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EMPLOYMENT TRENDS IN INDIA, 1993-94 TO 2009-10**

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Occasional Paper No.56



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(August 2011)**



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Published by:
Centre for Women's Development Studies, New Delhi

Rs.40/- (US \$ 5)

GENDER DIMENSIONS:

EMPLOYMENT TRENDS IN INDIA, 1993-94 TO 2009-10

Indrani Mazumdar and Neetha N.

The recently released Key Indicators of Employment and Unemployment in India 2009-10 (NSSO, 2011) shows that the disturbing trend of a steep fall in female work participation rates that had appeared in 2007-08 has continued. With the increase in the male workforce by 22.3 million between 2004-05 and 2009-10 being virtually cancelled out by the reduction in the female workforce by more than 21 million, the need to understand the gender dimensions of employment trends in India has acquired a new urgency.¹ This paper examines some of the explicit as well as not so explicit trends in relation to women's employment in India from 1993-94 till 2009-10 and argues that they indicate a grave and continuing crisis in women's employment under liberalization led growth. Trends in the distribution of male and female workers by employment status and broad industry for the same period are also outlined. The paper shows how specific attention to unpaid work in the NSS data can overturn standard assumptions regarding women's employment, and indeed has relevance for more general discussions on employment growth in India. It argues that the time has come to constantly and explicitly make a clearer distinction between income earning/paid employment and unpaid work in the analysis of employment trends.

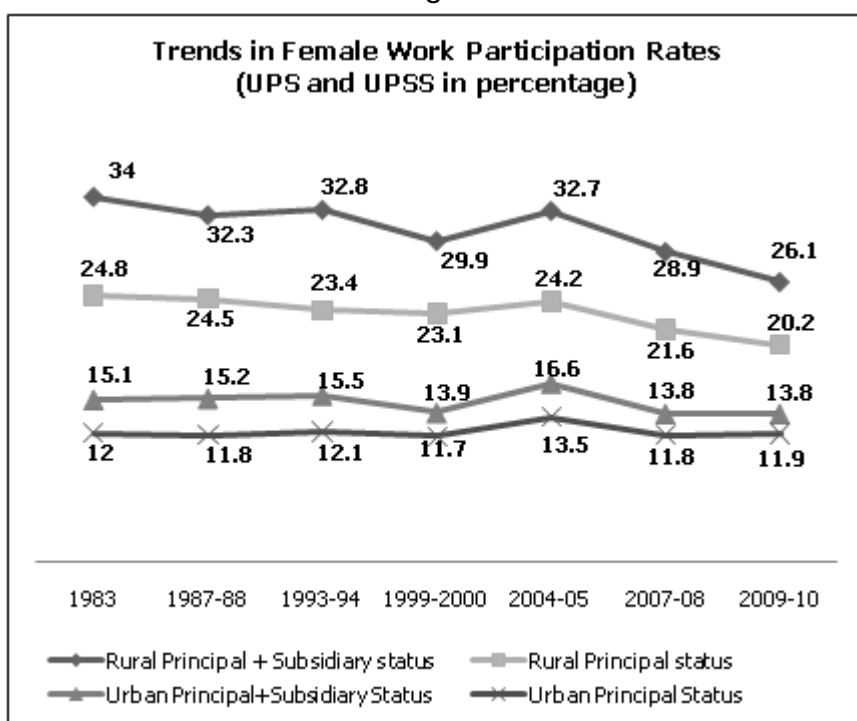
Declining female work participation rates

The most striking revelation of NSSO's 66th round survey is the significant fall in female work participation rates (FWPR) between 2004-05 and 2009-10. Where the mid-quinquennial survey of 2007-08 (64th round) had already shown a drop in the rural FWPR to below the all time low of 1999-2000, it further dropped to

¹ Workforce figures in this paper have been calculated using Census segment wise population Projections and NSS segment wise Worker Population Ratios.

reach 20 per cent in principal status work/employment (UPS) and 26 per cent in usual (principal + subsidiary) status work (UPSS) in 2009-10. In urban areas too, FWPR has fallen substantially from 13.5 per cent in 2004-05 to below 12 per cent in the case of UPS employment and from close to 17 per cent to below 14 per cent in UPSS (see Fig.1). With principal status or main work/employment as well as subsidiary status or marginal work having both lost ground, it appears that relatively more durable work as well as shorter bursts of temporary employment have become less available to women.

Fig. 1



Source: Employment and Unemployment Reports, Various Rounds, National Sample Survey Organisation

It may be recalled that a sharp slump in female work participation rates and a decline in the share of women in total employment had appeared as a major feature of the first decade of 'economic reforms' in India. The evidence of the 1999-2000 survey (55th round) had pointed to displacement of women from employment across the 1990s, denting the then widely accepted argument that liberalization and globalization leads to feminization of labour (Neetha, 2009a; Mazumdar, 2007). In 2004-05, the 61st round survey appeared to alleviate the

gloomy picture by showing a seeming 'revival' in women's work participation, albeit primarily driven by an increase in 'self employment' (Table 1). Further analysis had highlighted a sharp rise in unpaid labour by women as a sub-category of the self employed (Neetha & Indrani 2006). Where the share of regular salaried employment had increased by a few percentage points to reach a paltry 9 per cent of the female workforce in 2004-05, casual (wage) labour actually witnessed a precipitate fall by 6 percentage points between 1999-2000 and 2004-05. This fall was matched and exceeded by a sharp rise in share of *self employed women* that touched 61 per cent in 2004-05, within which the share of the sub-category of *unpaid women helpers* rose to 72.5 per cent. Clearly, even when FWPR increased, the conditions of women's work participation in India called for a different approach from the feminization thesis that was premised on the expectation of higher demand for women in wage work. Further, where the 2004-05 aggregate data on work participation rates appeared to be giving the impression of more women finding jobs or employment, the disaggregated data on employment status suggested a process of large scale substitution of paid work by unpaid labour of women.

Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Employment by Status- UPSS

| Employment Status and Year | Rural | | Urban | | Total | |
|----------------------------|-------|--------|-------|--------|-------|--------|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| Self-Employed | | | | | | |
| 1993-94 | 57.7 | 58.6 | 41.7 | 44.8 | 53.6 | 56.8 |
| 1999-2000 | 55.0 | 57.3 | 41.5 | 45.3 | 51.2 | 55.5 |
| 2004 -05 | 58.1 | 63.7 | 44.8 | 47.7 | 54.2 | 61.0 |
| 2007-08 | 55.4 | 58.3 | 42.7 | 42.3 | 51.9 | 55.9 |
| 2009-10 | 53.5 | 55.7 | 41.1 | 41.1 | 50.0 | 53.3 |
| Regular Workers | | | | | | |
| 1993-94 | 8.5 | 2.7 | 42.0 | 28.4 | 17.1 | 6.3 |
| 1999-2000 | 8.8 | 3.1 | 41.7 | 33.3 | 18.1 | 7.8 |
| 2004 -05 | 9.0 | 3.7 | 40.6 | 35.6 | 18.3 | 9.0 |
| 2007-08 | 9.1 | 4.1 | 41.9 | 37.9 | 17.9 | 8.9 |
| 2009-10 | 8.5 | 4.4 | 41.9 | 39.3 | 17.7 | 10.1 |
| Casual Workers | | | | | | |
| 1993-94 | 33.8 | 38.7 | 16.3 | 25.8 | 29.3 | 36.9 |
| 1999-2000 | 36.2 | 39.6 | 16.8 | 21.4 | 30.7 | 36.8 |
| 2004 -05 | 32.9 | 32.6 | 14.6 | 16.7 | 27.5 | 30.0 |
| 2007-08 | 35.5 | 37.6 | 15.4 | 19.9 | 30.1 | 35.1 |
| 2009-10 | 38.0 | 39.9 | 17.0 | 19.6 | 32.2 | 36.6 |

