



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



Role of women in improving livelihoods as micro-entrepreneurs: A case study of women from Gadiya Lohar community in Delhi

Gulshan * and Nisha Varghese

School of Extension and Development Studies, Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi, India.

World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews, 2024, 21(02), 140–146

Publication history: Received on 19 December 2023; revised on 31 January 2024; accepted on 03 February 2024

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2024.21.2.0363>

Abstract

In Gadia lohar community women play an important role not only in shaping the family but also in shaping the iron tools and equipment. This paper focuses on the role of Gadia Lohar women in improving livelihoods as micro-entrepreneurs; they manage businesses on their own to improve the financial condition of the family. Still, there is no vocational education and training outside the house and family, they are bound to live in deplorable living conditions and lack the needed support from the government in accessing health and sanitation facilities. Study found that women of gadia lohar community are involved in the same old business and mostly remain unpaid workers of the house, while adding to the family income. Their participation is very less in all decision-making related to the house and business matters. Furthermore, this paper makes some suggestions and recommendations to empower and to improve the situation of Gadia Lohar women individually and collectively.

Keywords: Gadia Lohar; Livelihoods; Micro-entrepreneurs; Economic support

1. Introduction

Gadia Lohars are a nomadic community originally from Chittorgarh district of Rajasthan. Their ancestors used to make iron tools and iron weapons for the army of the Rajput king, Maharana Pratap of Chittorgarh, but they fled from the fort when it was attacked by the Mughals in 1568 AD and it was captured by Akbar [1]. When Mewar was captured by the Mughals, the Gadia Lohars took an oath that they would never return or settle elsewhere until the king regained his land. They vowed never to return back to the fort, never to live in a permanent settlement or permanent house, not to light a lamp or candle in the house at night, not to sleep on cots and draw water from wells. The community has adhered to these vows taken by their ancestors for the past 400 years. However, due to varying circumstances and heeding to the call for a change due to life's circumstances, they have now broken some of their vows. They have stopped their nomadic way of life and are now settled in urban areas in different states of India. They live in small huts built on vacant lands alongside the roads or railway tracks. Most of them continue their ancestral profession of ironwork and have built houses for themselves. The remnants of the bullock carts used by their ancestors still stands in some corner of their settlements as a reminder of their nomadic past.

In Delhi, they are an extremely marginalized community and live in informal settlements in the city and neighbouring areas [2]. There are around 90 informal settlements in and around Delhi where they reside. They constantly fear being forcibly evicted from their homes on the pavements or along the roadways. As the name suggests, traditionally they are blacksmiths by profession and depend on making and selling of iron goods, selling of crockery and other items for their livelihood. They have expertise in making iron pans, stoves, griddles, sickles etc. According to a study done on Delhi's Gadia Lohar Community by Housing and Land Rights Network, 2019, 75 per cent of the households lacked access to health care services, 41 per cent lacked access to clean drinking water, 22 percent did not have electricity connections.

* Corresponding author: Gulshan

Most of the settlements did not even have proper garbage disposal facilities, forcing them to settle in unhygienic conditions, exposed to various diseases. The informal settlements of Gadia Lohars are considered as encroachments and they are subjected to eviction time and again by the municipal officials. Lack of land titles poses not just a problem for the community but also for local authorities.

The Gadia Lohar is a closely knit community in which participation of all the members of the household keeps the livelihood running. Iron working is the most important and basic unit of the Gadulia Lohar production [3]. While men who are skilled as ironsmiths make utensils and other tools made of iron, women are involved in selling these items. Children are taken care of by the elders at home. In this community every member of the family is involved in the family business where not just men strive to earn money but women also participate in iron work [4]. The transformative role of Gadia Lohar women as entrepreneurs not only improves their lives but also enhances their livelihood. As micro entrepreneurs, they help in reducing poverty, operate small business ventures, and they usually have the ability to manage and run a business even with limited support.

