
UNIT 3 INDIAN DEBATES-II

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3.1 INTRODUCTION

Who is the 21st century Indian Working Women? What makes her choose to work outside home? What does she consider meaningful work? How does the childhood socialization impact her working status? How does Indian traditions, culture and society influence her agency in acquiring working status? Interrogating these and related aspects are essential in understanding today's working women in India.

In this Unit you will read about cotemporary challenges which working women in India face today and how do they negotiate with these confrontations. The Unit will delve into the issue of falling employment rates of women in the country in the last couple of decades followed by implications of caste and class for women's working status.

The last section of the Unit deals with the impact of neoliberalism and other global forces on working women in India. Let us look at the objectives of reading this Unit.

3.2 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you will be able to:

- Explain women and work scenario in India in post-liberalisation phase of the economy;
- Analyse the causes of the fall in employment rates of women in the last 20 years: and
- Discuss new trends of women's employment as a result of globalisation and opening up of Indian economy.

3.3 INDIAN WOMEN WORKERS: CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

Throughout most of the world, the way in which people work has changed dramatically in the past two centuries. The processes of development that first emerged in Europe and later spread across the globe have transformed both the purposes and the conditions of labour.

Working women in India is a rising group that collectively symbolizes a force that has been critical to ongoing social change. With the opening of its markets to foreign investment, privatization and subsequent globalization, Indian economy began a new journey of integration into the world economy. India's new globalising economy posed challenges along with numerous opportunities it created. They tread the tightrope of socio-cultural expectations and personal professional ambitions.

India has the second largest workforce in the world at 478 million but since early 2000, participation of women in labour force is declining resulting into economic loss. (Shenoy-Packer 2014, p.6)

As a result of liberalization and modernization of Indian economy followed by globalisation, work participation of women in workforce nose-dived. But, it has also given rise to a 'new avatar of an Indian woman', who indulges in guilt-free materialism, re-negotiates parental ties, delays marriage and motherhood and pursues career single mindedly. But, the same economic reforms that integrated a liberalized Indian economy with world capitalism bringing massive changes in life style of this neo-globalized upper middle class section of Indian society, have distressing consequences on the lives of the poor, unskilled and the uneducated by increasing their social and economic exploitation (Mazumdar, 2007). And, women constitute a large chunk of this poor, unskilled and uneducated mass of Indian population. Therefore, face deep of social, economic and sexual exploitation.

Thus, it can be said that though globalisation opened new vistas of employment opportunities which have advantaged the educated women

while being disproportionately unfair on the employment of poor women within the same socio-cultural milieu. This is what Datta (2005) writes that increase in employability of educated middle class women has led to rise in demand of services of unskilled or semi-skilled women. The lives of upper middle class women is possible because of services of lower class women as house maids, cooks, care givers, thereby 'McDonaldizing' household jobs. As a result of power and status acquired through high profile jobs, this section of working women with specialized skill sets fight the glass ceiling at work place but along the way become ' increasingly sterile, dehumanized, technology driven and demanding'. Though the whole process has helped women of lower strata to have more avenues of employment but also face more occupational hazards and personal health issues more gravely.

3.4 FALL IN EMPLOYMENT RATES

According to Census 2011, women constitute 48.4% of the population but female labour participation is only half of that of men in the country. National Sample Survey Organisation, 66th Round shows that only 23% of women are in labour force. The actual rate of Female Labour Force Participation (FLFP) has declined from 33.3% in 2004-05 to 26.5% in 2009-10 in rural areas and in urban areas; the decline has been from 17.8% to 14.6% in the years 2004-05 and 2009-10. A total of 23 million women are missing from the labour force. (MWCD, 2014, p.2)

The Commission on Growth and Development (2008) notes that women's participation in labour force has developed differently since 1980's. **Female Labour Participation Rates (FLPR)** also called **Activity Rates** have risen especially in the industrialised countries and in some developing countries like Indonesia, but has decreased in India, China and Russia mainly on account of varied demographic, social, cultural and legal trends and norms that determine if women's activities are regarded as economic. (Klavern and Kea, 2012,p. 77)

Conventional reasons for loss of women participation in workforce have been cultural and traditional expectation to remain home bound. Rise in household incomes, erroneous data collection methods, limited opportunity to work and high fertility rates are also some other factors responsible for withdrawing women out of labour market. The International Labour Organization (ILO) added other factors like employment in non-traditional sectors of employment and challenges to re-enter the labour net after child birth have also resulted in the fall of women's employment rates.