Source: Employment and Unemployment Reports, Various Rounds, National Sample Survey Organisation

It was the analysis of the 61st round, with its unusual and unexpected jump in work participation that highlighted the need to bring the specifics of unpaid labour into the discussion around female work participation rates. Sanguine approaches to the general increases in work participation rates of 2004-05 were already being countered by the argument that a real difficulty in finding paid work or wage work (jobless growth) was the real reason for the significant increase in self employment among both male and female workers (Ghosh, 2009). We, ourselves argued that the simultaneous expansion in women's work participation rates and self employment may be interpreted as desperate attempts by women to prop up crisis ridden family based production through unpaid labour and/or to garner a scrappy living through intermittent piece rated home based work (defined by NSSO as self employment) - all with uncertain results in an employment scenario characterized by extraordinary insecurity and volatility (Neetha, 2009a, Mazumdar, 2008.) Further, the substitution of paid work with the unpaid labour of women between 1999-2000 and 2004-05 could only be explained by an insufficiency of family incomes in meeting petty production and related consumption costs, particularly in agriculture.² In other words, the expanded work participation of women in 2004-05 that was largely based on expansion of their unpaid labour in/and self employment, actually signified a mounting crisis of paid employment and family incomes.³

The hypothesis regarding volatility/uncertainty and crisis inherent in the self employment driven increases in the FWPR of 2004-05 appears to have been confirmed now with the drop in proportions of self employed women from close to 61 per cent in 2004-05 to below 56 per cent in 2007-08 and further reduction to below 54 per cent in 2009-10. Since the deflation of the self employment balloon has occurred within the broader picture of an overall decline in numbers of employed women (See Table 1 in conjunction with Fig.1), it is no longer reasonable for anyone to argue that the earlier increases in work participation

² It may be remembered that it was from the same 2004-05 NSSO survey round that NCEUS calculated that 77 per cent of India's population were living below Rs.20 per day (Report on the Conditions of Work and Promotion of Livelihoods in the Unorganised Sector, 2007).

³ The compulsion for substitution of paid work by the unpaid labour of women between 1999-2000 and 2004-05 was understandably influenced by the pervasive agrarian crisis, marked as it was by rising input costs and declining returns in peasant agriculture that appeared to be propelling a section of male worker/peasants to move out of agriculture. No doubt supplementary incomes of particularly poor peasants were also affected by the non-availability or collapse of casual work in rural areas and falling real wages for casual work in urban areas.

between 1999-2000 and 2004-05 reflected growing employment opportunities for women in the economy. Quite to the contrary, the abysmal situation of women's employment in the era of liberalization has once again been sharply foregrounded by the successive surveys of 2007-8 and 2009-10. Significantly, the falling off of women's employment from 2004-05 to 2009-10 contrasts sharply with the surge in GDP growth rates in the same period.⁴

Of course, from a slightly longer perspective, a more long term downward trend in work participation for rural areas is also evident as shown in the graphs in Fig. 1. An even more worrisome feature is that the downward trend is more explicit in relation to principal status workers (UPS). The proportions of principal status workers among rural females have been consistently been falling across almost three decades between 1983 and 2009-10, apart from the solitary exception of 2004-05. If the UPS figures indicate a consistent process of marginalization of women's work in rural employment, the up and down swings in the UPSS work participation figures (Fig. 1), reflect the volatility and precariousness of subsidiary, relatively more short term/part time employment for rural women that cannot be explained away merely by seasonal variations.

Among urban women on the other hand, UPS and UPSS work participation rates have followed a more or less similar pattern of apparent stability but marked by low levels and stagnancy, the brief spike of 2004-05 being the only outlier. We will come back to the significance of these long term trends in a later section. Before that, attention may be drawn to the need to make a clearer distinction between employment with wage/income and employment without any wage/income accruing directly to the worker when analyzing trends in women's employment.

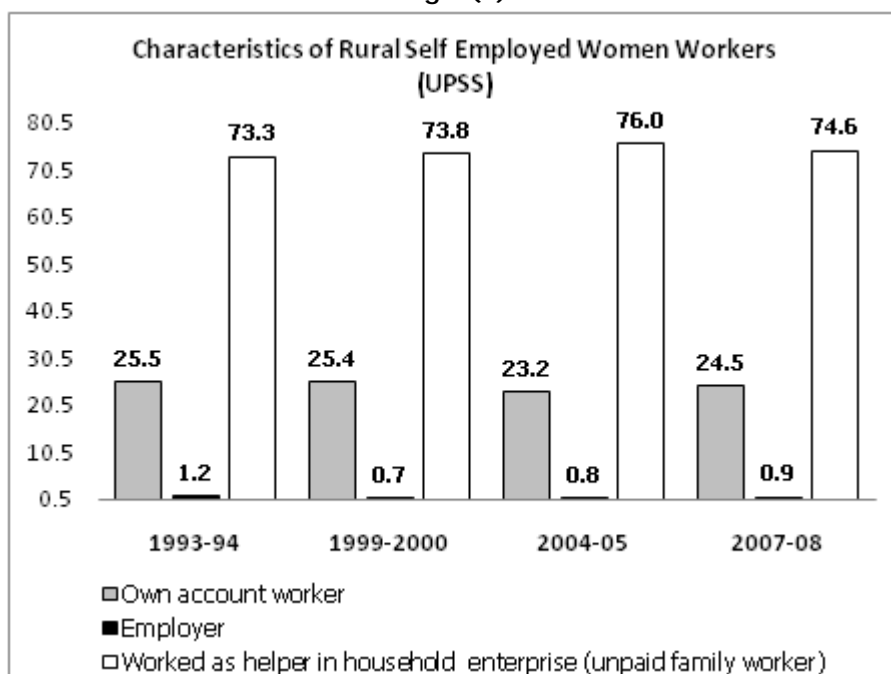
Women's Unpaid Labour

An aspect of the NSS data that generally gets missed in the debates around women's employment trends, relates to how much of women's work participation is in the form of unpaid labour. Of the three employment/activity status categories of workers recorded by the NSS, namely, self employed, regular salaried and casual labour, a higher proportion of the female workforce is always found to be

⁴ As is well known, India's growth story picked up from 2003-04 pushing GDP growth to an average of 8.8 per cent per annum till 2007-08 as compared with an average of 5.4 per cent in the six years preceding, and even following the slowdown after 2007-8, GDP growth in 2009-10 stood at a high 7.44 per cent.

concentrated in the 'self employed'. However, concealed within the aggregate figures for the self employed is the large unpaid segment, which contributes to the production economy, but without receiving any independent payment/income for their labour. Of the three sub-categories within 'self employment', the 'own account worker' and 'employer' segments receive wages/incomes. The third sub category of those who work as helper in household enterprise, are however, *unpaid*. Drawing on unit level data, Figures 2 (a) and (b) describe the characteristics of self employed women (UPSS) for rural and urban areas respectively across three large quinquennial rounds from 1993-94 to 2004-05 and further up to the medium large sized round of 2007-08.⁵

Fig 2 (a)



