

GENDER DIMENSIONS OF LABOUR MARKET IN INDIA: TREND RE-EXAMINED

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines dimensions of the employment challenge in India from a gender lens. We find an unprecedented decline in the number of workers for the first time since independence due to a substantial reduction in rural female work participation. A closer look at the data for the period 2004-05 to 2017-18 shows a consistent decline in female work participation in India while male work participation more or less remained constant; the worrying part is rural women from poorest, vulnerable, illiterate, Dalit and Muslim communities have borne the disproportionate brunt of job loss. There has been a massive reduction in female workers in the unpaid family labour category of self employment and casual labour, in agriculture, manufacturing and the informal sector, especially in rural areas. Although, female workers have also gained in new employment opportunities created in regular salaried jobs, formal jobs and in service sector. However, gains to female workers are very small compared to gains to their male counterpart and could not offset their net loss in agriculture, manufacturing and in the informal sector. On average, female workers are paid a significantly lower wage than male workers, even in the regular salaried jobs. On detailed examination of those who were not in the labour market, we found that around 60 per cent of working age women in India were engaged in 'domestic duties' category in 2017-18. These are clear sign of female worker's deteriorating condition in India's labour market with strong social dimensions. Therefore, the paper argues for a blend of 'Active and passive' labour market policies to address multifaceted challenges of the gender gap in India's labour market and ensure access to decent jobs and to protect these vulnerably placed women workers.

Key words: Gender inequality, quality of jobs, informalisation, labour market segregation, wage inequality.

1. INTRODUCTION

Promoting gender equality in the labour market is considered to be smart economics as it can affect poverty, inequality, enhance economic well being

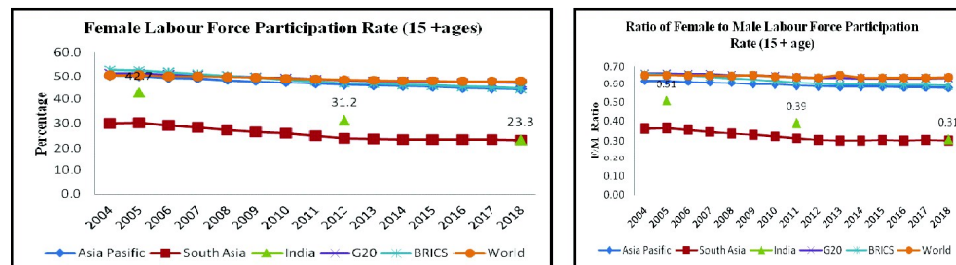
and inclusive economic growth of a country through increase in household income, improvement in nutrition & productivity and an increase in investment. In the era of globalisation, no country can develop and achieve its full potential if half of the population is locked in non-remunerative, less productive and non-economic activities (GoI, 2020). This is the prime reason gender equality has received considerable attention recently. Various goals have been laid down to achieve gender equality in general and in the world of work in particular at most of the international policy fora recently. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) have not only identified gender equality as a separate dedicated goal (Goal 5) out of its 17 goals to be achieved by 2030 but have also identified gender equality and women empowerment as critical channel for achieving the other SDG's. Therefore, Goal 5 of the SDG's which aims at achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls by 2030, gives paramount importance to gender equality in access to employment opportunities.

Similarly, the G20 summit in 2014 made a history by including a dedicated target to reduce the gender gap in the labour market in G20 economies by 25 percent by 2025. This is popularly known as the Brisbane goal. Moreover, G20 countries have also outlined the country-specific strategies to achieve Brisbane's goal and monitors progress and action taken by the member countries towards Brisbane Goal every year. In the recently concluded 14th G20 Osaka Summit in June 2019, the world leader's identified women's empowerment as an essential component for sustainable and inclusive growth and committed to take further action to improve the quality of women's employment, reduce gender pay gaps, and end all forms of discrimination against women and combat stereotypes and to recognize women as agents of peace, and in the prevention and resolution of conflict (G20 Osaka Leaders' Declaration, 2019). Due to such consistent efforts by these multilateral fora, gender dimensions of employment have been integrated into core development policy agenda of the some G20 member countries. As a result, female labour force participation has increased dramatically in some countries, and the global gender gap has declined.

As far as India is concerned, as the influence of macroeconomic consideration is increasing on the Indian labour market; the outcomes in the labour market are showing distinctly different outcomes for women compared to men. Various studies have documented that the male labour force participation remains constant while female labour force participation has declined significantly in India in recent years irrespective of location (rural and urban), age group (15–24 and 24+), and economic activities (agriculture, industry and

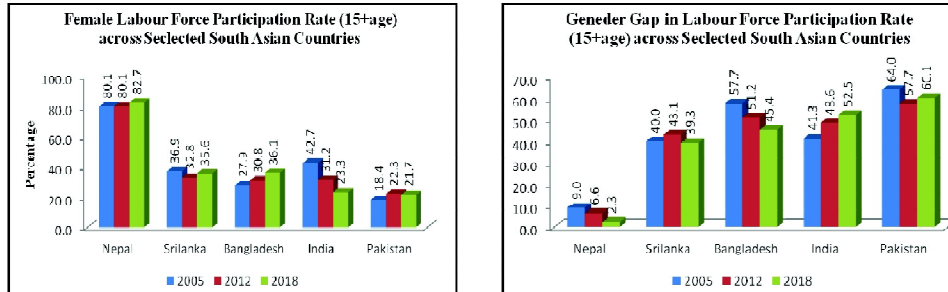
services) (Himanshu, 2011; Chandrashekhar and Ghosh, 2011; Hirway, 2012; Klasen & Pieters, 2013; ILO Global Employment Report, 2013; Kapsos *et. al*, 2014, Ara, 2019). According to recent statistics based on ILO, global female Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR)¹ for 15 years and above age has declined marginally by three percentage points (from 50.4 percent in 2004 to 47.4 percent in 2018) (Figure 1). Similar is the trend for G20, BRICS and Asia-Pacific region. However, decline rate is sharper in India and it has recorded lowest female labour force participation rate in post independence period. According to various rounds of NSO and PLFS data², the female labour force participation rate in India for 15 years and above age has declined by 11.5 percentage points from 42.7 in 2004-05 to 31.2 percent in 2011-12 and by 7.9 percentage points from 31.2 percent in 2011-12 to 23.3 percent in 2017-18. As a result of this, the gender gap in India's labour market has widen further which is reflected from the declining trend in the ratio of female to male labour force participation rate (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Gender Gap in Labour Force Participation



Source: International Labour Organisation (ILO) modelled estimates and NSO Unit Record, Various Rounds.

