

## **Work Participation: A Gendered Analysis**

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### **Abstract**

Women were treated as 'second class citizens' during the Victorian age in the United Kingdom and patriarchal bias was seen in the working class theoreticians in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. To counter the prejudice and bias, the world witnessed waves of feminist movements which advocated restoring women's rights and gender equality for women in all walks of life. The present article explores the various theories that got debated simultaneously which helped in the growth of gender sensitization. It tries to capture that early development theorist's incorporated gender as a mere statistics into the developmental framework of the nation. It was found that this kind of approach was not enough to reduce gendered differences. In India, the overall work participation was highly skewed in favour of the males. Hence the article is an attempt to understand facts of the various feminist movements in India and the condition of the work force in a gendered analysis framework.

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**Keywords:** Gender, Feminist Movement in India, Labour Participation, Work Force Sex Ratio, Rights

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In India, women's social status as compared to that of men was very low in prestige and value. It was found that women could not look after their needs and hence the male intervention was upheld.<sup>1</sup> Women's participation in activities other than social and traditional were a taboo to the society. Hence the social participation within the household was seen to be the only arena in which the women could specialize; in other words remain confined. If any economic need would arise, it would be the males who would take the responsibility of the house and the women-folk. Women were considered the weaker of the two sexes. The societal norms detached the women from the economic practices thereby making the women out of the picture of economic participation. A general consensus that runs world-wide is that, a woman and her work isn't that important to be recognized and recorded. Even if they are not employed they had other duties to perform in the household. In this way their contribution for the social well being of the men folk is totally neglected and goes unaccounted for. In India, women's work participation is discouraged by her family as well as the society.

The present article is a study of the gendered factors that affect work participation rate. The study is made on the ground that gender bias prevails in the society and it is detrimental to the physical, mental and economic growth of the women folk. A thorough

<sup>1</sup> A. Ramegowda, *Gender Inequality*, New Delhi, Rawat Publications, 1997.

understanding about the nature of gender-related issues in feminist perspectives will aid in making the study worthwhile. There are various issues that cover the diverse areas of woman and her development. Among them gender-wise occupational segregation and ignorance of women as main workers, constitute the focus area of this dichotomy in the society. The paper seeks to identify the various factors that influence the economic participation taking into consideration the failure of philosophers to capture women's contribution towards economic upheaval and also certain flaws in enumeration process for gathering statistics for India.

A movement from the 'gender and development' approach to the 'gender in development' approach could be one such product of the feminist movement in India that has stood for the welfare of the women. Nevertheless understanding the gendered differences have been helpful in recognising that women are also the deprived section of the society. It has in turn helped in framing of certain policies that would reduce society made differences and increase work participation of women in various fields.

### **Feminist Perspectives on Gender**

Identification of gender based differences has been done by men and women collectively in various forms. Their ideology together has been named as feminism. It is difficult to unify all the movements under one banner, but in the last two centuries the world has noticed the following four types of feminism: Liberal, Socialist, Radical and Third Wave Feminism. The liberals believe that if opportunities open up for the women, individual equality will be established. The socialist on the other hand stressed upon the collective equality of the women which could be done by the redistribution of the power throughout the society. The radical feminists also were in favour of revamping the social system. They believed that the society was extremely patriarchal and that the men and women needed to maintain separatist identity in all respects. The third wave feminists focus upon the personal empowerment for the social change.

Patriarchal bias was seen in the 19<sup>th</sup> century working class theoreticians like Marx and Proudhon. In between 1890 and the beginning of the First World War, the first wave of Feminism took place. There was strong German proletarian women's movement. The biased views of male economists including the Marxian theories were thereby challenged. The feminists brought forward the importance and contribution of domestic labour by the housewives as economically productive. They insisted upon the fact that their labour was indirectly helpful to the entrepreneurs in reaping profits. Marx had ignored women's domestic labour while he measured the workers labouring strength.<sup>2</sup> Again, Marx also overlooked the sexual division of labour between women and men. The other economists of his time had mainly focused upon the 'public economy' and not the domestic economy. It was least realized that transformation of the domestic economy along with the uprise of capitalist relation, started becoming an intrinsic part of economic analysis. This issue led to stronger arguments against it because contribution

<sup>2</sup> K. Marx, *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, 1977.