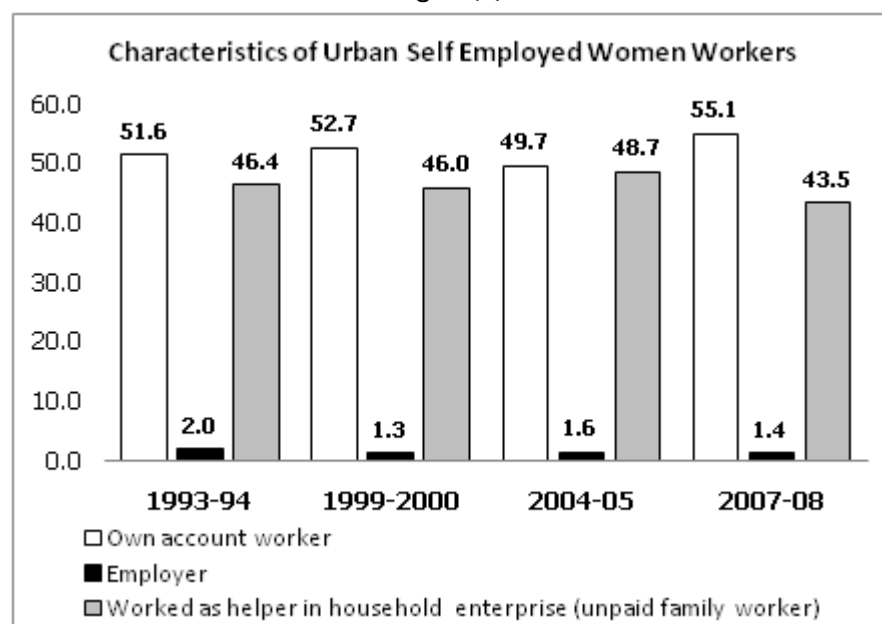
Source: Unit level Data, Various Rounds, National Sample Survey Organisation

Fig. 2 (a) makes the generally high share of unpaid workers among rural self employed women strikingly evident. Unpaid workers account for a whopping three fourths of rural self employed women across the four rounds, crossing the three fourths mark in 2004-05 and only slightly reduced in the next round of 2007-08. The sub-category of employers is of course negligible throughout and

⁵ At the time of writing unit level data (without which the proportions of unpaid helpers cannot be extracted) was not yet available for 2009-10.

even own account work generally represents just one quarter of rural self employed women. Needless to say, the unpaid work of women in NSS does not here refer to domestic work such as cooking, cleaning and child care, but to economic activities defined as all the market activities in production of goods and services for exchange, as well as non-market activities which result in production of primary goods for own consumption or relate to the own-account production (such as construction of houses, roads, wells, manufacture of machinery, tools, etc., and also construction of any private or community facilities free of charge) or in the capacity of either a labourer or a supervisor.

Fig. 2 (b)



Source: Unit level Data, Various Rounds, National Sample Survey Organisation

Among urban women [Fig. 2 (b)], own account work is a little more prominent, while employers are again consistently too small in numbers to be significant. It should be borne in mind that NSSO's definition of own account worker includes a range of workers engaged in piece wage work in homes, on the streets, etc for whom self employed own account worker is somewhat of a misnomer⁶. However,

⁶ For these piece rated workers the nomenclature of own account worker can be somewhat misleading, since it involves piece wages for work that is farmed out to workers by entrepreneurs/traders/other employers, and the workers themselves actually work for wages, albeit mostly on piece rates. For example, the lakhs of women rolling beedis at home for beedi magnates or their contractors, are clearly not really working in own account enterprise, but they are counted as own account workers in NSS.

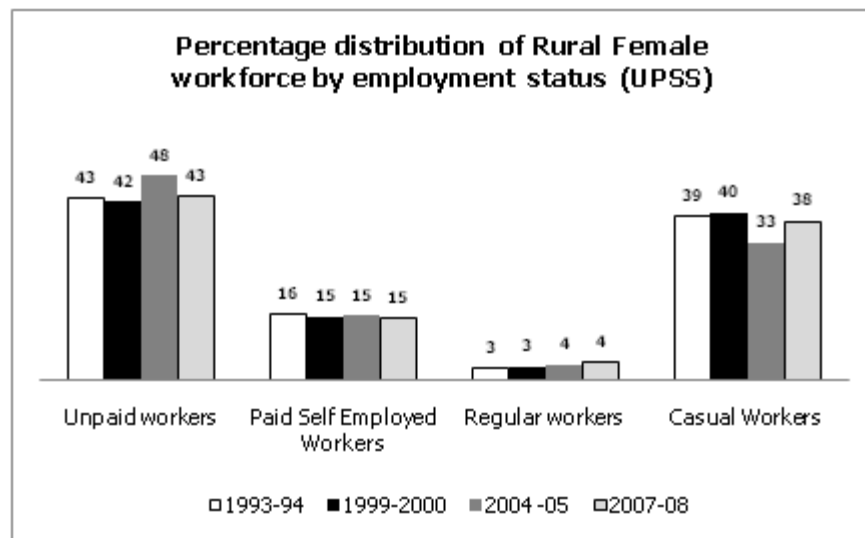
for the purposes of our present discussion, the important feature that needs underlining is that the own account workers in NSS data are paid for their work. Nevertheless, despite the greater relative weight of own account work among urban self employed women, the share of unpaid workers still constituted a substantial proportion of the urban self employed, with a high of 49 per cent in 2004-05 and a low of 43 per cent in 2007-08. The peculiar feature of the data on urban self employed women, is that the share of unpaid labour and FWPR follow a common trajectory. The share of unpaid labour increased when FWPR rose and declined when FWPR fell, emphasizing the need to look more closely at unpaid work when assessing the implications of any increases in work participation trends for urban women as well. A cursory view of industrial distribution of unpaid workers confirms the assumption that in rural areas, the overwhelming proportions of unpaid women workers are of course, concentrated in agriculture (Neetha & Indrani, 2006). Clearly the unpaid workforce in rural areas is largely composed of peasant wives or daughters working on/cultivating/supervising land owned by either husband/in laws or father/parents. In urban areas, on the other hand, unpaid workers are more evenly distributed across industries. Of the 43 per cent of unpaid workers among the urban self employed in 2007-08, more than two thirds were in community and personal services (including domestic workers, teachers, launderers, beauticians, etc), a little less than one fourth in manufacturing (primarily homebased piece rated work). This makes it difficult to any longer accept that unpaid work by women is solely a feature of 'traditional' production systems/sectors that are outside the contemporary monetized value exchange economy associated with 'modern' capitalist social relations.

The Structure of the Female Workforce

With unpaid workers separated from all other categories of income earning/paid workers, Figures 3 (a) and (b) present a useful description of the broad structure of the female workforce in rural and urban areas from 1993-94 to 2007-08. As is evident, from Fig. 3 (a), unpaid workers account for a very large proportion of the entire rural female workforce, consistently above 40 per cent and with an all time high of 48 per cent in 2004-05, while the share of paid/income earning self employment hovers around a mere 15 per cent. What is strikingly foregrounded is the fact that in rural areas, casual labour accounts for the majority of the paid female workforce. If one removes unpaid workers from the count and considers the distribution within paid/income earning workers alone, then in 2007-08, more than two thirds (67 per cent) of paid rural women workers were casual

labour, followed by 26 per cent of income earning self employed women and then 7 per cent of regular salary earning women workers.⁷

Fig. 3 (a)