Among India's neighbouring South Asian countries, female labour force participation is highest in Nepal and the lowest in Pakistan (Figure 2). Between 2005-2018, female labour force participation has shown increasing trends in these countries except India, where it has shown a consistent declining trend. Neighbour countries like Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh are ahead of India on the path to gender parity; the worrying part is that gender inequality in India's labour market is increasing due to a consistent decline in female labour force participation (Figure 2). This declining trend in female labour force participation has further worsened India's ranking in Global Gender Gap Index. India has been ranked at 112th among 153 countries in gender gap index and at 149th in economic participation and opportunity subindex of the World Economic Forum's *Global Gender Gap Report 2020*.

Figure 2: Gender Gap in Labour Force Participation across Selected Countries

Source: ILO modelled estimates and NSO unit-level data, Various Rounds.

Even though women account for almost 49 percent of India's population, their contribution to GDP is only 18 percent and their participation in labour market is only 23 percent and is declining over several NSO-EUS rounds (Mc Kinsey Global Institute, 2015). A joint paper published by Ex-IMF Chief and Christine Lagarde and Norway's Prime Minister Erna Solberg estimated that increasing female participation in the labour market to the same level as men can boost India's GDP by 27 percent (Kumar, 2019). Similarly, the Mc Kinsey Global Institute estimated that promoting gender parity in the labour market can add \$12 trillion to global GDP by 2025 and up to \$770 billion to India's GDP-around one-sixth of our cherished goal of \$5 trillion economy by enhancing gender parity in its labour market (Mc Kinsey Global Institute; 2015).

Given the significance of gender equality for growth and productivity and somewhat little contemporary literature on the gender dimension of employment challenge in India, it will be of interest to know the detailed characteristics of the labour market in India from a gender lens. In view of this, the present study analyses overall access to work and working conditions available to female workers with respect to level of education, employment status, sectors and occupations. By analysing these detailed characteristics, this paper attempts to measure the extent of job creation/loss and tries understand whether job loss to female is the result of the job creation process in some sectors dominated by urban, highly educated and rich women or is the result of job displacement in some sectors, overwhelmingly represented by rural, less educated and women from poorest strata of the society.

2. FEMALE WORK PARTICIPATION IN INDIA

Although the fertility rate in India has declined and female literacy rate has improved significantly over the years, but women participation rate has reduced

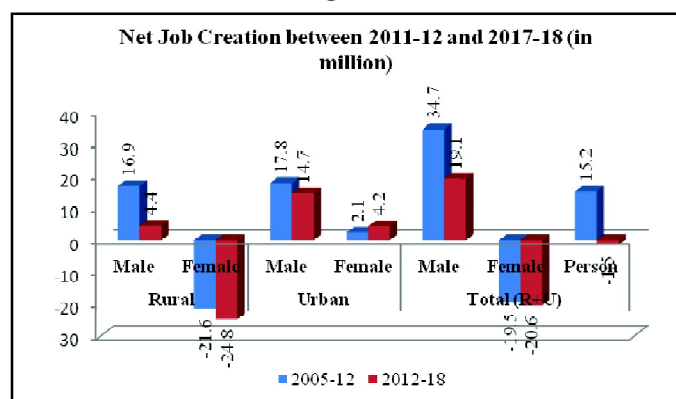
substantially in India. According to NSO-EUS and PLFS data, the Work Participation Rate (WPR) of male more or less remains constant around 52-54 percent during 2004-05 to 2017-18 while that of female has declined by 6.8 percentage points from 28.7 percent in 2004-05 to 21.9 percent in 2011-12 and by 5.4 percentage points from 21.9 percent in 2011-12 to 16.6 percent in 2017-18 as per usual status (Table 1). The female work participation rate is just half of the male work participation in rural areas and one third that of male in urban areas. Though female work participation rate is higher in rural areas than urban areas, the rate of decline is also sharper in rural areas compared to urban areas. Female work participation rate more or less remained constant around 14 per cent in urban areas while it has reduced by 7.9 percentage points during 2004-11 and by 7.3 percentage points during 2011-18 (from 24.8 percent in 2011-12 to 17.5 percent in 2017-18) in rural areas. (Table 1).

Table 1: Worker Population Ratio (ps+ss, all age) by Sector and Sex in India

WPR	Rural		Urban		Total (R+U)		
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Person
	(in percent)						
2004-05	54.6	32.7	54.8	16.6	54.7	28.7	42.0
2011-12	54.3	24.8	54.6	14.7	54.4	21.9	38.6
2017-18	51.7	17.5	53.0	14.2	52.1	16.5	34.7
	No. of Workers (in millions)						
2004-05	217.7	123.4	91.4	25.2	309.1	148.6	457.7
2011-12	234.6	101.8	109.2	27.3	343.8	129.1	472.9
2017-18	239.0	77.0	123.9	31.5	362.9	108.5	471.4

Source: NSO unit-level data, various rounds.

Figure 3



Source: Calculation based on NSO unit-level data.

