

WOMEN AND ASSET OWNERSHIP IN DELHI'S MAHILA HAAT : A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Women have come a long way when it comes to fighting for their rights since the Independence. But they still have to face challenges from the male dominated society. The social reformers have done their part by raising issues for women, organizing marches and protests, fighting for women rights. There are people who have been engaged in promoting and advancing women's interests in the recent years too. There have been programs and policies, projects and other initiatives as well to make women socially, politically and economically empowered.

KEY WORDS: *Women, Ownership, Asset, Delhi*

Many studies demonstrate the important relationship between asset ownership, poverty reduction, and growth. The main objective of this study is to look at the efforts of government towards women's economic emancipation, the steps taken for the same and the importance of it.

To develop policies to promote the accumulation of assets, it is critical to understand how assets are acquired and whether acquisition patterns differ for males and females. Owning asset gives women the power to bargain. It empowers them to stand up against violation, be confident and emancipated, making them less vulnerable.

The North Delhi Municipal Corporation initiated projects to ensure women empowerment. They wanted the women artisans to have control over their produce, sell it by themselves and earn revenue.

After a delay of three years, the North Delhi Corporation was all set to start an all women market with 39 stalls at a minimal rent of Rs 90 a day in the year 2012. It was a first of its kind market with only women artisans and entrepreneurs.

The construction of this Mahila Haat was initiated by the Municipal Corporation Delhi (MCD) in the year 2009. Women sellers finally had the opportunity to showcase their wares and rent stalls.

An article by the webindia123.com reported that the MCD Standing Committee visited the Haat to

fix rents, see designs and finalise the process for allotment of the space to be run exclusively by women. It was also reported that the Committee, after visiting the site recommended setting up of another sub-committee for selection of vendors on the basis of their products to be sold. The then MCD Standing Committee Deputy Chairman Sarita Chaudhary had informed that space would be allotted for a month and one can apply for space once in four months. In an interview with the Indian Express, Krishna Kumar, Deputy Commissioner of City Zone had said that they would invite talented women from all over the country to send in their applications, so that everyone could get a chance to showcase their wares.

Constructed on the terrace of multi-level underground car parking at Asaf Ali Road, the Haat was to be built on the lines of Dilli Haat and was developed on an area approximately 6,000sqm. Asif Ali Road was chosen as it is a convenient location and also frequented by a lot of people. The market was constructed at a cost of Rs. 2 crore, as reported by the Times of India. However, the Daily Pioneer reports that sources said the construction cost was to the tune of Rs 5 crore owing to inordinate delay in execution of the project.

The Haat was thrown open to women from all over the country. All the stalls at the Haat were to exhibit and sell products like ornaments, furnishings, kitchen products, fabrics among others.

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The idea of the Haat was welcomed by all with great pomp and show. With attractive incentives presented to the women, this became a much awaited project. It was believed to empower women, give them control over their produce and make them economically independent. Depending on the success of this project the civic body planned to build five more haats in the city.

The neglected Mahila Haat was soon tried to be revived and given a new lease of life by the North Delhi Municipal Corporation in collaboration with the women's wing of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI). The revival of the project was supposed to be based on social partnership between FLO (FICCI Ladies Organisation) and North Delhi Municipal Corporation. There were extensive changes to be made and FLO was expected to design and administer these changes. The North Corporation would create a seed fund corpus of Rs 50 lakh for renovations. Initial promotion is to be looked after by FLO.

It was meant to provide cheap and centrally located retail spaces to women artisans and entrepreneurs. But, a year and a half after it was inaugurated amid much celebration, the space is a mess.

FICCI Ladies Organisation had signed an MOU with North Delhi Municipal Corporation, New Delhi for creating a Mahila Haat, with the objective of serving as a market place for the women artisans and entrepreneurs, thereby encouraging and promoting entrepreneurship and skill development at the grass root level among women, across all sectors in March 2016.

The main objectives as stated by FLO were-

- The Mahila Haat Project was an ambitious project that aimed to facilitate women empowerment.
- It would provide a platform for women entrepreneur's to sell their products under a single roof.
- Create awareness among people about the products manufactured by women entrepreneurs.
- It would bring a change in the lives of women artisans, craft persons and entrepreneurs socially and economically.
- It would create market linkages for women artisans and entrepreneurs. Mahila Haat would thus emerge as an important shopping and cultural destination in Delhi.

- Mahila Haat would also serve as a cultural centre for Women oriented performances.

It had only generated Rs 5.61 lakh as revenue to the agency till March 31, 2014. However, during the first four months of its inauguration, the Mahila Haat had shown 100 per cent occupancy. On the contrary, more than 50 per cent stalls remained vacant during the last four months. The revenue collection too remained dismal for these months and varied between merely Rs 14,000 to Rs 20,000, as reported by The Pioneer.

Vijender Gupta wanted to set an example by promoting this Haat as harbinger of women empowerment.

Called a 'khandar' by the locals, to find Mahila Haat is a task in itself. The approach to the Haat is unmarked and crowded by small dhabas, with employees and patrons passing comments at women going by. Instead of women's empowerment, the Mahila Haat has ended up causing harassment, as reported by The Hindu.

The Haat was criticized by the then Leader of Opposition of the NDMC, Mukesh Goel, for its design and structure. It reportedly did not protect artisans from the blazing sun, rain or the cold. Mr. Goel had raised the issue in the Standing Committee meeting. He criticized the Engineering Department and blamed the then ruling BJP government for its apparent failure.

The then Leader of the House Mira Aggarwal, admitted the Mahila Haat project was a failure, as reported by The Hindu. She said that the Haat was never meant for revenue generation but to empower women. The project had to be relooked at because the women artisans had stopped coming. There were no proper sanitation facilities like toilets and thus the place became unhygienic for both the buyers and sellers.

All the stalls were occupied when the project was initiated in the year 2012 but by the end of 2014, only 10 stalls were actually functioning.

If the bustling in regular haats is one's expectation and idea of shopping then the pin drop silence there would leave one deaf. The place lied neglected and disregarded within a few months after it convened.

When men go and sell the products produced by women, their assets are wrongly taken away. There

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is no correlation between the producer and buyer as the men become the middleman when they sell these produce. There is no guarantee too if the money earned goes essentially or rightly to the women producers or artisans.

Previously radio and print advertisements and cultural programmes kept the sales going. Sushma Yadav, a stall owner, said that they could not display their goods as the kiosks were open from all sides, reported the Deccan Herald. They do not wish to shift from that area as it is a cusp of Old and New Delhi.

The FICCI has not been able to do much towards the improvement of the Haat. It remained in the same condition as it was even after the contract was given to them 2-3 years back, says senior NDMC officer, Mr. Kundan Singh Bisht. The North Delhi Municipal Corporation has decided to take back the contract and auction the Haat. They plan on to giving it to an NGO who can they organize and structure it accordingly.

Recommendations and suggestions:

- Better management of the venue
- Construction of shop-like kiosks with better facilities
- Proper advertisement
- Proper time to time inspection
- Proper funding
- Structural changes should be brought about after consulting the shop owners

Several initiatives have been proposed but their improper implementation has jeopardized their sustainability. There is not a dearth of progressive reform but stricter, strategic implementation is a necessity. The intrinsic will to bring about change and reduce gender inequality shall manifest a better and more empowered platform for women. Governmental efforts and incentives must be prioritized in order to bring about the required holistic change.

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