

**INEQUALITIES REINFORCED?
SOCIAL GROUPS, GENDER AND EMPLOYMENT**

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Contents

Introduction.....	1
Labour Market Participation and Social Groups.....	5
Structural Shifts in Nature of Employment: Social Dimensions.....	11
Widening Segregations through Markets: Trends in Paid Work.....	20
Social Islands in the Making: Sectoral and Occupational Dimensions.....	24
Labour Market Outcomes of Education.....	37
Conclusion.....	42
References.....	46



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I. Introduction

In the post liberalisation period, female employment has remained a matter of puzzle with contradictory trends and patterns, especially when one looks at the macro data. Much of this confusion has been on account of the interconnected nature of female employment with other social parameters, which are outside the realm of the standard labour market analysis. Although, social background is an important determinant of labour market participation for both men and women; its relative influence is much higher for females. This in fact to a large extent explains the sharp differences in participation rates between men and women, even when other factors such as demographic variables or education and skill backgrounds remain same. More importantly, participation rates in labour market differ across various categories of women when social and cultural variables are taken into account. These social and cultural norms arguably operate at multiple levels and often mirror the status of women permeating the households as well as the public sphere. Of the various socio-cultural restrictions and norms, the most important variables are religious and caste backgrounds. The differences in employment across social groups are often associated with the process of exclusion and discrimination which many of these groups suffered in the past, and continue to suffer in modified forms. These not only imply increasing polarisation across social groups but distinct gender differentials in human development and poverty across particular social groups. Though the relation between religion and caste with labour force participation and its patterns are largely acknowledged, its complex interplay with other parameters such as education, economic and demographic status often makes any firm conclusion difficult.

The link between caste, economic status and material resources (Deshpande, 2000; Thorat & Newman, 2007) has been established by many studies. Some studies suggest that with structural changes in the rural economy, migration and entry of dalits into non-traditional occupations have loosened the link between economic status and caste. Though traditional caste based occupational divisions no longer exist, the vicious circle continues to operate with many deprived sections concentrated in unskilled or low paid semi-skilled occupations in the informal sectors (Bremner 1990; Kumar et. al 2009). Analysing all-India data on scheduled castes and scheduled tribes (SCs and STs), Thorat (2002) finds many from these communities concentrated in agricultural labour. It is also shown that the proportion of agricultural labourers among other castes is substantially smaller. This tendency is not very different in the urban areas. Available evidence suggests that although urban informal sector occupations, especially services, have attracted members of diverse castes, caste based segmentation continues to be strong (Thorat & Attewell (2007). The predominance of SCs among sweepers and the disproportionate representation of Brahmins in civil services highlight this link between caste identity and occupational division (Desai & Dubey, 2011).

But how these broad patterns have affected women's economic status is a more complex issue. It is wrong to assume that women's status also followed the same pattern, given the varied gender relations across various social groups and families and its changes over time. Changes in economic status of households do affect gender relations which are influenced by the social understanding of the roles of women in various households determined by their social status. Members of specific communities react to economic changes, in the process retaining, reshaping and redefining their social and cultural norms leading to contestation, renegotiation as well as acceptance of gendered power relations. Further, there is a tendency to imitate the values and practices of upper caste households in an attempt to move upwards in the social ladder¹ and in this context women's labour is often the first that is regulated as they are seen as bearers and faces of household's social status.

Though gender specific analysis is crucial, there is a lack of interest at the policy level to acknowledge women as a separate category requiring specific intervention. The quotas or reservations in government sector jobs and state-funded educational institutions were the core of the state policy for development of scheduled castes (SCs) and scheduled tribes (STs). The OBCs reservation issue in government jobs services and education came up in the 1990s leading to

significant debate. Subsequently the issue of reservation for specific categories within various social groups alongside political reservation for women has been debated at length during recent years. However, the issue of separate reservation in jobs for women has not been a subject of any interest and debate. Political reservations at the lower levels seems to be the easier and less problematic route, though at higher levels it remains highly contested.