Traditionally women are busy performing domestic chores within their own houses and their work is not paid or accounted for. Gadia lohar women are not only skilled in their iron work but are also actively involved in sale of their produce and for this is the reason they are financially independent and are capable of taking care of their family. Micro-entrepreneurship not only impacts on their own life and but also helps them to make an impact in community in which they live. While there are increasing number of studies on the role of women as entrepreneurs but the story of women entrepreneurs of Gadia lohar community is seldom told. This paper will explore the transition role of Lohar women in improving livelihood and facing the challenges and difficulties that arise in setting up and running a small business and how they solve them.

2. Methodology

Field survey was conducted on 50 Gadia Lohar households settled in Delhi to study the role of women as micro-entrepreneurs. The primary data is collected from South Delhi, Southwest Delhi and North-East Delhi. A sample of 50 Lohar households was surveyed using semi-structured interview, Focus Group Discussions, observation from field visits, enquiry with heads of the households and interactions with heads of the community. The secondary data required was collected from various sources such as available literature, reports, books, published research papers, articles etc.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Gadia Lohar Settlements in Delhi

Gadia Lohars have led a nomadic life for generations as they consider themselves bound by the vow taken by their ancestors. Originally from Rajasthan, now they are settled in various Indian states including Delhi, Haryana, Punjab, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra. The report of the Renke Commission, 2008 [5] to the National Commission for Denotified, Semi-nomadic and Nomadic Tribes considers Gadia Lohars as nomadic tribe owing to their history of deprivation and marginalization with respect to land, housing and livelihoods. Their main source of livelihood in manufacturing and sale of iron goods including utensils, tools, implements etc. In Delhi, most of their settlements are along road sides and pavements which helps them in carrying out their trade. As these settlements have not found place in surveys conducted by the Delhi Government, they are not eligible for various schemes and policies targeting Delhi residents like the Delhi Slum and JJ Rehabilitation and Relocation Policy 2015 [6].

Traditionally, being nomadic, they used to move from place to place in a bullock cart, most of the time, treating the bullock cart as their homes. As they were blacksmiths possessing bullock carts, they came to be known as Gadia lohars where Gadia means bullock cart and Lohar means blacksmith. Those families, which go from village to village in two or three days, do not construct any shelter but they live below the cart itself [7] but later for settlements they construct mud or brick houses with proper roof. Though now they no longer travel in bullock carts, some have still preserved their damaged bullock carts as a symbol of their glorious past. They build temporary houses also called kachha house. These are make shift structures which generally shares a wall with the boundary of a park or any other building alongside which they have settled. The rest of the sides are covered with plastics or tarpaulins which protects them from bad weather conditions. They no longer prefer to move from place to place but want to settle down for longer periods at places where they can earn from selling and repair of iron tools used by agricultural labourers and construction workers.

3.2. Profile of the Respondents

This research has been conducted on a sample of 50 households of Gadia Lohar community settled across Delhi. The location of settlement of the respondents and their family structure is given in table 1.

Table 1 Settlement Location and Family Size of Respondent

Name of settlement	No. of Respondents	Total No. of family members of Respondent	No. of children
Hauz Rani	2	11	7
Swami Nagar	5	29	17
Chirag Delhi	4	23	14
Madangiri	13	81	53
Lal Kuan	15	81	51
Dakshin puri	4	20	12
Malviya Nagar	6	32	21
Shahdra	1	2	0
Total population	50	279	175

A total of 50 households were studied from 8 different settlements of Gadia Lohar Communities in Delhi. In all the 50 households, there were a total of 279 members. The average family size of the households was 5.58. Out of the 279 members, around 62 percent were children. The demographic dynamics of these households shows the need for proactive measures towards the development of this community to ensure equitable living conditions to the future generations. Maximum 15 households were interviewed from the Lal Kuan area followed by 13 in Madangiri area.