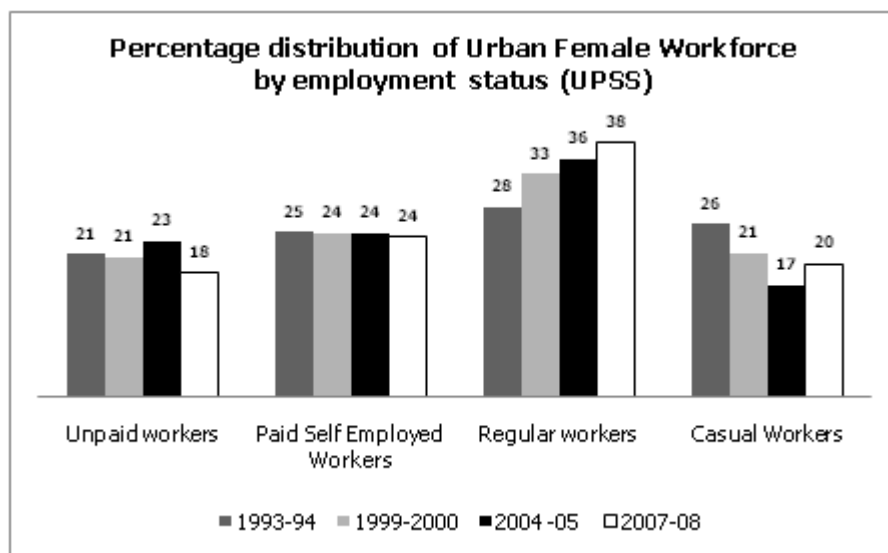
Source: Unit level Data, Various Rounds, National Sample Survey Organisation

Across these four surveys between 1993-94 and 2007-08, the essential status distribution of the paid female workforce in rural areas remained unchanged, with casual labour dominating as the principal form of paid work for women. Casual labour accounted for 64 per cent of the women in the paid workforce in rural areas, even during the exceptional year of 2004-05, when otherwise a sharp increase in unpaid 'self employment' mirrored the fall in the proportions of casual labour. Of course, the mirror image reversed in 2007-08 when the share of casual labour rose by 5 percentage points and the share of unpaid 'self employed' workers fell by the same amount. In fact, there appears to be a consistent inverse relationship between the shares of unpaid workers and casual labour, the former declining when the latter rises and vice versa through the years, suggesting that a significant number of unpaid self employed women tend to go in for casual work when they are either able to find such work or are in special need, and return to being just unpaid workers when even casual work is unavailable or too difficult to perform or when the demands of unpaid labour

⁷ Among the rural males, on the other hand, casual labour accounts for 39 per cent of the paid male workforce and self employment for a little over 50 per cent.

increase to levels incompatible with outside work. The 64th round underlined an increasing presence of casual labour as the most significant form of work for income for women in rural areas.⁸ Unit data for 2009-10 is likely to show further enhancement of such a trend.

Fig. 3 (b)



Source: Unit level Data, Various Rounds, National Sample Survey Organisation

Interestingly, where the absolute numbers of paid female self employed workers (usual status own account + employer) actually fell in rural India by over 2.2 lakhs between 2004-05 and 2007-08, the number of female casual workers increased by over 4 million.⁹ Further disaggregation of the data showed that usual female casual labour in public works increased by only 1.4 lakhs between 2004-05 and 2007-08. On the other hand, female casual labour in *other than public works* increased by well over 38 lakhs (3.8 million) in the two to three years between the two rounds to reach some 42.24 million in 2007-08. The nature of this increase of course needs more detailed analysis.

⁸ Even in 1993-94 and 1999-2000, the share of casual labour in the paid female workforce in rural areas stood at 68.4 and 68.9 per cent respectively.

⁹ The number of female own account + employers in rural India dropped from 18,964,700 in 2004-05 to 16,734,800 in 2007-08, while female casual labour increased from 38,562,000 to 42,581,400.

In urban areas, on the other hand, the separation of unpaid work focuses attention on the emergence of regular salaried workers as the most significant segment of paid work. While Fig. 3(b) shows that regular workers reached 38 per cent of the urban female workforce (UPSS) in 2007-08, within a universe of only the paid workforce, the share of regular workers would have been 46 per cent followed by self employment (29 per cent) and then casual labour (24 per cent). The sizable proportions and increases in regular salaried workers are of course largely accounted for by the rapidly expanding numbers of women in education/teaching and in the class of paid domestic workers. The phenomenal increase in the numbers and proportions of women in paid domestic service between 1999-2000 and 2004-05 had been brought out earlier by extracting the sub categories of housemaids, cooks and governess/baby sitters from the broader industrial category of workers¹⁰ in private households (Neetha, 2009b).¹¹ Unfortunately, the 64th round (as also the 66th round) has merged these sub categories with gardeners, chowkidars, etc. making for problems in comparability with 2004-05 and before.¹²

However, to return to the principal issue that this part of the paper seeks to address, the point that needs to be noted is that even in urban areas, unpaid work by women is not insignificant. Further, across the two survey rounds of 2004-05 and 2007-08, a see saw between the shares of unpaid labour and casual work is observable, perhaps a muted echo of the same phenomenon in rural areas. It appears that even in desperate times, regular salaried domestic work is either not available or rejected in favour of other forms of casual labour by some, if not all women making the transition from unpaid to paid work in urban India.

¹⁰ Gleaning out the numbers and proportions of domestic workers from the industrial categories (NIC) had emerged as the conceptually most appropriate method adopted by the principal researcher on employment trends for domestic workers in India.

¹¹ See Neetha, 2009b.

¹² Under the revised NIC classifications of 2004 followed by the survey for 2007-08 (as also 2009-10), we can no longer make any clear distinctions, for example, between security guards in private households - a rapidly expanding segment of male employment in urban areas - and domestic workers - an increasingly feminized occupation. It is obvious then that the data is failing us. Thus, perhaps an equally important problem is the official statisticians' disconnect from the discussions around labour issues (in this case in relation to paid domestic workers) and their apparent indifference to the need to develop tools for a better understanding of this low end service sector employment.

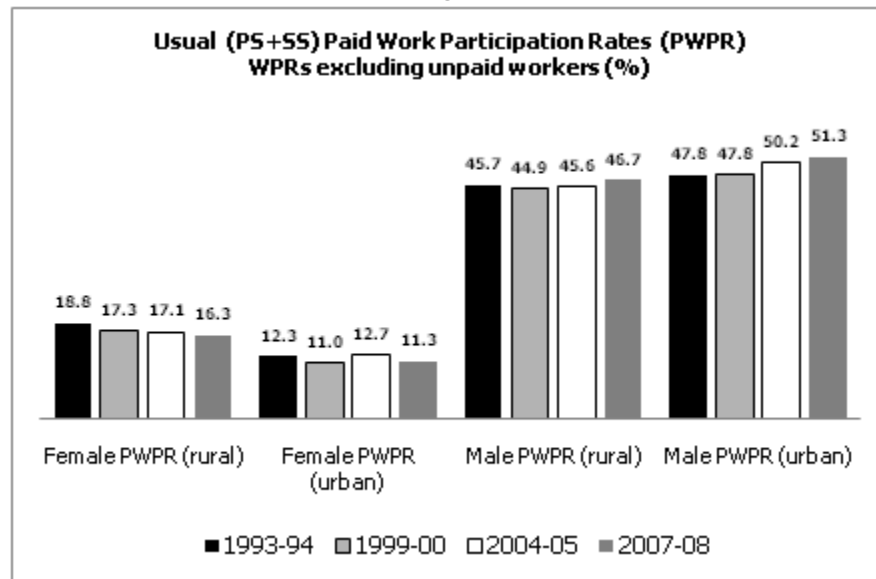
Paid Work Participation Rates

It is our contention that most of the studies on women's work and employment based on the NSS data (including some of our own work) have hitherto failed to incorporate the structural importance of women's unpaid work in their analysis. Analysis of women's employment has usually been based on UPS or UPSS figures, with workforce and employment used interchangeably and without distinguishing between unpaid and paid work. As a result, the numbers and proportions used for analysis actually give us a somewhat inflated picture of women's employment situation in the country. Of course it is not only women who are involved in economically productive but unpaid work. Nevertheless such unpaid work by men is neither of the same scale as among women, nor does it carry the same social significance. Unlike in the case of most men, women's unpaid labour in productive activities is deeply imbricated in the patriarchal nature of the household/family and its property, and therefore a material articulation of their lack of social freedom and independence in the overall economy and society. The continued mediation of a large part of women's productive/economic labour and incomes derived from such unpaid labour by the household/family represents conditions of both economic dependence and patriarchal domination in the lives of these women workers. In the case of men, the dependent relationship represented by unpaid labour is more likely to be of a temporary nature in relation to parental/family property or family activity that will either be inherited or broken free of at some stage of their lives. In the case of women, on the other hand, it is more likely to be of a durable structural nature, extending from dependence on natal kin to dependence on husband and his kin.