of domestic labour was most of the time delinked with the public sphere of the capitalist economy. The working class women's struggles challenged many aspects besides the issue on domestic labour. The French women workers were the one in 1930s who had challenged the 'bourgeois' monogamous marriage.<sup>3</sup> The women workers' struggles in the US were like that of the German proletarian women's movement.<sup>4</sup> There was also the movement of the British suffragettes for women's voting rights.<sup>5</sup> British feminist author Glucksmann provides a 'dialectical' theoretical frame-work, where the domestic and public spheres of the capitalist economy were mutually related.<sup>6</sup>

### **Feminist Movements in India**

India was undergoing a social transformation due to the reformist movements during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The country being dominated and subdued both economically and politically, the social reformers took up the task of revamping the society which the colonists criticized to be as backward one. The British also vehemently criticised the way the women folk were treated in the family, which ultimately forced the Indian national leaders to focus on the pathetic conditions of the Indian women.<sup>7</sup> The legislations for the abolition of sati and child marriage were pioneering steps taken by the British government by the various petitions submitted by the national leaders of the country. Again assessing the distress of women as widows, the remarriage of the widows was allowed by the government after constant debate by the reformers against the upper caste society. It was during the same period that education came up as a respite for the early child marriage widows and women of lower caste.<sup>8</sup> This movement for pledging the rights of women before gaining political independence from the British could be traced as the first wave of feminist movement in India. But unlike the feminist movement seen the other parts of the world, the Indian feminism had different sets of problems to be addressed. Moreover the kind of revamping of the women were being done mostly with the help of men and their direction at the national level.

The journey from the first wave of feminism to the second began around 1920s in the Indian context. Breaking down traditional barriers, asserting voting rights to women after the age of 18, giving property rights to women, educating women and allowing them to economically participate, encouraging small scale industries to employ women were some achievements made by the first feminist's movements with the various legislations. During the second wave of feminism, it was ensured that women were a part of the developmental process and that they somehow got representation in most

<sup>3</sup> M. Mies and K. Jayawardene, "Feminism in Europe, Liberal and Socialist Strategies 1789 - 1919", *The Hague*, 198, pp. 111-155.

<sup>4</sup> M. Tax, "The Rising of the Women: Feminist Solidarity and Class Conflict 1880 - 1917", *Monthly Review Press*, New York, 1980.

<sup>5</sup> J. Liddington and J. Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind us: Rise of Women's Suffrage Movement*, London, Virago, 1978.

<sup>6</sup> N. Glucksmann, *Structural Analysis in Contemporary Thought*, London and Boston, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974.

<sup>7</sup> G. Forbes, *The New Cambridge History of India - Women in Modern India*, UK, Cambridge University Press, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

of the activities in the society. After achieving freedom from the British governance, the need at the dawn of independence was to show that India would be better governed and prosperity would come to the Indians in a quick succession. Hence industrialization was taken up as a major tool for bringing about growth in the economic indicators, i.e., National Income and Production. The policy makers had very little provisions for tackling the unemployment problem. It was believed that if the Trickle Down effect of trickling the gains to the people in the lower rung of the economic ladder would take place, then the people will not be impoverished. But the failure of the Trickle Down effect on the Indian Economy led to the rise in the unemployment. India mainly suffered from fictional unemployment at that time. Thus when the overall employment level was so low, the employment of women was very low. The government policies towards encouraging gender and development, also called the GAD approach were widespread during this period but they were highly criticised towards the beginning of 1970s.

Women have been seen as the harbingers of wellness for the family. At the individual level her role is restricted to being a facilitator not only to the elderly male but also to her contemporaries and younger ones. She is supposed to be a means for their social, physical and economic upheaval. But in all this process a woman's health, education, economic well being, political say and above all the right to dignified life gets compromised on the family welfare goal. If we look at the data released by the Census Survey Organisation, a government of India agency for tracking the statistics of the nation, the sex ratio of India provides a dismal picture, 943 females per 1000 males posing vital questions like mortality rates, female foeticide and also undercounting of women at the times of population enumeration.<sup>9</sup> What society looks as women is just a different approach when the same issue arises for the men. The biological distinctions of being either male or female gender have eventually shaped up in distinguishing certain societal norms that have become gendered in nature.

In the study conducted by Nath, occupation of the women workers on the basis of educational levels was seen mostly in the 'other services' section of the Broad Industrial categories.<sup>10</sup> The broad industrial categories in India are Cultivators; Agricultural Labourers; Mining, Quarrying, Fishing etc; Household Industry; Manufacturing Other than Household Industry; Construction; Trade and Commerce; Transport Storage and Communication; Other services. There were 85.4 percent of the total matriculate (i.e. Class X pass) women workers employed in the above category. Nath has divided the category into modern and traditional according to the services rendered by them. The modern sector includes public services, educational and scientific services, medical and health services, legal services, business services, and community. The traditional sectors included the electricity, gas water and sanitary services and activities not adequately described. There has been greater absorption of women in the modern sector especially education, as shown by the study conducted by Nath.

