

STATE OF WOMEN EMPLOYMENT IN INDIA

Subhra Sinha Roy (Ghosh)

Assistant Professor in Economics

Institute of Education (P.G.) for Women, Chandernagore

Email: subhrasinharoy2017@gmail.com

subhrasinharoy@yahoo.in

Abstract

It is a general belief that economic dependence of women is a major obstacle of their empowerment. Women's participation in the labour force is therefore, regarded as an index of their empowerment. It is believed that economic independence gives them personal autonomy and the power of decision making. Studies have shown that a decline in their employment adversely affects their fertility, mortality and nutrition. Viewed from this angle, women of the lower strata can be considered as empowered because most of them work as labour, not only in their private homes, but also as paid workers- maid servants, labour on daily wages, and women employed in salaried jobs- both skilled and non-skilled. But there are also a sizeable number of women who are out of the labour force. D.R. Gadgil made a very interesting point in this regard: "The ability to keep away from manual work has been an important distinguishing sign of socioeconomic status among us. Therefore, non-participation of women in any work, and particularly manual work outdoors, is considered a value." [10] From this angle, all nonworking women cannot be considered as poor or deprived of high status. Non-work in such cases gives them a high status. However industrialization and technological change have opened vast opportunities of employment for women in different sectors of the national economy. Today Indian women go to the factory, the office, or the school, or the college to work for a wage.

Key Words: Women Employment, Labour Market, Economic Growth

Trends in women employment

Employment data indicate that there has been marked difference in the work participation rates of males and females in India. Until 1961, female participation rate was nearly half the rate. But in 1971, the female rate declined considerably as compared to the male rate (14.2% for females and 52.8% for males).

The census of 1971 reported 31 million women in the labour force, of which 28 million were from the rural areas, representing only 13 percent of the total rural female population eligible for the labour force. As against this, only 7% of the urban women-3million- participated in the work force. These figures were disputed by the Planning Commission on the ground of the definition

employed for workforce participation. According to the planning commission, the rate in 1971 was 28%. In 1981, the female workforce was calculated at 66.3 million, with a female participation rate of 20.85%- higher than in the 1971 census, but again lower than the Planning Commission estimates. The 1981 figures suggest that the largest number (46%) of women workers were agricultural labourers. This proportion has increased from 24.6% in 1961 to 46% in 1981. An analysis of the 1981 data suggested that women began to lose their traditional avenues and did not get absorbed in the modern sectors.

A small section of middle class educated women benefited from developmental activities by getting administrative jobs. The 1993-94 data on the workforce participation rate suggests that the rates for rural women is 32.8% (representing 92 million women) and for urban women, 15.5% (representing 17.3 million women). Thus, these were 109.3 million women in the workforce as compared to 251.1 million men.

Employment statistics from the NSSO round of 2004-05 reveal an upward trend in labour force and workforce participation of women over 1999-2000. The increase in work opportunities during the early years of the new millennium has been to the tune of 9.3 million jobs per annum (from 1999-2000 to 2004-2005). This acceleration in employment growth from 1.25 percent per annum (1993-1994 to 1999-2000) to 2.62 percent per annum in the period 1999-2000 to 2004-2005 has been beneficial to women's participation as well. Of the 46 million job opportunities created from 1999-2000 to 2004-05, nearly 15 million women joined the workforce. Urban areas almost doubled their number of women workers, while in rural areas women workers increased from 9 to 12 million between the same period.

The primary sector still provides employment to bulk of the women workforce in India. Rural agriculture is increasingly drawing women's labour supplies, with over four- fifths of women in rural areas working in agriculture amidst the declining share of male workers (from 74 percent in 1993-94 to 66 percent in 2004-2005). Thus it seems that women in rural areas are finding it harder to shift away from agriculture.

In urban areas, women have achieved substantially higher growth of employment in manufacturing sector and have been able to increase their share, especially after 1999-2000 (from 24% in 1999-2000 to over 28% in 2004-2005). But in urban areas, the share of male workers in manufacturing has not increased. Even in the service sector, women have gained in terms of employment, especially in the domestic and personal services category.[6]

Present Scenario of Women participation in labour market

Female labour force participation rate is a multidimensional agglomeration of structural and socioeconomic factors. Over the years, the female participation in labour force showed an increasing trend. Encouraging and welcoming female higher participation in the labour force is vital for economic growth. The latest Report of Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2021-22 is evident of increased Female Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) in India. Though it is lower than the male, but female LFPR is significantly increasing over the years and at present, around one third of women have joined the labour force. As per the latest PLFS report, around 32.8% female of working age (15 years and above) were in labour force in 2021-22 which was just