Markets are known to reconfigure existing social and gendered constructs to its interest. Attributes of religion/caste/ethnicity and gender are primary variables to understand the overall labour market trends and pattern in the era of changing economic conditions. However, non-availability of relevant data across various social groups is an issue, especially when it comes to sex segregated analysis. There have been some attempts to study various social groups by setting up Committees and Commissions which has helped in the creation of some knowledge. In the absence of gender specific data and analysis many of these reports could not contribute much in the understanding of women's issues or in generating any gendered debate. The limited inclusion of social and religious groups since 1999-00 in NSS surveys allows some preliminary analysis of these issues across broad social groups.

In the above back drop, the present paper which is based on the last four rounds of National Sample Survey Data (1999-00, 2004-05, 2007-08 and 2009-10) explores some dimensions of women's labour market participation across social groups². The paper explores the interface of religion and caste status with the labour market outcomes of women. It shows how specific attention to social and cultural variables overturns standard assumptions regarding women's employment, and indeed has relevance for more general discussions on employment in the country. The importance of explicitly and continuously drawing distinctions between religious and caste categories in the analysis of female employment trends and in policy formulations is highlighted in the paper. Since education is often thought to affect labour market status- much more than or alongside caste status, and has been a critical variable for intervention in the past, the paper also explores the possible effect of education across various religious and caste groups.

Hitherto attempts to explore labour market outcomes of religious and caste groups have either analysed each social category separately/independently or clubbed the caste groups into two segments -SC/ST and Non SC/ST. Such attempts though they may have relevance, hide important labour market trends

and patterns which have linkage with distinct religious as well as caste dimensions. For example, the popular caste division of SC/ST versus 'others' fails to take into account the diversity of the 'others', which comprises of OBCs as well as upper castes. Within these, Muslim and Non Muslim categories are also important distinctions which could throw much insight into the dynamics of the social structure and its impact on labour market outcomes. However, there has been no rigorous analysis of employment trends among Muslims prior to the setting up of Sachar Committee³.

Ideally it would have been better to separate all caste categories by religion. However, the sample size for some religious groups when subdivided across caste status gives very few entries which would affect the results. Thus, one is limited by the size of the NSS data, in undertaking detailed disaggregate data analysis, which would have helped in examining the gender differentials across social groups much better. Given this, in the present analysis caste and religious groups are divided into 5 categories such as ST, SC, OBC Non Muslims, Muslims and Upper caste Non Muslims. The first two categories are considered without any reference to their religion as this identity does not affect their overall social status much, though NSS since it follows the reporting method allows for this disaggregation. Muslims are taken together whether they belong to OBC or upper castes as caste classification of the group vary between states on their caste status. All Non Muslim OBCs and Non Muslim Upper castes are clubbed together with Hindus - OBC Non Muslims and Upper caste Non Muslims.

Discrimination in labour markets can be analysed and understood in different ways. The first is through looking at differences in participation and the related analysis of entry barriers. The second is through looking at occupational segregations and prospects of occupational mobility. This will also throw light on the earnings as well as other working conditions. Such analysis help in understanding the work force patterns not only in a pure statistical sense but also in assessing the status of women in multiple dimensions. In particular, the activity status or industry and occupation status or formal and informal status of individuals reflect not only the quality of life of individual women but also outcomes and manifestations of discriminatory social practices where gender and caste/ religion are central variables.

The rest of the paper is divided into 6 sections. Section II discusses the patterns and changes in women's labour force participation rates across various caste/religious groups and in comparison to their male counter parts. The nature

of employment and its differences across these social groups are analysed in Section III. Apart from broad divisions of employment structure, a distinction is drawn between paid and unpaid employment as this would provide better insights into the processes accompanying female employment. Trends in paid employment, its structural changes and the implications for women from different social groups are analysed in Section IV. Sectoral, sub-sectoral and occupational trends and patterns in female employment across various caste/religious groups are outlined in Section V highlighting the continuation as well as emergence of caste based segregations at various levels of female employment. In the debates around globalization both in the context of female employment as well as among social groups, education is a central variable. Differential labour market outcomes are often assumed to have strong links to educational backgrounds either lack of it or its mismatch with labour market requirements. In the context of women across various social groups, education not only intersects with the gendered identity but also their religious/caste status leading to a multiplier impact in the outcome. In this context, Section VI attempts to unveil the link between education, caste/religious categories and female work force participation. Finally Section VII sums up the discussion and advances issues for future research and policy intervention.