There were 15 respondents from Lal Kuan area. Like all the areas taken for the survey, the respondents in this region also live in kuchha houses. Most of the respondents were not aware about any of the welfare schemes of the government and neither did they possess the required documents to avail such benefits. Lack of title to land or any proof of residential address, it is difficult to get any official documents made which are needed to access various government schemes. Besides, most of the respondents did not possess any other skill which could help them to switch to alternative livelihood options. Women complained of not having proper place to market the goods produced by them. Most of the households did not have any BPL card, ration card, voter's card or LPG connection. They struggle to make their ends meet.

3.3. Case 1: Deplorable Condition of Settlements in Swami Nagar

The five families interviewed in Swami Nagar near Chirag Delhi were forced to make their settlement on the banks of a sewer drain. This drain overflows during rainy season exposing them to the risk of infectious diseases. After rains, the drain becomes a breeding place for mosquitoes and the settlers are constantly at risk of being infected with diseases like dengue and malaria. They struggle to get access to clean drinking water and live without electricity. They don't have access to government medical facilities nearby and their children are unable to attend school. This forces them into a vicious circle of poverty from which they have very little chance of escape.

3.4. Livelihood pattern of women of Gadia Lohar Community in Delhi

Making and selling of iron goods including tools required for labour work, implements needed by agricultural labourers and utensils is the main occupation of the Gadia Lohar community. Some of the main iron tools sold by Gadia Lohars include axe, spade, sickle, hammer, tongs, pan, iron brazier (angithi) etc. As their settlements are along the pavements, it becomes easy for them to carry out their trading activities and display their products to the customers. Adapting to the requirements of the city, they have diversified the items traded by them and have now included various pottery items and statues made of plaster of Paris for sale as well. They procure pottery in bulk from cheaper markets and sell them in their shops. As can be seen in table 2, almost all the households include both iron tools and utensils as well as pottery. The Gadia Lohars typically have an integrated settlement which includes their houses; work area and market are all at the same place. In Lal Kuan, all the 15 households interviewed also kept gym equipment for sale. Notably, there were a number of gyms in Lal Kuan area. One of the households in Madangiri also had another furniture shop away from

their settlement in the Banjara market. It is interesting to see how the community is trying to adapt to the surrounding by including newer items for sale.

Table 2 Present Source of income of Gadia Lohar Households

Name of settlements	Source of income					Total Households
	Iron work	Pottery work	Gym Equipment	Furniture	Labour	
Hauz Rani	2	2	0	0	0	2
Swami Nagar	5	5	0	0	0	5
Chirag Delhi	4	4	0	0	1	4
Madangiri	13	13	0	1	2	13
Lal Kuan	15	15	15	0	0	15
Dakshin puri	4	4	0	0	0	4
Malviya Nagar	6	6	0	0	0	6
Shahdra	1	1	0	0	0	1
Total						50HH

Microenterprises may be owned or operated by individuals, often their family members are also involved [8]. In the family business, while men take a lead in manufacturing of products for sale, women are mostly involved in selling of the items. Women have good bargaining skills and hence they take a lead in dealing with the customers in terms of price fixation. Hence women in all the 50 households are greatly involved in the family business. Besides being involved in the routine household chores, a very small percentage of women also go out and work as house helps in nearby localities (Table 3). The demand for domestic workers in the state has been on a rise as a result of the rise of a new affluent middle class who hire domestic workers to support their lifestyles [9]. One of the women in Chirag Delhi had established a small eating outlet and add to the family income by selling snacks. Similarly, another woman in Madangiri was skilled in embroidery and sewing beads on clothes and thus contributed to added family income. Some are also involved in other work like painting pots and coloring the POP statues in festival seasons of Navratri, Diwali, Ganesh Chaturthi etc. Some of these works may be temporary and may change according to the season.