23.3% in 2017-18, registered a surge of 9.5% points during these years. The major push came from the rural sector than the urban sector, where it increased by 12.0 and 3.4 percentage points, respectively. In rural areas, female LFPR has increased to 36.6% during 2021-22 as compared to 24.6% in 2017-18, showed an increase of 12.0% points. On the other side, female participation in urban areas was significantly lower than the rural areas. Female LFPR was 23.8% in 2021-22 as compared to 20.4% in 2017-18 in urban areas, showed an increase of just 3.4% points.[1]

Table 1 shows the LFPR in usual status for persons of age 15 years & above (in %) segregated by gender and geographical location (rural and urban).

Year	Rural			Urban			Rural+Urban		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
2017-18	80.2	26.6	53.6	80.1	22.3	51.6	80.2	25.3	53.0
20-21	82.1	39.3	60.8	81.2	26.5	54.5	81.2	35.6	58.9
Change in 2021-2022 over 2017-2018	1.9	12.7	7.2	1.1	4.2	2.9	1.6	10.3	5.9

Source:- Annual PLFS Report, MOSPI

The data in the above table shows that out of the total females of age group 15-59 years, 35.6% females were in labour force during 2021-22 as compared to 25.3% during 2017-18, a total increase of 10.3% points during the span of 2017-18 to 2021-22. Around 39.3% females of age group 15-59 years in rural areas were in labour force during 2021-22, registered an increase of 12.7% points from the year 2017-18. In urban areas, around 26.5% females were in labour force during 2021-22 as compared to 22.3% in 2017-18. One of the main factors of positive signs in female labour market is various steps taken by the Government of India for boosting employment and women empowerment through Female LFPR 32.8% India: More than a quarter; around one third female are participating in labour force during 2021-22 11 various laws, policies and schemes. Although, the female LFPR is lower than male in India, but the optimistic point is that the female LFPR is increasing over the years and has already crossed one quarter of total female and touched one-third of women

Factors responsible for low Female Participation in labour force

The participation of women in the labour market are primarily driven by various factors, viz., economic development, education levels, fertility rates, access to childcare and other supportive services and, ultimately, the cultural and normative context of society and social norms. These factors react as the “Push and Pull factors” for female participation in employment. However the

rapid economic growth, rising education, and declining fertility, results in increasing women participation in labour force but women faces barriers in accessing economic opportunities. World Bank Report 12 “Reshaping Norms: A New Way Forward” reveals that the economic development and increasing income levels don’t seem sufficient to reduce stubbornly high gender gaps across multiple dimensions in the region. Social norms about gender can be considered as a key obstacle towards gender equality. This section highlights the major reasons that forced women to be outside the labour force. Here, an analysis has been done to understand the prime factors that create hurdles for women for participating in labour force. The periodic labour force surveys capture the information on the reasons for not being in labour force. According to the PLFS 2021-22 results, the percentage distribution of men and women not being in labour force by the main reasons are as follows:[1]

Table2: Reasons reported by Females are not being in labour force

Reasons reported by Females are not being in labour force	Percentage
1.Child care/personal commitments in home making	44.5%
2.Want to continue study	33.6%
3. Health/age related reason	9.3%
4. Others	4.7%
5. Social Reasons	3.4%
6. Did not have the required training/qualification/age for work	3.2%
7. Financially well-off	0.7%
8.Non-availability of work at a convenient location	0.6%

Source:- Annual PLFS Report, MOSPI

Table 3: Reasons reported by Males are not being in labour force

Reasons reported by Males are not being in labour force	Percentage
1.Child care/personal commitments in home making	0.8%
2.Want to continue study	71.7%
3. Health/age related reason	16.7%
4. Others	3.8%
5. Social Reasons	0.1%
6. Did not have the required training/qualification/age for work	6.3%
7. Financially well-off	0.3%
8.Non-availability of work at a convenient location	0.2%

Source:- Annual PLFS Report, MOSPI

It is evident from the above data that out of the total women, who are outside the labour force, around 44.5% women were not in labour force due to “Child care/personal commitments in home making” and 33.6% women want to continue their study instead of joining labour force. Around 3.4% women were outside the labour force due to “social reasons”.

