



LOCATING WOMEN IN WORK FORCE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO WEST BENGAL

Dr. Susmita Bhattacharyya¹&Dr. Samhita Chaudhuri²

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Calcutta

²Assistant Professor, Department of Geography, Bijoy Krishna Girls' College, Howrah

Abstract

In India, gender equality in workforce is still far from reality. In spite of increasing female literacy all over the country, a clear gender difference is seen in economic participation with low female work participation rate in organized sector. In this paper an attempt is made to discuss the matters like increasing participation of women in work, debate on defeminization, trends of women's engagement in work force of the country with special emphasis to West Bengal. Besides, secondary sources, a small survey for an empirical experience involving 100 workers from Kolkata has also been conducted for the study. Findings reveal some interesting scenario regarding status of women in organized and unorganized sector.

Key words: Women, Workforce, Women's participation, Main and Marginal workers

Introduction

Incorporation of women in workforce is not a new phenomenon in India. The nature of their participation and persistence in work sphere may change on the basis of convergence of time and space. Especially in the age of wide spread globalization as well as economic liberalization, considerable transformation is reflected in the entire sphere of work with reference to gendered production system. Economic development in any country is intrinsically linked with production process and nature of participation in economy. Thus a clear picture can be visualized with proper causal analysis of joining of women in economy. On the basis of present context specific discussion, the focus of this paper will be centred on some issues like increasing participation of women in the work force, defeminization debate, emerging trend and link between feminization of workforce with economic development.

Initially it should be worthwhile to mention that the nature of feminization of workforce in India is to some extent different from other countries. Some thinkers point out that feminization can be taken neither as a necessary nor a sufficient condition to bring about improvements in the situation of women. 'Women workers mostly have been in marginal rather than mainstream process of production of goods and services. Concentrated in the informal sector and low paid jobs in the organized sector, technological changes have displaced women from some employments, and also provided work opportunities for women in other areas.[Andal N.: 2002, p-207]. It must be remembered that from the ancient period gendered work division became the part and parcel of Indian society. Men were assigned for outer work including production while women were mainly confined to home sphere. This traditional root is still operating in a transformed version in participation of womenfolk in economy. Holistic development is related with proper utilization of human resource in an optimum level. So equal or atleast considerable participation of women must be there to achieve this goal.

Methodology:

The study here is based on a small empirical survey of 100 working women [50 from organized and 50 from unorganized sector] in Kolkata, capital of West Bengal. Face to face interview method is used here. Purposive sampling method is applied for the selection of samples. Secondary sources like articles, chapters in books and Census of India are used for analytical purpose. The objectives of this paper will be ---1] to determine the trend of feminization of labour and 2] to analyse the pattern of women's participation in workforce in India with special reference to West Bengal.

Review Of Literature:

To Amartya Sen (Sen 1990: 144)(as mentioned by Sunny Jose:2012), paid work can enhance women's well being through a higher perceived contribution to the family's economic position, possibly a clear perception on their well being and better bargaining or fallback position. Poor women don't have the opulence to wait for a proper job with regular and well payment system. As a result their inclusion happens to be in low paid, seasonal, insecure and physically strenuous jobs. This can be perceived as 'poverty propelled participation' (used by Sunny Jose: 2012) of women in workforce. Dasgupta and Verick (2016) pointed out that the nature and spatial distribution of economic growth and job creation can be a help for determining the access of women in jobs, particularly in a context where social norms dictate how and where women can work. To Banu (2016), the pervasiveness of entrenched patriarchal social norms obstruct women's agency, mobility and freedom to work. Mammen and Paxson (2000) revealed that increases in the wage for women who are initially out of the labour force, can put forth only substitution effects and thereby causing an increase in labour force participation.

Time allocation model (Becker, 1965) posits that women make their labor supply decisions not only considering leisure and labor tradeoffs, but also home-based production of goods and services (including caring for children). Studies of Heckman and MaCurdy, (1980) include wages as a key driver of female labor supply.