Of course, trends in the unpaid work of women may also be an indicator of some generalized conditions of the people, with possibilities of gauging levels of household/family/class distress by increases or decreases in unpaid work as exemplified in the observations on the 61st round data referred to earlier in this paper. However, the employment situation/opportunities for women in the economy/society and related possibilities or lack of possibilities for economic independence/empowerment can be better measured by focusing on paid employment. Such measurement becomes all the more important and necessary in the contemporary period, given the depth of commercial penetration in all forms of production and related connections between even subsistence production and the money economy. The fact that income earning/paid work is not separately available in the published employment and unemployment reports of NSS has no doubt discouraged the wider use of its measurement and analysis of trends therein. As a result, even among those who regularly deal with employment

data, too few would realize how small is the income earning share of the female population and how large is the share of women, including those in the workforce, who are tied down by absolute dependence on the household/family and without the potential/opportunity to work free of the conditions of economic/financial dependence.

Fig. 4



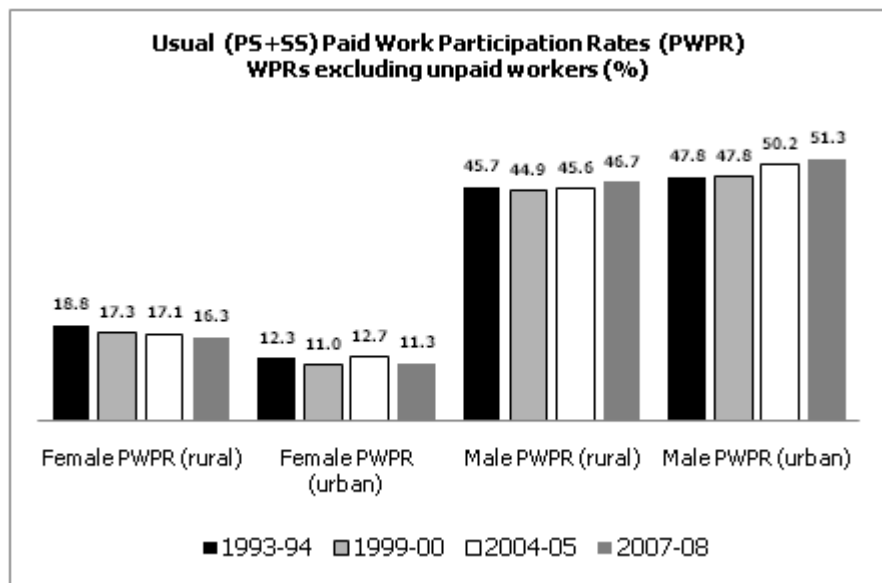
Source: Unit level Data, Various Rounds, National Sample Survey Organisation

Fig. 4 presents the work participation rates after excluding unpaid workers for women and men in rural and urban areas across four survey rounds from 1993-94 to 2007-08. For the purposes of easy comparison Fig. 5 presents the commonly used standard work participation rates across the same rounds, i.e., without excluding unpaid labour. Sharper differences between what we have termed paid worker participation rates (PWPR) and the standard WPR in rural areas in comparison to urban appears quite clearly for both women and men. The higher component of unpaid labour of both women and men in the rural economy, is no doubt, largely explained by the family labour aspect of peasant farming. However, the expanding arena of gender differentiation in the sphere of paid work since 1999-2000 needs more explanation. The proportions of paid workers in the rural female population show a trend decline from 1993-94 to 2007-08, not consistent with the up and down features of standard usual female WPR, while among rural males, the proportion of paid workers increased between 1999-2000 and 2007-08 consistent with the trend in standard usual male WPR. This would suggest that rural women are becoming either even more severely constrained in taking

up paid work or facing more direct discrimination in the paid job market. Either way, greater attention needs to be paid to reversing the socially regressive trend of declining rates of paid employment for rural women.

We might add here that the 2009-10 survey, however, shows a marginal drop in standard usual male WPR (ps+ss) for rural India between 2007-08 and 2009-10, from 54.8 to 54.7 per cent, although no such drop would be visible across the unpunctuated quinquennium from 2004-05. For rural women the drop in standard WPR is of far greater magnitude from 28.9 per cent in 2007-08 to 26.1 per cent in 2009-10 and appears even more sharply across the quinquennial period. We expect that when unit data for 2009-10 becomes available, it will be found that relatively sharper drop in standard female WPR will also be reflected in a further widening of the gender gap in rural paid work participation rates.

Fig. 5



Source: Employment and Unemployment Reports, Various Rounds, National Sample Survey Organisation

In urban India, the gap between men and women in both paid work participation as well as standard usual work participation is substantially greater than in rural areas. Among urban males, there were significant increases in both usual PWPR as well as standard usual WPR between 1999-2000 and 2007-08, although surprisingly, the proportion of unpaid male workers appears to be relatively higher than among women. The picture for urban females, on the other hand, is predominantly one of continuity in extremely low levels of work participation by

both measures, although the proportions of unpaid women workers are substantially lower than in rural areas. The 2007-08 survey shows a worrisome fall in both PWPR as well as standard WPR for urban women, underlining the fact that the most distinctive period of corporate led high growth in the country yielded negative results for even urban women's employment.¹³ (The link between the nature of such high growth and falling rates of employment for both rural and urban women needs to be explored further than is possible here). It is of course striking that the wide gap between female work participation rates in rural and urban areas narrows down if one considers only paid work. Nevertheless, the fact remains that where the overall picture is of greater and relatively increasing employment opportunities for men in the urbanization process, the same does not appear to hold true for women.

The slowing down of the economy between 2007-08 and 2009-10 has perhaps led to some reduction in the standard usual urban male work participation rates (ps+ss) by some 1.1 per cent from 55.4 per cent in 2007-08 to 54.3 per cent in 2009-10, although again across the quinquennial period from 2004-05 the reduction would appear as negligible. Urban women's employment situation, however appears to be impervious to lowered GDP growth between 2007-08 and 2009-10 and of standard usual work participation rate among urban females remained the same in both these survey rounds. It is more than likely that the fall in paid work participation rate among urban females found in the 2007-08 survey would be reflected in 2009-10 as well.

Industrial Distribution of Workforce

The numbers of usual workers (rural + urban) in India across broad industrial categories, estimated on the basis of census projections of male and female populations in rural and urban areas for the relevant NSS survey years from 1993-94 to 2009-10 (along with percentage shares of the various industrial categories) are given in Table 2. Apart from the four quinquennial surveys, the 2007-08 mid-point survey has also been included in these tables to get a more nuanced picture of the most recent developments, as well as for the purposes of presentation of trends in relation to paid and unpaid labour for which, as mentioned before, at present we have data only up to 2007-08. Table 3 presents the estimated numbers of workers after excluding unpaid helpers across three

¹³ Since 2003-04 and till the global crisis erupted, the pace of aggregate growth of India's economy moved to levels unprecedented in her history driven by a sharp rise in investment levels, led by the private corporate sector as a distinctive feature of this growth phase (See Mazumdar, Surajit, 2010) .

quinquennial rounds till 2004-05 and also for 2007-08. Table 4 gives the share of women workers in standard UPSS estimates for each of these industrial categories till 2009-10 and in paid employment till 2007-08.