There is no analogy in the hindrances faced by men and women to participate in the labour force. The main reason for men not being in labour force was continuation of their study. Around 71.7% men wanted to continue their study and it keeps them outside the labour force

Here, it can be easily understood that most of the work of women is home based such as caregiving, contributing to non-market activities, which have economic benefits for households. Women play the multidimensional role in the family and are, therefore, burdened with housework or house commitments, a situation that is influenced by 0.1% 0.2% 0.3% 0.8% 3.8% 6.3% 16.7% 71.7% Social reasons Non-availability of work at a convenient location Financially well-off Child care/personal commitments in home making Others Did not have the required training/qualification/age for work Health/age related reason Want to continue study Figure 5: Reasons reported by male (in %) for not being in labour force 14 gender norms. Such sort of work is overlooked, undervalued and under-reported.

Social norms are informal, unwritten rules of behaviour and social conduct that determines the acceptable, appropriate doings and attitude in the given social context. The prevalent social norms for female are “Female Homemaker norm” which assigns that the role of taking care of home and children to Woman, and for males are “Male Breadwinner norm” which assigns the responsibility of Household expenses to the man. Thus the prime social and cultural norm is ‘time poverty’ among married women. Even when women are educated and allowed to work outside the home, they prefer not to do work due to the disproportionate burden of the care economy.

Therefore, following basic interlinked factors explain the low female labour force participation in India: a. Unpaid domestic duties/Unpaid care work b. Pervasiveness of various gender biased social norms c. Rising household income which works as disincentive for female participation in labour market d. Salary/Wage Disparity.

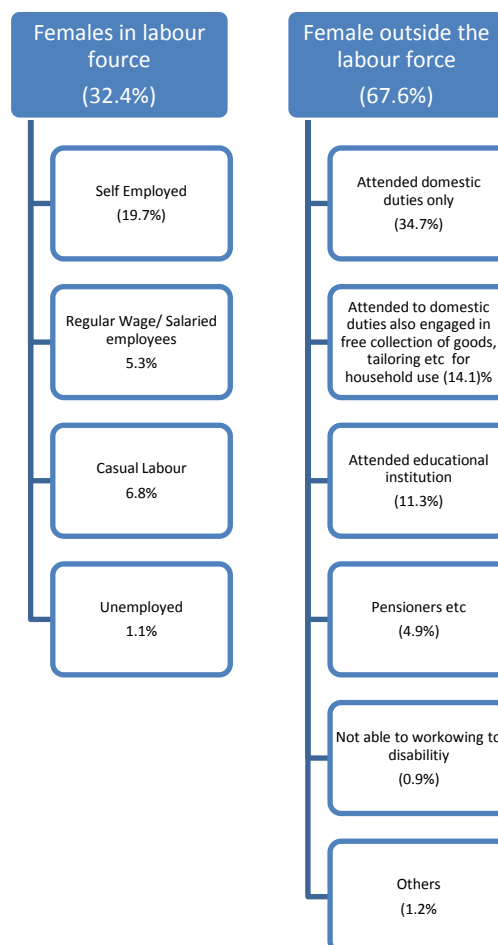
Further, education is one of the most important factors that influence the female labour force participation. The educational attainment has an important effect on an individual’s decision to participate in the labour market. There are many theories that underline the importance of education in employment outcomes. The theories also reveal that greater educational attainment leads to higher participation in the labour force and also increased productivity.

Components of Female Labour Utilization

The labour force is categorized in two components, viz., persons who are working, i.e. employed, and persons who are not working and want to work, i.e. unemployed. On the other side of the spectrum are persons outside of the labour force (also known as the economically inactive population), a person who neither works nor looks for work. The descriptions and analysis regarding the distribution of females by the activity status are based on the PLFS results. Breaking down the female labour into different components helps to understand the type of work, paid-unpaid activities and unemployment. It also gives the details where the females are engaged if not in labour force. In India, 32.8% of total women of age 15 years and above are participating in labour force and the remaining 67.2% women are outside the labour force.

Breakup of these two broad activity status is shown in Table 4. It is clearly visible from the Thable 4 that out of total female, 67.2% females of age 15 years & above is not in labour force and must have engaged in some kind of noneconomic activities. Here, it is observed that female participation in unpaid works is truly high and that are unlikely to be considered as work. Around 49% females (almost half of the female population) are engaged in performing their domestic duties, child care, free collection of goods, sewing, tailoring, weaving, etc. for household use. These household chores keep the females away from labour force due to the “Female Homemaker Norm”. Female partaking in their domestic activities, thus, are not paid for the labour they perform. Around 11.3% females are neither in work nor seeking any work as they are attending the educational institutions. Thus, it is apparent that the large proportion of females of age 15 years & above is outside the labour force due to the unpaid household activities and studies. [2]

Table 4:- Breakup for total females of age 15 years & above in India



Source:- Annual PLFS Report, MOSPI

The female workforce is skewed towards the “Self-employment” followed by “casual labour”. In India, out of the total females 19.7% females are self-employed, 6.8% are engaged as “casual labour” and 5.3% are “Regular wage/salaried employees”.

