
After Independence, Women Participation in Unorganised Service Sectors of West Bengal

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Abstract

75 years of India's independence. Male revolutionaries were not the only ones on the front line to break the British Empire, numerous women like Matangini Hazra, Pritilata Waddadar, Kalpana Datta etc. have shed their blood to bring freedom alongside the male revolutionaries. After independence, women played an active role in building a new India. From Politics to Education, Bureaucracy to Space Science, Defense of the country to the Army, to the Airforce and to the Intelligence Agency, women have shattered the male-dominated model in almost every field. Just as it can't be denied that gender inequality still now exists in independent India. Discrimination on the basis of race, community, particularly gender discrimination, has reduced women's participation in organized or unorganized wage employment. A comparative discussion of types of employment shows a very small number of women engaged in gainful employment in India from the late 1970s to the present. The level of women's work participation in the unorganized sector has increased as compared to women's participation in organized sectors. In this article, the level of women participation in unorganized service sector in post-independence West Bengal is demonstrated.

KEYWORDS: Gender inequality, Work participation

INTRODUCTION

Hansa Jivraj Mehta, the great freedom fighter and one of 15 women – members of the Constitution council of pre-independent India – handed over the very flag of to Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the first president of free India, which is flying with pride on the top of our Parliament House. It means that the very matter speaks eloquently that the role the women – freedom fighters played during the struggle and fight for the freedom of our bonded motherland was not a little less important and the endurance of the equal right of a citizen in our constitution for the women today is the consequence of that sacrifice of the women-fighters. But the real picture of the women-folk who are bound to render physical labour for earning their livelihood is facing a hard challenge for enjoying the right particularly in the perspective of today's market of high-price-rise.

The life and living of the women folk in the pre-independent India was exclusively led and controlled by the dictums of the classical Manu Smriti, which is ultimately a

ruthless constitution of the Paternal system. 'Manu Smriti'- the very book, an indispensable part of the Hindu-belief and supports strongly with the religious reasons in born inequality, gender-difference and casteism in the society. But the constitution of our free India elaborates the ways through theoretically on the basis of secularism to end the customs of casteism and broaden means of women empowerment. But practically the laws that are written in the constitution for the wellbeing of the women population are not executed fruitfully to achieve the desired ends, and this is reflected when we see every day the mischief done upon the women population are increasing steadily and the doers are not punished proportionately. The role of government play in this regard is quite unsatisfactory as it is undeceived, weak and even, sometimes directly controversial and rather congenial to the victims.

In 1994 though the law to prevent female foeticide has been adopted. Yet a report published by UN Population Fund in 2020, reveals clearly that the crimes are not on the wave rather on the rise as from 2011 to 2016 the numbers of female foeticide were committed was 4 Lakh due to the practice of sex-determination factors. On thus added the cruel practices of cruelty on female childlike raping, sexual harassment, acid-attacking etc. These incidents evidently speak the sheer reaction of the paternal system to women's claim for equality and justice in their social and domestic lives. The report of the National Crime Bureau in 2019 also supports the fact as it says that the numbers of crimes done upon the women population rose to 4.12 lakh, whereas punishments given to the doers was only 23.7%. (Leacock, 1981)¹

WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN THE PARLIAMENT

In the first Parliament the women representation was 5%. But in a long 75 years the picture is not so hopeful as today the women representation in the Parliament is only about 14%, whereas in the whole world perspective it is 24.6%. In our state of West Bengal, the picture is worse as here it is only 8.8%. In this context the position of India in the world list is 141st. Though much words are said in the election-manifesto about women- development and women- empowerment, the implications do not get executed the Women-Reservation Bill is not passed yet and no positive signs are seen in this regard. The picture is not positive even in the grass-root levels of women-political- representation, where the male – representation is much much higher than that of the females. So, the researchers consequently reveal that the women cannot take right political decisions and thus only the male representatives are entitled to take them. The patent-fact is that how much the status as well as the liberty of women could be given depend upon their economic stability and the social treatment they get in the society. It also depends on the outlook of the society to the historical burden of unequal division of labours on the basis of gender discrimination between men and women. Again, though the farmers and the toiling class of people took active part in

the independent movement in free India they had no place in the newly framed government formed by the zamindars and bourgeoisie. This very reason has yielded a number of equalities in the directives like economic disparity, disparity in the equal right for jobs and equal wages, equal justice and so many things as ensured by the fundamental rights of our Constitution.(Brinda Karat,2022) ²

EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN IN POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

Though in comparison with other countries women-employment in India is not so good, yet it is admitted that scopes for employment of women in India in the post-independence period have increased a lot. Nevertheless, the new economic policies of the government have resulted more deterioration in the economic condition of the women which has ultimately made them victims of social-disparity. In 2021 the World Bank has published a report depicting women-employment in different countries like 19% in India, 62% in China, 41% in Myanmar, 79% in Nepal, 21% in Pakistan, 31% in Sri Lanka and 35% in Bangladesh.

In the developing countries like India, the economic development of the country is dependent upon the jobs of women. Women-labour particularly plays here an important role in voluntary and wage-free services in yielding the relatively surplus-money of the capitalists. This nourishes the exploiting behaviours of the capitalists and inspires them to build ready labour block by the women (Custers,2012).³ He has shown that the gender-based labour-division has not only reserves the dominance of the male upon the women, it also helps the capitalists to exploit them economically to the extent as they desire. The importance of fragmented labour market help lowering wages of the women-labours. By adopting a number of techniques. The capitalists increase the time period of work of the women and lowering their wage to yield more and more surplus money.

Now in free India or more precisely in west Bengal, there are four different types of tendencies both in the rural and urban working women – (i) Paid Labour (ii) Unpaid Labour (iii) Underpaid Labour and (iv) Unemployed women

It is admitted that though the overall economic development or the total GDP growth has been achieved in India in a rapid rate, yet the matter of creation of employment opportunities has not been had with the same pace. The same be said for in West Bengal. The self-contradictory character of Indian economy where a wide gulf of difference prevails in between the well-economic development of the Haves in one hand and the meagre and low-paid employments for the toiling masses on the other has affected the lives and livelihood of the working women both in the rural and urban areas.

In the post-independence period in India the overall women participation in employment is much lower in comparison to other developing countries. There prevails ugly disparity in women working areas, their types of work and the wages they are paid. The same picture is clearly unveiled both in rural and the urban areas. Working women in maximum number in urban areas are engaged in either in domestic work or in voluntary services, but their participation in high productivity works to export based works is too small. In rural areas women are mostly engaged in self-helped group-works. In West Bengal the last few years women in increasing number are being engaged in self-helped-employment areas rather in decreasing number in the irregular works. (Beneria & Sen,1981)⁴

WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN SELF-EMPLOYMENT, PERMANENT OR CONTRACTUAL WORKS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PATTERN OF WORKS

According to the patterns of works about 61.9% of rural women were engaged in self-employment areas and in urban areas it was about 45.8% in permanent works 2.8% rural women whereas 25.8% urban women were engaged. In contractual works the figure were 35.3% in rural areas and 25.4% in urban areas. In 1993-94, the information in this regard depicts the picture as in self-employment the rural women participation was 58.5% and in urban areas it was 45.8%, in permanent works 2.8% rural women were engaged where 28.4% women got work in urban areas. Again, in contractual works 38.7% rural women were engaged and 25.8% urban women got that opportunity. In 1993-94 in self-employment 58.5% rural women and 45.8% urban women were engaged. In permanent works 2.8% village women and 28.4% town-women got employment. In contractual works 38.7% rural women and 25.8% urban women got employment. In 1999-2000, the statistics remain almost the same. In 2004-2005, in self-employment 63.7% rural women and 47.7% urban women were engaged. About 3.7% rural women and 35.6% urban women got employment in permanent jobs. In contractual fields 32.6% rural women and 16.7% urban women got jobs. (Pandey, 2021)⁵