Another reason of decline in female work force participation rates is the fact that the recent global economic slowdown has a detrimental effect on Indian manufacturing and export oriented sectors due to of reduced international demands. Loss of 3.7 million jobs of which 80% were held by

women is the result of global economic slowdown. (Thomas, 2013 cited in Shenoy-Packer 2014).

NSSO's 66th Round has also shown that the number of young people in education has increased, thereby rendering them unavailable for labour, thus causing drop in LFPR. Let us look at age-wise change in the picture as shown in the table below:

Age Group	Percentage of Children in School in 2009-10	Percentage of Children in School in 2004-05
14-15 years (both)	89.3	82.4
Girls	87.7	79.6
15 -19 (both)	59.5	46.2
Girls	54.6	40.3
20-24 (both)	15.6	11.25
Girls	12.8	7.6

Source: Planning Commission, 2011- Approach Paper to 12th FYP (2012-17)
http://planningcommission.gov.in/plans/planrel/12appdrft/approach_12plan.pdf

Though, some studies suggest that despite challenges Indian women face in the workforce their numbers, at least in urban areas, have been steadily increasing but the increase is not significantly reflecting in census reports of 2001 and 2011. But, this new section of 'visible working women' does not truly represent all of India's working women. The true picture is much more intricate multilayered and paradoxical than it apparently looks from the surface. Thus, this new globalised Indian Working Woman co- exists with the realities of poor women working in the informal economy.

Till the decade of sixties and mid seventies of 20th century, the normative restrictions on upper caste women were stricter than for lower caste women, making working for wages more irreverent and demeaning to the family. In fact, exclusion of women from the labour force was a symbol of high socio-economic status. As urban Indian society became more progressive , upper class women started taking up professions that were considered 'noble' and akin to feminine attributes .These professions provided very little upward professional mobility and also required no translocation or need to travel for work. But, with increase in education amongst the middle class of Indian society and opening up of employment opportunities after liberalization of economy, Indian women have been stepping out of their homes to take up occupations and venture into professions that were the prerogative of men till a couple of decades ago. **Liddle and Joshi (1989)** writes that because of changes in legislation and a dynamic society where normative control over women's behaviour began to relax more and more urban women started entering into workforce , stepping beyond their traditional roles as wives and mothers.

It must be well understood that the visibility of middle class women in public spaces is not an absolute indication of women's participation in the labour force. Depending upon the social status and organisational position women continue to get a raw deal in the labour market. Banerjee (2002) avers that the reason women continue to be economically disadvantaged is because of the tight control that family still impose on their bodies, sexuality and labour. (cf. Shenoy-Packer, 2014, p. 20) Thus, as a result of their location in the class structure and the traditions, training and their socialization imparted to them, women remain disadvantaged when entering workforce.

Take up the following exercise before reading further.

Check Your Progress:

1) *What is meant by 'MacDonaldisation of services'?*

2) *What are the reasons of fall in employment of women in India?*

In the following section we will read above intersectionality of caste, class, gender and women's work.

3.5 INTERSECTIONALITY OF WOMEN'S WORK

Along with gender, the cumulative negotiations of societal discourses surrounding class and caste are important social processes in any discussion on women workers in India.

For an economy to be functional at its potential, women's skills and talents should be engaged in activities that makes best use of their abilities. When women's labour is underused or mislocated because they face discrimination in markets or societal institutions that prevent them from completing their education, entering loses are the result. (World Development Report 2012, cited in Klavern and Kea, 2012, p. 79)

Gender relations in any society have a centrality in production relations by virtue of the way that structure systems of ownership of means of production, work organisation, rewards, power and authority.

Shenoy-Packer (2014, p.10) writes that the particular caste, community and religious group to which women belong, the extent to which their caste and class overlap, and the extent to which these are embedded in social formations and structures influence their participation in the workforce.

3.5.1 Historical Perspective

Women in India have been traditionally assigned secondary position vis-à-vis men due to rigid social system stratified by caste and class. Mohanty (2004) writes that the image of women as dependent on men, mainly performing household chores and their child bearing and nurturing role, as a result of a long period of the country's feudal and capitalist social history that looked upon men as playing crucial roles in the society's production system and therefore wielding more power. Desai and Krishnaraj (2004) state that caste not only determined social division of labour but also the sexual division of labour in a way that basically labeled task as 'essentially for men' and 'essentially for women.' (cf, Shenoy-Packer, 2014 p. 15)

Liddle and Joshi (1989) remark that the subordination of women was crucial to developing a caste- based hierarchy. The higher the caste of women, more her independence was constrained for the requirement of purity of clan and the family. Thus, lower caste women had more freedom and unrestricted mobility concerning their work while upper caste Hindu women were restricted in movement and secluded at home. The middle class in India emerged out of British colonises need to hire English educated Indians to administer the country. The opportunity to be educated in English and work for the British was available almost exclusively to upper caste Brahmins. This new order of tailored or manufactured working class had contradictory effects on women's work.

