



Participation Of Women In Labour Force In India: A Study On West Bengal

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Abstract:

Women have reproductive role. But basically they face deprivation from the aspect of gender discrimination in all the sphere as well as in the sphere of work force. This paper is basically focused on the position of women in work force in India and West Bengal. Women more participate in unorganised sector. The study focused on the rural and urban scenario of participation of women in work force in India and West Bengal. The study found that rural women are more active than urban women and they are more engaged in unorganised sector. To overcome the situation is need to make the social environment positive towards the span the area of workforce to women and remove the patriarchal barriers.

Index Terms: gender discrimination, work force, women's participation, gender gap

Introduction:

Gender inequality is a world phenomenon. The patriarchal societies nourish the system and help to exist. The social construction of gender is affected a girl child from before her birth. The patriarchal social structure makes Indian women habitual to gender discrimination. So, maximum women are not aware about their own rights and freedom in the society and family (Kohli, 2017, p.178). The participation rate of women in work force was increased after Second World War due to die of so many male soldiers and women took the financial responsibilities of their livelihood. Developing countries of the world suffer more with this issue (Bhattacharya, 2021, p.330).

The gender gap is much more shrinking in the education in recent time. But women are still suffering for health issues. In the accession of formal financial services, the position of women is lower than men. This gap is large in South Asia. 37 percent women in South Asia have an account in any financial institutions when 54 percent of men have the same. The accession of financial services would increase the income generating ability of women and their power in the household (Jain-Chandra. & *et al.*,2017, pp.13-16).

In the world out of 142 nations India ranks 141st and 2062 districts as gender critical in the world is present. In gender inequality index the country ranks 127th and in the world on gender gap 114th. "Gender economists call this phenomenon, disempowerment of women" (Kohli, 2017, p.178). In India 'less than a quarter of women join the workforce'. Oxfam report of 2018 showed, in India gender pay gap was 34 per cent. Deloitte report of 2018 showed that participation of women in workforce in India decreases from 2005 (36.7 per cent) to 2018 (26 per cent). In informal or unorganised sector women are employed 95 per cent or 195 million (Bhattacharya, 2021, p.330). But the report of 2011 of World Bank showed that women "represent 40 percent of the global labor force", but in past two decades participation of women in labour force is increased around

50 percent (Jain-Chandra. & *et al.*2017, pp.20-22). Women demand that some reasons are responsible for their lack of participation in work force. Those are child care and personal home making commitments, health or age related reason, social barriers, have not required training, qualification, age for work, financial barriers, non-availability of work at a convenient location (Female Labour Utilization in India, 2023, p.12). Women play home maker role and the role of 'breadwinner'.

Objectives:

To study the participation of women in labour or workforce in West Bengal.

To find out the participation of women in formal and informal or unorganised sector.

Methodology:

The author to make this study only used the secondary data sources. She has used the books, research articles from journals, census reports and other relevant reports.

Theoretical context:

Nobel Laureate Prof. Amartya Sen presents seven types of gender inequalities in India at present time. The first is morality inequality is directly related to the high mortality rates of women. Second one is natality inequality which priorities boys over girls. Third is employment inequality, seen in every work place and related to the conditions. Fourth one is ownership inequality means in many societies the ownership of property distributed unequally. Men have more access on property than women. Fifth is regarding special opportunity inequality, where men get better chances in education, professional training. Sixth identify the basic facility inequality and the seventh is household inequality (Kohli, 2017, pp.179-180).

Gender socialisation makes a boy as man and a girl as woman with some specific behaviour. Societal expectation from them is based on patriarchal in nature. The families also make them as the demand of gender based societal culture. Manu said, "Women are supposed to be in the custody of their father when they are children, they must be under the custody of their husband when married and under the custody of her son in old age or as widows. In no circumstances she should be allowed to assert herself independently" (Kohli, 2017, p.181). The status of women which was taught by Manu is existing in the present Indian society.

The 'organised sector' consists of the government services, all companies 'employing more than ten persons full time and utilizing electricity for the production process, or more than twenty persons, without utilizing electricity' - this official definition used by the government. 'These production units comply with several regulations associated with labour laws regarding wages, hours of work, dismissal, labour conditions, etc.' (Tom,1989,p.2).

All other smaller units and activities together constitute the "unorganised" sector. The majority of women are employed in the unorganised sector (94 per cent in 1971). Moreover, the work division is based on gender division of labour and makes women marginalised (Tom,1989,p.2).

Literature Review:

Irene Tom (1989) in her book *Women in Unorganised Sector* discussed about the organised and unorganised sector and status of women in production system. He also discussed about the gender based division of labour.