In absolute terms³, around 20.6 million women workers in India have lost their jobs with job loss of 24.8 million in rural areas while urban woman workers experienced job gain of 4.2 million during 2011-12 to 2017-18. Although around 19.1 million additional male workers and 4.2 million additional urban female workers have joined the workforce in India during 2011-12 to 2017-18. However, there has been 1.6 million job loss due to substantial reduction in rural women workers, and India has experienced unprecedented decline in the number of workers for the first time since independence (Table 1 and Figure 3).

The unprecedented decline in the absolute number of workers is a matter of concern; the worrying part is rural women from poorest, vulnerable, illiterate, Dalit and Muslim communities have borne the disproportionate brunt. As per NSO-EUS and PLFS estimates, the share of women from the illiterate category has declined by 6.2 percentage points (from 50.8 percent in 2011-12 to 44.6 percent in 2017-18) and 17.3 million women workers from this category have lost their jobs during 2011-18. However, the work participation of women with higher level of education has increased (Table 2). Similarly, around 13.8 million women from the poorest & poor income groups and 19.3 million women from Hindu Dalit and Muslims communities have been pushed out of the workforce during the same period (Table 3 and Table 4). These clearly indicate that the labour market process is exclusionary, and women from poorest, illiterate and less privileged groups are bearing the disproportionate brunt of multiple overlapping vulnerabilities of caste, class and gender discrimination through its multiple channels.

Table 2: Distribution of Female Workers (ps+ss, all age) by Level of Education in India

<i>Level of Education</i>	<i>Distribution of Workers (in %)</i>		<i>Number of Workers (in million)</i>		<i>Net Job Creation/Loss (in million)</i>
	<i>2011-12</i>	<i>2017-18</i>	<i>2011-12</i>	<i>2017-18</i>	
Illiterate	50.8	44.6	65.6	48.4	-17.3
Up to middle level	32.8	32.8	42.3	35.6	-6.7
Secondary	9.8	11.9	12.7	12.9	0.2
Higher	6.6	10.7	8.5	11.6	3.1
Total	100.0	100.0	129.1	108.5	-20.6

Source: NSO(2013), 68th Round and NSO(2019), PLFS, Unit-level data.

Table 3: Distribution of Female Workers (ps+ss, all age) by Income Group in India

<i>Income Group</i>	<i>Distribution of Workers (in %)</i>		<i>Number of Workers (in million)</i>		<i>Net Job Creation/ Loss (in million)</i>
	<i>2011-12</i>	<i>2017-18</i>	<i>2011-12</i>	<i>2017-18</i>	
Poorest	26.5	25.9	34.1	28.1	-6.0
Poor	22.9	20.1	29.5	21.8	-7.8
Middle	20.8	24.8	26.8	26.9	0.1
Rich	17.3	16.2	22.3	17.6	-4.7
Richest	12.6	13.0	16.3	14.1	-2.2
Total	100.0	100.0	129.1	108.5	-20.6

Source: NSO (2013), 68th Round and NSO (2019), PLFS, Unit level data.

Table 4: Distribution of Female Workers (ps+ss, all ages) by Socio-Religious Category in India, 2017-18

<i>Socio-Religious Category</i>	<i>Distribution of Workers (in %)</i>		<i>Number of Workers (in million)</i>		<i>Net Job Creation/ Loss (in million)</i>
	<i>2011-12</i>	<i>2017-18</i>	<i>2011-12</i>	<i>2017-18</i>	
H-SC/ST	31.5	31.5	40.6	34.2	-6.5
H-OBC	38.3	37.0	49.5	40.2	-9.3
H-Gen	15.9	18.2	20.5	19.8	-0.7
Muslim	8.6	7.1	11.1	7.7	-3.5
Other Minorities	5.7	6.2	7.4	6.7	-0.6
Total	100.0	100.0	129.1	108.5	-20.6

Source: NSO(2013), 68th Round and NSO(2019), PLFS, Unit level data.

The decline in already low female work participation and the sharp increase in the gender gap in work participation raise several questions. It will be interesting to know why majority of working-age female are out of work force. If they are not in the labour market, where are they? Are they attending education institutes and their work participation has delayed, or they are available and seeking for jobs but are not getting employment opportunities due to labour market constraints? Detailed analysis of those who are out of the workforce may facilitate a better understanding of the issue.

To understand the declining trend in female work participation, the activity status of females outside the workforce has also been examined separately for youth (15-29) as well as for the age groups (30-59 & 15-59) (Table 5). We find

that a higher proportion young male were unemployed (10.45 percent) than young females (2.94) in 2017-18. Remarkably, there has been significant jump in proportion of youth attending education with an increase of 15.28 percentage points from 23.19 percent in 2004-05 to 38.47 percent in 2017-18 while that of the young female has almost doubled from 15.88 percent in 2004-05 to 30.30 percent in 2017-18. This is a good indicator as one third of youth were acquiring skills and more skilled work force is expected to join the labour market in the coming future. However, it is depressing to note that around 53 percent of young female were attending domestic duties in 2017-18, and this proportion has increased over the last decade. This proportion further increases if we move from 15-29 to productive age group 30-59, where females are out of education; the proportion of women engaged in domestic duties is 65 percent. For the entire productive age group (15-59 years) around 60 percent of women were engaged in domestic duties in 2017-18 while that of the male is even less than one percent (Table 5).

