

**SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF SLUM DWELLING WOMEN –  
A CASE STUDY ON DANKUNI MUNICIPALITY, HOOGHLY, WEST  
BENGAL**

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**ABSTRACT**

The slum dwelling women are most negligible among their society. Their level of education is below in standard. Early age of marriage, giving birth of many children, long working hours and hard work and low wages are common features of them. In the slum area of Dankuni Municipality, only 28.53% women have passed madhyamik (secondary) examination. If their social status is analyzed, it is observed that 89.35% women got married before twenty years of their age, 40.90% women are mother of more than three children. Aged women don't get proper food; proper treatment and they also have to do work to earn money for their family. In the study area, there are also many social problems like dowry system, consumption of alcohol, torture on women etc. The present paper deals with the socio economic habitat of slum dwelling women of Dankuni Municipality of Hooghly District, West Bengal.

**KEY WORDS:** Early age of marriage, Low level of education, Social problems.

**INTRODUCTION**

In India, slums have been defined under section 3 of slum areas (Improvement and Clearance) Act, 1956.

- a) Area in any respect unfit for human habitation.
- b) Area by reason of dilapidation, overcrowding, faulty arrangement and design of such building, narrowness or faulty arrangement of streets, lack of ventilation, light, sanitation facilities or any combination of these factors, which are detrimental to safety, health and morals.

The following criteria characterize an area as slum:

- a) All areas notified "slum" by state govt. under any act.
- b) All areas recognized as slum by the state govt. which have not been formally notified as slum under any act.
- c) A compact area of at least 300 populations or about 60 – 70 households of poorly built congested tenements in unhygienic environment usually with inadequate infrastructure lacking in proper sanitary and drinking water facilities. (Khullar, 2006).

Rapid unplanned urbanization, rural-urban migration in search of jobs, overcrowding, and problems of housing create slum area which is a striking feature in almost every Indian cities. In slum area, normally the socio economic status is poor in nature. But in developing countries like India where gender gap exists in almost every parts of society, it becomes necessary to highlight specially the socio-economic status of slum dwelling women as they are almost neglected among their society. So the paper presents here to reveal the socio-economic status of slum dwelling women as well as to highlight the threats and challenges that exist among their life.

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**OBJECTIVES**

- To analyze the social status of slum dwelling women
- To highlight engagement of women in occupation
- To examine the position of women among the economically poor sections
- To find out different social problems that exist in the slum area
- To highlight the condition of aged women in the study area.

**STUDY AREA**

Dankuni is a fast growing industrial township near Kolkata. The town is part of the Community Development block Chaditala II, of Hooghly district, in the state of West Bengal (Fig.1). The latitudinal and longitudinal extension of the area are 22°40'N to 22°42'N and 88°16'E to 88°18'E. Dankuni municipality has 19 wards. There are 87 slum pockets and 6212 dwelling units in this area. The total population of this municipality is 104326, among which 31063 live in slum. (Banerjee, 2012)

**TABLE 1 - WARD WISE SLUMS**

Ward No	No of the Slum	Name of the Slum	No of household	Slum population	Total population	% of slum population to total population
8	45	Kalipur Mal Para	100	250	5852	23.06
	46	Mrigala mal para	100	200		
	47	Buno para	30	150		
	48	Purbasa	100	300		
	49	Part of Mrigala Mallick Para	150	450		
10	53	Monoharpur, Raypara Rail line	315	2800	4836	69.23
	54	Monoharpur Baishali Pally	75	548		
13	60	Aurobindo Nagar	50	200	4427	4.51
14	61	Sukanta Pally	42	220	5182	42.93
	62	Khudiram Pally	43	175		
	63	Bonder Bill	355	1750		
	64	Delhi Road Chaitanya para	20	80		

Source: Survey conducted by Dankuni Municipality, 2010

**METHODOLOGY**

Here, the study is based mainly on primary data. Purposive random sampling was adopted in the selection of data. The sample survey was carried out among randomly selected samples for generation of primary data. 50 slum dwelling women of different ages were taken into consideration through structured questionnaire. As the study area i.e. Dankuni Municipality was formed in 2008, there are no census records of ward wise total population and actual slum population that have hindered for the preparation of this paper to a limited extent. Thus the data related to population was collected from the survey report of Dankuni Municipality, conducted in the year 2010. After the completion of field work, the collected data and related information are computed and presented with suitable diagrams with the help of Microsoft Office Excel package.