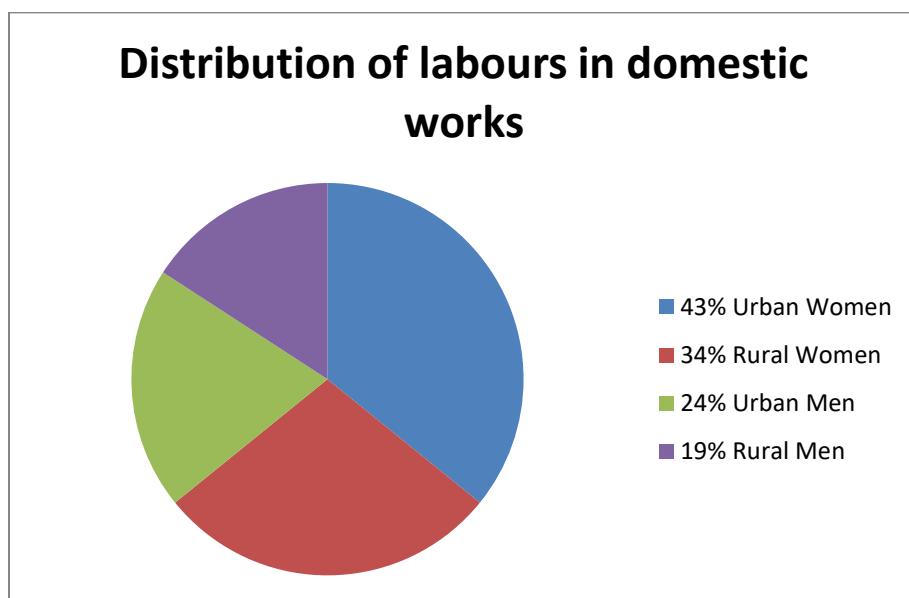
The picture did not change notably when read the statistics of the same for the period 2017-18 and 2018-19. So, the observations help us to reach the conclusion that the status of women in respect to their availing of the job-opportunities whether in self-employment, permanent jobs or in contractual works remaining the almost same for decades after decades.

Here it must be admitted that the women in towns and cities now get a little more opportunities in getting employments in urban areas and the jobs they get are likely cooking, washing, nursing etc which are not so coveted by them. From 1999-2000 to

2004-2005 a large number of urban women (about 30 lakh) got themselves engaged in domestic works.

WOMEN IN DOMESTIC WORKS

In almost all economically sound families in Indian women belonging to BPL (Below Poverty Line) are generally engaged to do domestic jobs in life of low- or under-paid salary, and this reality is being more and more evident particularly in towns and cities. A survey reveals that of the increasing labours in domestic areas in 2000's more than 75% are women.



Source: Created by author on the basis of NSSO report 2022

The above diagram shows that the participation of urban women in domestic jobs is more than that of rural women, and of the increasing women labour 14.4% are engaged in domestic works.

WOMEN WORKING IN AGRICULTURAL FIELDS

Due to some basic problems in economy India still is unable to create diversities in employments, and as a result of it is increased in low-paid women-labourers who are engaged in more strenuous works in agricultural fields. About 2/3 of the women labourers are still employed in agricultural jobs as the primary economy yielders. History says it clearly that the success in development in any country depends on the importation of labourers from Primary sectors to more beneficial Secondary and tertiary sectors. But the picture in this regard in our country remaining unchanged

herein the women labours in agricultural fields are still the prime condition. This is supported by the survey report from West Bengal during 2017-20.

Year	Women participation in agricultural work		Men participation in agricultural work	
	Rural area	Urban area	Rural area	Urban area
2017-2018	73.2%	9.1%	5.5%	5.4%
2018-2019	71.7%	7.8%	53.2%	4.9%
2019-2020	75.7%	8.2%	55.4%	5.0%

Source: NSSO Employment-Unemployment estimates as per PLFS(2017-2020) ⁶

The chart shows that the number of women-labours is increasing while that of men is decreasing, and this is due to scarcity of suitable jobs compels the working women to engage themselves in agricultural works.

MIGRATORY LABOURER

Women render labour without pay in agricultural works in their own land but mostly they are not acknowledged. Moreover, women are deprived of the different opportunities and advantages that are availed by the men in their agricultural works. This very thing makes the women in agricultural works more uncertain and insecure than that of the men. This insecurity and uncertainty transform women migratory labourer.

