



## Trends in employment status of women in India

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### **Abstract:**

*It is the fact that investing in human capital is one of the most effective means of reducing poverty and encouraging sustainable development of women. Thanks to the fight for women's rights, increasing participation of women in the job market and to the right to vote, women have emerged from the strictly private sphere to which they were formerly restricted. Women have broken the implicit social contract that for more than hundreds of years confined them to home, child rearing, household tasks and fieldwork, while men worked outside the home. In employment opportunities too, women in India today have stormed all male bastions. Be it piloting aircraft, heading multi-national corporations, holding top bureaucratic positions, leading industrial houses, making a mark as photographers, filmmakers, chefs, engineers and even as train and lorry drivers, women have made it to all hitherto considered male bastions in India. However women in India usually receive less education and employment opportunities than men. In this context, the present paper is tried to analyze the women education and employment opportunities in the post-independence period and studied the factors affecting the extension of women education in India with help of regression model.*

**Key words:** human capital, twentieth century, Geeta Sharma

### **Introduction**

There is little denying the fact that investing in human capital is one of the most effective means of reducing poverty and encouraging sustainable development. In recent decades, there have been large gains, no doubt on comparable levels, in basic rights and opportunities, in life expectancy and enrolment ratios for women. The twentieth century has witnessed rapid transformations in labour market structures in both developed and developing countries. The changes have been so dramatic that the work place in these countries is no longer a man's preserve. Women in large numbers have joined the labour force and taken up paid employment.

Thanks to the fight for women's rights, increasing participation of women in the job market and to the right to vote, women have emerged from the strictly private sphere to which they were formerly restricted. Women have broken the implicit social contract that for more than hundreds of years confined them to home, child rearing, household tasks and fieldwork, while men worked outside the home.

In employment opportunities too, women in India today have stormed all male bastions. Be it piloting aircraft, heading multi-national corporations, holding top bureaucratic positions, leading industrial houses, making a mark as photographers, filmmakers, chefs,



engineers and even as train and lorry drivers, women have made it to all hitherto considered male bastions in India (Geeta Sharma). However, in the context of the developing world, lack of education has forced many women into the risky "informal" economy as street traders, domestic servants, home workers and seasonal laborers.

This in turn reflects a continuing belief that there is little benefit in educating a girl when she could be working in the market place or fields. There still are large gender disparities in basic human rights, resources, and economic opportunity, and in political rights. Yet, women usually receive less education than men.

### **Procedure of the study**

An attempt is made in this paper to analyze the importance of and the levels of women education and their employment opportunities in India. Further, labour force and workforce during pre and post reform period is presented. The rural unemployed population by 2015 is estimated and ongoing Schemes with time bound Strategy to eliminate unemployment is also presented basing on the factors keeping women in low quality employment.

### **Women's Education in India:**

Women's education in India plays a very important role in the overall development of the country. It not only helps in the development of half of the human resources, but in improving the quality of life at home and outside. Educated women not only tend to promote education of their girl children, but also can provide better guidance to all their children. Moreover educated women can also help in the reduction of

infant mortality rate and growth of the population. Even if a woman is employed, she may not have control over the money she earns, though this money often plays an important role in the maintenance of the household. In Indian culture women are expected to devote virtually all of their time, energy, and earnings to their family. Men, on the other hand, are expected to spend time and at least some of their earnings on activities outside the household. Research has shown that women contribute a higher share of their earnings to the family and are less likely to spend it on themselves. Research has suggested that as the share of the family income contributed by woman increases, so does the likelihood that she will manage this income.

In the Vedic period women had access to education in India, they had gradually lost this right. However, in the British period there was revival of interest in women's education in India. During this period, various socio religious movements led by eminent persons like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar emphasized on women's education in India. Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Periyar and Baba Saheb Ambedkar were leaders of the lower castes in India who took various initiatives to make education available to the women of India. However women's education got a fillip after the country got independence in 1947 and the government has taken various measures to provide education to all Indian women. As a result women's literacy rate has grown over the three decades and the growth of female literacy has in fact been higher than that of male literacy rate. While in 1971 only 22 percent of Indian women were literate, by the end of 2001, 54.16 percent female were literate and



65.46 per cent in 2011. The growth of female literacy rate is 14.87 percent as compared to 11.72 percent of that of male literacy rate.