<sup>9</sup> *Census of India, Figures at Glance: Provisional Population Totals*, [http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/data\\_files/ani/PPT\\_Press\\_Release\\_Final.pdf](http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/data_files/ani/PPT_Press_Release_Final.pdf), 2011.

<sup>10</sup> K. Nath, "Urban Women Workers - A Preliminary Study", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol XVII, No. 37, 1965.

The third wave of feminism eventually came forward to seek clarifications regarding issues arising due to gendered differences. The feminist recognised that the differences arose were cited not on the basis of being different in ability or quality but only due to the fact that how the society perceived a particular being as either male or female. The feminists strongly raised voice against the gendered bias and also questioned about the occupational segregation based on gender. Questions ranged from the acceptance of the age old Indian philosophy for women to identify themselves with the identity of the family like the surname of father or husband to the choice of motherhood and work. It is said that the third wave feminists are the children of the first wave feminists. They voiced their opinion for the women not to emphasise on the women's rights or reservations but for gender equality. So far, the incorporation of women into the developmental policies and framework was not recognised as important. Post 1970s, the GAD approach was replaced with the newer concept gender in development, popularly known as the GID approach. This approach to gender studies incorporated gender in developmental process. It focussed on enabling women folk to witness gender equality in most of walks of life. Moser has analysed that there are five approaches while understanding women's position, they are: Welfare, equity, anti-poverty, efficiency, and empowerment.<sup>11</sup> These approaches were overlapping in many cases but together they formed the base for the Indian planner to identify suitable plans for different societies.<sup>12</sup>

Promoting gender equality was identified as a priority strategy goal for the UN system in India under the United Nations Development Assistance Framework.<sup>13</sup> The report prepared by the Resident coordinator of the UN, has analysed deeply into the situation of women in present day India focusing upon their access to freedom and their right to equality. While the Indian Government decided to eradicate the problem of poverty by identifying the different sections in the society who were deprived, the social distinction of the poorer section of the society consisted mainly of the scheduled castes, tribes and backward classes. Women were not considered among the deprived sections of the society. There were no policies that helped to improve the conditions of women. Industrial policies, developmental plans and programmes were all directed for the economic growth of the country. The agenda of women in development found its place after four five-year plans of the government of India. Gender parity or equality was aimed for and thus the policies regarding gender issues started incorporating the national agenda for growth and development. Initially, the government's responsibility was to disaggregate the population group in all its studies. Like in the case of Income of the Indian population, during the early plan period it was only expressed as National Income earned by an individual. Later on national income was reviewed and segregated in terms of male and female. But the feminists weren't satisfied by this method of study because; there was no detailed study of the women and their work. They were in favour

<sup>11</sup> C. Moser, *Gender Planning and Development: Theory, Practice and Training*, London, Routledge, 1993.

<sup>12</sup> B. Das and V. Khawas (Eds.), *Gender Issues in Development*, New Delhi, Rawat Publications, 2009.

<sup>13</sup> K.M. Sen and A.K.S. Kumar, *Women in India – How Free? How Equal?* Report of commissioned by the Office of the Resident Co-ordinator of India, United Nations, 2001.

of having women incorporated in the development process and not just as a section on the receiving end. There was a radical change in the outlook of the Indian feminists in this regard. Women had been just a spectator in all the growth and developmental activities. They were underrepresented in many areas which actually affected their position in the society. The empowerment approach to planning was thereby undertaken to bring developmental justice to the women. Hence there was focus on women's capabilities and their role in the value addition to the total population.