Table 2: Estimated numbers of UPSS workers (rural + urban) across broad industrial categories, 1993-94 to 2009-10 [000s]

| Industry | Male Workers | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| | 1993-94 | 1999-00 | 2004-05 | 2007-08 | 2009-10 |
| Agriculture | 1,44,638 (57.3) | 1,45,619 (53.1) | 1,51,107 (48.9) | 1,56,801 (48.3) | 1,56,224 (47.1) |
| Mining and Quarrying | 2,232 (0.9) | 1,869 (0.7) | 2,229 | 2,058 (0.6) | 2,653 (0.8) |
| Manufacturing | 28,336 (11.2) | 31,583 (11.5) | 38,629 | 40,508 (12.5) | 36,817 (11.1) |
| Electricity , water etc | 1,331 (0.5) | 1,056 (0.4) | 1,240 (0.4) | 1,196 (0.4) | 995 (0.3) |
| Construction | 10,378 (4.1) | 15,475 (5.6) | 23,305 (7.5) | 26,805 (8.2) | 37,481 (11.3) |
| Trade, hotels & restaurant | 24,610 (9.8) | 35,924 (13.1) | 43,433 (14.0) | 44,420 (13.7) | 44,446 (13.4) |
| Transport, storage and communications | 10,446 (4.1) | 14,241 (5.2) | 17,950 (5.8) | 19,868 (6.1) | 19,569 (5.9) |
| Other services | 30,380 (12.0) | 28,220 (10.3) | 31,418 (10.2) | 33,286 (10.2) | 33,500 (10.1) |
| All Workers | 2,52,350 (100.0) | 2,73,980 (100.0) | 3,09,310 (100.0) | 3,24,942 (100.0) | 3,31,686 (100.0) |

| Industry | Female Workers | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| | 1993-94 | 1999-00 | 2004-05 | 2007-08 | 2009-10 |
| Agriculture | 94,188 (77.4) | 92,365 (75.1) | 1,07,772 (72.5) | 98,044 (72.5) | 87,566 (68.7) |
| Mining and Quarrying | 480 (0.4) | 361 (0.3) | 409 (0.3) | 399 (0.3) | 382 (0.3) |
| Manufacturing | 11,524 (9.5) | 12,376 (10.7) | 17,313 (11.7) | 14,451 (10.7) | 13,766 (10.8) |
| Electricity , water etc | 86 (0.1) | 45 (0.0) | 62 (0.0) | 42 (0.0) | 127 (0.1) |
| Construction | 1,598 (1.3) | 1,969 (1.6) | 2,728 (1.8) | 3,199 (2.4) | 6,501 (5.1) |
| Trade, hotels & restaurant | 3,893 (3.2) | 5,215 (4.2) | 6,101 (4.1) | 5,461 (4.0) | 5,481 (4.3) |
| Transport, storage and communications | 280 (0.2) | 436 (0.4) | 528 (0.4) | 584 (0.4) | 510 (0.4) |
| Other services | 9,664 (7.9) | 10,292 (8.4) | 13,677 (9.2) | 13,107 (9.7) | 13,129 (10.3) |
| All Workers | 1,21,713 (100.0) | 1,23,038 (100.0) | 1,48,589 (100.0) | 1,35,288 (100.0) | 1,27,462 (100.0) |

Source: Unit level Data, Various Rounds, National Sample Survey Organisation

Note: 1- Data on workforce was calculated using Census segment wise population Projections and NSS segment wise Worker Population Ratios; 2 –Figures in parentheses are sectoral share in total employment.

At the outset, it may be underlined that a widening gap between the numbers of male and female workers is evident for the paid workforce as well as in the standard estimates of the UPSS workforce, although the fall in number of paid women workers between 2004-05 and 2007-08 is not as dramatic as in the standard estimate.

**Table 3: All India Industrial Distribution of Workforce (Rural+Urban)
Usual (PS+SS) excluding unpaid helpers (in thousands),
1993-94 to 2007-08**

| Industry | No. of Paid Workers (Male) [000] | | | | No. of Paid Workers (Female) [000] | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| | 1993-94 | 1999-2000 | 2004-05 | 2007-08 | 1993-94 | 1999-2000 | 2004-05 | 2007-08 |
| Agriculture | 1,14,649 (53.5) | 1,18,214 (49.7) | 1,19,188 (44.9) | 1,32,467 (46.6) | 52,758 (71.6) | 52,690 (70.0) | 52,732 (63.0) | 53,266 (65.1) |
| Mining and Quarrying | 2,195 (1.0) | 1,840 (0.8) | 2,205 (0.8) | 2,030 (0.7) | 471 (0.6) | 312 (0.4) | 381 (0.5) | 371 (0.5) |
| Manufacturing | 25,683 (12.0) | 28,530 (12.0) | 34,574 (13.0) | 35,695 (12.6) | 7,852 (10.7) | 7,585 (10.1) | 11,640 (13.9) | 10,081 (12.3) |
| Electricity, water etc | 1,323 (0.6) | 1,133 (0.5) | 1,237 (0.5) | 1,149 (0.4) | 78 (0.1) | 45 (0.1) | 61 (0.1) | 39 (0.0) |
| Construction | 10,333 (4.8) | 15,478 (6.5) | 22,984 (8.7) | 26,529 (9.3) | 1,510 (2.0) | 1,938 (2.6) | 2,699 (3.2) | 3,145 (3.8) |
| Trade, hotels & restaurant | 20,982 (9.8) | 31,252 (13.2) | 37,610 (14.2) | 36,748 (12.9) | 2,242 (3.0) | 3,147 (4.2) | 3,092 (3.7) | 2,838 (3.5) |
| Transport, storage and communication | 10,257 (4.8) | 13,908 (5.9) | 17,569 (6.6) | 18,815 (6.6) | 263 (0.4) | 387 (0.5) | 449 (0.5) | 505 (0.6) |
| Other services | 28,981 (13.5) | 27,268 (11.5) | 30,122 (11.3) | 30,679 (10.8) | 8,500 (11.5) | 9,119 (12.1) | 12,611 (15.1) | 11,636 (14.2) |
| All Workers | 2,14,403 (100.0) | 2,37,623 (100.0) | 2,65,490 (100.0) | 2,84,112 (100.0) | 73,674 (100.0) | 75,222 (100.0) | 83,665 (100.0) | 81,881 (100.0) |

Source: Unit level Data, Various Rounds, National Sample Survey Organisation

Note: Figures in parentheses are sectoral share in total employment.

As the tables show, a relatively greater concentration in agriculture of the female workforce has remained a continuing feature of both the standard UPSS workforce as well as among paid workers alone. However, while the numbers of male workers in agriculture have been increasing across each of the quinquennial

surveys, of the reduction in the overall female workforce by some 21 million between 2004-05 and 2009-10, more than 20 million were from the agriculture.¹⁴ Moreover, whereas the share of agriculture in the standard measure male workforce appeared to be rapidly declining between 1993-94 and 2004-05, the pace of decline seems to have significantly slowed down in the last quinquennium at precisely the period when the pace of decline of the share of agriculture in the female workforce has almost doubled.¹⁵ Of course, a major part of the reduction in numbers of women in agriculture (as per the standard estimate) represents the withdrawal of unpaid family helpers from the workforce, as indicated by comparison with paid women workers. While we have argued in this paper that paid work is a better measure of employment opportunities for women, the withdrawal of such large numbers of unpaid workers from the agricultural workforce without a concomitant increase in their overall numbers in paid work cannot be accepted as a positive development. It is more likely to be an expression of greater domestication and dependence of women offering even less scope for them to claim a share of output as their own contribution to production.