Table 3 Occupational position of women

Name of settlements	Work Participation of Women				Total Households
	Household Chores	Maid/ servant	Managing Business	Others	
Hauz Rani	2	0	2	0	2
Swami Nagar	5	0	5	0	5
Chirag Delhi	4	2	4	1	4
Madangiri	12	1	13	1	13
Lal Kuan	15	0	15	0	15
Dakshin puri	4	0	4	0	4
Malviya Nagar	6	0	6	0	6
Shahdra	1	0	1	0	1
Total					50HH

3.5. Role of Women in Taking Business Decisions

The Gadia Lohar community is progressive in terms of involvement of women in decision making in various matters concerning the household and finances. Almost all the decisions related to the household and business are taken jointly by both men and women in 92 percent of households (Table 4). However, the decisions on marriage of children are taken by both husband and wife together in only 58 percent of the households. In 22 percent households, the decisions on marriage of children are taken by men only and in 14 percent of households by women only.

Table 4 Decision-making in house hold and business of Gadia lohar women

Decisions Made	women (%)	Husband (%)	Elders/ Parents (%)	Both wife & husband (%)
Decision on selling of products	2	0	6	92
Decision on buying groceries	2	0	6	92
Decision on house hold purchases (land, property, furniture, cloths, electronic items, other assets)	2	0	6	92
Decision about children health, education.	2	2	6	90
Decision on child marriage (preparing gifts, clothes)	14	22	6	58
Decision in managing finances of the HH	4	0	6	90

3.6. Role of Women in Improving Livelihoods as Micro-Entrepreneurs

Microenterprise refers to people starting small businesses with limited capital [10]. Gadia Lohar community are microentrepreneurs who have been involved in selling of iron tools in utensils since ages. The contribution of women in the sale of the items produced is substantial. In the world where e-marketing and selling of goods on various online platforms, the Gadia Lohars are still selling their products on roadside shops set up by them in front of their houses. Lack of education and skills to market their produce is a major problem which reduces their bargaining power. To enhance the livelihood and marketing options and to make use of the digital technology, it is essential to upgrade their skills and educate them of the opportunities of the modern world.

The women of this community actively support their families in their businesses and help strengthen the financial condition of the family. There are many cases where women have single handedly managed their businesses while nurturing their families. A widow woman from Malviya Nagar narrated her story of how she came back to a normal life after the death of her husband and how she struggled for her children's education and now runs her business independently. Women who know how to earn money make their families financially stronger with their children and increase their share in household income [11].

Women not only manage the household chores, they also help with buying of raw materials and selling of finished products. Their role is significant in giving finishing touch to the products like colouring the pottery items. They also contribute by diversifying and adding to the income source. Some go as domestic helps in nearby localities and some have opened small tea stalls and corner shops.

3.7. Challenges Faced by Gadia Lohar Women in Delhi

The women in Gadia Lohar community are multi-taskers who manage the family business along with their domestic chores like cooking, child care, laundry etc. Though they have vital role in managing house and business together they seldom get any support from the community or from the society at large or even from the government. They face several challenges at both personal and community level. As a community, most of them are engaged in their traditional iron work only and that is their major source of livelihood. This barely helps them meet their family and children's needs. At family level, they are generally not educated or skilled enough to explore alternative livelihood opportunities. Even though they contribute equally to their male counterparts or even more, if their other roles are also taken into consideration, they hardly have any say in business decisions and nor are they consulted on any matters related to sale of the products in weekly markets. Female education is less in this community. Most girl children don't go to school, others dropout at early age and very few make it up to secondary education.

Women struggle even in the basic day to day activities. Due to lack of availability and access to clean cooking fuel, women living in temporary housing facilities struggle in rainy days as they have to depend on coal and wood for cooking. They have to then depend on their husbands to refill the small LPG cylinders which they keep for use during emergencies only.

The community being patriarchal, women generally face issues related to their health and nutritional requirements as well. Their nutritional requirement takes a back seat as they are the last ones to eat in the family and have their meals only after feeding their husbands and children. Their minor health concerns are neglected by them and their families. A visit to the Anganwadi center has to be consented by their husbands.

Very few households have their own toilets. Most of the households use paid public toilets. It becomes a major concern when the sick, elderly and pregnant women have to use the shared toilet which exposes them to several ailments.