Women end up becoming disadvantaged in the public domain of work and also subjugated to social control in their private spheres under the garb of value constructs determined by men. Caste and class have been other factors responsible for relegating women to a lower position. (Shenoy-Packer 2014, p.2)

Juxtaposed with this were the norms of behaviour imposed on upper caste women to be applied to urban, middle class women. Economically independent women were considered difficult to control and capable to undermining the social structure and hierarchy. Liddle and Joshi (1989) suggest that women's organisation, activism and resistance arose from middle class working women. (You will read more about it in the next Unit on Mass Mobilization and Resistance).

3.5.2 Contemporary Situation

In the new liberalized economy, caste has been subjected to de-ritualisation due to loss of support system (Seth, 1999). In contemporary India, people of all caste feel the desire of upward mobility, both individual as well as collective. Nijman (2006) argues that caste as a marker of social stratification has been replaced by class especially in urban social spaces with an overwhelming educated population. (Cited in Shenoy- Packer 2014, p.13)

Caste and class share a complex relationship and class has revived itself as a social and political lens.

This new rising class associate itself with new life styles and modern consumption pattern along with ownership of economic assets non available to traditional middle class of Indian society till twenty five years back. Thus, along with economic growth, economic class is increasingly gaining prominence over all social stratifications. As a result, caste based status and ritual purity are slowly declining in importance. (Kapadia, 2002 p.151)

In the present context, 'class-caste dynamics' has remarkable ramifications on the workforce participation of urban women where upper class and the emerging new middle class women have consistently got out of social and cultural control of their mobility and caste dictates, successfully pursuing higher education and fulfilling professional aspirations.

Mazumdar (2007, p. xxiii) argues about the emergence of multilayered contradiction in the sphere of paid work by women, about processes associated with globalised organisation of production have tended to be highly 'circumscribed' and have led to fall in women's employment and work force participation rate in last two decades.

As a result of liberalization of Indian economy and impact of forces of globalization, new Indian middle class has emerged, which is educated and rising slowly towards upward mobility. It is this new and rich middle class of India which is driving the labour market. This rising new middle class structure has cut across the caste hierarchy forming new alliances and antagonism (Mukherjee, 1999, p. 1761).

Thus, caste and class have always affected women's work in Indian Society.

3.6 NEOLIBERALISM AND WOMEN WORKERS

Neoliberal is a word used to describe particular features of the structures that have come to dominate the global economy since the 1980s. The central characteristic of neoliberalism inheres acceptance of basic principles of market capitalism in a country's internal and external economic policies.

In practical terms, neoliberal policies mean that few countries are able to isolate themselves from the structures of global production, finance and investment and labour allocations. The assets, competitiveness, and flexibility of individuals, countries, and corporations determine whether they are winners or losers in this system of global competitiveness.

The liberal in neoliberalism derives historically from the structures and practices of economic and political openness and competitiveness that emerged in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These became central to the political economies that are found today in Western, industrialized countries such as the United States. Liberalism connotes economy governed by market mechanism. At its origins, liberalism stood in opposition to the tyranny of monarchs; as a philosophical principal, it provided support for civil rights such as free speech, the rule of law, and competitive political processes. A liberal economy is one in which government interference in economic processes was minimized. By the late twentieth century, the liberal norms of earlier decades took on new meanings in a global economy dominated by Western, industrialized countries, particularly the United States, and by the international organisations that they largely controlled, such as the World Bank. Hence the prefix "neo" was added to liberalism to signify the changed global context that emerged during this period. (Everett and Charlton, 2014, p.3)

Capitalism and liberalism led to the private ownership of property by individuals and corporations. For some people, this meant that for the first time in history, they could farm land that they owned and controlled. Others could only sell their labour, often in degrading conditions. Over time, spread in improvements in material consumption had negative consequences on the new systems of productions that included human exploitation and environmental destruction. By the mid- twentieth century in industrial capitalist economics, most individuals working in corporations, factories, and government had secure wage contracts and some level of social protection (health, unemployment, and retirement benefits); and their workplaces were subject to government regulation of wages and working conditions. These jobs constituted what was characterized as the formal economy, which was seen as a defining characteristic of the modern world. The nature of work continues to evolve in the twenty-first century due to changes in the structure of international production.