Table 5: Distribution of Non-Workers by (ps+ss, 15-59 years) by activity and Sex in India (in %)

<i>Out of Work Force</i>	<i>2004-05</i>		<i>2011-12</i>		<i>2017-18</i>	
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
<i>15-29 age group</i>						
Unemployed	3.91	2.18	3.77	1.62	10.45	2.94
Attending education institutes	23.19	15.88	34.33	25.44	38.47	30.30
Attending domestic duties	0.47	45.92	0.51	49.25	1.03	52.29
Recipient of remittances/Disabled/Others	1.72	1.12	1.60	0.91	1.72	1.00
Total	29.28	65.09	40.21	77.25	51.68	86.53
<i>30-59 age group</i>						
Unemployed	0.43	0.49	0.36	0.24	1.29	0.48
Attending education institutes	0.03	0.05	0.03	0.05	0.10	0.11
Attending domestic duties	0.24	46.03	0.22	58.52	0.37	65.39
Recipient of remittances/Disabled/Others	2.26	1.89	1.96	1.84	2.69	2.84
Total	2.96	48.47	2.57	60.63	4.45	68.82
<i>15-59 age group</i>						
Unemployed	2.01	1.24	1.86	0.83	5.3	1.51
Attending education institutes	10.5	7.07	15.11	10.89	16.9	12.75
Attending domestic duties	0.34	45.98	0.35	54.57	0.66	59.9
Recipient of remittances/Disabled/Others	2.01	1.55	1.81	1.44	2.27	2.07
Total	14.86	55.83	19.12	67.72	25.13	76.24

Source: NSO unit-level data, various rounds, MoSPI

Such outcomes may be due to five factors. *Firstly*, the unequal division of household chores among male and female due to a social construct. In India, male are considered to be bread earners of the family while female are considered to be responsible for all household work and care activities. As a result, women hardly get time to participate in economic activities outside their home sphere. *Secondly*, female workers are less educated and skilled compared to male workers. This limits their access to employment opportunities to limited unskilled sectors or occupations. *Thirdly*, there may be stigma against female work participation due to social, cultural, regional and institutional factors. In a patriarchal set up, it is generally seen that upper caste and higher income family choose to educate their girl child. However, they restrain their movement and work participation to maintain purity, dignity and family honours. *Fourthly*, the sampling frame of NSO is not good enough to capture the extent and nature of female work and work of female are clubbed into the 'domestic duties' category⁴. The recent decline in female work participation may be due to movement of women from low productivity informal sector to sectors that are difficult to measure by NSO surveys. The other probable reason may be 'discourage work effect'. Very often, it is noticed that female workers are not able to get suitable jobs due to employers prejudice. Often, female workers are not being paid at par with their male counterpart despite being employed in the same sector and occupation and endowed with similar education and skill. As a result, they tend to move out of the labour market (Ara, 2019). However, an in-depth analysis is required to understand these dimensions of the labour market. A detailed analysis of female workers by employment status, sector and occupation may facilitate better understanding of nature, structure and the extent of job loss.

3. NATURE AND STRUCTURE OF FEMALE EMPLOYMENT IN INDIA

To analyse the structure of employment, workers have been grouped into three categories based on employment status. These includes: self-employed workers; regular salaried workers; and casual labourers. The self employed category includes those who work for themselves and do not sell his/her labour-power to anyone else in return for wage. This category of workers includes all those workers who operated their enterprises or are engaged in a profession or trade, either on own account, individually or with partners, or as home-based workers (NSO, 2019). However, regular salaried are those workers who receive pre-determined wages on regular basis. Casual worker includes those who are hired for a very short time period on a daily or monthly basis. Out of these three

categories of employment, regular salaried categories are considered the best and casual employments are inferior and most unattractive kind of employment. As far as self employment activities are concerned, the quality of this category of employment depends on its subcategories. Employer category is considered to be the best, and unpaid family workers are considered the most inferior category of jobs in qualitative terms. Generally, self employment is considered to be better than casual wage employment but unpaid family labour is considered inferior to casual employment.

The distribution of workers by employment status gives an interesting insight into the labour market segregation. We find that around half of India's workforce was engaged in self-employment activities during 2011-12 as well as in 2017-18 (Table 6). When we disaggregate this category of worker, what is noticeable is that majority of self employed male workers were engaged in own account activities while majority of self employed women were working as unpaid family labour especially in rural areas. While the proportion of female workers in own-account and employer category has increased and unpaid family labour (helper) has declined, but still around one third of female workers with 39 percent in rural areas and 11 percent in urban areas are working as unpaid family labour in 2017-18. In absolute terms, there has been job loss to the extent of 12.7 million to women workers with 11.6 million in rural and 1.1 million in urban areas in this category of employment during 2011-2018 (Table 6).

The regular salaried job which is considered as best kind of job in qualitative terms; it provides livelihood to a little less than quarter of male and female workers and this proportion has increased for all categories of workers viz. rural male, rural female, urban male and urban female. The proportion of workers in this category of jobs have improved by five percentage points from 18 percent in 2011-12 to 23 percent in 2017-18 with the addition of 26.2 million (12.2 million in rural areas and 13.9 million in urban areas) new employment opportunities created in this category (Table 6). The rate of improvement is faster for female workers compared to male workers, especially in urban areas. The proportion of female workers in regular salaried jobs have increased by 8 percentage points from 12.7 percent in 2011-12 to 21 percent in 2017-18 with addition of 7.1 million new jobs (2.4 million in rural areas and 4.7 million in urban areas). This is a remarkable achievement. However, there was a significant jump of around 19.1 million new jobs for male workers in this category with 9.8 million in rural areas and 9.2 million during the same period and more than

two-third of the new employment opportunities created in this category has gone to male workers (Table 6).

Table 6: Distribution of Workers (ps+ss, all age) by Sector, Employment Status and Sex in India 2011-12 (in %)