Government Interventions

The Government has taken various steps to improve female's participation in the labour force, to ensure their economic security and quality of their employment. Some major schemes/policies/programmes are as follows:[5]

A) For Survival and Education of Females

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme: The scheme was launched for creating awareness among the people to educate all girl children in the country. It was launched with the objective to guarantee the survival, safety, and education of female children. The initiative intends to tackle the issue of the diminishing sex ratio in recent years, raise social awareness, and improve the effectiveness of welfare benefits for girls.

National Education Policy (NEP), 2020: The policy prioritises gender equity and envisions ensuring equitable access to quality education to all students, with a special emphasis on Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs)

B) For Safe and Convenient Accommodation

Working Women Hostel: One of the main difficulties faced by working women is lack of safe and conveniently located accommodation. The Government introduced a scheme of grant-in-aid for construction of new/ expansion of existing buildings for providing hostel facilities to working women in cities, smaller towns and also in rural areas where employment opportunities for women exist. The objective of the scheme is to promote availability of safe and conveniently located accommodation for working women, with day care facility for their children, wherever possible, in urban, semi urban, or even rural areas where employment opportunity for women exist. The scheme is assisting projects for construction of new hostel buildings, expansion of existing hostel buildings and hostel buildings in rented premises. The working women's hostel projects being assisted under this scheme shall be made available to all working women without any distinction with respect to caste, religion, marital status etc., subject to norms prescribed under the scheme. While the projects assisted under this scheme are meant for working women, women under training for job may also be accommodated in such hostels subject to the condition that taken together, such trainees should not occupy more than 30% of the total capacity the hostel and they may be accommodated in the hostels only when adequate numbers of working women are not available. Children of working women, up to the age of 18 years for girls and up to the age of 5 years for boys may be accommodated in such hostels with their mothers.

C) For Supporting Women affected by violence

One Stop Centre (OSC) and Universalization of Women Helpline: The Scheme of Universalization of Women Helpline is intended to provide 24 hours immediate and emergency response to women affected by violence through referral (linking with

appropriate authority such as police, One Stop Centre, hospital) and information about women related government schemes programs across the country through a single uniform number. Women Helpline (WHL) will be integrated with One Stop Centre Scheme (OSC) under which one OSC shall be established in every State/UT to provide 33 integrated support and assistance to women affected by violence, both in private and public spaces under one roof. One Stop Centres (OSCs) are intended to support women affected by violence, in private and public spaces, within the family, community and at the workplace. Women affected by violence and in need of redressal services will be referred to OSC through WHL.

D) Codification of the Labour Laws for harmonizing the needs of job seekers, workers and employers Introducing Labour Codes

The Government has notified four Labour Codes namely, the Code on Wages, 2019, the Industrial Relations Code, 2020, the Code on Social Security, 2020 and the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 by simplifying, amalgamating and rationalizing the relevant provisions of 29 Central Labour Laws. Codification of the Labour Laws provides a policy framework for harmonizing the needs of job seekers, workers and employers. The Labour Codes will, inter-alia, reduce multiplicity of definitions & authorities, facilitate implementation and use of technology in enforcement of labour laws and bring transparency and accountability in enforcement, promote setting up of more enterprises, catalyzing the creation of employment opportunities in the country. It would promote setting up of industries by reducing rigidity of labour market and facilitate hassle free compliance, paving the way for realizing the goal of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

E) Steps for Protected Employment in Government Jobs

To increase the representation of women in Central Government jobs and to provide them a balanced life between professional and family, following concerted efforts has been taken:

Child Care Leave: The women employees having minor children are granted Child care Leave (admissible in different spells) for maximum period of two years (i.e. 730 days) during the entire service. CCL can be taken to take care of upto two children whether for rearing or to look after any of their needs like examination, sickness etc. In continuation of the child care leave, a female Govt. servant can also take any leave due and admissible for a period of one year.

