

Beyond Bricks and Mortar : A Qualitative research on evolving spatial experience in rural Bhiwani

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Abstract

This paper explores the changing spatial experience of women in rural India through the lens of home architecture and movement patterns. The focus is on Premnagar, a village in Bhiwani district, Haryana, where traditional courtyard houses have gradually evolved to include separate kitchens, bathrooms, and personal rooms for women. While this has improved privacy and autonomy, it has also led to the decline of dedicated social spaces for women, raising concerns about social isolation and access to support networks. The paper concludes by calling for the incorporation of social spaces into rural homes to foster community interaction and promote well-being for women in Premnagar and beyond.

Keywords- women spaces, social norms, empowerment, policies,

Status of women in rural Haryana

The status of women in rural Haryana has undergone considerable change in recent decades, characterised by both progress and persistent challenges. There are still gender disparities and conventional patriarchal practices, but there have been indisputable advancements in the areas of education, health, and social and economic engagement. This study explores how women's empowerment is developing in rural Haryana, concentrating on the Bhiwani district. Literacy and Education The sharp rise in female education is among the biggest developments. Women's literacy rates have increased dramatically, which has increased awareness of their rights and opportunities. The promotion of girls' education in rural regions has been greatly aided by government programmes like the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (2000) and the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao plan (2015) (Sharma, 2021). Even if obstacles like hurdles to cultural diversity and access to high-quality education still exist, the growing number of educated women is a positive indicator.

Wellness and Health:

The lives of women in rural Haryana have improved as a result of advancements in healthcare. Better access to prenatal care and institutional births have resulted in a decrease in maternal death rates (Gupta, 2022). Furthermore, immunisation rates have increased and improved sanitation practices have been encouraged by awareness efforts, both of which have improved overall health (Rana, 2017). Still, there are issues that need to be addressed, like poor dietary intake and limited access to specialised medical facilities (Singh, 2023). Financial Involvement Women's employment involvement, especially in rural regions, is gradually but steadily rising. Economic issues, such as the desire for extra income and the shifting social scene, are what are causing this transformation (Kumar, 2021). Nowadays, women are actively engaged in small company ownership, dairy farming, and agriculture, which boosts rural household income and economic growth (Rana, 2018). Engagement in Social and Political Aspects More and more rural Haryana women are standing up for their legitimate positions in the political and social spheres. They are actively involved in village councils, panchayats, and even running for office in the elections for leadership positions (Sharma, 2022). Growing awareness of their rights and capabilities along with a change in power dynamics are indicated by their increased involvement in decision-making processes (Gupta, 2023).

Status of Women of Bhiwani

The Indian district of Bhiwani in Haryana has given birth to a number of remarkable women who have achieved success in a variety of domains, such as athletics, politics, and administration. These extraordinary people have forged their own paths and surmounted societal obstacles, inspiring future generations. Bhiwani is home to some gifted athletes, including rising wrestler Kavita Chahal, who has won gold at the Asian Wrestling Championships and the Commonwealth Games. Young ladies in Bhiwani and beyond look up to Poonam Rani, a talented fighter who won a bronze medal at the 2022 World Boxing Championships. A silver medal winner at the 2022 Asian Boxing Championships, Manju Rani is another talented fighter who

has encouraged many young ladies to follow their passions in sports. Bhiwani has also given rise to powerful female politicians. Renowned politician and former member of parliament Dr. Sumitra Devi has devoted her professional life to serving the public and advancing women's empowerment via education.

Mrs. Sunita Devi, a well-known personality in the community's politics, has demonstrated her dedication to rural welfare and community development by serving as a Zila Parishad member and sarpanch (leader of the village). Bhiwani has witnessed the commitment of two distinguished individuals in the field of administration: Dr. Shailja Yadav, a well-known physician and administrator, who has led multiple health initiatives in Bhiwani, resulting in notable advancements in healthcare quality and accessibility; and Mrs. Anju Rani, an effective civil servant who has worked in a variety of administrative capacities throughout her career. These are but a handful of the several outstanding women who have left their imprint on the Bhiwani district. Their origins and accomplishments are varied, but they all have one thing in common: they are steadfast, resilient, and committed to their career. Their stories serve as an inspiration to all, demonstrating that with hard work and passion, one can achieve anything, regardless of their background or gender.

For this research a sample survey was conducted with females of Haryana District. While the age group that responded maximum belonged to the age group of 20 - 40 years of age.