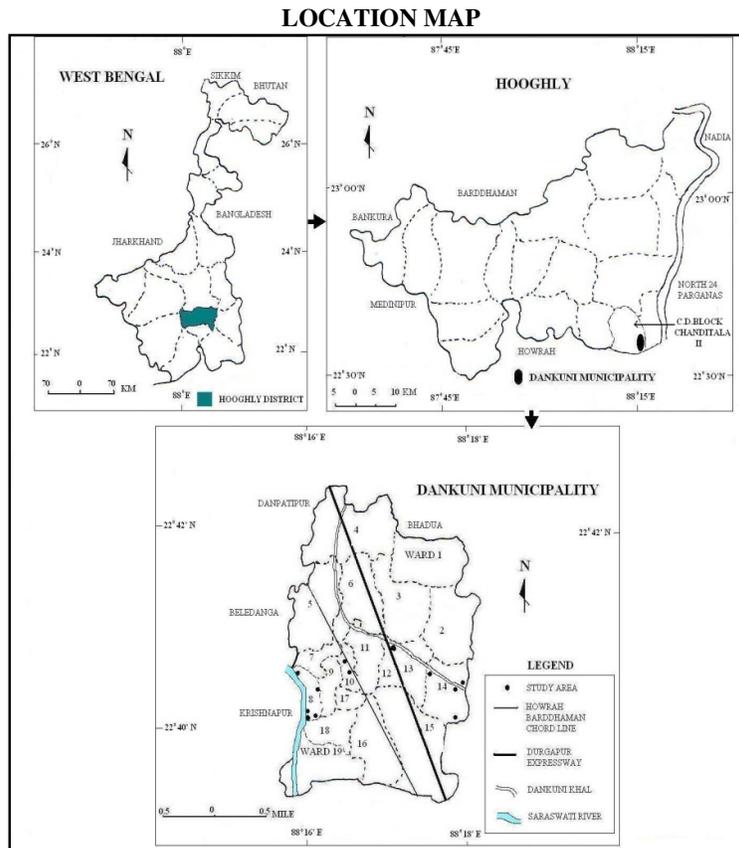


Fig. 1

**ASSESSMENT OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF SLUM DWELLING WOMEN**

Socio-economic status of women means the position of women in their society as well as in their family and also their engagement in economic activities. It is observed that in slum areas of Dankuni Municipality womens’ socio-economic status is very poor. Here, some parameters have been selected to analyze the socio-economic status of women.

- Literacy rate and Level of education
- Age of marriage
- Number of children per women
- Women engagement in occupation and economic contribution to their family
- Types of occupation
- Gender specific right to decision making
- Condition of aged women
- Social problems

**LITERACY RATE AND LEVEL OF EDUCATION**

Normally the literacy rate among slum dwelling women tends to low as observed in other slum areas. But in this area, the situation reflects very striking feature that almost 84% women are literate here. But when the level of education is analyzed the real picture of the society is viewed. It is observed that 26.19% women have studied up to class IV, 45.23% women have studied up to class IX. Only 16.66% women have passed madhyamik and

9.52% women have passed Higher Secondary level. Only 2.38% women have studied above Higher Secondary (H.S) (Fig-2).

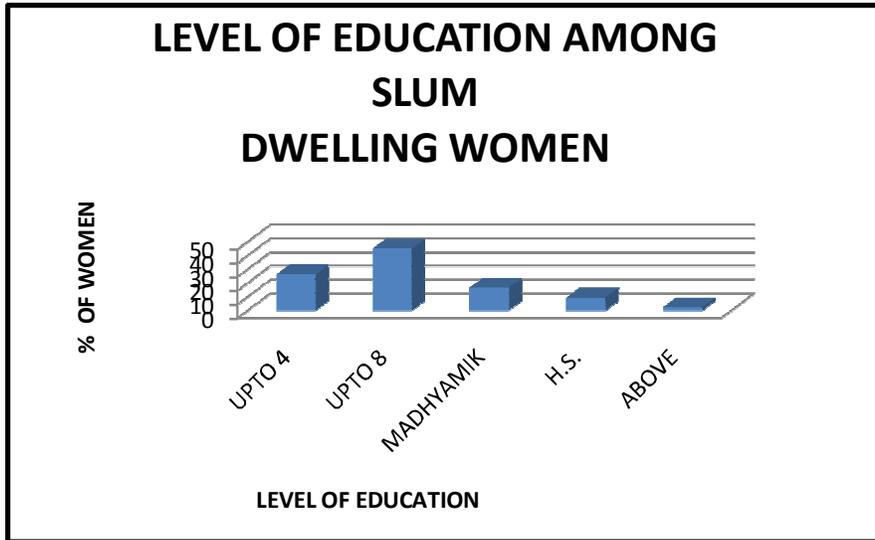


Fig-2

**AGE OF MARRIAGE**

In the study area, the age of marriage of the slum dwelling women shows a striking feature. It is found that 6.38% women got married before 15 years of their age. 48.93% women married between 16 – 18 years and 34.04% women in between 19 - 20 years of their age. Only 10.63% women got married after 21 years of their age. It is a serious matter that most of the women are married at a very lower age. (Banerjee, 2012). If the relation between total year of studies and age at the time of marriage is analyzed it is observed that there is a positive relation between them. That means woman who have studied more got married comparatively on later age (Fig-3).