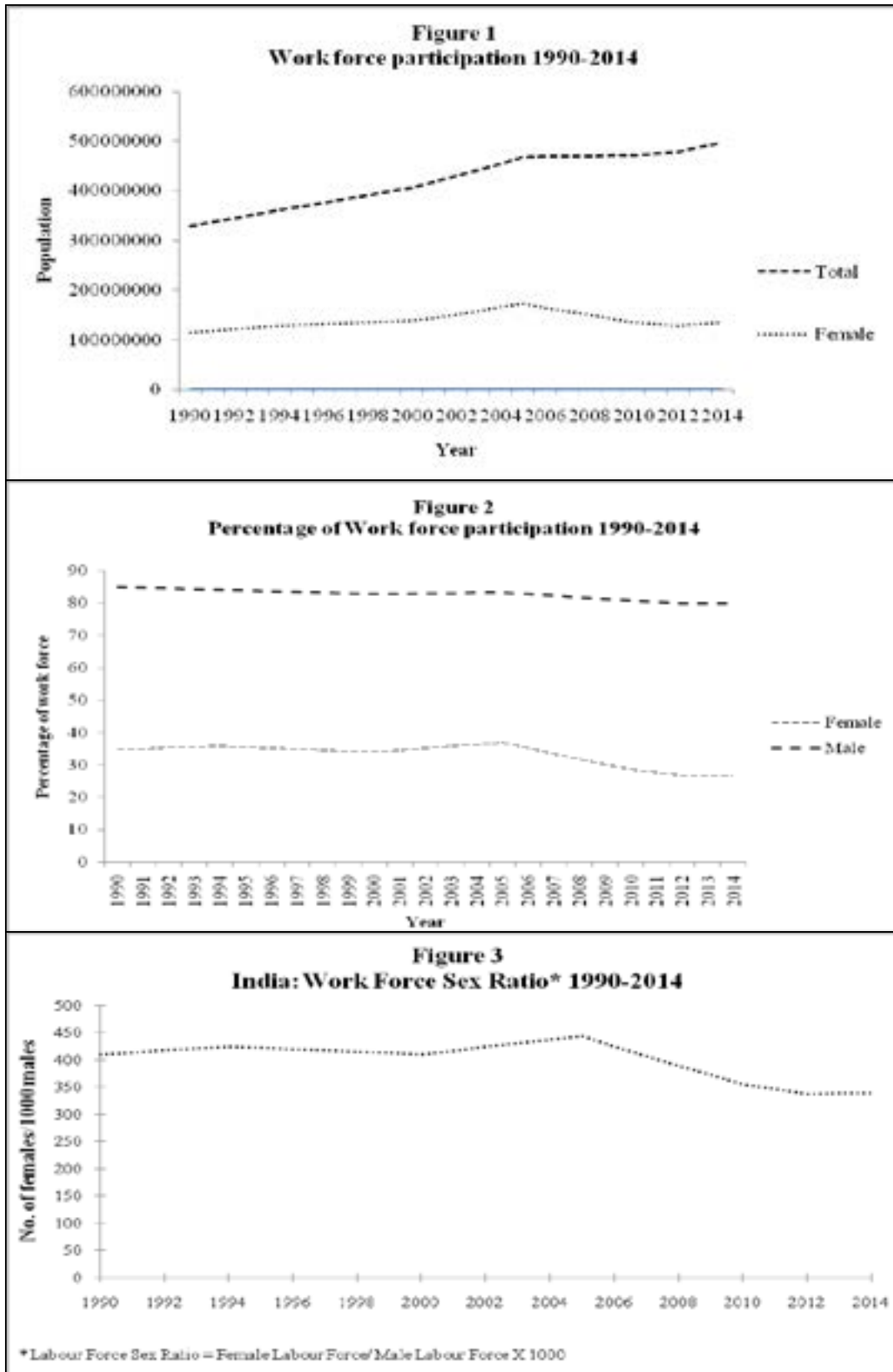
### **Gendered Work Participation**

Recognising the dire need for increasing women empowerment and involving women in the developmental process, ensuring women into the nation building via economic participation became a major agenda. It was believed that once women became self sufficient and independent on the financial part, their societal subjugation would also be reduced. In order to obtain gender parity in all the spheres of life, there should be increase in women's work participation. However, differences in social norms and the gendered perspectives on the role of women and men have always been a hindrance in the equal work participation.

During the tenth plan, it was projected that there would be 50 million employment opportunities created for both the males and females based on the kind of economic growth. The 61<sup>st</sup> NSSO round shows that 47 million persons were provided employment during 2000 to 2005. In the approach paper to the eleventh plan, it was emphasized that gender would be recognized as a cross-cutting theme across all sectors.<sup>14</sup> In order to increase economic participation of women, various employment generation schemes were launched in the backward areas of the country irrespective of gender. Primary among them is the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, also known as NREGA after the scheme became an act. Based on the realization that poverty and unemployment were interrelated, the scheme under the act, aimed at addressing unemployment and poverty at one go. Hence along with the existing poverty alleviation programmes, employment generation programmes was also launched. Besides NREGA, there was the Jawahar Rojgar Yojana, Swarna Jayanti Gram Swarajgar Yojana and others that aimed to provide employment and help in the alleviation of poverty. Schemes like Antodaya, Food for Work and Job Card programmes were put into force so that both health and poverty could be taken care of. It can be said that the NREGA program tried to address the provision of employment on a larger and faster pace to the women.

