

# **A Study of Gender Wage Inequalities and Hierarchies in the Labour Force**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In every society, men and women experience differently in relation to housing assets, transport, relative mobility, spheres of employment and a host of domestic caring responsibilities etc. The country has experienced rapid economic growth, structural shifts in the economy accompanied by high rates of urbanisation, increase in educational attainment levels, and declining fertility rates among other things. But during the same period there has been a gradual and long term fall in women's economic activity (Lahoti 2013:24). The joint family system has undergone changes, we see that in the urban sector nuclear families have come about and both men and women work outside the homes. But even at work places wage differentiation and low labour force among the female continues. Women are often exemplified as weaker than men in relation to jobs, skills, etc. In this regard men tend to occupy the higher positions of authority and women subordinate to it. Most women who are not well educated or just finished high school do not find jobs that match their skills and as such a lot of women are out from female labour force participation. Development has not brought about much change in the labour force differentiation between men and women. Also manufacturing and agriculture which provides employment opportunities have not contributed much towards economic growth. But along with this we also see today that fewer women have succeeded in climbing up the social ladder and positions of authority. The service sector has been one of the drivers of growth but this requires high skills and many women do not possess such skills. These results clearly point to the fact that growth by itself is not sufficient for increasing women's economic activity (Ibid 2013:24). There are a majority of women who work mostly in unpaid activities such as household works, small street shops, marginal farmers, etc. which are not recognised and are given little credit. Most of the people engaged in activities, are employed in the unorganized sector. In this sector they are given low wages and are made to do a lot of work under harsh and unhygienic conditions. The idea of class and race also further intervenes in which women of colour or poor status are put in the category of most undervalued, underpaid and unsatisfying types of work. Women, who work as maids in other rich families abroad, are forced to migrate leaving their children behind and this leads families to disintegrate and care to unfold. According to the Minimum Wages Act of 1948, minimum wage has been prescribed and in some cases this also goes for household works as per the scheduled act but this has not been extensively followed. A lot of women working as maids in households are given insufficient wages and are made to work more. Also child labour is prevalent in many parts of India; children are employed in the unorganised sector such as in the mines, restaurants, salesmen, workshops and are given meagre amount of wages. There is gender hierarchy and sexual division of labour everywhere in the society. Rosaldo argues that "everywhere men have some authority over women and that they exercise culturally legitimated right to her subordination and compliance" (Rosaldo 1974:21). Women are always associated with domestic orientation, women as mothers, while men are primarily associated with extra domestic, political and military spheres of activity. Margaret Mead is of the opinion that "in every society male's need for achievement is recognized. Men may cook, or weave or hunt hummingbirds but if such activities are appropriate occupations of men, than the whole society, men and women alike, votes them as important. While the same occupations performed by women are regarded as less important" (Mead 1949:125). We also find that there are inequalities regarding wage distributions based on gender. Often for the same amount of work performed, women are often less paid. Wage employment is low over all, highest in the north eastern states and lowest in the central states, most people who earn for a livelihood are engaged in self-employment. There are also various stigmas associated among the upper caste regarding women working outside the homes. And although men of lower caste/class face discrimination in work places, or concerning mobility, the discrimination towards women is far more, they are discriminated not only on the basis of educational qualifications, jobs income etc., but on the very basis of their gender.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In the early tradition of community studies, gender divisions of labour were neither problematized nor explained. Instead the association of men with waged labour and women with the home was taken for granted. Driven and compelled by financial circumstances most of the population engage in the low paid unorganised sector such as street vending, marginal farmers, household works etc. Organised sector in the urban area consist of the formal activity recognised by the government. Women have fewer opportunities than men as a group. There is inequality and hierarchy in the distribution of labour and wage patterns. We often see that women are paid less than men for the equal amount of work performed and also the fact that most of women's activities and work are under the unpaid and unorganised sector. Women have less mobility in occupying the top positions in the office. According to Walby in her book, *Theorizing Patriarchy* (1990), she suggests that patriarchal relations in advanced industrial societies are constructed and maintained by six sets of analytically separable structures in which men dominate and exploit women. The six structures are: household productions in which men appropriate the value of women's unpaid domestic labour; patriarchal relations in waged work in which women are segregated into particular occupations and are well less paid; patriarchal relations in the state in which women dominate the institutions as well as produce gender biased legislation; male violence against women; patriarchal relations in sexuality, male control of women's bodies; and patriarchal relations in cultural institutions, that is, male domination both of the production and form of different media and of the representations of women therein. Not only in the area of work per se, have women had fewer opportunities in accessing a number of facilities. According to Linda McDowell, "in many societies women are often denied educational opportunities and in probably all societies women earn less than men and also have less access to sources of wealth". She argues that she is not anxious to construct women as victims but that women are subjected to particular forms of domination and violence (McDowell 1999: 25).