Indrani Chakraborty and Achin Chakraborty (2009) presented the scenario of women participation in workforce in West Bengal through field survey in Murshidabad and South 24 Parganas in their occasional paper titled Female work participation and gender differential in earning in West Bengal.

Dr. (Smt) Harapriya Patnayak (2011) in her writing *Gender and Economic Development With Special Reference to Status of Women in Orissa* focused on women and labour issues in Orissa, women empowerment etc.

Sugandha Kohli (2017) discussed in her writing *Gender Inequality in India*, the theoretical aspect of gender inequality in every sphere of the society, gender socialisation, and makes an elaboration on the opinion of Nobel Laureate Prof. Amartya Sen.

Deepak Bishoyi (2018) in his writing Gender Issues on Socio-economic Development expressed about the status of women in society, economic independency makes women empower in the family and in the outer world. But he also talked about the patriarchal structure as barriers to empowerment of women and the economic reform makes their position worse than before.

Santanu Bhattacharya (2021) in his writing titled with Working hours choice of married women in informal sector activities: A case study of Kesargarh village, Purulia District explained and analysed about the more engagement of women in unorganised sector in India and through primary data collection.

Tanuka Endow and Garima Gambhir (n.d.) in their paper A Re-look at the Status of Women in India focused on the status of sex ratio in India in pre to post independent era, status of child sex ratio, child mortality rate, age of marriage- specially child marriage, educational status of women, employment of women and their major participation in unpaid work in families and house.

Participation of Women in Unorganised Sector:

In India a major part of workforce is associated with informal or unorganised sector. The economy of India is dependent on this sector more than 90 percent. From this sector more than 50 percent product in national market has come (Bhattacharya, 2021, p.330).

Women have not only the reproductive role, they play a vital role in certain tasks in productive sources, like organised and unorganised. Many cases show that women with equal education and equal work earn less from men of the same status. Women in fact do not take part in productive work. They are being pushed out of the production process. B. Rogers identified this tendency as “domestication” of men (Tom,1989, p.1). A study on Orissa showed that the gender discrimination is found in labour market. Rural women are engaged in agricultural sector in majority and urban women workers are more engaged with unorganised sectors, like household industries, trade, building construction workers etc. The study showed that a man spends more time in a week than a woman. A Woman spends her more time in unpaid domestic or household activities and caring services (Patnayak, 2011, p.99).

Women participation rate in labour force was increased or “experienced an employment boom in the late 1960s and 1970s”. But there were no possibilities to economic advancement of women and upward mobility. Though during 1980s and 1990s the rate of women employment was increased than men four times faster. But there was no confirmation regarding equal treatment to women with men for wage or other facilities. “They were underpaid, denied promotion opportunities and treated for the most part as ‘marginal’ workers (Bishoyi, 2018, p.7).

Women earn lower wages than men in everywhere for same work. They have limited access to the resources like land, fertilizer, higher technology in agricultural sector, to get credit. They face difficulties and embarrassment to provide some improvement facilities to their families and their situation will bitter when they play a crucial role to their low family income. Government of India thinks about the need of income generating programmes for women and their employment (Bishoyi, 2018, p.3).

The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 was enacted to pay equal remuneration to women and men for equal work or similar work and the gender discrimination will be eliminated that way. This Act is “now subsumed in the Code on Wages, 2019” to eliminate all kind of gender discrimination in service sector in any establishment and institution or employer (Condition of Women in Unorganised Sector, 2022).

The gender gap is higher in South Asia. India also suffer from this effect in literacy gap and strong son preference (Bishoyi, 2018, p.4). Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) of National Statistical Office survey 2019-20 showed that women were engaged in non-agricultural sector is 56.5 per cent (Condition of Women in Unorganised Sector, 2022). The report of PLFS of the year 2021-2022 showed the increasing rate of female labour force participation, though it is low than man. But around one-third of women has joined the labour force. The global average is 47 percent for several years (Female Labour Utilization in India, 2023, p.7). A large number of women are involved with the secondary agricultural activities (Bishoyi, 2018, p.5).

The Southern India has the greater sex-ratio than the Northern part of India. In South India female participation rate is high and their autonomy is greater. "...the share of employment outside their farm business is the highest" (Bishoyi, 2018, p.5).