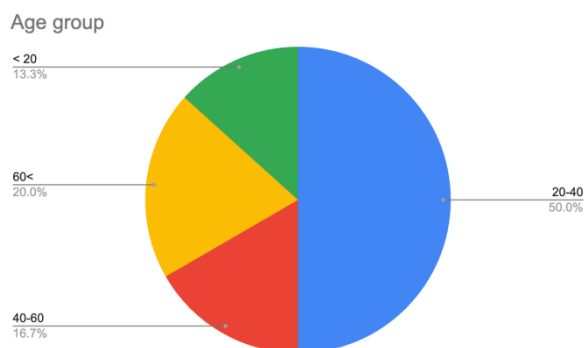


Fig 1.1- Age group of respondents

The data collected also showed that how maximum respondents are educated and basic is now an accepted and required social norm. Where 37% of the respondents were graduate and 34% were post graduate

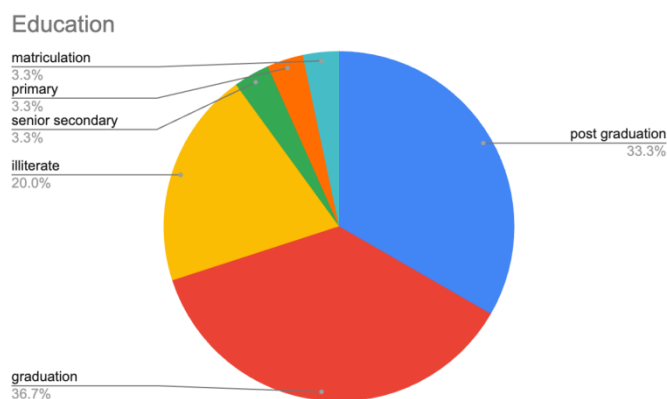


Fig 1.2- Education of respondents

Now the rising trend for better education and seeking better opportunities professionally . About 25% of the respondents are engaged in the working sector like teaching, anganwadi . followed by agriculture which was 18% . Homemaker is an extremely engaging and most unrecognised work sector . 43% of respondents were working as homemakers.

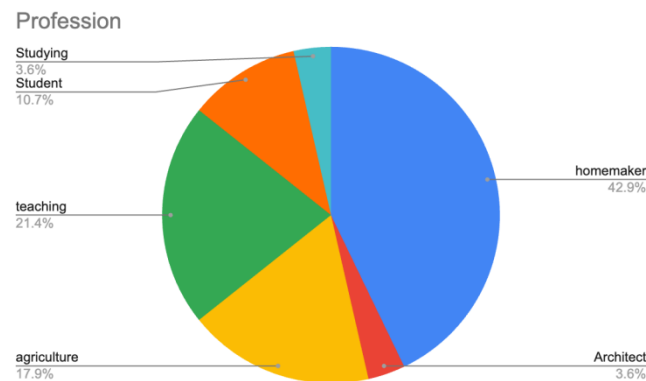


Fig 1.3- Profession of respondents

When they were asked about how they perceive social spaces for women and evolution of these spaces . Most respondents replied that social spaces are socially monitored by elders of the community. The rural areas hence work on the concept of neighbourhood watch. They move beyond neighbourhood watch to community watch. While 17% also believe that these hard boundaries are gradually dissolving.

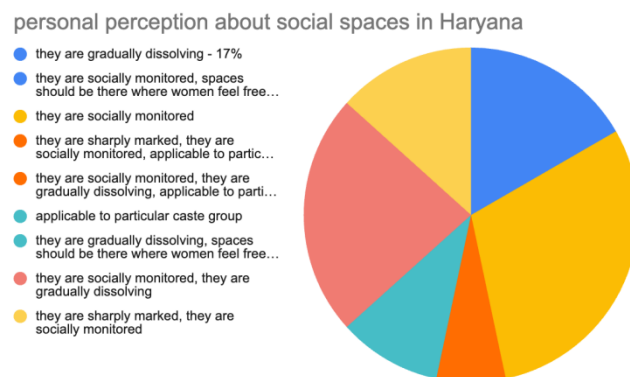


Fig 1.4- Perception about social spaces of respondents

Vernacular architecture of Bhiwani

The architecture of Bhiwani district, Haryana, India, is a confluence of ancient and modern influences. While grand forts and historical temples dominate the urban landscape, a closer look reveals a unique and vibrant rural architectural tradition. Characterised by its use of locally available materials, sustainable construction techniques, and adaptation to the harsh climatic conditions, rural Bhiwani architecture offers a glimpse into the lives and cultural heritage of its inhabitants. The most striking feature of rural Bhiwani houses is their construction with mud bricks, also known as kaccha bricks. These bricks are made from a mixture of soil, water, and straw, and offer excellent thermal insulation, keeping the houses cool in summer and warm in winter. The walls of the houses are often thick, further enhancing their ability to regulate temperature.

Traditional houses in Bhiwani are often built around a central courtyard, which provides a space for cooking, dining, and socialising. The courtyard also serves as a source of natural light and ventilation. The houses themselves are typically single-story structures, with rooms arranged around the courtyard.