### Women Employment in India

India is the first among countries to give women equal franchise and has a highly credible record with regard to the enactment of laws to protect and promote the interests of women, but women continue to be denied economic, social and legal rights and privileges. Though they are considered to be equal partners in progress, yet they remain subjected to repression, marginalisation and exploitation. It has been advocated by many researchers (Amartya Sen, 1990) that independent earning opportunities reduce the economic dependence of woman on men and increase her bargaining power in the family. This bargaining power depends on the nature of work she is employed in. But the income earning activities increase the workload of a woman unless the man accepts an increased share in domestic work. Since globalization is introducing technological inputs, women are being marginalized in economic activities, men traditionally being offered new scopes of learning and training. Consequently, female workers are joining the informal sector or casual labor force more than ever before.

Since Indian culture hinders women's access to jobs in stores, factories, and the public sector, the informal sector is particularly important for women. More women may be involved in undocumented or "disguised" wage work than in the formal labor force. There are estimates that over 90 percent of workingwomen are involved in the

informal sector and not included in, official statistics.

The informal sector includes jobs such as domestic servant, small trader, artisan, or field laborer on a family farm. Most of these jobs are unskilled and low paying and do not provide benefits to the worker. According to the 2011 census, the average age of all female workers was 33.6 compared with the male average of 36.5. These data are reported by local employment offices that register the number of people looking for work. Researchers have estimated that female agricultural laborers were usually paid 40 to 60 percent of the male wage. Even when women occupy similar positions and have similar educational levels, they earn just 80 percent of what men do, though this is better than in most developing countries. The public sector hires a greater share of women than does the private sector, but wages in the public sector are less egalitarian despite laws requiring equal pay for equal work. There is evidence that suggests that technological progress sometimes has a negative impact on women's employment opportunities. When a new technology is introduced to automate specific manual labor, women may lose their jobs because they are often responsible for the manual duties. For instance, one village irrigated its fields through a bucket system in which women were very active. When the village replaced the manual irrigation system with a tube well irrigation system, women lost their jobs. Many other examples exist where manual tasks such as wheat grinding and weeding are replaced by wheat grinding machines,



herbicides, and other modern technologies ([www.azadindia.org](http://www.azadindia.org)).

**Population Vs labour force and workforce in the post reforms era:**

Growth of population is the crucial determinant factor of employment of the country and the recovery in employment growth is reflected in the increase in the labour force participation rates. The growth of population is continuously increasing during 1983 to 2000. The growth rate per annum was registered by 2.12 percent during 1983-94 and 1.93 percent in 1994-2001. The percentage of labour fore to the total population was 43 percent in 1983 followed by 42.2 percent in 1988, 42.7 percent in 1994, 40.4 percent during 1999-2000 and declined to 39.2 percent in 2001 respectively( *source : planning commission and task fore on employment opportunities 2000 and census 2001*). Besides, the pattern of employment generation rate has sharply declined from 2.01 percent per annum during 1983 to 94 to 0.98 percent per annum during the period 1993-94 to 2004-05 (*Economic survey, 2006-07 and EPW Jan.2007*). Currently, India is passing through an unprecedented phase of demographic changes. The ongoing

demographic changes are likely to contribute to an ever increasing size of labour force in the country. The Census projection report shows that the proportion of population in the working age group (15-59 years) is likely to increase from approximately 58percent in 2001 to more than 64 percent by 2021. In addition to the overall variations in the estimates of labour force in the country, the gender dimension of the labour force is equally important to understand. In general, women participation in labour market has been typically low in India. Only 25 to 30percent women in rural and 15 to 18percent in urban areas participate in labour market.

The workforce participation rates also mirror the changes in labour force participation rates, though to lesser extent. Table 1 reveals the trends in work force participation rates. A gender-wise analysis suggests that the recovery of WPR corresponding to various segments, during 2004-05, from the fall during the previous period has been much sharper in the case of women than in the case of men.

Table -1. Trends in workforce participation rates (WPR)

NSSO Round (year)	Usual Status		CWS		CDS	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Rural						
50 <sup>th</sup> (1993-94)	53.8	23.4	53.0	26.7	50.4	21.9
55 <sup>th</sup> (1999-00)	52.2	23.1	51.0	25.3	47.8	20.4
61 <sup>st</sup> (2004-05)	53.5	24.2	52.4	27.5	48.8	21.6
Urban						
50 <sup>th</sup> (1993-94)	51.3	12.1	52.1	13.9	49.6	12.0
55 <sup>th</sup> (1999-00)	51.3	11.7	50.9	12.8	49.0	11.1
61 <sup>st</sup> (2004-05)	54.1	13.5	53.7	15.2	51.9	13.3