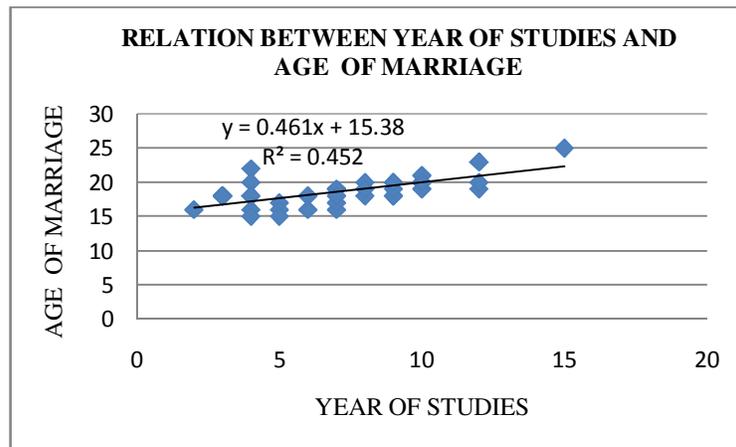


Fig-3

**NUMBER OF CHILDREN PER WOMAN**

Socio-economic status may be determined from number of children per women. Poor economic condition influences parents to give birth more child, mainly with expectation of boy child, as they can depend on him in future. This mentality belongs to every stages of their society significantly.

In this slum area, it may be said on the basis of collected data that women are used as productive machinery. Here it is observed that 22.72% women have only one child, 36.36% women have two child and 40.90% women are the mother of more than three children. This indicates not only the pressure on women and the detrimental social condition but also indicates the lack of awareness about family planning (Banerjee, 2012).

**ENGAGEMENT IN OCCUPATION AND ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION TO THEIR FAMILY**

Most of the slum dwelling women work to earn money as they can contribute for their family to improve their economic condition. Among the slum dwelling women, 48% women work to earn money for their family. Women monthly contribution varies with the variation of their works. The data shows that most of the women workers living in slums are basically performing low wage works as they have no such higher level of education to involve themselves in the high waged employment

(Banerjee et al., 2009). In these slum areas, 33.33% women contribute below Rs. 1000 in every month, where 41.66% women contribute Rs. 1000 – 1500 per month and 25% women contribute more than Rs. 1500 per month.

**TYPES OF OCCUPATION**

Women are engaged in different types of work in these slum areas. In the study area, as the level of education is poor, women are compelled to do hard working jobs, though they don't get proper wages. It is observed that 20.83% women work as maid servant in different houses of the local area (Fig 4). As Dankuni is a developing township, agricultural practices are also done in its nearby areas and 37.5% women work as agricultural labour. In slum areas, few women are engaged in different small scale industries like papad production, making of soft toys etc. from which they earn money. Women are also engaged in works like stitching clothes, making paper packets etc.

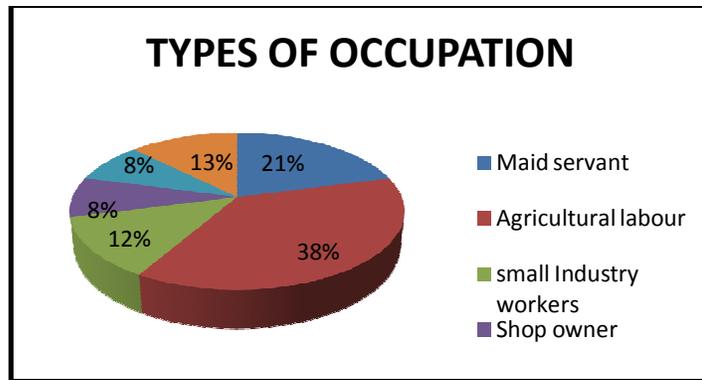


Fig 4

**GENDER SPECIFIC RIGHT TO DECISION MAKING**

Females' equal rights in every stage reflect their equal status with male. Among slum dwellers, normally male members of the family take major decisions about family matter or about children than that of the females. But with the increasing rate of literacy, females are now also enjoying equal rights to take decisions. This indicates womens' importance in

their family. In those families, where both husband and wife are engaged in same kind of job, both of them enjoy equal right to take decisions. Here it has been observed that about 36% women take part in making decision equally with their husband. (Fig 5) But in those families where females are only housewives, their husbands take decisions, many times without the consultation of female members' consultation. 48% women agree that they don't have any right to take major decisions of her family and children. They also don't have right to do anything without permission of their husbands. Though females also earn money, sometimes males compel them to accept their decision. Sometimes, aged people in the family take major decisions. In some cases, where male persons are absent in the family or physically handicapped or unable to earn money for their family, females take the decisions. It is observed that women, who contribute money in a relatively high proportion, enjoy freedom in case of taking any decision. 16 % women agree that they enjoy freedom in taking decisions. The observation indicates that womens' engagement in occupation do not only help them to earn, but also expedite to uplift their status also in their family.

