



RESEARCH ARTICLE

WOMEN WORK PARTICIPATION IN INDIA: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Gender equality and empowerment plays an important role in economic development. In India, despite the fact that female literacy and education enrollment rates have been rising, today it has lower levels of women's workforce participation than many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East. This paper is made an attempt to explore the major objectives like, to review the global trend of women work participation in general, to study the women work participation status in India and Karnataka and suggest steps to increase women work participation rate. This paper is based on the information gathered through available secondary sources and literature reviews. It is found that the percentage of women in South Asia was much lower than the global average of 51.1 per cent, and it was much lower than the percentage of women in East Asia, which was 66.4 per cent. As per Census 2011 workers constituted 39.79 percent of total population whereas the ratio of female workers was 25.51 per cent. In Karnataka as per Census of India 2011, only 23.39 percent of women workers are participated in main work force against 52.80 percent of male work force. Based on this I have come up with some suggestions to improve the women participation rate in India. Government has to launch policies that include sectors which are friendly to women increasing women's participation in labour markets and policies will be needed to encourage women to overcome social and cultural constraints.

INTRODUCTION

The World Economic Forum's 2014 Global Gender Gap Report finds a positive correlation between gender equality and per capita GDP, the level of competitiveness and human development indicators. That gender equality plays an important role in economic development. Various studies have studied what way the lower female labor force participation or weak entrepreneurial activity drags down economic growth, and that empowering women has significant economic benefits in addition to promoting gender equality (Duflo 2005; World Bank 2012). In India, despite the fact that female literacy and education enrollment rates have been rising, today it has lower levels of women's workforce participation than many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East. India ranks 127th on the gender inequality index and 108th on the global gender gap index. This is borne out by data on the ground. Over the last decade, women's participation in the labor force has seen a dramatic decline. Latest government statistics suggest that women's labor participation rate fell from 29.4 percent in 2004-2005 to 22.5 percent in 2011-2012. The gender gap in the labor force is particularly stark when we consider that in the 15-59 age group, women's participation is only 32 percent in rural areas compared to 83 percent for men, and 21 percent in urban areas compared to 81 percent for men.

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The phenomenon of female economic activity and women's employment in each of these segments are main issues in the economy of all developing nations. The economic activity may be classified as organized and unorganized, each of which may be in the formal or informal sector. Participation of women in economic activities in formal sectors of industries, services and agricultural sector is measurable, but activities of women in informal sectors such as house works, training and education of children, activities in agricultural sectors and household services are although women constitute a little less than the half of the economically active population, but their contribution to economic activity is far below its potential. Against this background this paper is made an attempt to explore the following objectives.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The main objectives of this paper are:

- To review the global trend of women work participation in general ;
- To study the women work participation status in India and Karnataka;
- To suggest steps to increase women work participation rate.

This paper is based on the information gathered through available secondary sources and literature reviews. The secondary sources include the reports collected from

governmental reports and working papers of international institutions like IMF and ILO, socio-economic reviews, various research articles at state, national and international level.

Global Trend in Women Work Participation

Globally, women's participation in the labour market has remained relatively stable from 1993 to 2013, whereas the participation rate for men has declined steadily over the same period. Though 345 million women have joined the labour force in the past 20 years, women still only account for approximately 40 per cent of the global labour force. In 2013, the regional estimates for the female labour force participation rate varied from 19.1 per cent in the Middle East to 65.5 per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa. The participation rate in South Asia was just 30.5 per cent in 2013. The rate has increased the most over this two-decade period in the Middle East and Latin America and the Caribbean. In contrast, the rate has fallen in South Asia (driven by the situation in India) and in East Asia (Ruchika Chaudhary and Shere Verick 2014). The rate of female labour force participation in South Asia was just 31.8 per cent in 2012, while the rate for males was 81.4 per cent. The rate for women in South Asia was much lower than the global average of 51.1 per cent, and it was much lower than the rate for women in East Asia, which was 66.4 per cent. In comparison to India, women in Bangladesh have increased their participation in the labour market. Nepal, where the participation rate for women reached 79.4 per cent in 2010–11 and the Maldives (54 per cent in 2009–10), Bangladesh now has the highest rate in the region. Labour force participation rates of women in Sri Lanka, among the lowest in South Asia, stand at 34 per cent, in contrast to the male participation rate of 75 per cent. Pakistan have always experienced only 28 per cent of women participation in the labour force, which is particularly low in the urban areas. The gender disparity is highest in South Asian countries, notably Afghanistan, Pakistan and India, and lowest in Nepal (the exception for South Asia) and South-East Asia (Cambodia and Myanmar). In the latter set of countries, there is virtually no gender gap, reflecting that women and men participating equally in the labour force, at least in numerical terms. However, the quality of employment and opportunities for better jobs continue to be unequally distributed between men and women, even in countries where there is close to parity in the labour force participation rate.