II. Labour Market Participation and Social Groups

One of the most highlighted and debated aspects of recent changes with regard to female employment is the issue of feminisation of labour, which reached its peak with an unexpected jump in female work participation in the 61st round of NSS employment and unemployment data for the period 2004-05. Later rounds however showed a reversal with female participation rates falling drastically. A pre-supposed homogeneity characterises the discussions during this period, which may help in laying the broad employment patterns. However, to understand the processes that have impacted the overall changes or to analyse the impact of overall changes on different categories of women with specific socio-economic characteristics there is a need to dissect these overall changes.

In general it is understood that women from Muslim and upper caste Hindu communities face strict restrictions in their participation in outside work compared to women from SC/ST or communities. In the case of Hindus, participation is found to differ widely across various caste groups. Thus, often religion is seen as an associated variable, which has strong bearings on the caste background of women. The strict division of labour that existed between castes in traditional

societies not only determines the social division of labour in the private sphere but also influences women's participation in work outside their homes. Thus, while it was well within the caste system for women from certain castes to work outside their homes, this was completely forbidden for women from upper castes. Further, the choices of occupations were also limited since certain categories of work were assigned to particular caste groups. This, compounded by the differences over time in terms of human capital, limits the choice considerably. Within discussions on globalisation and integration of markets, caste and gender relations occupy key roles and a few studies have analysed the interactions. Similar to the contradictory findings that exist in the literature on various aspects of globalisation, diverse views exist on the actual impact of economic reforms on caste/religious dimensions and its gender aspects. At one end, some scholars have made a case for positive impact of globalisation for women from lower castes drawing on the framework of neutrality of markets. These scholars argue that the changes in production relations and work organisations in the new economic era could help the lesser privileged lower caste women, who have been marginalised or sidelined in the era of state led welfare regime. This position also assumes that the internationalisation of capital will loosen the hitherto upper caste monopolies amongst Hindus, thereby helping women from lower castes to reap the benefits of their labour (Omvedt 1997). The marginalising aspect of globalisation on the other hand has been the highlight of another set of analysis. It is held that in the context of a social system where progressive state policies such as reservation, have failed in addressing social exclusion –markets which operate within the given unequal social and economic structures are bound to widen inequalities rather than reduce it. Thus, women from lower castes and unprivileged religious groups with low education and other skill endowments would be further marginalised in the labour market in an open economy (Thorat & Mallick 2004, Madheswaran & Attewell (2007). This would, it is argued, either push them out of the labour market or confine them into low paid menial work. Further, it is argued that one way to seek caste mobility is through redefining the role of women and controlling their mobility as part of the widely acknowledged 'sanskritisation' process. This affects women's participation in labour market or restricts their choices of occupations. Thus, caste divisions affect both their participation in outside work as well as their concentration in particular occupations. Consequently, social restrictions, though they may have become less formal or lost their significance to some extent, continue to be important variables that determine the labour market outcomes of women differentiated by their social and economic status.

In the literature on women's participation in the labour market across religious groups, it is generally understood that participation rates of SC/STs are higher than that of Non SC/ST counterparts (Das, 2006). As discussed earlier, the existing analysis often clubs the rest of the categories (OBC and general) together with no room given for religious backgrounds.