Source; various rounds of NSSO



Workforce Participation Rate As per Census 2011, the workforce participation rate for females is 25.51% against 53.26% for males. Rural sector has a better female workforce participation rate of 30.02% compared with 53.03% for males whereas for urban sector. The participation rate of females trails at 15.44% against 53.76% for males. 41.1% of female main and marginal workers are agricultural labourers, 24.0% are cultivators, 5.7% are household

### Employment situation

The latest comprehensive labour market survey was conducted by NSSO during 2004-05. The next survey on employment and unemployment for the period 2009-10 has been started by NSSO in July, 2009 and will be completed by June, 2010. It is important to mention here that MoL&E (Ministry of Labour and Employment) has also taken a decision recently to conduct annual labour market surveys. The first such survey will be conducted for the period 2009-10. Based on the 2004-05 survey, the estimates of total employment in the country varies from 385 million (as per CDS measure) to 459 million (as per UPSS measure). However, the data does not reflect the impact of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) on rural employment as it was enacted in September, 2005. Overall assessment of employment situation based on UPSS in the country over relatively two longer periods, i.e., 1983 to 1993-94 (Period I-10.5 years) and 1993-94 to 2004-05 (Period II- 11 years) suggests that employment growth in period I was 2.06percent per annum as against 1.87percent in the period II .

This high growth in employment achieved during the first half of the present decade is one of the positive outcomes of the fairly high growth of 6 to 8 percent per annum of the Indian economy during the same period. The high economic growth provided enhanced business opportunities in the country leading to increased demand for labour and hence employment growth. However, it is important to recognize at this stage that the employment growth during the first half of the present decade has not been uniform across various population segments. First, the employment growth was much higher in urban areas than in rural areas. Second, the employment growth has been significantly higher for urban females than for all other three segments of population viz. rural males, rural females and urban males (See Table 1) Women Employed in Organized Sector A total of 20.5% women were employed in the organized sector in 2011 with 18.1% working in the public sector and 24.3% in the private. The labour force participation rate for women across all age groups was 25.3 in rural sector and 15.5 in urban sector compared with 55.3 and 56.3 for men in the rural and urban(table 1.1).

### Trends in quality of Employment

The distribution of workers across, self, regular and casual status is widely taken as an indicator of the quality of employment and conditions in the labour market. Table 2 summarized the trends in distribution of workforce by nature of employment. During the initial years of this century, there has been a significant increase in self employment in both male and female workers in rural and urban areas.



Table 1. Women employment in organized sector

( Figures in Thousands)

Year	Public Sector			Private Sector			Total		
	Women	Total	% Women	Women	Total	% Women	Women	Total	% Women
1995	2600.4	19466.3	13.4	1627.5	8058.5	20.2	4227.9	27524.7	15.4
2000	2857.0	19313.7	14.8	2065.8	8646.0	23.9	4922.8	27959.7	17.6
2005	2921.0	18006.6	16.2	2095.3	8452.3	24.8	5016.2	26458.6	19.0
2010	3196.0	17862.0	17.9	2662.5	10846.0	24.5	5858.6	28708.0	20.4
2011	3171.0	17548.0	18.1	2783.0	11452.0	24.3	5954.0	28999.0	20.5

Table-2. Distribution of workforce by nature of UPSS employment

Year	Employment status, area and gender					
	Rural		Urban		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
	Self -Employed					
1993-94	57.7	58.6	41.7	45.8	52.90	56.7
1999-00	55.0	57.3	41.5	45.3	52.80	55.6
2004-05	58.1	63.7	44.8	47.7	54.21	61.0
	Regular employees					
1993-94	8.5	2.7	42.0	28.4	17.0	6.3
1999-00	8.8	3.1	41.7	33.3	14.0	7.3
2004-05	9.0	3.7	40.6	35.6	18.25	9.0
	Casual labour					
1993-94	33.8	38.7	16.3	25.8	30.10	37.0
1999-00	36.2	39.6	16.8	21.4	33.20	37.1
2004-05	32.9	32.6	14.6	16.7	27.54	30.0
2011						

Source: various rounds of NSSO data. Note:  
UPSS= Usual principal subsidiary status

The increase is more visible in the case of rural women accounting for nearly 2/3 of all jobs. Alongside the trend of increasing self-employment, there has been a discernable shift in the wage employment in general. The latest round data exhibits a visible deviation for the earlier data on casual employment, which indicated and overall trend of

increased casualization of employment, except for urban women workers. During 1999-2000 to 2004-05, the share of casual employment in total employment declined by more than 7 percent. Though shares of regular employment improved slightly in all categories except urban males, the fall in casual employment was so prominent that the aggregate share of wage employment has fallen considerably (Chandrasekhar and Ghosh, 2006). A



closer examination reveals that even the increase in regular employment was largely in low paid segments such as domestic services which are indicative of the deteriorating quality of wage employment.