Analysis and Discussion:

Andal N. (2002) determined diverse factors affecting women's participation in workforce like level of general economic development, style of development, available infrastructure, government policy concerning the employment of women, types of available work, structure of family, cultural tradition in relation to women's roles and responsibilities, child care availability, women's property right, age at marriage, education, migration behaviour and access to technology. In Indian situation substantial increase is marked in participation of women in workforce. Scope and prospect of work has become bigger and diversified in structural and functional aspects with globalization. According to Paul and Raju (2014), 'despite a few ambiguities and breaks, the recent decades have, in general, witnessed an increase in the workforce participation rates for women.' In primary sector principally female dominated activities are agriculture, forestry, logging, mining of coal and lignite, extraction of peat and metal ores, crude petroleum, natural gas, fishing, operation of fish hatcheries, fish farms. Women play significant roles in industries like food products and beverages, textiles, wearing apparel, dressing and dyeing of fur, wood and products of wood and cork, articles of straw and plating materials, paper and paper products, publishing, printing, reproduction of recorded media, chemical products and so on. In tertiary sectors women are mainly related with education, health related services, social work and similar occupations. Now women are also present in trade, management and even public administration. Abraham (2013) determines that rise of service sector including white collar jobs, institutionalized care giving, expansion of education. Among women declining wage differentials are catalysts to substitute domestic activities for paid employment. Dasgupta (2006) points out that globalization may have beneficial result especially in conventional activities where patriarchal ideology dominates. So, education and organized economic activity as social context must be considered as mostly significant in this situation. Indian economy is linked with gendered segregation parallel with patriarchal ideology till today. Segregation of women can be done in aspects like differential wage, occupational differentiation and varied treatment in workspace. Women are treated as secondary breadwinners in most of the countries. Reality shows if primary male breadwinner becomes unemployed then participation of women in work process increases considerably. Again in times of economic recessions, women workers are preferred because they usually give consent to take lower wage than male workers.

Defeminization of labour in India is appropriately articulated by pre existing discourses of 'nimble fingers' or 'disposable women'. Elson and Pearson (1981) and Wright (2006) (as shown by Gothoskar: 2013) mentioned the nature of feminized work force as a low paid and flexible setting. The studies of Chandrasekhar and Ghosh (2011), Rangarajan (2011) and Kannan, Raveendran (as shown by Vinoj Abraham: 2013) have marked a significant delay in the growth rate of female labour force in India. All the studies indicate 'missing female labour' as the most vital constituent. Amartya Sen popularizes the concept of 'missing women'. Data showed that the growth rate of female labour force was almost stagnant from 1993-94 to 2011- 12. On the whole the

share of female labour force as a percentage of total labour force has declined from 26.6 % [1993- 94] to 22.2% [2011-12] [On the basis of NSS reports]. Remarkable withdrawal of women from work sphere has taken place after the spreading of globalization. Then they begin really to struggle with male workers for their share in the labour market. Henceforth the accentuation of feminization of workforce takes place.

An exotic picture is budding in Indian workforce after the introduction of new age economy of liberalization as well as globalization. Reality shows a contradiction of facts and ideas with increase in feminine workforce in organized sector and simultaneous defeminization of workers in unorganized sector. In domestic services 3.2 % workforce was engaged in 1999-2000. This percentage has shown a decrease due to several reasons. Principal factor is that a lot of educated women have lost their jobs. After that these women take up the role of housewives. This in turn affects the joining of women in the work force as domestic help. Surprisingly, the domestic workers can earn foreign currency after joining workforce outside India. Scholars define this specific type of migration as 'globalization from the below' (Parrenas: 2001)(as mentioned by Gothoskar:2013). Modern work scenario has dual aspects. Low skill oriented repetitive work is the consequence of fragmented and differentiated production process. Non regular and flexible employments are commonplace now. Use of information technology and multitasking are popular aspects of up -gradation of production process on the other hand. The concepts of consumerism and marketization are significant in the process of commodification of women. The reflection of this incidence is seen in the involvement of women in entertainment sectors like hotels, media and tourism industries. Causal analysis reveals that the introduction of technology has a negative effect in feminization of workforce. Now in conventional industries the role of women is destabilized with no formation of alternative paths for them. The worst victims are those who are allied with traditional skill dominated handicraft industries. Similar picture is observed in the sphere of cottage industries and home based production. In fact women are beneficiaries only in those spheres where they have sufficient qualification for the jobs. Modern work scenario is dominated by the process of decentralization, individualization with 'flexi-time'. In this utterly changed work environment women can do their job from home. Hence, home based production reappears in a transformed structural and functional setting coupled with technological advancements.