Women Work Participation in India

It is important to learn about participation of Males and Females in Economy, so that corrective decision may be taken for overall economic growth of the Nation. The progress toward gender equality in respect of participation in economic activities seems to have stalled. Compared to other countries which are at similar levels of development, Indian women tend not to participate as much in wage employment. The working participation of women (WPR) for women above 15 years of age in India was a little below 30% in 2011, significantly below the world average of around 50%, according to World Bank estimates. In comparison, Brazil and China were at 60% and 67% for the same age group.

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 sectors respectively in 2011-12 (NSS 68th Unemployment rate Round). The unemployment rate for women in Rural area was 2.9 against 2.1 for men whereas it was 6.6 and 3.2 for women and men in urban areas during 2011-12.

Labour Force Participation Rate Category Wise

Female participation in labour force has remained lower than male participation as women account for most of the unpaid work, and when women are employed in paid work, they are overrepresented in the informal sector. The table 1 illustrates that as per Census 2011, total workers constituted 39.79 percent of total population whereas the ratio of female workers was 25.51 percent. At All-India level the percentage share of females as cultivators, agricultural labourers, workers in the household industry and other workers stood at 24.92, 18.56, 2.95 and 47.20 percent respectively. The percentage of female main workers to total female population stood at 25.5 percent which show an increase as compared to 14.68 percent reported in the 2001 Census. Table 1 shows that the percentage of female under all categories of workers have increased in 2011 as compared to 2001.

The female WPR is especially low in urban areas and has remained close to 15% over two decades. Meanwhile, the female WPR in rural areas has varied between 25% and 30% in the same time period. In contrast, urban male participation rate was 53%, according to 2011 National Sample Survey Organization Data (NSSO). According to Census 2011, the number of women working and seeking work grew by 14.4 percent annually between 1991 and 2011, even though the population of urban women grew at only 4.5 percent during the same time period. The total number of women in the work force increased more than three-fold, from 9 million in 1991 to 28 million in 2011, while the number of women seeking or available for work increased more than eight-fold, from 1.8 million in 1991 to 15.5 million in 2011. This shows that the number of women in the workforce in 2011 was higher by more than 55% if these 15.5 million women were able to find jobs.

Women Work Participation Rate in Karnataka

As per 2011 census, in urban area, the total population of workers is 69.58 lakhs of which only 24.11 lakhs are females. In rural areas out of 185.02 lakhs, 113.11 lakhs are males and 71.90 lakhs are females. According to Employment and training department, Bangalore the total employment of women in organized sector as on 31st March 2013 was 7,61,948 of which 2,89,709 were in public and 4,72,239 were in private sector. Women work longer hours than men, and carry the major share of household and community. There are far fewer women in the paid workforce than there are men. There are more unemployed women than unemployed men. Women generally earn lower wage than men doing the same work. It has been estimated that women's wage rate are, on the average only 75% of men's wage rates and constitute only one fourth of the family income. In no State do women and men earn equal wages in agriculture. Also, women generally work in the informal sector where wages are lower and they are not covered by labour laws. Within organizations, women workers are also engaged in piecework and subcontracting at exploitative rates.

Table 1. Percentage of Female Main Workers to Total Female Population under Broad Categories-1981 to 2011

Census Year	Percentage to Total Female Population				
	Female main Workers	Cultivators	Agricultural Labourers	Household Industries	Other Workers
1981	13.99	4.65	6.46	0.64	2.24
1991	15.93	5.51	7.05	0.55	2.82
2001	14.68	5.11	4.51	0.95	4.11
2011	25.5	24.0	41.1	5.7	29.2

Sources: Office of the Registrar General, India

Table 2. Work Participation Rate of Main and Marginal Workers by Sex (Percentage) in Karnataka, 2001 and 2011

Year	Main Workers		Marginal Workers		Non-Workers	
	2001	2011	2001	2011	2001	2011
Female	20.63	23.39	10.91	8.48	68.01	68.12
Male	51.66	52.80	4.97	6.20	43.36	41.00

Source: Census of India 2011.

The table 2 clearly illustrates the rate of women work participation in main and marginal and non work force. As per Cences of India 2011, only 23.39 percent of women workers are participated in main work force against 52.80 percent of male work force. In the year 2001 it was 20.63 percent for women and 51.66 for men. A slight progress we can recognize. The percentage of female marginal workers in the year 2011 was 8.48 against 6.20 percent of male workforce in this category. It is clear that percentage of female workforce is more than male in marginal work force in this category. If we look at non work female percentage women stands 68.12 percent and male non work percent were only 41 as per 2011 census data.