## LABOUR FORCE

India has experienced rapid economic growth, structural shifts in the economy, increase in educational attainment levels, and rapid urbanization in the last twenty five years. In the same period there has been a 23% decline in the female labour force participation rate. Labour force in India largely consist of the unorganised sector, like street vending, As compared to other countries labour force in India among women is low. According to the report by National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO), while men force participation is high, female labour force participation (FLFP) has been dropping at alarming rates, it has dropped from 40% in the early mid-1990s to 22% in the year 2011-2012. As compared to the rural areas female labour participation is generally low in the urban areas. Women are often denied equal education, and at these low levels of education and income women tend to work to support the family, but as men in the family start earning more income, women tend to cut back their work in the formal economy to concentrate more on household works. Economists like Stephan Klaisen and Janneke Pieters shows that the FLFP is high among illiterate women (above 20%), the lowest among literate women with some schooling or high school (10-15%) and the highest among university graduates (around 25 per cent) which creates a U shape. Focussing on urban India between 1987- 2009, their statistical analysis in particular points to the impact of rising male education and income, which includes women to drop out of the labour force. As Durkheim talks about specialization in the division of labour, there is a huge growth of specialization and there is a competition among people with various skills in search of employment and as such many are left unemployed especially women as compared to men. According to them, the demand for employment among high school and university graduates has not kept pace with the large supply of women looking for jobs. Frustrated at being unable to find work commensurate with their education and skills many women choose to drop out of the workforce altogether which contributes to low and stagnating FLFP. Often we see that it is women in the middle those who are literate but have at most some schooling or have completed only high school, who are squeezed both by the pressure to stay at home and also lack of plentiful jobs that match their qualifications or skills. And as such many with their qualifications stay at homes doing the household chores. Girls who have not completed schooling or illiterate are sent to take up the jobs of maids. Women as such are also victims of prostitution forced by circumstances and trafficking. At the same time, women with higher levels of education, re-enter the workforce through well-paying jobs that match their skills and qualification. In some communities, notably the upper caste Hindus and Muslims there may be certain stigmas attached to women working outside the home. And if the work is considered as menial, there is pressure both from family and society to drop out especially if the men in the household are earning enough to pay the bills.

## **ECONOMIC GROWTH**

Economic growth and development has not improved the conditions of women. For economic growth in India has not been employment intensive. In a low-income, agriculture dominated economy women are active participants in the labour force through their roles as contributing family workers on family farms or enterprises. There is no monetary remuneration for this work, but is recognized as being part of the labour force. This phase of economic development also coincides with relatively high fertility rates and low educational levels for women. Economic growth is usually accompanied by a changing sector composition; there is a greater focus on industrialization while agriculture starts losing its primacy which has the effect of lowering women's participation in the labour market. Agriculture related activities are easier to combine with other household duties that women are responsible for. Further, the jobs available during the early stages of industrialisation are not attractive to women largely because of the social norms against their participation in blue collar activities. Household incomes increase with economic growth and women tend to drop out of the labour force as they are not needed to contribute monetarily to the household (Lahoti et al 2013:7). "The country has experienced rapid economic growth, structural shifts in the economy accompanied by high rates of urbanisation, increase in educational attainment levels, and declining fertility rates among other things. But during the same period there has been a gradual and long term fall in women's economic activity (Ibid 2013:24)