About 96 percent of entire women work force is engaged in unorganized or informal sector. A significant increase of working women is seen in retail trade, hotels and restaurants. From 1994 to 2000 hotel industries have seen an increase of 2,78,000 working women. Nandal (2012) points out those women are mainly concentrated in unorganized sector. In organized sector participation of women is too low in India. Persistence of gender inequality in educational sphere and less acquisition and acceptance of professional and technical education are major causes behind this phenomenon. An interesting picture is opened in Indian economy with the presence of unorganized aspects in organized sector. Existence of part time and contractual jobs is the effect of this phenomenon. Most of the workers in this section are women. In rural India economy is comparatively

stagnant with limited work opportunity. Most women can have the opportunity of work facility only for few months in a year. This has made them 'subsidiary' workers. Their come back for work is mainly for economic reason though domestic responsibilities are primary to them.

Severe problem of role conflict is connected to working women. In this context Nilanjana Mukherjee (1985)(as mentioned in Women and Development by R.K. Sapru) wrote, 'with inflexible standards to meet at both home and work, the working woman is thus always chasing an impossible ideal.' They have to carry on dual responsibility of family as well as in work place. So they have to combat an intense struggle to maintain equilibrium within them. Actually this problem is specific for developing societies like India. Conflict of tradition and modernity in Indian context is playing significant role here. After achieving permanence in societal aspect, this problem will decrease gradually.

Status of Women in Workforce

Several factors can enumerate as responsible for present scenario of female work force participation in West Bengal. Some of them are- education, demographic profile of society and the cultural taboos as well as values of society. There is markedly high positive correlation between gender equality in education and gender equality in employment as it has been noticed that increasing rate of urbanization encourages more participation of women in workforce and thus there is growing awareness about increasing gender equality in the initial phase. It is widely observed that work participation of women is higher in lower income group when agriculture plays dominant role. With the rise of manufacturing sector women workers have to face hindrances because of limited educational opportunity, skill and technology and prevalence of conventional social customs. Thereafter service sector begins to dominate with encouragement of joining women in work sphere. On the basis of National Sample Survey data of India, sociologists say that feminization is influenced by cultural aspects, where traditional believes and social norms discourage work participation of women with increase in status of family.

In West Bengal, in terms of percentage of total female marginal workers to total female workers, census data reveals that, more females are engaged as marginal workers in majority of districts (ten districts- in Cooch Behar, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur, Malda, Birbhum, Bankura, Puruliya, South 24 Parganas, Paschim Medinipur and Purba Medinipur), i.e., more than 50 percent concentration of female marginal workers. Only in Kolkata district, more than 70 percent female workers are engaged as main workers. Actually, Kolkata is the district with no rural population, thus urban women are more engaged in main workforce.

