of dowry and property received by the respondents from their parents had positive influence on women's social status. High amount of dowry and property also strengthen women's economic condition that helped them to be empowered. It was also found that women with greater number of brothers were more empowered than the women with lesser number of brothers. The greater number of brothers was also considered as greater socio-economic support for women. Keeping in view the all above mentioned findings, it was concluded that social, moral and economic support of women, their economic self reliance and free of threat life is a viable strategy for their social status.

The study found that social status increased with the increase in conjugal age. Earlier studies also indicated that women gradually earned better status and capacity to tackle their personal issues effectively with their increasing age and experiences of life. This capacity helped them to be empowered. Present study also revealed that education and awareness about the rights also enhanced women's social status. Therefore, younger women can also be empowered by developing such capacity among them through education and awareness. Study explored that women's social networking or group participation was also a source of social status for them. Therefore, efforts are needed to make these social groups more vibrant and effective for women's collective action against their subordination. Study also found that women's political interest enhanced their social status. It was concluded that development of political interest among women will bring change in their thinking which will help them to be empowered. The study investigated that women who were observing veil were less empowered than the women who were not observing veil. In order to empower veil observant women, study suggested a change in women's perceptions about veil, that they feel no hesitation to go to various places and believe their veil as a source of protection rather than considering it a hurdle for their free movement. Eventually, study concluded that women's economic self reliance, awareness, collective action and supportive social environment are the issues of key concern for their social status.

## SUGGESTIONS

Keeping in view the findings of study following suggestions are being proposed for execution at various levels and making effective policy for empowering women. **At government level**, Women feel insecurity, uncertainty and vulnerability within home and outside home. The government should make effective legislation with strict implementation of the laws regarding women. In this connection local level committees should be made effective for providing women quick justice and supportive environment. The government should pay due attention towards this issue by focusing on female education, by introducing less complicated laws for inherited property and by creating paid work opportunities for women at their door steps. Television was the most commonly used mass media in the area



under study therefore this media can be used as an agent of change by introducing new television channels which present effective programs on women's issues. **At institution level**, NGOs can play a vital role in addressing the issues of women's social status. In this regard it is necessary to organize women's groups and organizations that provide women a platform where they can highlight their problems, enhance their learning, develop political interest and eventually raise their voice collectively. There is need to change the mindset of the people. Hence for this purpose more conferences, seminars and symposiums should be arranged in order to educate masses regarding women issues. Much research work and field work is needed in order to understand women issues and to educate them regarding their rights. **At household level**, within house woman should be provided a supportive atmosphere for developing confidence among them. For this purpose, husbands' and in-laws' cooperation and democratic atmosphere within household can be used as an effective tool. Parents should also give the due share to their daughters in the property, without any discrimination, for their economic well being. Marriages of the daughters should be arranged by their parents with their formal consent. Furthermore, written agreement about the physical and economic security of their daughter should be made with her in-laws and husband at the time of marriage.

### SCOPE FOR FURTHER STUDIES

Women's social status is a broad area of study but present study is not an end in itself rather it highlights some of its aspects; therefore, there is need for further studies in this area. It is needed to conduct studies on husbands in order to take their point of view regarding women's social status and to evaluate the extent to which they want to empower their wives. Further studies are needed to develop universal tool kit for measuring women's social status especially at household level. Participatory approaches that can be used in order to get in-depth knowledge about the phenomenon of women's social status.

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