<i>Employment Status</i>	<i>Rural</i>		<i>Urban</i>		<i>Total (R+U)</i>		
	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
Self Employed	54.5	59.3	41.7	42.8	50.7	56.1	52.2
<i>Own Account Workers</i>	40.2	18.1	32.1	25.7	37.8	19.6	32.8
<i>Employers</i>	1.5	0.4	2.7	0.5	1.8	0.4	1.4
<i>Unpaid Family Labours</i>	12.8	40.7	6.9	16.7	11.1	36.1	18.0
Regular Salaried Workers	10.0	5.6	43.4	42.8	19.8	12.7	17.8
Casual Workers	35.5	35.1	14.9	14.3	29.4	31.2	29.9
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
2017-18 (in %)							
Self Employed	57.8	57.8	39.2	34.7	52.3	51.9	52.2
<i>Own Account Workers</i>	46.1	18.6	31.3	22.9	41.7	19.7	36.6
<i>Employers</i>	1.9	0.5	3.6	0.8	2.4	0.5	2.0
<i>Unpaid Family Labours</i>	9.8	38.7	4.3	11.0	8.2	31.7	13.6
Regular Salaried Workers	14.0	10.5	45.7	52.1	23.4	21.0	22.8
Casual Workers	28.2	31.8	15.1	13.1	24.3	27.0	24.9
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Number of Workers (in millions)							
2011-12							
Self Employed	127.8	60.3	45.6	11.7	173.3	72.0	245.4
<i>Own Account Workers</i>	94.3	18.5	35.1	7.0	129.4	25.5	154.7
<i>Employers</i>	3.5	0.4	3.0	0.1	6.4	0.6	7.0
<i>Unpaid Family Labours</i>	30.0	41.4	7.5	4.6	37.5	46.0	83.7
Regular Salaried Workers	23.6	5.7	47.4	11.7	71.0	17.4	88.3
Casual Workers	83.2	35.8	16.2	3.9	99.5	39.7	139.2
Total	234.6	101.8	109.2	27.3	343.8	129.1	472.9
2017-18							
Self Employed	138.2	44.5	48.6	10.9	186.8	55.4	242.1
<i>Own Account Workers</i>	110.2	14.3	38.8	7.2	149.0	21.5	170.5
<i>Employers</i>	4.5	0.3	4.5	0.3	9.0	0.6	9.6
<i>Unpaid Family Labours</i>	23.5	29.8	5.3	3.5	28.8	33.3	62.0
Regular Salaried Workers	33.4	8.1	56.6	16.4	90.0	24.5	114.5
Casual Workers	67.4	24.5	18.7	4.1	86.1	28.6	114.6
Total	239.0	77.0	123.9	31.5	362.9	108.5	471.2

Note: M, F, P indicates Male, Female and Person respectively. Source: NSO (2013), 68th Round and NSO (2019), PLFS, Unit-level data.

In casual jobs, the proportion of male and female workers declined by 5.1 percentage points and by 4.2 percentage points respectively during 2011-18, but this segment of the labour market still provides livelihood opportunities to around a quarter of workers in India. The magnitude of the decline is very sharp in this category, and we find the fall in employment of rural women by 11.3 million and those of rural men by 15.8 million during 2011-18 (Table 6).

The sectoral analysis also gives similar outcomes. We find that more than half of female workers and around 40 percent of male workers were engaged in agriculture and allied activities which contributes only 16 percent of GDP and its contribution to GDP is declining. However, there has been decline in the proportion of male and female workers in agriculture sector (Table 7). The distribution of male workers in this sector declined by 3.3 percentage points (from 43.6 percent in 2011-12 to 40.3 percent in 2017-18) while that of female has declined by 5.8 percentage points (from 62.8 percent in 2011-12 to 57 percent in 2017-18). In absolute terms, there has been a net job loss of 23 million in this sector, with 4 million lesser jobs for male and 19 million lesser jobs for female workers (Table 7). This outcome may be due to the changing preference of people towards non-farm sector with improvement in education. It is generally seen that employment opportunities and aspiration level of people changes with the improvement in education level. Being lower wages in agriculture and allied activities, intensive mechanisation in agriculture, structural shift towards the non-agriculture segment, agrarian distress and decline in international demand for agro-based products could be driving rural female and unpaid family workers engaged in this segment out of the workforce. However, the outcome cannot be generalized without analysing the extent of job creation/displacement in other sectors.

The industry sector which is considered to be absorber of unskilled, semi skilled and skilled workers; it contributes 30 percent to GDP and provides livelihood opportunities to around quarter of workers in India. When we further disaggregate this sector, we observed that the share of women in the manufacturing and construction sector has declined marginally while men have gained in these two sub-sectors. In absolute terms, women have lost around 3.8 million jobs in manufacturing sector and 2.4 million in construction sector during 2011-18 while around 8.7 million additional male have gained employment in these two sub-sectors during the same period (Table 7).

The service sector is considered as the most buoyant sector of Indian economy; it provides employment opportunities to around quarter of female workers while this proportion is around 34 per cent for their male counterpart.

Table 7: Distribution of workers (ps+ss, all age) by Industry Category (NIC-1 Digit) and Sex in India

Industry Category (NIC)	2011-12		2017-18		Net Job Creation/Loss		
	(in percent)				(in millions)		
	M	F	M	F	M	F	P
Agriculture and allied activities	43.6	62.8	40.3	57.0	-3.9	-19.2	-23.1
Industry	25.9	20.0	26.9	17.8	8.7	-6.5	2.2
Mining and quarrying	0.6	0.3	0.5	0.2	-0.4	-0.2	-0.6
Manufacturing	12.3	13.4	12.0	12.5	1.4	-3.8	-2.4
Electricity, gas and water	0.6	0.2	0.7	0.2	0.5	-0.1	0.3
Construction	12.3	6.1	13.7	5.0	7.3	-2.4	4.9
Services	30.5	17.2	32.8	25.2	14.2	5.1	19.3
Wholesale/trade	11.4	3.9	11.7	4.8	3.3	0.2	3.5
IT and transport, communication etc.	8.3	1.6	9.4	2.5	5.5	0.7	6.2
Financial intermediation	1.1	0.5	1.1	0.8	0.5	0.2	0.7
Real estate	0.3	0.02	0.3	0.05	0.1	0.02	0.1
Professional and public administration	3.5	1.2	4.1	2.1	2.8	0.7	3.5
Education	2.3	4.7	2.6	7.6	1.5	2.2	3.7
Health and social services	0.7	1.4	0.8	2.5	0.4	0.9	1.3
Community and personal services	2.5	1.9	2.3	1.8	-0.3	-0.5	-0.8
Domestic work	0.4	2.0	0.5	3.0	0.5	0.7	1.2
Total	100	100	100	100	19.1	-20.6	-1.5

Note: M, F, P indicates Male, Female and Person respectively. Source: NSO(2013), 68th Round and NSO(2019), PLFS, Unit-level data.