From shelter to sanctuary - case study of Premnagar

Prem Nagar is a charming village nestled in the heart of Bhiwani district, Haryana, India. Located approximately 9 kilometers north of the district headquarters town of Bhiwani.

The exact origins of Prem Nagar are unknown, but it is believed to be a centuries-old village. Historical records suggest that it was once a major center of trade and commerce, owing to its strategic location on a trade route. Over time, the village transitioned to a predominantly agricultural way of life, which remains its primary economic driver today.

Demographics and Culture:

As per the 2011 Census of India, Prem Nagar had a population of 3,495, with a slight majority of males (1,849) over females (1,646). The village boasts a rich and vibrant culture, with a strong sense of community and tradition.

Agriculture forms the backbone of Prem Nagar's economy. Farmers in Prem Nagar rely on traditional irrigation techniques, such as canals and wells, to sustain their crops.

The architecture of Prem Nagar reflects the traditional style of rural Haryana. Houses are typically built using mud bricks and have thatched roofs. These houses are well-suited to the local climate, providing coolness in the summer and warmth in the winter. Traditional courtyard houses are also common in Prem Nagar, offering a communal space for families to gather and socialise.

Prem Nagar is well-equipped with basic infrastructure facilities, including schools, healthcare centres, and a post office. The village also boasts a vibrant market where residents can buy and sell essential goods and produce. Additionally, Prem Nagar has a strong network of self-help groups and community organisations that work towards the social and economic development of the village.



Figure 1 : Movement plan for women

Scene 1: The Pre-1980 Era

- Homes: Traditional courtyard houses with limited dedicated spaces.
- Women's spaces: Primarily the kitchen, often shared with other women in the household. Bathing and ablutions typically took place in designated outdoor areas lacking privacy. Personal rooms were non-existent.
- Movement: Restricted to the immediate vicinity of the home, including the courtyard, well, and communal areas. Interactions with other women occurred during household chores, agricultural work, and social gatherings in designated spaces.

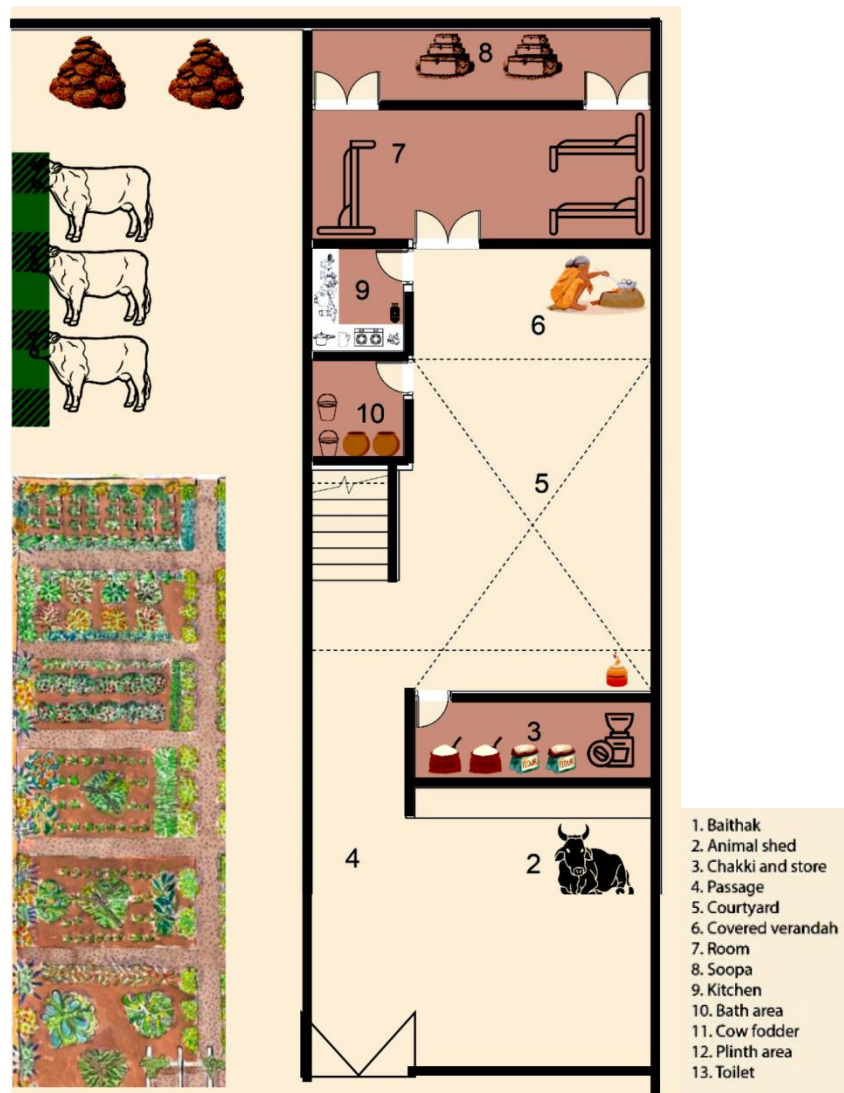


Figure 2 : unit plan till 80's

Scene 2: Post-Green Revolution (1980s and beyond)

- Homes: Introduction of separate kitchens, bathrooms, and personal rooms for women. Improved water access and sanitation facilities within the home.
- Women's spaces: Increased privacy and autonomy within the household. Dedicated spaces for personal care, hygiene, and relaxation.
- Movement: Greater freedom of movement within the home and immediate surroundings. Access to public transportation allows for travel to markets, schools, and government offices.