The self-employed women work force was 56.7 percent and it was 6.3 and 37 percent in case of regular and casual labour in 1993-94. but in 2004-05, it was increased to 61. percent in self-employed and to 9 percent of regular employees. Meanwhile, casual labour employees' workforce women labour has declined to 30 percent.

#### **Impact of economic slowdown on employment including women:**

The recent (2007-09) global financial meltdown and the related economic recession are seen as the worst since the Great Depression of 1930s. Given the increased (as compared to pre-liberalization period) integration of Indian economy with the world economy, India in no way could remain unaffected of the negative fallout of this recession. Although the overall impact of the economic slowdown is not considered to be acute on India, the same had moderate impact on the Indian labour market as well. The falling profitability of Indian industries led to job cuts in general and in export oriented sectors, in particular. Labour Bureau, an organization under MoL&E, conducted five quarterly surveys during October 2008 to December 2009 covering sectors like textiles including apparel, metal and metal products, information technology, gems and jewellery, leather, automobiles, handloom/power looms and transportation to assess the impact of economic meltdown on job losses. Major

findings of Surveys by Labour Bureau are as follows (source: annual report to the people on the employment, GOI, Ministry of labour and employment (2010):

- Employment declined by 4.91 lakh during the quarter Oct-Dec, 2008. Employment increased by 2.76 lakh during Jan-March, 2009.
- Employment declined by 1.31 lakh during Apr-June, 2009 probably due to seasonality.
- Employment increased by 4.97 lakh during the quarter July-Sep, 2009.
- As per latest quarterly quick survey for the period Oct.-Dec. 2009, overall employment has improved by about 6.38 lakh during Dec., 2009 over Sep. 2009 due to substantial increase in employment by 5.70 lakh in the IT/BPO Sector.
- The estimated employment in the selected sectors has experienced a net addition of 12.8 lakh during Dec,2008 to Dec, 2009.
- A detailed study indicated that most of the job losses during the economic slowdown had taken place in unorganised sector<sup>3</sup>. In the organised sector, the job loss was minimal as indicated by the Labour Bureau study.

#### **Factors keeping women in low quality employment**

In many countries like India, informal sector jobs are synonymous with female employment and associated with low status and poor working conditions. Consequently the factors keeping women in the informal sector also imply that women continue to face poor working conditions. In addition, as outlined below, women may continue to face poor working conditions due to flaws in labour market legislation. Poor compliance of labour market legislations



at the work place and weak enforcement mechanisms may also contribute to keeping women (and men for that matter) in jobs with poor working conditions: Many women are not guaranteed decent work conditions due to flawed labour market legislation. Working conditions with direct impact on women, such as equal wage, maternity leave, and pension are in many cases not properly addressed.

In many instances workplaces do not consider gender aspects in working conditions and organization. Many employers, especially small and medium sized enterprises lack the knowledge, skills and motivation to put in place working conditions that are attractive to women. This includes measures such as flexibility in working hours and place of work, accessible means of transport, affordable quality child care facilities, bath and toilet facilities and access to training and education. Occupational safety and health (OSH) is another concern for female workers. According to a recent International Finance Corporation (IFC) study, international experiences indicate that OSH regulation based on prescriptive and enforced regulation does not significantly reduce the rate of accidents - and the administrative cost of such regimes are very high (World Bank, 2007b). On the other hand, experience from trade unions shows that OSH is a good entry point for dialogue as it can lead to a win-win situation in terms of improved working conditions for workers and improved productivity for employers.

### **On-going Schemes -Mission Mode Approach/ Time bound Strategy to generate employment opportunities**

The proposed strategy envisages that through a Mission Mode approach to

implementation of the poverty reduction schemes it is possible to lift the 4.5 crore BPL households above poverty line by 2015. The regular flow of income to at least one member of BPL household either through self-employment or gainful employment through placement linked skilled development would enable the BPL household to move above the poverty line.

#### **a. SGSY-Self-employment schemes**

Recognizing the importance of **Self Help Group** (SHG) and Micro-Enterprise (ME) approach, the Swarnjayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana (SGSY) a major self employment scheme was launched in April, 1999 after merging the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) with allied programmes.

