

CENTRE FOR WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

**An autonomous research institute supported by the
Indian Council of Social Science Research**

Concept note/Call for papers

Women as Workers: Interconnections, Exclusions and Nuances

One of the key findings of the 1974 *Towards Equality* report by the Committee on the Status of Women in India was the persistent decline in women's employment, particularly in rural areas. These findings were pivotal in establishing the foundation for women's studies scholarship in India, highlighting the underrepresentation of women's labour despite their active participation in the economy. Alongside the issue of undercounting, CSWI highlighted the ruination of domestic industry especially female labour intensive sectors affecting non-agricultural occupations of women. The exclusion of women in the new sectors of the economy was highlighted leading to a permanent shift of women to the periphery of the economy. Marginalization of women in employment thus became a key issue that engaged those involved in women's studies. The National Commission on women in the unorganised sector, *Shram Shakti* Report with its focus on self-employed women workers led the debates around women in the informal sector which has also been an important theme of research in the later decades as well. With the shift in economic policy, early discourses in the 1990s on women's employment became preoccupied with the feminization of labour in the context of large scale informalisation.

With the macro data showing a fall in women's work participation, in the context of a 'jobless growth', discussions on undercounting of work and marginalisation of women became issues once again. The consistent fall in female work force participation rate with fluctuations since early 1990s and the increase in self-employment among women, a pattern that were seen as reflection of declining opportunities for wage employment and the consequent distress among poor families. The large share of unpaid workers within the self-employed and the negligible share of 'employers' point to the vulnerability of self-employed. As far as sectors of employment are concerned, though services sector with intense concentrations has emerged an important sector for women's employment, agriculture remain as the critical sector with about one-third of rural women engaged in the sector. Women's presence in manufacturing is also limited to labour intensive sectors such as textile and garments and with increased emphasis on women's skill development labour relations in the sector is changing.

The integration of women into development through SHGs and their role in addressing the livelihood issues of poor women need nuanced analysis with varied experiences from diverse locations. The lack of infrastructure, whether it is access to pipedwater supply, or cooking gas, and withdrawal of the state from welfare measures or increased privatization of education and health have implications for women's housework and care work responsibilities. The burden of care is found not only affecting women's entry into employment but also the sectors of employment and working conditions. Rather than being resolved, there are fresh challenges with the coming of new labour codes, the rapid expansion of the gig economy and the challenges of AI.

Given this general context, research on interconnections between female employment and other social parameters have shown how market operate within the existing structural inequalities further worsening and reinforcing inequalities and concentrations. Migrant status of women not only worsens these structural inequalities but bring complex dimensions into the inclusion, sourcing/recruitment of women workers and their labour and employment relations. Securing gainful employment despite near gender parity being achieved in higher education continue to be a critical question.

Reflecting on the past 50 years, beginning with the foundational work of the Towards Equality report, the examination of women's labour in India unveils intricate historical, economic, and social dynamics. Complex, counterintuitive and nuanced approaches have indeed entered the debate on women's employment and labour market participation. How patterns of economic growth and its specificities relate to the construction of gendered employment relations; who how women enter into certain segments and forms of work but remain excluded from others are still important questions that need discussions. Paid -unpaid work continuum and women's documented willingness to take up paid work are also aspects that need further enquiry. Discussions during the pandemic, have underscored the pivotal importance of social security, the repercussions of agrarian distress, and the imperative need for intersectional frameworks to comprehensively comprehend women's work.

We invite abstracts of up to 300 words from a wide range of disciplines, researchers, policymakers, practitioners and locations on topics including but not limited to:

Sub-themes

1. Women's Work, Datasets and Measurement
2. Labour market-oriented motivations, conditions and constrictions experienced by various sections of women
3. Interconnections between female employment, social structures and migration

4. Work organisation, working conditions and labour processes – Sectoral and regional perspectives
5. Reorganization of work, platform economy and AI
6. SHGs, micro finance and Women's work
7. Women in Public employment: Scheme workers and care workers
8. Rural employment, agrarian distress, migration and climate change
9. Women's care work and the paid –unpaid work continuum
10. Unionization and networks of solidarities

Submission Details:

Abstracts can be emailed to: teconfsubtheme-work@cwds.ac.in

Important Dates

- **Abstract Submission Deadline: 10.12.2024**
- **Notification of Acceptance: 20.12.2024**
- **Full Paper Submission Deadline: 31.01.2025**