Most households do not even have access to clean drinking water. Government water supply does not reach their settlements and they have to fetch water drinking water from public water tanks. Fetching drinking water is a responsibility shared by both men and women.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The Gadia Lohar community is one of the marginalized and vulnerable communities in Delhi, Many settlements of Gadia Lohars in Delhi have not been surveyed by any government institute or organization, till now they are not in the list of DUSIB, NSSO etc. living below the poverty line and most of them are very poor and unemployed. Having migrated from Rajasthan, they have no permanent home or job, are forced to live in abject conditions and live in constant fear of displacement. Manufacture and sale of iron goods is their major and traditional source of livelihood and Gadia Lohar women contribute substantially towards their livelihood. Despite playing a major role as care givers of family and towards finishing and sale of the commodities produced, the status of women in the community is filled with challenges. Lack of education and skill training, lack of access to clean cooking fuel, clean drinking water, health facilities and having to use shared toiled are some of the major concerns for women of this community.

Women's individual empowerment as well as their collective empowerment are sources of social change. The government needs to make policies and programs for the upliftment of this Dalit community and women. Some recommendations to improve the situation of Gadia Lohar women which can be made from the observations made during the research are:

- Emphasis should be given to educate the girl child. Government policies which facilitate education of girl children should reach the marginalized.
- Skill enhancement programmes for women will help the women to diversify their source of income.
- Making the Delhi government's housing scheme available to this community will relieve them from the woes of having to use shared toilets, lack of access to clean drinking water and health facilities.
- Lack of proper documents needed to register themselves for various welfare schemes is a major concern. Proper listing of their settlements and facilitating documents which are needed for registering them for government schemes is much needed.
- Though there are several schemes available for the economically weaker sections of the society, the Gadia Lohar's are unable to avail them due to lack of awareness about such schemes. Awareness programmes may raise their chances of availing these benefits.

These women have less knowledge about government assistance or initiatives, so such awareness programs should be organized in their settlement so that no woman should be deprived of her rights, they should get a chance to use the schemes provided by the government. However, women empowerment brings changes in their social structure and these recommendations or policy suggestions will help them to improve their life, education status, skills and health etc.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

References

- [1] Ruhela S P. *The Gaduliya Lohars of Rajasthan: A Study in The Sociology of Nomadism*. Impex, India; 1968.
- [2] Ayushmaan A and Pandey A. *Mapping the Marginalized: Delhi's Gadia Lohar Community*. Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN) New Delhi; 2019.
- [3] Tehrani N H. The Ethnographic Narration of Gadulia Lohar Tribe of Udaipur, Rajasthan: With the Special Reference to the Ethno archaeological Perspective and Traditional Iron Tool Technology. *Ancient Asia*.2015; 6 (2)
- [4] Jain B. *Visual Ethnography: Gadiya Lohar (Research Seminar)*. IDC, IIT Bombay; 2016.
- [5] National Commission for Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes. *Renke Commission Report 2008*. Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Government of India, New Delhi; 2008.
- [6] DUSIB [Internet]. *Delhi Slum and JJ Rehabilitation and Relocation Policy 2015; 2016* [cited 2023 December 22]. Available from <https://delhishelterboard.in/main/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Policy-2015.pdf>
- [7] Misra P K. *The Nomadic Gadulia Lohar of Eastern Rajasthan*. Anthropological Survey of India. Calcutta; 1977.
- [8] Lateh M, Hussain M D and Halim M S A. Micro enterprise development and income sustainability for poverty reduction: a literature investigation. *International Journal of Business and Technopreneurship*. 2017; 7(1), 23-38.
- [9] Natrajan A and Rangarajan M. Bound to labour: The Cyclical burden of wages and time poverty on female Domestic Workers. *Economic Political Weekly*. 2022; Vol. LV II No. 53.
- [10] Socorro Márquez F O, and Reyes Ortiz G E. Entrepreneurship and micro-enterprise: A theoretical approach to its differences. *Journal of Entrepreneurship Education*. 2020; 23(1S).
- [11] Folbre N. Measuring Care: Gender, Empowerment, and the Care Economy. *Journal of Human Development*. 2006; 7(2).