The participation of women in work force is determined by so many factors, like education level, economic development, fertility rates, access to children, social context and norms etc. These factors of female participation in workforce are related with each other as "*Push and Pull factors*". "...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" (Female Labour Utilization in India, 2023,p.11). The World Bank Report "*Reshaping Norms: A New Way Forward*" shows that the high gender gaps in several regions is not reduced after the income level increase and economic development (Female Labour Utilization in India, 2023,pp.11-12). "Social norms about gender can be considered as a key obstacle towards gender equality" (Female Labour Utilization in India, 2023,p.12).

Table: 1 Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) report of female participation rate in work force of age 15 or above in India

Years	Female of working age 15 or above (%)	Urban (%)	Rural (%)
2017-2018	23.3	20.4	24.6
2021-2022	32.8	23.8	36.6
Increasing gap of participation	9.5	3.4	12.0

Source: Female Labour Utilization in India. (2023). Ministry of Labour and Employment [Employment Statistics in Focus April 2023]. Government of India. p.7

The table of the above (No.1) shows that the Periodic Labour Force Survey (2021-2022) highlights that in India the Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) is increased into 32.8 percent of age 15 or above. It was 23.3 percent in 2017-2018. The improvement is showing in the report 9.5 percent. In this respect the result of rural area is more satisfactory than the result of urban areas. In rural areas in 2017-18 female LFPR was 24.6 percent which increased in 2021-22 to 36.6 percent, gap is 12.0 percent. In urban areas this participation rate is low in 2017-2018 was 20.4 percent and in 2021-22 to 23.8 percent. The rate was increased 3.4 percent just (Female Labour Utilization in India. 2023. p.8).

Table: 2

LFPR in usual status (ps+ss) for persons of age 15 years and above (in %) in India

Years	Urban			Rural			Urban+Rural		
	Female	Male	Person	Female	Male	Person	Female	Male	Person
2021-22	23.8	74.7	49.7	36.6	78.2	49.7	32.8	77.2	55.2
2017-18	20.4	74.5	47.6	24.6	76.4	47.6	23.3	75.8	49.8
Gap	3.4	0.2	2.1	12.0	1.8	2.1	9.5	1.4	5.4

Source: Female Labour Utilization in India. (2023). Ministry of Labour and Employment [Employment Statistics in Focus April 2023]. Government of India. p.10

Table 2 shows that women labour force participation rate in urban areas in 2017-18 was 20.4 per cent and male participation rate was 74.5 per cent. The participation in labour force of women is increased in 2021-22. The participation rate of women is 23.8 percent and the men reached to 74.7 percent. Practically the participation rate of women is increased much more than men. If we make a focus on rural women then it is clear that the percentage is little high than urban areas. In rural areas female participation in labour force in 2017-18 was 24.6 per cent, where the male participation rate is 76.4 per cent. This participation rate was increased in 2021-22, the rate of women participation in work force was 36.6 per cent and male participation rate was 78.2 per cent. If noticed the total percentage of rural and urban participation rate in work force by women was 23.3 percent and male participation rate was 75.8 percent in 2017-18 session. When in 2021-22, participation rate in work force of women in urban and rural areas was 32.8 percent and male participation rate was 77.2 percent.

Table: 3 LFPR in usual status for persons of age 15-59 year (in %) in India

Years	Urban			Rural			Urban+Rural		
	Female	Male	Person	Female	Male	Person	Female	Male	Person
2021-22	26.5	81.2	54.5	39.3	82.1	60.8	35.6	81.8	58.9
2017-18	22.3	80.1	51.6	26.6	80.2	53.6	25.3	80.2	53.0
Gap	4.2	1.1	2.9	12.7	1.9	7.2	10.3	1.6	5.9

Source: Female Labour Utilization in India. (2023). Ministry of Labour and Employment [Employment Statistics in Focus April 2023]. Government of India. p.11

Table 3 shows that the age of 15 to 59 year women's participation in work force in urban areas in 2017-2018 was 22.3 percent and male participation rate was 80.1 percent and in rural areas this percentage was of women 26.6 percent and of male 80.2 percent. In 2021-22 the participation of women in urban areas was 26.5 percent and male participation rate was 81.2 percent, and in rural areas women's participation rate was 39.3 percent and male participation was 82.1 percent. The statistics is showing that in urban and rural areas women's participation in 2017-2018 was 25.3 percent and in 2021-22 was 35.6 percent and male participation was 80.2 percent and 81.8 percent respectively.