Interestingly, the proportion of women workers in the service sector has increased by 8 percentage points from 17.2 percent in 2011-12 to 25.2 percent in 2017-18. In absolute terms, men gained 14.2 million new employment opportunities in the service sector while women workers gained only 5.1 million new jobs in this sector during 2011-18. When we further disaggregate subsectors of the service sector, what is noticeable is that female gained mostly in female dominated, less lucrative sectors like education, health and social services, domestic work etc. In contrast, gain to male has come from the spectrum of lucrative activities like wholesale trade, information communication, professional and public administration etc. For example: out of 5.1 million new jobs created for female workers in this sector, around 2.2 million have been added in the education sector, 0.9 million in health sector, 0.7 million in domestic work, 0.7 million in the IT sector. However, male workers gained by 5.5 million new jobs

in the information & communication sector, 3.3 million new jobs in wholesale trade, 2.8 million in professional and public administration and 1.5 million additional jobs in the education sector during 2011-18 (Table 7).

As far as the qualitative dimension of employment challenge is concerned, we find that the proportions of workers in organised sector have increased from 17.5 percent in 2011-12 to 19.2 percent in 2017-18, with an increase of 7.8 million new jobs during the same time. Similarly, total formal employment in the economy also increased from 8 percent in 2011-12 to 10 percent in 2017-18 with an increase of 8.1 million new formal employments. This was mainly due to an increase in formal employment in organised sector (Table 8). However, still half of the workers in organised sector were informal workers with no job security and no social security. Moreover, 81 percent of workers were engaged in unorganised sector and around 90 percent of workers were informal workers⁵ in India in 2017-18. Gender wise, large proportions of female workers were informal workers compared to male workers. Although, there have been improvement over the years and new formal jobs have been created, but job gain to female is only 2.5 million while gain to male workers was just double than that of female workers. Women lost out heavily in informal employment to the extent of 23.1 million while male workers gained by 13.5 million informal jobs during 2011-18 (Table 8).

Table 8: Distribution of Workers in Formal and Informal Employment (ps+ss, all ages) by sex in India

Type of Employment	Orga- nised	Unorga- nised	Total	Orga- nised	Unorga- nised	Total	Orga- nised	Unorga- nised	Total
	2011-12 (in %)			2017-18 (in %)			Net Job Creation/ Loss (in million)		
	<i>Person</i>								
Formal	45.4	0.4	8.0	48.9	0.7	10.0	7.1	1.0	8.1
Informal	54.6	99.6	92.0	51.1	99.3	90.0	-1.3	-8.2	-9.6
Total	17.3	82.7	100	19.2	80.8	100	5.8	-7.3	-1.5
	<i>Male</i>								
Formal	46.9	0.5	9.1	51.3	0.8	10.4	4.7	0.9	5.6
Informal	53.1	99.5	90.9	48.7	99.2	89.6	-1.1	14.6	13.5
Total	19.1	80.9	100	19.1	80.9	100	3.6	15.5	19.1
	<i>Female</i>								
Formal	33.4	0.3	5.2	41.3	0.5	8.5	2.4	0.1	2.5
Informal	66.6	99.7	94.8	58.7	99.5	91.5	-0.3	-22.8	-23.1
Total	14.7	85.3	100	19.5	80.5	100	2.1	-22.7	-20.6

Source: NSO(2013), 68th Round and NSO(2019), PLFS, Unit-level data.

As far as workers' earnings are concerned, on average female workers are being paid lower wages than their male counterparts. According to PLFS estimate, female workers were paid around 20 percent lower wage than that of their male counterpart in urban areas and 30 percent less in rural areas even in regular salaried jobs in all four quarters. This is reflected from female to male wage ratio which is around 80 percent in urban areas and 70 percent in rural areas in regular salaried jobs. The gender pay gap is higher in casual jobs. On average, female workers earned just 60 per cent wage of their male counterparts in urban areas and 66 percent in rural areas in all quarters in 2017-18 (Table 9).

Table 9: Average Daily earnings (in Rs) by Employment Status and Sex in India (2017-18)

<i>Quarters</i>	<i>Regular Salaried workers</i>			<i>Casual workers</i>		
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>F/M</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>F/M</i>
Urban Areas						
July- September 2017	577.1	463.2	0.8	314	192	0.61
October- December 2017	600.5	502.6	0.84	318	186	0.58
January – March 2018	609.2	492.6	0.81	328	189	0.58
April- June 2018	611.8	482.9	0.79	335	201	0.6
Rural Areas						
July- September 2017	422.0	292.6	0.69	253	166	0.66
October- December 2017	433.5	284.5	0.66	265	172	0.65
January – March 2018	481.5	285.0	0.59	270	175	0.65
April- June 2018	467.5	329.8	0.71	282	179	0.63

Source: NSO(2019), PLFS data.