At the same time, where very little movement took place in the numbers of paid women workers in agriculture between 1993-94 and 2004-05 (less than 1 lakh per quinquennium), a sudden jump by 5 lakhs between 2004-05 and of 2007-08 is noticeable. Since the share of casual workers in the paid workforce in rural areas also increased in this period [refer Fig. 3(a)], it would appear that while the more substantial section of unpaid female workers are being withdrawn from the workforce, a significant number are also turning to casual labour. It is also possible that MGNREGS has contributed to this slight surge in the numbers of paid women workers in agriculture .

The industry which has probably absorbed the largest numbers of workers moving out of agriculture is construction, whose share in the male workforce equaled that of manufacturing in 2009-10. Among female workers, manufacturing seems to have held ground as the second largest employment after agriculture, despite having ejected some 3.5 million women (according to the standard estimate) between 2004-05 and 2009-10. Nevertheless, a jump in numbers of women in construction has undoubtedly occurred after 2004-05 (by more than 3 million according to standard workforce estimates) taking the share of women in

¹⁴ There was, however a reduction of around 5.8 lakhs in the number of male workers in agriculture between the mid-point survey of 2007-08 and 2009-10.

¹⁵ Curiously, while the numbers of paid male workers in agriculture increased by 4.5 million across a ten year period till 2004-05, in the space of the few years between 2004-05 and 2007-08, their numbers jumped by well over 13 million.

construction to a two decade high of 15 per cent in 2009-10. This stands in contrast to the preceding periods from 1993-94 to 2004-05, when there had been an observable process of masculinization of construction jobs that was confirmed by the decline in share of women in the industry (see Table 4). It is noticeable that among both male and female construction workers there is very little difference in numbers between only paid workers and the standard estimate of workers for all the survey rounds till 2007-08, a feature that is likely to hold good for 2009-10 as well. Taking this into account, it would appear that the earlier decline in the female share of construction jobs is now being reversed. Again, here it is possible that MGNREGS has played a role. There are however, limits to the capacity of this upward swing of women's employment in construction in mitigating the broader picture of reduced employment for women in India. Further, with the contractor based circular migration regime that dominates construction labour, the movement from agriculture to construction for survival, is often of a temporary and partial nature, particularly for women.¹⁶

Table 4: Female share of paid and UPSS Workforce across Industrial categories (Rural+Urban)

| Industry | Female share of paid workforce | | | | Female share of standard UPSS workforce | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------|---------|---------|---|-----------|---------|---------|---------|
| | 1993-94 | 1999-2000 | 2004-05 | 2007-08 | 1993-94 | 1999-2000 | 2004-05 | 2007-08 | 2009-10 |
| Agriculture | 31.5 | 30.8 | 30.7 | 28.7 | 39.4 | 38.8 | 41.6 | 38.5 | 36.2 |
| Mining and Quarrying | 17.7 | 14.5 | 14.7 | 15.5 | 17.7 | 16.2 | 15.5 | 16.2 | 12.7 |
| Manufacturing | 23.4 | 21 | 25.2 | 22 | 28.9 | 28.2 | 30.9 | 26.3 | 27.5 |
| Electricity , water etc | 5.6 | 3.8 | 4.7 | 3.3 | 6.1 | 4.1 | 4.8 | 3.4 | 11.5 |
| Construction | 12.8 | 11.1 | 10.5 | 10.6 | 13.3 | 11.3 | 10.5 | 10.7 | 14.9 |
| Trade, hotels & restaurant | 9.7 | 9.1 | 7.6 | 7.2 | 13.7 | 12.7 | 12.3 | 10.9 | 11.1 |
| Transport, storage and communications | 2.5 | 2.7 | 2.5 | 2.6 | 2.6 | 3 | 2.9 | 2.9 | 2.6 |
| Other services | 22.7 | 25.1 | 29.5 | 27.5 | 24.1 | 26.7 | 30.3 | 28.3 | 28.4 |
| All Workers | 25.6 | 24 | 24 | 22.4 | 32.5 | 31 | 32.5 | 29.4 | 28 |

Source: Unit level Data, Various Rounds, National Sample Survey Organisation

¹⁶ Perhaps construction is the clearest example of the link between growth and employment under liberalization led growth, where significant corporate investment and profit growth is combined with permanent temporariness and degraded conditions of work.

The only other industry where women's share has shown an increase is Electricity, water, etc. where an inexplicable jump in numbers and proportions of women seems to have taken place between 2007-08 and 2009-10, although even after such an increase the industry accounts for a negligible 0.1 per cent of the female workforce. In every other major industry, women's share of employment has fallen in 2009-10 in comparison with 2004-05 as per the standard measure. The most significant fall has been in manufacturing, where the number of female workers has been reduced by some 20 per cent between 2004-05 and 2009-10. Across the same period, the numbers of women working in trade, hotels and restaurants reduced by 10 per cent. Even transport/storage/communications and surprisingly other services have reduced the numbers of women, although to a lesser degree.

A comparison of paid and standard estimates of workforce in manufacturing reveals some interesting insights into the changes in the sector and its gendered impact. The recent decline in women in manufacturing has largely been on account of decline in unpaid work. The crisis and the resultant closing down of many traditional household industries where women are part of the family labour seems to have resulted in women being pushed out of the workforce. Further, the decline in the numbers of unpaid women in manufacturing may also indicate a contraction in the sub-contracting of part processes into homes that had appeared to be offering some degree of employment to women in an earlier phase of the expansion of modern but unorganized small to medium industries.

At an overall level, a comparison of both standard and paid measures of employment by broad industry for 2007-08 indicate that the decline in numbers of women in the standard UPSS estimate of employment in 2009-10, is likely be reflected in women's paid employment as well. While the dramatic fall in the estimated number of female workers according to the standard measure has been primarily driven by withdrawal of large numbers from agriculture and manufacturing, the estimates of numbers of paid workers show a slightly different picture. The decrease in numbers of paid women workers may not be as large, but it remains true that apart from agriculture and construction, in every other major industry there appears to have been a reduction in the absolute numbers of paid women workers also. Thus, whichever way one looks at the employment data, the first decade of the 21st century has ended in a grim situation for women's employment, and a further marginalization of women in the economy.

Advancing the debate on counting women's work

Concern regarding marginalization of women in employment has engaged those involved in women's studies since its inception in the 1970s. In the 1960s, before the advent of specialized women's studies, declines in female work participation had been noticed, but generally thought to be a transitory phenomenon as the economy moved from subsistence agriculture and household industry to modern industry.¹⁷ Further, it was assumed that the decline would be automatically corrected by a 'countervailing force' identified with educational progress and substantial increases in income (Nath, 1968). Analysis of historical trends in developed countries, particularly in Europe, had given rise to a generalized developmental view that although initially income increases aggravated the downward trend in female work participation, further gains in income reversed the decline (Sinha, 1967). Such assumptions and perspectives were, of course, proven to be erroneous in the case of India on several counts, and following the report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI, 1975), the long term overall decline both in percentage of workers to total female population and in their percentage to the total labour force began to be viewed as evidence that women's economic participation had been adversely affected by the nature of the development process itself. The CSWI postulated that ruination of domestic industry (deindustrialization) from the colonial period onwards (with relatively greater ruin in the female labour intensive sectors) eroded non-agricultural occupations of women while the externally induced process of limited modernization excluded them from the limited opportunities in the modern sector, resulting in a permanent shift of women to the periphery of the economy (CSWI, 1975; Banerjee, 1998).