The PLFS result shows that within total rural female population of 24.2 percent was self-employed in 2021-22. This participation rate was 13.6 percent in 2017-2018 (Female Labour Utilization in India, 2023, p.17). When salaried or regular wage participant women was in 2021-2022 2.9 percent than 2.5 percent in 2017-2018, increased their participation. In the sphere of domestic helper participation of women is decreased in 2021-2022 (28.3 percent) from 2017-2018 (40.8 percent). Urban women participation rate in workforce is high as domestic helper- 50.3 percent (2021-2022). Salaried or regular wage worker was 11.0 percent in 2021-2022 and 9.5 percent was in 2017-2018. Self-employed women worker was quite low in urban areas, in 2021-2022 was 8.6 percent and 6.3 percent was in 2017-2018 (Table:4).

Table: 4

Participation of women in work force in age 15 years & above (in %) in India

Types of worker	Rural		Urban	
	2021-2022 (%)	2017-2018 (%)	2021-2022 (%)	2017-2018 (%)
Self-Employed	24.2 (increased)	13.6	8.6	6.3
Salaried/ Regular Wage	2.9 (increased)	2.5	11.0	9.5
Domestic Helper	28.3 (decreased)	40.8	50.3	NA

Source: Female Labour Utilization in India. (2023). Ministry of Labour and Employment [Employment Statistics in Focus April 2023]. Government of India. pp.17-18.

Table 5: Work Participation Rate in West Bengal by Sex (Total Worker)

Years	Total(%)	Male (%)	Female(%)	Gender Gap(%)
1981	29.34	48.71	8.07	40.64
1991	32.2	51.4	11.3	41
2001	36.78	54.23	18.03	36.15
2011	38.08	57.07	18.01	38.99

Source: Census Data, Office of the Registrar General, India & Biswas, (2018), p.428

The above table has shown that gender gap between men and women workers are gradually decreasing. But the rate is not so satisfactory. The gender gap decreased 1.65 percent only from 1981 to 2011. The participation of women in work force in West Bengal in 2011 achieved only 18.01 per cent, where the participation rate of men was 57.07 per cent.

Table 6: Work Participation Rate in West Bengal by Sex in Rural and Urban Areas

Years	Rural(%)				Urban(%)			
	Total	Male	Female	Gender Gap	Total	Male	Female	Gender Gap
1981	29.35	48.72	8.89	39.83	29.30	48.70	5.59	43.21
1991	33.18	52.09	13.07	39.02	29.59	49.64	6.21	43.43
2001	37.93	54.30	20.70	33.60	33.82	54.07	11.13	42.94
2011	38.7	57.2	19.40	37.80	36.69	56.84	15.40	41.44

Source: Census Data, Office of the Registrar General, India & Biswas, (2018), p.428

The above statistics (Table 6) has shown that the gender gap between men and women worker is more in urban areas of West Bengal. The gap in urban areas was in 2011 41.44 percent, which decreased only 1.77 percent from 1981. The situation in rural West Bengal is a few better. In 2011 the gender gap was in rural areas 37.80 percent, decreased from 1981 (39.83 percent).

Barriers:

Cultural norms make women uninterested to take part in workforce out-side of the house. Traditional patriarchal society is being responsible for that. Patriarchal thinking makes women limited in the household work and **nourishment** of child and take care of family members. Major financial decisions are considered as responsibilities of men (Bishoyi, 2018, p.5).

Conclusion:

Some studies have shown that the economic reform was introduced to help poor people, but the situation of poor women getting worse in the era of **economic reform** (Bishoyi.2018.p.3). Female participation rate in 1921 was 33.7 percent, which declined to 11.8 percent in 1971. The rate of women's participation in work force was drastically fall from 28 percent in 1961(Endow, & Gambhir, n.d., p.4).

Participation of female in labour force is associated with their economic independence and accession of money. It affects and extents the position of women in out-side world, socio-economic interactions and their autonomy level to make decision inside and outside of the family (Bishoyi, 2018, p.4).

In West Bengal the female labour participation rate is low. In rural areas of West Bengal only 26.8 per cent women are working or seek to engage with work, age of 15 year and above. The percentage in urban areas is 21.0 percent, low than rural areas shown in 61st round survey of National Sample Survey, 2004-2005 (Chakraborty & Chakraborty,2009, p.4).

Participation of women in work force will be increased their status in side family and the outer world. The future generation girls will get better value attached. More married women are associated with the informal sector in Purulia district of West Bengal, like vegetable seller, labour, maid servant and tuition teacher etc. Most of them are engage with agriculture and labour force, specifically as construction labour (Bhattacharya, 2021, pp.332-333).

Women are more involved with the unpaid domestic work. Their involvement is higher 'in production of goods for own final use' which does not represent them to the official or national employment statistics, though they are actually working in majority (Endow, & Gambhir, n.d., p.5).

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