The above analysis reveals that the nature and structure of employment have changed considerably over time, and employment growth has shown some peculiar characteristics in India. *Firstly*, although India is still one of the fastest-growing economies globally, the employment content of the growth has declined, and there has been unprecedented decline in the number of workers for the first time since independence due to substantial reduction in rural female work participation. The worrying part is rural women from poorest, vulnerable, illiterate, Dalit and Muslim communities have borne the disproportionate brunt of job loss. However, the total number of male and urban female workers has increased during 2012-18. *Secondly*, there has been a consistent decline in female

work participation in India since 2004-05 and India has recorded lowest female work participation rate in post independence period. When we further analyse the proportion of those who were out of workforce, we found that most males were either attending education institute or were unemployed while around 60 percent of working age female were attending domestic duties only. The proportion of working-age male and female in the unemployed category has also increased sharply. *Thirdly*, new employment opportunities have been created in the organised sector and in the formal employment category, but the rate of growth is very low and could not offset the net loss in female employment in unorganised sector and informal employment³. Further, female workers gained only one third of whatever little employment opportunities have been created in organised sector and formal employment categories while men gained two-thirds of new jobs created in these segments. *Fourth*, although proportion of informal workers in organised sector has declined during 2011-12 to 2017-18 but still more than half of the jobs in organised segments were informal in nature with no job security and no social security. *Fifth*, there has been a substantial reduction in female workers in the unpaid family labour category of self employment and casual labour, especially in rural areas. This could be due to migration of male members out of rural areas and closure of activities in which female workers were employed as helper. It could be due to increase in household responsibilities of women workers in absence of male members of the family. Remarkably, employment in regular salaried jobs has improved substantially irrespective of gender and location. *Sixth*, employment in agriculture and allied activities has declined drastically. The rate of decline is sharper for female workers than male workers. This could be due to relatively lower wages in the agriculture sector; people prefer to move to high productive manufacturing and tertiary sector with the improvement in education and skill. Intensive mechanisation in agriculture, agrarian distress and decline in international demand for agro-based products could be the other probable reasons behind the decline in rural female and unpaid family workers engaged in this segment and pushing them out of the workforce. However, this sector still provides livelihood to more than half of the female workers and a little less than half of the total workforce in the country. *Seventh*, women are the net loser in all sub-categories of industry sector, and loss is higher in manufacturing and construction sector. However, male workers gained by 8.7 million new jobs created in these two sub-sectors during the same period. *Eighth*, in the service sector the most buoyant sector of the post-reform India, the gender divide is much sharper with men gaining most in lucrative sectors like wholesale trade,

professional and public administration, information communication, transport storage and communication, while most gain to women coming from the 'other services'. When we disaggregate the other services what is noticeable is that most gain to women is coming from domestic work, education and health and social services. *Ninth*, women workers still earns 30 percent less than men in regular salaried jobs and around 40 percent lower wages than their male counterparts in casual jobs.

This paper has tried to understand the nature, structure and trend in female work participation in India based on secondary data. However, a detailed empirical field based study is required to understand determinants of female work participation at local and regional level. Further, research is also required to understand the nature of work taken by women. How exactly cultural, patriarchal and social factors restricting female work participation in India? How reproductive and unpaid care work by women member of the family supports productive activity of other family members and contributes to national GDP? What are the measures which can be taken to capture the work of women especially in informal sector and unpaid activities in national sample surveys? These questions are avenues for future research.

4. CONCLUSION

The above mentioned features of employment reveal that the conditions of female workers are more precarious. The recent decline in already low female work participation in India has further deteriorated their position. The female labour force participation rate in India is substantially lower than that of the global average of 48 percent; the worrying part is that it is declining consistently over the years, and rural women from the poorest, vulnerable, illiterate, Dalit and Muslim communities engaged in agriculture and informal activities are bearing the disproportionate brunt of job loss. We cannot reap the benefit of demographic dividend and achieve our cherished goal of \$5 trillion economy unless we bridge the gender gap in access to employment opportunities and provide productive and decent jobs to all. Therefore, urgent policy intervention is required to ensure access to productive and decent jobs and to protect these vulnerably placed women in India. The situation calls for a blend of 'Active and passive' labour market policies for employment generation and to ensure minimum conditions of work for the female workers.

In order to bridge the gender gap in employment, emphasis should be given on inclusive economic recovery in post pandemic period. In this regard,

sector having high long term employment elasticity needs to be focused. Manufacturing sector in general and small & micro enterprises in particular needs to be targeted as these sectors has potentiality to generate higher employment by absorbing semi skilled, skilled and all kinds of workers. Effort should be made to create more decent or formal jobs through labour intensive growth especially in backward regions. As highlighted by various studies, many women want to enter into workforce as part time workers due to family responsibilities. Therefore, quantity and quality of such part-time and flexible jobs needs to be improved. At the same time, effort should also be made to enhance the productivity of workers. The girl child should be encouraged for higher education, technical education and skilling training by providing them with scholarship, free hostel facility, free tuition facility and remedial classes. This would improve their capability, productivity and would reduce pre-labour market segregation. Various studies have documented that female workers are not able to participate in labour market due to lack of safe and affordable transport facilities, especially in rural areas. Thus, there is need to create gender responsive, safe and affordable transport network. Further, legal protection should be provided to female workers by ensuring property rights, labour rights and business rights.

India is committed to achieve gender equality by empowering women and girls. Given the gender gap in the labour market, several legislative and policy measures have been introduced to overcome gender dimensions of employment challenges in India. The Government of India has notified the Code on Wages Act, 2019 on 08.08.2019 which prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender in recruitment, promotions and payment of wages for same work or work of similar nature. The Wage Code defines work of similar nature as type of work which requires same effort, skill, responsibility and experience. The Wage Code also mandates the Central and State governments to constitute advisory boards containing one-third women members which would advise on increasing employment opportunities for women.

India has also introduced the Code on Occupational Safety Health & Working Conditions, 2020. The section 43 of this Code permits women to do all types of work in all the establishments, with their consent before 6 A.M. and beyond 7 P.M. subject to conditions relating to safety, holidays and working hours etc. The Industrial Relations (IR) Code, 2020 was notified on September 28, 2020. The section 4 of the IR Code mandates establishment with twenty or more workers to form a Grievance Redressal Committees for resolution of

disputes. The total number of members of such committee should not exceed ten and there shall be adequate representation of women. The representation of women in such committees should not be less than the proportion of women workers to the total workers employed in the industrial establishment.