Suggested Steps to Increase Women Work Participation in India

- **Regulation and Organisation:** A lot of women actually work in unregulated, unorganised sectors. Their incomes are not included in national accounting, there are no laws or rules governing their nature and terms of work, and there is no union/apex body to bring them together and address their grievances. They are invisible, large in number, and extremely vulnerable to exploitation. The government can begin by tapping into these sectors, and actively addressing their need to be regulated, organised, and given avenues for grievance redressal, protection, and unification.
- **Improve the Women Education:** Educating girls and women helps to boost their economic participation, and helps improve the quality of the jobs women have, and therefore their wage-earning ability. According to, NSSO data suggests that, in 2011 to 2012, tertiary-educated women in India were 1.5 times more to participate in the labour force than secondary-educated women. Women with a secondary education were more to be in professional jobs than women with only a primary education. About 23 percent of secondary educated women were in jobs as professionals or associate professionals, compared with only 1 percent of primary educated women. Average wages also increase significantly with education. Primary-educated women earn about 120 rupees a day on average, while tertiary educated women earn 584 rupees per day. This clearly shows that education for women is the best solution for improvement in the work participation rate in the economy.
- **Women-Friendly Workplaces:** Workplace in Multi National Company or a small firm, should urgently revamp themselves and become women-friendly. Basic facilities such as clean and easily accessible toilets, drinking water to be provided in the premises for the thousands of workers. Some actions that can be taken are - providing equal, or perhaps even more financial benefits to women, adequate maternity and paternity leaves, actively hiring women coming back to the workforce after marriage or pregnancy, providing day care facilities, setting a flexible work-from-home culture in the company, introducing human resource activities with the specific intention of focusing on the development and empowering of female employees, providing information and any other help possible with accommodation, transportation, domestic help, healthcare etc., investing in their training and education, providing counseling services etc. to be provided.
- **Change in the Attitude of Society and Family:** Women continue to be perceived as weak, inferior, second-class citizens. For working women, this discrimination is extended to the workplace also. The improper and insufficient dietary intake along with the heavy workload results in nutritional disorders. In addition, this perception that they alone are responsible for the domestic work, leads to a feeling of guilt when they are not able to look after the children or family members due to their official work, often resulting in emotional disorders. Male and female to be treated as equally in the society and home and attitude towards working women to be changed.
- **Skill and Training for Women:** Indian government has introduced several programmes to improve the quality and skill of women workers in India. Recently, Indian government has launched Skill India programme, such programmes should be effectively coordinated with initiatives to create jobs that are focused on sectors conducive to jobs that have a natural affinity for women. Almost three-quarters of the vocational courses chosen by women in India relate to textiles and garments, computers, and health-care and beauty services. Leisure and hospitality (tourism services) and manufacturing (other than garments) do not yet figure among the top five areas where women acquire vocational training, indicating the need for more women-oriented skills programmes in these sectors in future.

- **Increase in Safety and Security:** In the era of globalization, the number of women working the night shift is increasing with call centers and export oriented companies located in the Export Processing Zone and many other economic activities employing women in large numbers during the night shift. This situation should be improved. Public transportation like metro and buses should run till late night and police patrolling should be increased, especially during 8 PM to 12 AM.
- **Accommodation Facility:** With progressive change in the economic structure, more and more women are living out of their homes in search of employment in big cities. These women are exposed to risks due to lack of suitable and safe accommodation. The Government already introduced a scheme like working women hostels. Such accommodation facilities should be increased in all the cities with all facilities and safety measures.
- **Place of Posting:** When people get a government job, they are sent to far off places. If a company is recruiting a large number of people, it should try its best to post the person close to their home. In banking industry many people, there were so many cases that it almost seemed deliberate on the part of the banks to post people far from their homes. It is known that all people can be posted close to their home, but there will always be people who are willing to travel and work away from home. If banks could give consideration to such choices, it would definitely help a large number of women to work in banking sector.
- **Increase in Maternity Leave:** The paternity leave and increasing the duration of maternity leave sabbatical to one year to be introduced. By making men more a part of the household, it will be easier to make more women part of the workforce.

Conclusion

Looking at India's demographics, it is clear that, it's a young nation. With this "demographic dividend," if effectively women work force not participated and mobilized, it is impossible to transform the country and accelerate its development significantly.

There is a huge gender gap in terms of employment in the labor force, but also in the kinds of work women are engaged in. A large segment of India's working women continue to be engaged in rural agricultural activities. The country is still largely an agrarian economy, in the process of growing economy, urbanization, and industrial development; more women should be entered to the workforce and productive sectors such as manufacturing and services. In this paper I have made a review of women work participation status in global level, India and Karnataka and found that the low level of female labour force participation in India and Karnataka comparing to the global status and suggested some measures to improve it. Despite of this, government has to launch policies that include sectors which are friendly to women increasing women's participation in labour markets and policies will be needed to encourage women to overcome social and cultural constraints.

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