An associated trend of this restructuring of international production system and services is what is commonly known as '**outsourcing**'. Facilitated by sophisticated computer and information technologies, outsourcing leads to the rapid loss of jobs in some parts of the world and the creating of new jobs in other places. Job may shift suddenly with the result that outsourcing is generally accompanied by job insecurity, even for those who initially benefit by the movement to new regions or countries. Another noticeable trend is the significance of international migration. Large-scale migration, particularly during the past two centuries, was central to the development of industrialization and plantation agriculture. However, international migration today is different in both quality and quantity. There are more migrants, moving in multiple directions, taking on new responsibilities. International migrants are almost evenly divided by gender, but men and women do different work. The other characteristic of contemporary globalization is the entry of new '**economic players**' into positions of power like China, Brazil and Russia who undermine the long dominance of Western Europe and North America (Everett and Charlton, 2014).

Women have become a large segment of the labour force in Export-Oriented Industrialization (EOI) and predominate in labour-intensive industries such as garments and food production. The feminization of factory production is a result of several factors. The initial stages of EOI generate such high demand for workers that both men and women workers are needed. Once women are hired in a particular industry, "**stickiness**" (continuation of gender-based hiring patterns), "**spillover**" (later industrialize copying the gendered hiring decisions of early industrialized), and "**snowballing**" (rapid expansion in feminized sectors) occur. The gender ideologies of owners, managers and state agents characterize women as having "**nimble fingers**", but across regions and industries, employers and governments encourage recruit different categories of women-young, middle-aged, rural, and indigenous- as the appropriate labour force. (Everett and Charlton, 2014, p.126)

Critics present a picture of a vulnerable female workforce, working long hours at low pay, on short-term contracts, with unreasonable reduction targets, and risking their jobs if they try to organize. On the other hand economists argue that women's jobs in EOI are much better than the alternatives and have liberating effects. Problems mark both of these positions however, later argument emphasizes agency without examining the structural constraints whereas oppression and exploitation are evident in the earlier argument. Recently scholars have provided a more nuanced and complex picture of the lives of women workers in global market factories, noting that women workers experience contradictions such as an increase in the status in the family or greater autonomy from husbands and fathers alongside continued subordination at home and work. The workers themselves

respond to factory conditions in a variety of ways i.e. exhibiting resilience and in some cases, resistance. (You will read about Resistance and Mobilisation in the next Unit of this Block).

Attempt the following exercise before reading further.

Check Your Progress:

1) *What do you understand by 'neoliberalisation'?*

2) *What is meant by 'outsourcing'?*

3) *What is Export Oriented Industrialization?*

In the following section you read about gender related issues in the workplace and how men and women are affected by them in different ways.

Gender-specific issues in the workplace:

Let us review the situation in two sectors. One is the traditional sector where women have been working since the beginning of agrarian society, and the other sector is the result of socio-economic development in later part of 20th century.

Globalization and development have changed **agriculture** as they have other work sectors. The creation of international markets has stimulated agribusiness, which in general sense simply refers to for-profit agriculture. However, agribusiness is often very big business, engaging multinational corporations in structures of vertical integration, including seed selection and breeding, landholding, labour contracts, fertilizer and pesticides, marketing, and transportation. These changes may create opportunities for greater market participation for both women and men. However, for women in particular, to date, equal access to these markets is still limited. Long before the debates over the impact of agribusiness, women-in-development specialists drew attention to women's unequal access to education and technical assistance, secure property rights, and sources of capital. The smaller and poorer the farms, the more disadvantages women face in competing in the new markets. Cultural and social barriers often further handicap market access, particularly where women must rely on men for transportation, financing, and marketing.

Let us review another scenario.

Over the past few decades, the proportion of **women in management and allied professions** has been increasing. These developments reflect the increase of women in higher education. Even though women have made strides in the professional, technical, and managerial workforce, a large gender pay gap remains in these occupations. The pay gap is due in part to horizontal and vertical occupational segregation by gender. Women are concentrated into lower-paying professions, such as teaching and nursing. For example, women are the majority of primary-school teachers.