From the latter half of the 1970s through the 1980s, studies on the work participation rate attempted to further explain the processes underpinning the decline in female employment in India, while simultaneously focusing on the question of actual underenumeration/undercounting of women's work in the national data sets. There was sufficient observable evidence that the vast majority of women were actively contributing to their household economy and clearly not idle. The question therefore arose as to why and how their work was not being

¹⁷ International data also showed maximum activity rates among women in the least developed economies in comparison to far lower female activity rates in the 'highly industrialized economies'. This was explained by the predominance of household enterprises – agricultural and non-agricultural in which productive work was seen to be 'conveniently combined with family responsibilities.

counted. Considerable attention was paid to problems in measurement of the extent of decline in FWPR, especially in the context of changes in the definitions of workers across censuses and ensuing problems of comparability.¹⁸ At a more conceptual level, the need to evolve alternate methods of capturing women's work and the inadequacy of existing modes of data collection on women's work was linked to the invisibility of a large part of women's productive labour and contribution to the family subsistence, in the non-monetized as well as monetized segments of the economy.¹⁹ The two sectors where such invisibility was particularly emphasised were agriculture and household industry and two decades of discussion and debate contributed to generating a greater awareness of the need to make women's work more visible in the macro data, particularly in relation to agriculture. Occasionally questions were also raised regarding whether domestic work within families and productive work (economic activities which was also often within families) could or should be separated (Jain, 1985; Sen, 1985). On this question, the separation between economic and non-economic activities has held on more firmly.

It was the census as the primary source of historical trends, that remained the database at the heart of these initial discussions and it is only from the 1990s that the quinquennial NSSO surveys, became more central to the debates around women's work and employment. In the 1990s there was an understandable eagerness to assess the impact of the structural shift in the policy framework towards liberalization post 1991 without having to wait for the 2001 census

¹⁸In these early years, the censuses was the primary sources. Definitional differences confounded the issue. In 1951, workers were classified into 'self supporting persons' and 'earning dependents', both based on an income criteria (i.e., self supporting with sufficient income for maintenance and earning dependents with income not sufficient for maintenance). In 1961 the criteria for definition of worker was changed to duration of work with or without remuneration (more than one hour per day throughout the greater part of the working season for seasonal agricultural and household industry workers and employment during any of the 15 days preceding the enumeration for other workers). This led to a much higher count of women workers. In contrast, the 1971 Census tended to under report women workers, since only those whose main activity was participation in productive work were recorded as workers, while all those whose main activity was domestic work were categorised as non-workers even though they were engaged in some productive work. From 1981, marginal workers were also recorded, as a result of which, while main workers compared easily with the 1971 census, a much larger and more variable number of marginal women workers could be incorporated in the WPR, although the proportions in 1971 remained far below the 1961 census, prompting a still continuing discussion on biases and ordering of questions.

¹⁹ See Krishnaraj, Maithreyi (1985) & Duvvury, Nata (1989).

reports. However, given the publication delays and limitations of the published economic data of the 2001 census, the NSS, which is also thought to be more amenable to capturing women's economic activities, has continued as the principal data source for most of the studies and analysis of women's work/employment trends even after 2001.

A continued discussion regarding invisibility of women's work in the 1990s including on issues of definitional limitations in data sources was in a sense circumscribed by the force of discussions regarding the informal sector that came into their own in the 1980s. Arguably, it could be said that the new preoccupation with the informal sector shifted the focus from the classical developmental dualistic approach to agriculture (as the backward subsistence sector) and industry (as the modern sector)²⁰ to a more diffused set of occupations/ employments that could not always be catalogued and categorized within the dualistic framework.²¹ While there were clear failings in the formulaic assumptions of traditional developmental approaches brought out by the empirical evidence of informal/unorganized petty production in urban areas and then of shrinking organized sector employment, the informal sector discussions contributed little to the great question of agrarian social relations. In relation to women, homebased work became a primary point of discussion that united the earlier discourses regarding invisibility of women's work and the later preoccupations with the informal sector.²²

Further evidence of the uncounted labour of women in economic activities came from a 1998 time use survey conducted by CSO in some states, which showed that the WPRs for women as per the time use data was 58.2 and 30.9

²⁰ In its classical form, the dualistic approach saw two sectors, 1) the traditional subsistence sector consisting of small-scale agriculture, handicraft and petty trade, with a high degree of labour intensity but low capital intensity and little division of labour and 2) the modern sector of capital-intensive industry and plantation agriculture producing for the world market with a capital-intensive mode of production with a high division of labour.

²¹ According to traditional development theory, "sectors within the production structure of a country's economy can be distinguished because they produce different goods by processes that differ in technology and organization.

²² The distinction between formal and informal sectors in the ILO approach is on the other hand not based on characteristics of products, production processes and technology. The same goods and services, and perhaps even the same technology, may be found in both.

²² See NCEUS Report (2007)

per cent for rural and urban areas respectively as against 25.3 and 12.8 as per current weekly status in the closest NSSO employment survey.²³ The time use survey was further used to press a case for computing a value to women's unpaid labour on the grounds of giving it visibility in official statistics and provide a basis for unpaid workers to claim their due share from the state exchequer to improve their conditions. Implicit to the valuation argument is a critique of the GDP in its present form as "a limited variable to project the status of well being in an economy" (Hirway, 2005).

As becomes clear from this quick survey, invisibility issues have dominated discussions around women's work in India's macro-data sets, with the brief period of digression towards the feminization of labour thesis in the 1990s faltering before empirical evidence. While there can be little doubt as to the evidence of a significant part of women's economic activities/labour/work not getting recorded, in this paper, we argue that equally insufficient attention has been given to specifying and counting paid employment among women and there is a need to do so. We are well aware of the limitations of such a measure. Women's entry into paid employment is not necessarily any indicator of well being and may in fact indicate pauperization, impoverishment and greater levels of vulnerability for many of those entering paid work. Further, without the growth of supportive social institutions that will enable women to become freer of care and domestic family responsibilities, their entry into paid employment generally extracts a heavy price through the double burden of work inside and outside the home. Nevertheless, the present commonly used method of lumping paid and unpaid workers together without differentiation is hardly the best method for analysis of employment trends, particularly for women.

Apart from providing a better understanding of trends in women's employment, the separation of paid and unpaid work at the macro-level directs attention to the changing role of work and employment in shaping some of the qualitative changes taking place in gendered cooperation/interdependence/conflict/power in family/households, particularly of the labouring poor. With money incomes becoming more significant and necessary in meeting even subsistence consumption, and the relatively less diversified women being more concentrated in petty production functions in the form of unpaid labour in families/households (as distinct from a situation where both were working together in a common production process), qualitative changes and shifts in gender relations within families as well as in the broader society are inevitable.

²³ The male WPRs based on the time use survey were 63.26 and 59.29 for rural and urban areas respectively as against 51.00 and 50.90 WPRs as per the NSSO employment data.

At a more general level, it is worthy of note that with all the hype regarding expanding opportunities for women's employment that has become a kind of common sense among particularly the educated classes, the shocking reality is that if one removes unpaid labour from the work participation count, in 2007-08, only 15 per cent of the female population in the country received wage/income for their labour in comparison to 51 per cent of the males. In other words, 85 per cent of the female population was completely economically/financially dependent and without any employment/ income when GDP growth rates had reached an all time high. Given the further reduction in FWPR in 2009-10, such an extreme situation of financial dependence among the female population is likely to have further aggravated. The scale of such economic/financial dependence is perhaps the most significant factor in the continuing subordinate status of women in our society with all its extreme forms.

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