**Women's participation in the labour market** is influenced by social norms governing gender roles and responsibilities as much as it is by economic and structural factors. Olsen and Mehta (2006) find a U curve for employment by female educational status with illiterate and poorly educated women as well as those with university degrees more likely to work than middle educated women. Women who are not very well off have the burden of working out and also managing their household works and under such circumstances they are often compelled to drop out of labour force. While highly educated women can hire someone else to look after the house and as such has greater opportunities to participate in the labour force. We also find that there is less mobility among women in their occupation. Majority of the women who work are in the agricultural sector, men are mostly engaged in the construction and other services which are recognised as in the organised sector. According to Lahoti et al, "compared to the rest of the country, women in southern states enjoy a higher status with fewer restrictions on mobility which could have implications for women's ability to engage in productive work" (Ibid 2013:11). Women face inequality and discrimination on the basis of equal wages, often their jobs are not recognised in the paid sector. And if they do, at the end of the day for the same amount of work done, the wages are given differently and it is the women who are paid less. We also see that wage employment is low over all, highest in the north eastern states and lowest in the central states, most people who earn for a livelihood are engaged in self-employment. Klasen and Pieters (2012) argue that women with low-levels of education are forced to work to contribute towards household income; while women with very high levels of education are attracted towards the labour market due to high wages. Women between the two groups face social stigmas associated with female employment without the economic need for their income. India has undergone substantial changes in the last twenty five years, with the decline in agriculture at the national level, the proportion of women involved in it has reduced by 15 per cent; while the proportion of women in all other sectors has increased. The construction sector has witnessed almost a five times increase in the proportion of women in the work force involved in it. This is not surprising, given the rapid growth and the need of manual labour in this sector (Ibid 2013:12).

### **Classification of labour**

When we look at labour there are binary divisions between gender. Linda McDowell tries to give us a distinction of labour which is gendered\

Masculine Feminine

Public Private

Outside Inside

Work Home

Work Leisure/pleasure

Production Consumption

Independence Dependence

Power Lack of Power (Ibid 1999:12)

India's Ministry of Labour, in its 2008 report, classified the unorganised labour in India into four groups. The unorganised occupational groups include small and marginal farmers, landless agricultural labourers, share croppers, fishermen, those engaged in animal husbandry, beedi rolling, labeling and packing, building and construction, leather workers, weavers, artisans, salt workers, workers in brick kilns and stone quarries, in saw mills, and workers in oil mills. Another category of employment includes attached agricultural labourers, bonded labourers, migrant workers, contract and casual labourers. The third category consist distressed

unorganised sector such as toddy tappers, scavengers, carriers of head loads, drivers of animal driven vehicles, loaders and unloaders. And the last unorganised labour category includes service workers such as midwives, domestic workers, barbers, vegetable and fruit vendors, newspaper vendors, pavement vendors, hand cart operators, and the unorganised retail. The report states that agriculture, dairy, horticulture and related occupations alone employ 52 percent of labour in India. Pay differences between women and men have traditionally been attributed to the limited number of women in the higher-paying upper levels of organizations. Women are concentrated in lower-echelon positions because of initial hiring at the entry level and a lack of upward mobility within organizations (Guy 1993; Naff 1994 ; Newman 1994). Historically, women's have gained access to the public sector through the lower ranks (Ibid 1993;1994 ;1994). Guy has noted that "social pushes and pulls result in women gaining entrance to administrative positions while [the] wage gap continues to reveal the relationship between gender and salary" (1993, 285).

### **UNEQUAL WAGE DISTRIBUTION**

Many women are denied the opportunity of upward mobility as compared to men. The gendering of occupations affects women. Research shows that there is a gap between the payments of salary between men and women doing the same job. It is the question of gender itself which affects salaries. The process of migration also has effects on employment. Due to the construction of dams, natural causes like droughts, floods etc., and also due to the fact that urban jobs provides more wages, a lot of people migrate to the urban sector in search of jobs which at the same time leads to overcrowding and unemployment. An urban wage or production subsidy improves the efficiency of the economy by changing the composition of the employed work force; urban employment rises while rural employment falls. Since the urban marginal value product of labour is higher than the rural marginal value product of labour, these changes in employment tend to raise the value of national output. An urban wage or production subsidy may improve the efficiency of the economy, but the subsidy may also have irrevocable distribution effects (Chin 1998:304).

"Unlike in rural India, it is the self-employed, as a group, (and not casual labourers), who contributed the largest share of 44 per cent to the working poor in urban India in 1999-2000. These are mostly urban informal sector self-employment activities having very low productivity and absorbing unskilled workers with inadequate physical or human capital

endowment. Another significant feature of the activity composition of the working poor in urban India is the fact that regular wage/salaried workers accounted for a little under one-fifth (19.6 per cent) of the working poor..... In terms of changes over the 1990s, as we had noted earlier, the number of the working poor in urban India for both sexes taken together had declined - albeit marginally"(Sundaram et al 2004:5129).