TABLE : WOMEN IN WORK FORCE IN WEST BENGAL, 2011

Name	Percentage of Total Female Workers to Total Female Population	Percentage of Total Female Marginal Workers to Total Female Workers
------	---	---

WEST BENGAL	18.08	50.15
Darjiling	22.44	33.13
Jalpaiguri	22.31	45.06
Koch Bihar	20.67	51.71
Uttar Dinajpur	18.96	50.88
Dakshin Dinajpur	24.84	51.39
Maldah	23.30	55.90
Murshidabad	17.38	40.51
Birbhum	17.64	57.86
Bardhaman	16.48	46.93
Nadia	11.48	33.91
North Twenty Four Parganas	12.81	32.20
Hugli	16.24	42.81
Bankura	23.62	62.85
Puruliya	31.29	73.20
Haora	13.69	40.36
Kolkata	17.91	26.38
South Twenty Four Parganas	15.24	58.06
Paschim Medinipur	25.87	65.64
Purba Medinipur	15.99	67.76

Source: Calculated by authors from Census of India 2011

Findings:

The researcher has done a small survey to have some primary data in this context. Data show that educated, skilled and technically advanced women are getting more job opportunity in urban areas. 80 percent of the respondents say that they feel no discrimination at workplace. Some different scenario is found in the unorganized sector where respondents are discriminated in terms of work opportunity as well as wage. Some are treated badly as about 75 percent of them reported that their family condition forces them to work outside home. For their poor condition they have to take the job as early as possible without waiting for good opportunity. As a result of male preference in certain work, respondents have to accept low pay structure. Mostly negative picture is visible in traditional handicraft industries. Due to mechanization and technical advancements the production process has undergone a havoc change there. A displacement of female artisans takes place prominently. Some other has to work elsewhere accepting low wage.

Conclusion:

Social scientists argue that in informal sectors women have unequal accesses to land, credit, education and social facilities. They have pointed out that gender inequality is greater in agriculture based economy. Women workers have to fight with some social hindrances undoubtedly. The known concept of 'glass ceiling' creates obstacle for women from accessing higher positions in economic field. They have faced certain prohibitions in

working in some specific sectors like jobs in jails, underground mines etc. This dismal picture should be abolished as soon as possible. There is a bidirectional relationship between economic participation and women's work. In India socio-cultural factors like caste, religion, education and previous economic status play important role in feminization of workforce. So, the only way to get rid of this situation and to have a brighter future with proper developmental potential, women participation in workforce should be increased in a considerable amount. Indian women have capability to put their energies in outer sphere efficiently. This will be treated as catalyst to have stable position in economy.

References

1. Abraham V., (2013) ,Missing Labour or Consistent 'De-feminisation' , EPW, August 3, ,Vol XLVIII No 31.[p 99- 108]
2. Andal N., (2002)Women and Indian Society: Options and Constraints, Rawat Publication,.
3. Becker, G., (1965), "A Theory of the Allocation of Time," The Economic Journal, Vol. 75 (299), pp. 493–517
4. Banu, A. (2016). Human development, disparity and vulnerability: Women in South Asia. Background paper for Human Development Report.
5. Dasgupta, S., & Verick, S. S. (Eds.). (2016). Transformation of women at work in asia: an unfinished development agenda. SAGE Publications India.
6. Dasgupta Samir, (2010) Globalization and Humanity, Rawat Publication,.
7. Gothoskar S., (2013) The Plight of Domestic Workers: Confluence of Gender, Class and Caste Hierarchies, EPW, June 1, , Vol XLVIII No 22 [p 63- 75]
8. Heckman, J. and T. MaCurdy, (1980), "A Life Cycle Model of Female Labor Supply," Review of Economic Studies, Vol. 47 (1), pp. 47–74.
9. Jose S., (2012)Women's Paid Work and Well – being in Rajasthan, EPW, November 10, , Vol XLVII No 45. [p 48- 55]
10. Mammen, K.; Paxson, C. (2000). "Women's work and economic development", Journal of Economic Perspectives, Vol. 14, No. 4, pp. 141–164
11. Nandal S., (2012) Women and Development, Mittal Publications,.
12. Paul T. and Raju S. , (2014), Gendered Labour in India, EPW, July 19, Vol XLIX No 29, [p 197- 207]
13. Sapru R.K., (1989) Women and Development, Ashish Publishing House,.
14. Srivastava N. and Srivastava R., Women, Work, and Employment Outcomes in Rural India, July 10-16, 2010, VolXLV No 28. [p 49-63]