But according to the recent statistics released by the ILO, it is observed that although the Indian labour force (age 15+) has increased over past few decades, yet the female labour force has declined over the same reference period (Figure 1). The female labour force didn't grow as the total labour force during the period 1990-2014. With an all time high in 2005, the figures for females fell thereafter although the labour force

<sup>14</sup> Ministry of Finance, *Economic Survey of India 2007*, New Delhi, 2007.



Source: ILO report on the World Development Indicators 2016

continued to grow. Similar is the case with the percentage of male and female labour force participation (Figure 2).

It is found that the percentage of labour force participation of male was 85.1 in 1990, whereas for female it was 34.8. The figures subsequently declined for the males steadily but for females it grew towards the mid nineties. In 2005 the percentage of female as well as male labour force was highest after which there was decline. There was a smooth decline in the male labour force whereas for the females it was a sharp one. By 2012, the figures for male appeared steady, whereas for the female 2013 and 2014 the labour force participation was in all time low around 27 percent. Even the work force sex ratio represents a similar pattern (Figure 3).

Female labour force was in a better position in 1990 than 24 years later. The sex ratio which was 408 females per 1000 males in 1990 subsequently decline over time and fell to 337 females per 1000 males in 2014. Until 2008 the ratio was in between 400 to 450, but thereafter the fall in sex ratio in terms of labour force participation has become quite alarming.

## **Conclusion**

Although the percentage of females employed have grown due to education and employment in service sectors, yet the number of women workers in absolute sense was very low when compared to male. The reason behind this is the falling female to male ratio. The sex-ratio in India is lower than most of the countries in the world. The social and biological factors determine the sex-ratio. Briefly stated, it is a composite of both the socio-biological component. In a query for the declining proportion of females in India, Dandekar observed that the higher mortality of the Indian female compared to that of the male is due to social rather than biological factors.<sup>15</sup> The report from the Vital Statistics of Government of India at that time (1971) showed that the sex-ratio at the time of birth was responsible for the male-dominant population in India. The growth in medical science, the preference of male child and his development than the female one and high female mortality before reaching the adulthood have indeed contributed to the fall in the female-male ratio and hence the number of women workers.<sup>16</sup>

Besides the changes incorporated in the definition of work, there have been biases during the process of the data collection too that have made the women's work as marginally employed. The head of the family being a male in most of the households, the respondents in the questionnaires of the enumerators are also male. The male respondents are found to be unwilling to reveal about the employment of the female members of the family. Moreover, as women are the ones who mainly participate as home-makers, their activities are seen to be non-economic. The vast amount of invisible

<sup>15</sup> K. Dandekar, "Why has the Proportion of Women in India's Population Been Declining?", *Economic and Political Weekly*, (Oct 18, 1975), 1663 - 87.

<sup>16</sup> K.M. Sen and A.K.S. Kumar, *op. cit.*



non-marketed productive activities performed by the Indian women population is excluded from the Census definition of Work, 1991 which is very less different than its earlier sources. Hence their contribution to the Gross Domestic product of the nation is nil, unless their status of employment is declared without any bias. As per the Census survey, the activities of women within the household and the unpaid work that they perform don't get accounted for in the data available. However, it gives a fairly good estimate of the women who are engaged in paid work as either main or marginal workers.

The 15<sup>th</sup> census of India and the 9<sup>th</sup> one after independence conducted in the year 2011, focussed on gender sensitization. Great emphasis was laid at the inclusion of women's participation in the economic field. Training and workshops were organised to the surveyors to highlight gender related facts effectively. Gender sensitization was done in order to avoid gender bias. Addressing gender issues and bridging gender gaps were the main focus of Census 2011. Sex-segregated data has thus been generated and a lot of insight has been noticed in major economic and social activities. Workers have been done been categorised not only caste and tribe-wise but also according to educational level.

The United Nations Millennium Development Goals were embraced by 189 countries including India. The MDG Goal 3 was -'gender equality and empower women'. The principles and recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses advocates gender sensitive data avoiding gender biases and biases affecting minority populations. According to the Eleventh Five Year Plan, it is for the first time that an attempt to move beyond empowerment has been recommended. Similarly recognition of women as agents of sustained socio-economic growth and change has also been upheld in the background of Census 2011.