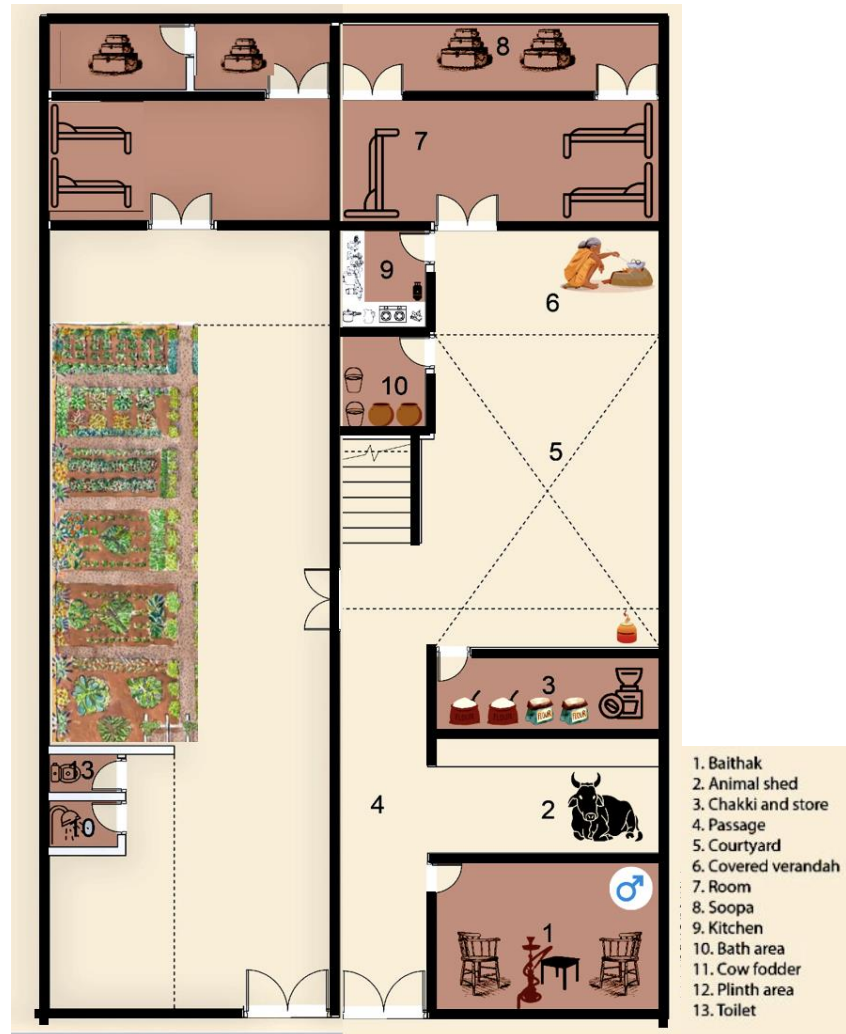


Figure 3 : Unit plan till 2010

Scene 3: Contemporary Challenges and Opportunities

- Homes: While infrastructure within homes has improved, dedicated social spaces for women are often missing. This can lead to social isolation and a lack of support networks.
- Movement: Women's movement is now primarily confined to the home and public transportation stops. This restricts their access to community spaces and opportunities for interaction.
- Opportunities: The evolving landscape presents opportunities to design homes with dedicated social spaces for women. This could include courtyards, community rooms, or recreational areas within the house or neighborhood.



Figure 4 : latest plan

The changing status of women in rural Haryana is a complex and multifaceted issue. While significant progress has been made on various fronts, there is still a long way to go before achieving true gender equality.

Conclusion:

The evolution of women's spaces in rural homes reflects the broader societal changes in India. While progress has been made in terms of privacy and autonomy within the household, the lack of dedicated social spaces presents a new challenge. Recognizing the unique challenges faced by women in different districts like Bhiwani is crucial for implementing targeted interventions and achieving sustainable development (Kumar, 2021). By focusing on education, health, economic empowerment, and political participation, we can create a future where women in rural Haryana are empowered to reach their full potential and contribute meaningfully to their communities and the nation.

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