Since inception of the SGSY scheme in 1999, the number of SHGs formed is 29 lakh having about 2.9 crore members (assuming on an average 10 members per SHG). Given that SHGs formed so far may also comprise of about 30 per cent members from above poverty line (APL), the coverage of BPL members in the SHGs may be around 200 lakh. This implies that *about 2 crore households are already covered*; presuming that one member from each BPL household is a member of the SHG. To cover all 4.5 crore BPL households, the SHG movement needs to be universalized in a time-bound manner i.e. the remaining households need to be brought under the SHG umbrella. While it has taken 10 years to form 29 lakh SHGs that includes 30 percent or more of APL families in some of the States and thus there is need to form about additional 28 lakh BPL SHGs, to reach the goal of universal coverage by 2012. If this is achieved, then economic activity of



all the mature groups so formed could begin by 2015, the cutoff date by which poverty is to be eradicated

The proposed strategic framework envisaged to cover entire BPL households under various programmes implemented by the Ministry and other Ministries/departments to eradicate poverty by 2015. The tentative number of rural BPL households likely to be covered under the self-employment, wage employment & social security net are given in the table-6. The Sub-Group on Employment & Labour Force Projections for the 11th Plan, Planning Commission projected 52.1 crore labor force consisting of 36 crore persons in rural and 16.1 crore persons in urban areas by 2017. In view of this, Government has taken initiatives through coordinated action for skill development by augmenting capacity to create 50 crore certified and skilled technicians by the year 2022.

#### **b. Skill Development & Placement Mission for rural BPL youth**

To achieve this, broad institutional structure consisting of a

National council for Skill Development, a National Skill Development Coordination Board and National Skill Development Corporation have been set up. It is expected that at least 1.7 crore rural BPL youth would be able to take benefit of skill development programme of the Ministry and other institutional arrangements made under the National Skill Development Mission (table-4)

#### **c. NREGA & IGNOAPS**

A considerable portion of rural BPL households are marginal & small farmers of which large numbers would have level of income near to the poverty line. The supplementary income through NREGA & IGNOAPS (Indira Gandhi Old Age Pension Scheme) will enable them to get at least desired level of income. It is expected that about 1.57 crore persons above 65 years of age will receive a minimum pension of Rs. 2400 per annum in 2008-09. In some states this would be more depending upon the additional amount supplemented by the States.

Table- 4 Proposed strategic framework for covered self-employment by 2015

Sl.No	Programme/Scheme	Number of BPL household to be brought to APL (In crore)
1.	SGSY	1.4
2.	Skill Development & Placement	1.7
3.	NREGA & IGNOAPS	To supplement income of BPL HH
4	Schemes of other Ministries/Departments	1.4
	Total	4.5

Source: Ministry of Rural development, Govt. of India



#### **d. Schemes of other Ministries/Departments/Agencies**

Various programmes implemented by other Ministries/Departments/Agencies are directly or indirectly providing benefits/opportunities for the rural BPL household to strengthen their livelihood support. Such target oriented focused programmes for certain groups like handloom weavers, craft persons, small & marginal farmers, fisherman, dairy development etc will help the rural BPL households to generate reasonable level of income at least to cross poverty line. It is expected that with the initiative of other Ministries/Departments/Agencies, the remaining 1.40 crore rural BPL household will be able to earn adequate level of income to support their livelihood by 2015.

#### **e. Small and Marginal Farmers Income**

The rural BPL households have multiple sources of income. This includes income from wages, cultivation, animal husbandry, and non-farm activity, etc. Large number of small and marginal farmers, especially in rainfed areas, falls under the BPL category. The households of farmers can be broadly categorized into nearly landless, marginal, small farmers, semi-medium, medium and large farmers according to size of their land holdings.

The national poverty line at 2004-05 prices is Rs 22000 (per hh per annum) in the rural areas. The income from agriculture of nearly landless, marginal farmer households is Rs 829 & Rs.5910 per annum respectively which is much lower than the desired level. These families may also be having some income from agriculture & non agriculture

labour but the total income will not enable them to move above the poverty line. The income of small farmers is Rs 14020 from agriculture is also not up the required level.

#### **f. Other schemes**

Among these, some of the families may also be beneficiaries of NREGA and IGNOAP to supplement their income. Income from NREGA & IGNOAPS at present at Rs. 3200 & Rs. 2400 per member per annum respectively and income from other sources like livestock, business etc will make their total annual income in the range of Rs 10000-15000 which may still be considerably lower than the required level of income. Thus, there is need for additional income to these households to cross the poverty line. The approach paper of the 11<sup>th</sup> plan has highlighted new employment policy to promote employment generation.

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