In order to extend social security to all employees and workers either in the organised or unorganised, the Code on Social Security, 2020 was notified on September 28, 2020. The chapter VI of the Social Security Code, 2020 states that no employer shall knowingly employ a woman in any establishment during the six weeks immediately following the day of her delivery, miscarriage or medical termination of pregnancy. The Maternity Benefit Amendment Act, 2017 which has been subsumed in the Social Security Code, 2020; it has increased the duration of paid maternity leave to women from 12 weeks to 26 weeks. The amended Maternity Benefit Act has included 'work from home' and mandates every establishment with 50 or more employees to provide crèche facility.

Besides these four aforementioned four labour codes, around 419 million bank accounts have been opened in last five years under Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana to ensure financial inclusion. Around 53% of the beneficiaries of this scheme are women. The Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) was established in 1993 to address credit needs of poor and asset less women in the informal sector. The RMK provides loans to NGO-MFIs (Microfinance Institutions) which on-lend to Self Help Groups (SHGs) of women for various income generating and livelihood activities at concessional terms. Further, Mahila E-Haat a direct online platform was launched under RMK in 2016 to support women entrepreneurs/SHGs/NGOs.

Moreover, schemes like *Mudra Yojana*, *Udyogini* scheme and *Annapurna* schemes have been introduced in India to promote women entrepreneurship by providing collateral free concessional loans to women and to support formation of cooperatives through Self Help Groups.

The aforementioned legislative and policy measures are laudable steps. However, there is need to strengthen the mechanism for its implementation, enforcement and monitoring so that benefits of these measures can reach to women workers. The condition of women workers was already precarious prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the pandemic hit the India's female workers the hardest. As per the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) data, the female work participation in India reached to 9.3% between May to August, 2020. This may reverse our progress towards Brisbane goal if timely and

appropriate policy measures are not taken to create more productive and decent employment opportunities for women, especially in rural areas. Awareness should be raised among females by popularizing these policy measures through media, trade unions, NGO's. Finally, detailed gender disaggregated data should be collected and analysed regularly to monitor the trend, effect of policies and to understand the progress.

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Notes

1. Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) indicates the proportion of population entering the labour market while Worker Population Ratio (WPR) indicates the proportion of population employed. The unemployment rate (UR) is the proportion of labour force who are not employed but are available for work. We have considered Usual Status (ps+ss) throughout the paper as this approach measures the average working condition of an individual for entire reference year.
2. To address employment challenges and to measure employment statistics at more frequent intervals, MoSPI has launched a new employment-unemployment survey, namely, Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) in 2017-18 with certain changes in methodology, sampling design and data collection mechanism vis-à-vis the earlier quinquennial surveys of NSO(NSO-EUS). Due to changes in methodology, labour market estimates based on PLFS is strictly not comparable with the results of earlier rounds of NSO-EUS. The results of the PLFS with earlier rounds of NSO-EUS need to be read along with explanatory notes on survey methodology and sampling design (GoI, 2020).
3. The NSO figures gross underestimates the total number of workers and total population in absolute terms. Thus to avoid this problem, we have computed midyear population (on 1January) for years 2004-05, 2011-12 and 2017-18 by extrapolating census population figures of 2001 and 2011 for all the states, and for rural male, rural female, urban male, urban female separately. Absolute employment figures have been estimated by applying corresponding NSS percentage (WPR) on these extrapolated figures. Employment/job gain or loss has been measured in terms of number of workers throughout the analysis and we have used terms 'job', 'employment' and 'workers' interchangeably.
4. Various studies have mentioned that sampling frame of NSSO is not good enough at capturing the extent and nature of women's work. It clubs all unpaid care and domestic activities into single category 'attending domestic duties'. It doesn't

include free collection of different kind of goods and household production for self consumption. It considers women as a worker only if end product of her labour enters the market network (Kak, 1994; Hirway, 2012). *The second* source of underestimation is related to socio-cultural values. In some regions of India, highest prestige is given to conventional domestic work and lowest to the work outside home. Therefore, women tend to underreport their work. Many a time women themselves do not consider their work worthy enough to be recorded as 'work'. Therefore, they do not report it to the investigators and their work remains unrecognized by the society (Hirway, 1999; 2012). *The third* source of underestimation is related to training and experience of investigators. Some scholars argued that NSSO statistics are losing its quality because most of the investigators are untrained. They are hired on contract basis. Due to lack of experience and training they are not able to distinguish productive and unproductive works. They often consider women work as household work and thus do not report it into work category (Hirway, 1999; 2012). In order to capture the work of female, time-use survey should be done at frequent intervals. The NSO frame should ask supplementary question to those who reports 'attending domestic duties' regarding their availability for work if employment opportunities offered to them. There is need to rethink the existing categories of employment and to ask more probing questions about multiple activities undertaken by female workers. The existing frame may also include a short module/sub block to record activities of men and women and time disposition thereon. It will provide good understanding into under-reporting of women's work.

5. To categorise the economy into organised & unorganised sector and formal & informal employment, we have used NCEUS classification. As per NCEUS classification, "The unorganised sector consists of all unincorporated private enterprises owned by individuals or households engaged in the sale and production of goods and services operated on a proprietary or partnership basis and with less than ten total workers." (NCEUS, 2007a, p. 3). However, "Informal workers consist of those working in the unorganised enterprises or households, excluding regular workers with social security benefits, and the workers in the formal sector without any employment benefits /social security provided by the employers." (NCEUS, 2007a, p.3). In other words, unorganized/informal workers are those workers who are employed whether in the organized or unorganized sector but are not provided any social security benefits.
6. Most of the labour laws in India were applicable only on organised sector which accounts only 8 percent of India's workforce. The informal sectors were not mandated by law to invest in gender diversity policies. Further, employer in such informal sector can fire any workers whenever they want to do so without any prior notice. Such outcomes may be due to this reason. However, Government of India has simplified, amended and rationalized all its existing labour laws and

introduced four Labour Codes in 2020. Some provisions of these Codes are also applicable to informal sector which ensures safety, social security and fair wages to workers.

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