Special Allowance to Women with Disability: Instructions issued for special allowance to women employees with disabilities. They are being provided Rs. 3000/- per month as Special allowance for child care w.e.f 1st July 2017. The allowance is payable from the time of the child birth till the child is two years old for a maximum of two children

Special Maternity Leave: Keeping in view the potential emotional trauma caused due to stillbirth or death of a child soon after birth, which has a far-reaching impact on mother's

life, provision has been made to grant a Special Maternity Leave of 60 days to a female Central Government Servant in case of death of a child soon after birth/stillbirth. It will be admissible to female Central Government Servant with less than 2 surviving children and for child delivery only in an authorized hospital.

Some features of female employment in India

- The urban female work participation rate (WPR) among ‘never married’ women is quite high for all ages except for the above 60 years age group compared to those who are ‘currently married’
- The importance in the active reproductive years on bearing and rearing children for ‘currently married’ women constrains their labour market participation.
- The indigenous *adivasis* have the highest WPRs both in rural and urban areas, 46 percent in rural areas and 24 percent in urban areas according to NSSO 2004-05 data.
- According to NSSO 2004-05 data, Scheduled Caste women report similar WPRs for rural areas as for all-India women in general. However, in urban areas Scheduled Caste female WPR is 20 while the average female WPR is 17.
- Women workers are found both in the organized and unorganized sectors. Some estimates suggest the 94% of women are employed in the unorganized sector. In the organized sectors, they are generally employed in factories, mines and plantations.
- The work participation for the women in the urban area is nearly half of it in the rural areas. This is largely due to the nature of India’s rural economy which largely depends on agriculture and animal husbandry that utilize substantial amount of unpaid workers.
- There is also a steady growth of female workers in the services and professions. In the latter, it is the teaching and nursing profession that has attracted women.
- In the rural areas women generally work in the agricultural sector while in the urban areas they work in manufacturing units, garments, food processing etc.
- Since women work in the unorganized sector, they are not covered by protective laws and policies. They possess poor skills, get low wages, face job in security, and are subjected to different types of exploitation. Women are, thus, a vulnerable group. Uneducated women find it difficult to get better paid jobs, and in the highly competitive job market, even the educated women remain unemployed. Education does not necessarily lead to employment.
- Overtime the share of self-employment has been rising especially among women. Large sections of women are self-employed in both rural and urban areas and their shares are highest in the villages. In the rural areas, 3/4th of self-employed are unpaid family workers while 1/4th are ‘own account’ workers.
- The increase in the regular employment is higher among women in the urban areas from 29% to 36% between 1993-94 to 2004-05
- Interestingly, a major distinction between regular and casual employment is that regular women workers are mostly skilled workers who belong to the richer community while casual workers are mainly poorer women.
- Women are mostly concentrated in the agricultural sector where the wage rate is the lowest.
- There is a very low proportion of women in the regular work where the wage rates are the highest, employment is more secured and working conditions are relatively better.

- Category of professional, technical and related works has seen an increase of female workers both in rural and urban areas.
- Clerical related work in this case employment of male workers has gone down therefore the proportion of female workers has increased in both rural and urban areas.
- Spinners, weavers etc. has shown a large share of women workers in non-agricultural activities. Tailoring, embroidery and related occupations has shown an increase in female employment.
- Women are in whole selling but in retailing and as salesman women employment has increased considerably.
- Interestingly, Women's share as working proprietors, directors and managers in occupations such as mining, construction, manufacturing concerns as well as other services has also registered an increase over time.

Conclusion

Some legal measures have been taken to correct the situation of low wage and lack of security in unorganized sector. The Equal Remuneration Act of 1976 requires that employers pay the same wages to men and women doing the same or similar work. The Maternity Benefit Act of 1961 provides for paid leave. There are other Acts that prohibit employment of women between 7 pm and 6 am in factories, mines, and plantations. Some rules regulate working hours for women, put conditions on the amount of weight to be lifted by them, and prescribe norms for their safety and welfare.

There are many barriers of female employment in the course of the country's economic development and modernization. Illiteracy, poverty, decline of Household industries, competition from factories, and technological changes are the major barriers for women employment.

Formerly a young - woman had before her two alternatives: early marriage or continued dependence on and subjection to the parental home. Today, a young - woman can earn her own living. The effects of the jobs for women have been to free them from economic dependence on the husband. She now bears him fewer children, and is freed to a great extent, at least the middle class working women, from the drudgery of her housework by the spread of modern household appliances. She can be educated in the same way, play a complementary part in politics, think in terms of equal pay for equal work and choose to make a career out of her job rather than out of motherhood.

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