Table 1:
Labour force participation rate by religious/caste categories

LFPR	Period				Difference between 2009-10 & 1999-00
	1999-2000	2004-2005	2007-2008	2009-2010	
Rural					
ST	43.92	46.63	39.88	36.22	-7.71
SC	32.73	33.77	30.99	27.35	-5.39
OBC excluding Muslims	31.68	35.32	31.39	28.6	-3.08
Muslims	16.31	18.47	15.25	14.36	-1.95
Upper castes excluding Muslims	25.16	30.4	24.85	22.62	-2.55
Total	30.03	33.31	29.24	26.5	-3.53
Urban					
ST	21.06	25.36	20.94	21.21	0.14
SC	19.08	21.01	17.29	18.57	-0.51
OBC excluding Muslims	17.67	21.01	17.08	16.63	-1.03
Muslims	10.42	12.85	10.4	9.97	-0.45
Upper castes excluding Muslims	12.25	15.45	12.7	12.57	0.32
Total	14.73	17.82	14.58	14.61	-0.12
Rural + Urban					
ST	41.42	44.64	38.28	34.9	-6.52
SC	30.21	31.35	28.24	25.63	-4.58
OBC excluding Muslims	28.8	32.39	28.29	25.74	-3.06
Muslims	14.37	16.66	13.6	12.87	-1.5
Upper castes excluding Muslims	20.53	24.53	19.88	18.45	-2.08
Total	26.21	29.43	25.42	23.3	-2.91

Source: Unit-level data, various rounds, NSSO.

The data confirms (Table 1) most of the existing understanding on caste/religious category wise participation rates with ST women showing the highest participation rates compared to other groups. Muslims show the lowest participation rates followed by Upper caste Non-Muslims both in urban and rural areas which is again a known pattern. SC women's participation is normally understood to be higher than that of higher caste women which seems to be the case in 1999-00 also. The higher participation rates among SC women are attributed to poverty and relatively fewer restrictions on lower caste women in terms of stigma associated with manual work and on mobility (Das, 2006).

Between the period, (1999-00 to 2009-10) participation rates have declined across all caste/religious categories in line with the overall decline in aggregate participation rate of women both in 2007-08 and 2009-1, though at differential levels. This uniform trend across social categories suggests that economic policies do have a generalised impact on women irrespective of their social status. However, within this general trend for women as a specific category, there are differences across social groups. The highest decline in participation rates is for ST women, followed by SC and OBCs. These differential rates of decline across social groups roughly match the class division within these social groups with a large section of SC and ST women belonging to poor households. This clearly highlights the case for a class/caste analysis of women's economic status.

One of the disturbing insight that disaggregate analysis gives is the steep decline in participation rate among ST and SCs (6.5 and 4.6 per cent respectively). The decline in participation rate cannot be fully explained by an improvement in their economic profile, which is the usual explanation given for any drop in female participation rates. Studies during this period, in fact, indicate strong relationship between low-caste status and poverty, suggesting aggravation of an unequal social as well as economic order (Deshpande 2001, Thorat, 2010). The decline in participation rate is largely on account of a steep drop in rural areas, which suggests declining opportunities in agriculture. Tribal population across the country are highly dependent on agriculture, (which has been their traditional source of livelihood) and women's contribution in subsistence agricultural production is known to be significant. The land alienation processes in tribal pockets accompanied by the non-viability of subsistence agriculture are factors that need attention in this context. The decline in opportunities for casual work in rural areas with changes in crop pattern and technological changes in agricultural operations (worsened by the declining area under cultivation) all seem to have

all contributed to a decline in the quantum of manual jobs thereby leading to a lower participation of SC women.

Along with the consistent decline in the participation rates of SC women, OBC Non Muslims take the second position in terms of higher labour force participation rate, except for urban areas. The disaggregate data also brings to fore the need to separate OBC and upper caste women with OBC women showing much higher rates of participation compared to upper caste women. This category of women seems to have more in common with SC women than that of upper castes, with whom they are generally clubbed in other analyses. Further Muslim women not only show a very low participation rate but also appear to have been marginalised further with declining participation rates both in rural and urban areas. The decline of traditional household manufacturing where many women from this community were involved and the lack of alternative opportunities coupled by social restrictions and inability to access newer jobs may have been critical factors in their growing marginalisation.

These above mentioned trends suggest that a small decline in employment affects women from certain social backgrounds more specifically/directly. Further, the data pertaining to 2004-05 when the participation rates peaked show a remarkable increase in participation rates of Upper caste and OBC Non Muslims (4 and 4.6 percentage points respectively). Thus, even in the context of an upward trend in participation rates, the benefits are largely taken over by the privileged sections in the society. The advantageous position that upper caste women have in terms of education and accessibility to job markets places them in a better position when fluctuations in employment occur. Thus it appears that they are the first to reap the benefits of any shifts and also the last to be affected during setbacks. On the other hand, OBCs on the whole have had land and have managed to maintain their overall status quo. A section of them also had access to higher levels of education and physical and capital endowments, which seems to have worked favourably. However, the diversity of OBC castes and the regional differences are important in understanding the higher rates, which points to the need to collect data on specific categories of OBCs.