According to anthropologists there is division of labour in every society, a way of dividing the task in order for the society to function as a whole. Feminists are of the opinion that gender plays a major role in allocating different task to different individuals on the basis of their gender. Like the division of labour in Durkheim, the gendered division of labour separate labour into two distinct spheres: the valued paid work done by men in the public sphere, such as politics, culture etc.; and the undervalued, largely invisible and free reproductive labour which are carried out by women at home. This division of labour by gender is often justified based on ostensible differences in the "natural" reproductive roles assigned to women and men. Gender relations also play out in the public world of work. In the workplace we see the enduring practice of occupational segregation by gender, occupations in which one gender accounts for at least 80 percent of the workforce. Considering how widespread this practice is, women who decide to enter occupations dominated by men find everyday work relations and advancement through the ranks very difficult, which means that most of these women typically remain in the lowest rank of the work hierarchy. Men, on the other hand, move more quickly through women-dominated occupations to reach higher-level administration or supervisory positions (Cook 2007:240). The idea of class and race also further intervenes in which women of colour or poor status are put in the category of most undervalued, underpaid and unsatisfying types of work. Women who work as maids to other rich families abroad, are forced to migrate living their children behind and this leads families to disintegrate and care to unfold. Mothers who migrate as nannies face the painful prospect of caring for other people's children while being unable to do the same for their own. Often we see that it is women who work in the households of others; if there is a man he is giving the duty of attending outside the house like gardening, driving etc. There are a few important studies on gender wage discrimination in India. Reilly and Dutta (1996) find that the mean wage differential between men and women was relatively stable in the 1980s and the 1990s. The average gender wage differential is much higher in rural areas than urban areas, and that rural wages are generally at the lower end of the overall wage distribution. Also wage distribution varies according to the educational qualifications, but the bottom line is it is the men who have a better position if both of the gender has the same educational qualifications. Gender gaps are lower in the public sector than compared to the

private sector. Also in terms of wages, public sector wages are more regulated with fixed salaries as compared to the private sector where wage tends to fluctuate. We also find that in the private sector, the amount of work is plentiful as compared to the amount of wage they earn, like Marx talks of surplus labour. Job segregation or jobs offered at the bottom with less payment might result in women dropping out of the labour force participation.

## II. CONCLUSION

Women form an integral part of the workforce but we find that women are often engaged in works that are unpaid or in the unorganised sector. Economic growth has not contributed much to the development of women in labour force. There is inequality and division of labour everywhere in society. With this division of labour like Durkheim talks about, there is gender division of labour. There is segregation of jobs, such as what kind of jobs is meant for which category of gender, thus further discriminating and exploiting the weaker sections. There is also inequality in the distribution of wage and income; often women have less access to various sources of wealth. In a patriarchal society like ours, it is men who have the better position in terms of employment, wage, and labour etc. Due to various social limitations of looking after the household, women are often compelled to drop out of their job if their husband earns enough to support the family. Women also fall out from labour force participation due to various social stigmas attached to women working outside the households. If women work outside their homes as compared to men it is often in the unorganised sector where they are less paid. In the urban areas, studies show that around 80% of women work in the unorganized sectors such as household industries, petty trades and services, construction sites etc. Men are also engaged in the unorganised sector, but there is inequality in wage distribution for the same amount of work done. In the rural areas women are mostly engaged in agricultural activities. While there has been an increase in the participation of women in the workforce through education, mobilization etc., it is still low compared to men. Women are often denied educational qualifications as compared to men because women are mostly put in the category of managing household chores, and this might be the reason for the low labour force participation. Men of economically low status and caste experience discrimination on the basis of jobs, mobility, wage etc., but it is the women who suffer the most, on top of being discriminated and marginalised for their economic status, they are further discriminated on the basis of gender. Compared to other lower and higher status of women, it is women in the middle, that is, those who did some schooling or completed high school that faces the frustration of not finding a work suitable to their skills. Women who are well educated have succeeded in finding jobs suitable to their skills. And women in the lower spectrum are engaged in agricultural work.

V.I Lenin in his work *Capitalism and Female Labour* (1913) argue that present day capitalist society conceals within itself numerous cases of poverty and oppression which do not strike the eye. Millions upon millions of women in this case live as “domestic slaves”, striving to feed and clothe their families, saving on everything except their labour. It is this capitalist who employ this women as home-workers who are prepared for monstrously low wage to earn a little extra to support their family. And it is from this category of women that the capitalists hire as concubines at a most reasonable price Lenin also states that “all the oppressed and exploited classes throughout history of human societies have always been forced (and it is in this that their exploitation exist) to give up to their oppressors, first, their unpaid labour and second, their women as concubines for their mastery”.

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