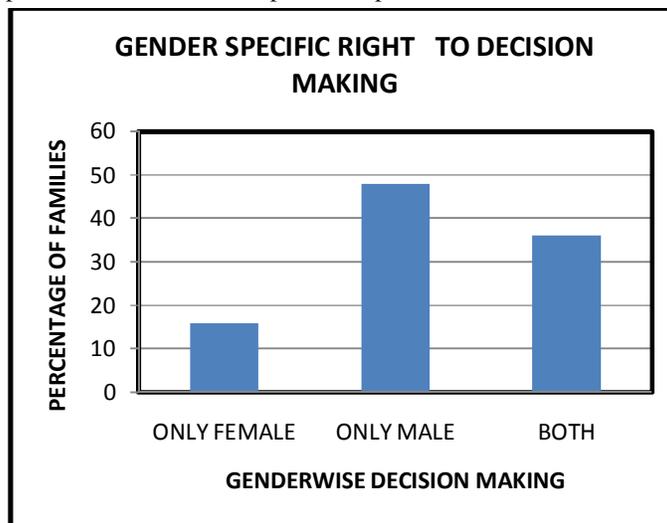


Fig 5

**CONTIONS OF AGED WOMEN**

Condition of aged women in slum areas is quite miserable. As the socio-economic condition is very poor in slum areas of Dankuni municipality, it affects the living standard of the aged persons very much. Among the aged persons, women are comparatively high in numbers than male, and they are the most sufferers. Most of them have been suffering from different types of illnesses and due to their physical inability, they cannot work properly. So, they are neglected in their family in many times. Despite, most of the aged women have been suffering from different illnesses but they cannot get proper treatment as their economic condition is very poor. Here the women who get treatment for their illness, have to mostly depend on different herbal treatment or quack doctors which they can avail at a cheaper rate. The Govt. hospital is located 3 km. away at Chanditala, but most of them do not avail the facility due to lack of their consciousness.

Most of the aged women have to work in their houses as the young males and females are engaged most of the time in outside for work. Aged women are also engaged in some productive works at home from which they can earn money. They make paper packets, help their family members in their work as much as possible by them. Some aged women also work as maid servants in different houses of the local area and they earn Rs. 800 – 1000 in every month. But some aged women cannot perform any type of work due to their

physical weakness. In slum area, only 12 % aged women get govt. allowances, which they contribute totally for their family.

#### **SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

In slum areas of Dankuni municipality, lower standard of education, lack of awareness, poor economic condition create different social problems which affect day to day life of the women. Dowry systems, alcohol consumption, torture on women are the common matters in the area under study.

Dowry system is a primitive practice of our society. As the economic condition is very poor and level of education is also very low in these slums, most of the women have to face dowry system. Women who get arranged marriage, dowry is a common phenomenon. But in case of love marriage the same is not found. Here, almost 54% women agree that their families have to pay money to their husband at the time of their marriage.

Another problem of the study area is consumption of alcohol. In slums of this area a large number of males are alcoholic, which creates different problems in females life. 45% women agree that their husbands consume alcohol at a regular interval. Some males also put pressure on their wives to provide money so that they can consume alcohol.

As some of the males are alcoholic, domestic violence on women is a regular event in these slums. When males become drunk, most of them torture their wife due create domestic violence. Though it becomes really tough to quantify the actual number, because most of the women do not agree to disclose this for fear or shyness but it is realized that approximately 51% women are tortured in this regard.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The case study on the socio economic status of slum dwelling women of Dankuni Municipality area reveals that the overall condition is miserable. Low level of education, early age of marriage, hard works to earn money, and also violence against women indicate lower socio-economic status of the slum dwelling women. Aged women are deprived of getting proper treatment and compelled to do hard work to earn money. So, to improve the condition, more stress on female literacy, steps for women empowerment are necessary at first. It is also necessary to control incidence like early age marriage or domestic violence with strict hands. Moreover, awareness of people and their intervention to control the problems like dowry system or consumption of alcohol is required. Mass media may take major role to increase awareness among people about these matters.

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