But, despite the persistent issues of access, pay inequity, double-day burdens and contractual workers in factories, their physical workplace is less hazardous. By virtue of their formal education and workplace skills, they are assumed to have more personal agency. This stands in stark contrast to the vast majority of informal economy workers.

3.7 WAY FORWARD

Two recent trends assure of '*acche din*' ahead for women in labour participation.

It has been seen that school drop out rates of girls of 11-14 years of age have gone down from 11.2% in 2004-05 to 5.9% in 2010, thus indicating that girl's education has gained momentum with masses and this dividend in future should convert into labour participation. Secondly, looking at the migration data, it is seen that largest percentage of women migrating from rural to urban areas is still because of marriage (60.8%) followed by those who migrate with parents/ earning members (29.4%) but 2.7% of them migrated for employment and another 2.2% migrated for pursuing education (MWCD, 2014, p. 3). Let us now look at the changing scenario of Indian women workforce and factors associated with the change.

3.7.1 Rising Educational Status of Women

The total number of young working age (15-24 years) population who continue in educational institutions doubled from 30 million in 2004-05 to over 60 millions in 2009-10. (Planning Commission, 2011)

Increase in education of girls and their staying in educational system for a longer period portends better job aspirations of educated women who have remained out of employment network to fortify themselves with higher qualifications and better skill sets. The possibility of their turning up for employment and at a higher level is evident from the resources that the family and the girls themselves have invested by keeping away from early entry into the labour market at lower and unskilled or semi-skilled stage.

As we have read in the earlier section, at present, male participation in labour force in India is much higher than that of women but enhanced educational attainments of women is an indication of increased participation of labour force in future. Also, such women workers will be looking for more enduring and decent employment opportunities and will also be full of self-confidence, augmented articulation and negotiating powers in the labour market.

It is also visualized that there will be growth in manufacturing sector, absorbing more skilled labour that is being trained and skilled. Also, there will be a shift in occupational pattern of women workers from traditional domains to manufacturing intensive sectors.

The Approach Paper on 12th FYP also suggests that this slump in FLFPR is temporary and there are all reasons to believe that the participation of women in labour will increase in 12th Plan in years thereafter.

3.7.2 Questioning Gendered Organisations

Organisations are gendered and masculinized. This gives men an unaccounted and unearned advantage. As a result women face additional challenges and

difficulty in advancing their career. Organizations and their culture were created by men and for men and reflect norms of wider patriarchal society. As a consequence women feel uncomfortable and out of place in their workplace making them disadvantaged and encounter barriers to their career advancement.

Britton (1999) writes that organisations are not gendered but more accurately, 'masculanized', where masculanized skill-sets are idealized and rewarded more than the skills associated with women. The masculanized benefits are maintained through personal and impersonal ways such as policies, ideology worker interactions, organisational structures and the creation and maintenance of male and female identities.

Barriers to women's advancement in careers have been identified mainly at two levels. One is **organisational culture** that deters women employees' upward mobility as they are a misfit because the work culture is male created and male dominated. It is a culture that is created to include some and exclude others. Second, men seen as part of problem but not part of the solution.

Sandberg (2013) writes of 'internal barriers' that cause women to stall their careers and refers this as 'leadership ambition gap'. But, there is ample evidence to proof that most workplaces are not merit rewarding, recognizing individual efforts and accomplishments. It is 'mentoring' and 'old boys' network' and a work culture that values working long hours in an aggressive and competitive manner that brings rewards and recognition thus, leaving women out its fold.

Lately, organisations have shown interest in supporting advancement of women employees in positions of decision making as their presence in critical mass brings in wider perspective and increase in productivity. Some initiatives have been taken in this regard but the progress is slow and far from satisfactory.

3.8 LET US SUM UP

Working is an inseparable part of human life. All of us work, have worked, or will work during our lives. Work, however, has different meanings for each of us; it varies by age and physical capacity, by gender, place, and class. Work may be paid or unpaid, and usually it is a combination of the two. For example, many people who work for an income also perform many households or farm duties that are essential to survival, but for which they receive no money.

Women workers in India are still concentrated in informal economy mostly as self employed and casual workers. But the situation is slowly changing with rise in educational status of girls. Lately, presence of women in critical

mass in decision making position in gaining importance but still backing in implementation.

3.9 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Discuss how caste and class in India impact women's participation in labour force. Give examples to explain your stance.
- 2) Explain neoliberalism and how it has changed the work scenario for working women in India.
- 3) Discuss contemporary challenges that Indian working women face both in informal and formal sectors.

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