In 2011 the number of migratory labourers in India was 45.36 corer which was about 37% of the total population of the country. In 2001 this number was 31 corers, and this shows that an increase of about 45% of the migratory labourers has been had in the period of that 10 years. Again, the patent fact is that of the 45.36 corer migratory labourers 70% were women. Merely the many crises that were prevailing in agricultures were not the only reasons for this increase of migratory labourers. The very “Push” and “Pull” reasons in the bordering line led women to take profession of migratory labourers. This process makes women empowered in one hand and being exploited at the same time, and of course, this matter depends on which thing they (women) import and export through the bordering line. Many women belonging to villages and towns and under the age group of 15-27 years are employed in this work as migratory labourers. There is no datum of the government about the actual number of the women migratory labourers but the number is increasing steadily as the tendency is in this matter of the last decade speaks so. (Ghosh,2022)⁷

WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN 100 DAYS WORK

It is not an exaggeration that at present, women are participating more and more in number in 100 days work, and the matter had made a National Record (56.6%) in the current financial year (2022-2023). If we analyse, we can see that women participation in the financial year 2012-2013 was 51.3%, in 2016-2017 it was 56.21% and in the

'COVID Period' and after the 'Lock Down' period the figure began steadily increasing, and now in the current financial year it has become 56.6%. Some Economists think that the prevailing crisis in rural economy and the steady shrinkage of family income have led women to engage themselves more and more in 100 Days work.

FAILURE IN EXECUTION OF THE FORMULATED RULE

Though women are having more and more opportunities in different jobs, yet the overall condition of the women in the country remaining hopeless even today. Only the execution of the governmental policy and the formulated laws in this regard can help to improve their condition. There are a number of laws formulated with this view—such as Work-men's Compensation Act 1926, Inter-state Migrant Worker Act 1976, Payment of wages Act 1936, Maternity benefit Act 1961, Minimum wages Act 1948, Equal Remuneration Act 1976, Employee's State Insurance Act, Employee's Provident Fund Act, Payment of Gratuity Act 1972. But it is unfortunate enough that none of the above stated laws has been executed fruitfully for the domestic employees. Only the positive is that women are brought under the purview of Unorganized worker's Social Security Act (2008), and the Worker's Unions in the state of Tamil Nadu are ahead to some extent in comparison to the rest of the country. The domestic workers in the state of Tamil Nadu in June 1999 were brought under the per view of 'Tamil Nadu Labour Act 1982'. In January of 2007 the Tamil Nadu Domestic Workers' Welfare Board was established. It determines different wages for different works as well as minimum wages for the domestic women workers on the basis of the duration of works. The minimum wages have been fixed for the domestic workers in the states like Karnataka, Kerala and Rajasthan but the cruel reality is that are yet to be executed. In Kerala the Government has made the domestic workers lawfully the members of Kerala Artisan and Skilled Worker's Welfare Fund. This project ensures security for the domestic workers to avail of the different social securities. So, this project is of paramount importance in the lives of the domestic workers. The National Domestic Workers' Movement (2008) of Kerala was endorsed as Trade Union with the power to give certificate for providing people with social security. But the pity is that the Trade Union problems to execute it (power) successfully.

The employment of paid and unpaid child labourers in towns and cities has been increasing day by day. Though the necessary law 'Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986 was adopted to combat the problem, yet the needful security and endeavour to execute the law successfully have not been taken.

CONCLUSION

Though the employment of women in different organized and unorganized sectors has been increased considerably in India in the Post-independence period, yet it is a hard

reality that women labour has become a cheap tool to extract more and more profit in those areas. Capitalistic economy prefers to use different social and gender inequality subtly in their sectors to extract more and more profit, and this inevitably results in the helpers' state that hinders the efforts to improve the economic condition of the working women. This exploitation machinery in India not only devalues the meaning of Independence of the country, it also weakens it, in fact, so the ways of solutions are to be invented and implemented. The solutions lies in the Movement an all-out Social Movement- which will raise necessary demands to the Governments. Then the coveted social acknowledgement, higher pay and improved working conditions for the working women will be achieved. And then will be the second independence movement for them. What is needed urgently in this moment is unification of all poor and middle-class working women.

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