The urban LFPR, shows a somewhat stagnant picture. However there is a clear differentiation across caste/religious groups over time revealing tendencies of exclusion and segregation. The two segments of women who have shown a forward movement in LFPR over the ten year period are ST and Upper caste Non Muslims. Given, the segmented nature of labour markets in urban areas, this

would clearly mean concentration in certain segments given their caste identities. A conclusive picture demands a detailed analysis of the occupational profile which is attempted in the subsequent sections.

The male-female differences in work force participation rates across these categories are further revealing as it shows how economic changes have differently impacted men and women in different social categories (Table 2). It also exposes the gendered variations across various social categories. The gender difference in labour force participation is the lowest for ST followed by SC and is highest for Muslims and upper caste categories. Here again interestingly the OBC category shows more similarity to SC than to upper castes or Muslims. What is disturbing across all categories is the widening gender gap in participation in employment. A comparison of the differences across two time periods shows that the highest declines have been for STs and SCs, followed by Muslims. Thus, though the gender gap between participation rates though has increased across all categories the widening gap for lower social categories raises serious concerns. It seems that women from upper caste categories are able to face the challenges better than that of lower caste women, who are losing out majorly in the labour market. How much of this decline is due to the '*sanskritisation process*', the tendency to restrict women's participation in outside employment following the upper caste norm is an issue which needs further analysis. The possibility of such a process is strongly related to the economic status of households. In other words, one would expect an increase in male participation rates in the event of a decline in female participation rates if such a process is at work. However, no such trend is visible from the data.

Table 2:
Male - female difference in worker participation rates

Social Groups	Rural			
	1999-00	2004-05	2007-08	2009-10
ST	12.1	9.8	17.1	20
SC	20.6	21.2	23.6	27.9
OBC excluding Muslims	22.4	19.9	24.1	26.7
Muslims	31.7	31.8	35.2	37.3
Upper castes excluding Muslims	28.6	27.4	32	33.3
Total	23.4	21.9	25.9	28.6

Social Groups	Urban			
	1999-00	2004-05	2007-08	2009-10
ST	27.6	27.8	30.6	30.7
SC	31.8	33.7	39.1	37.2
OBC excluding Muslims	36.5	36.9	40.2	39.3
Muslims	39.7	40.5	43.3	42.9
Upper castes excluding Muslims	41.5	41.2	44	42.7
Total	37.9	38.3	41.6	40.5

Social Groups	Rural + Urban				Difference*
	1999-00	2004-05	2007-08	2009-10	
ST	13.8	11.5	18.2	20.9	7.1
SC	22.6	23.5	26.7	29.7	7.1
OBC excluding Muslims	25.3	23.4	27.6	29.7	4.4
Muslims	34.4	34.6	38	39.2	4.8
Upper castes excluding Muslims	33.2	32.8	36.9	37.2	4
Total	27	26	30	31.8	4.8

Source: Unit-level data, various rounds, NSSO.

Note: * Difference between 1999-00 and 2009-10 for rural + urban

While the increased male-female differentials in work participation rates in SC and ST categories have been largely on account of a sharp decline in female WPR, the difference for other categories have been more on account of an increase in male participation rates. Thus, these two categories represent different processes at work with different implications for policy. While one process would have led to increased aggregate income of the household, the other would have worsened the already poor economic status of ST&SC households. The resultant overall decline in economic status of poor households from marginalised communities represents the continuation of structural inequalities and its strengthening with economic changes, raising serious concerns in terms of women's status in these communities.

III. Structural Shifts in Nature of Employment: Social Dimensions

There is increasing evidence to the fact that socio-cultural restrictions not only prevent women from participating in the labour market but also determine the

nature of work that women undertake. An aspect which is normally missed out in discussions around female employment is the close relation between shifts in nature of employment and social groups/locations. Analysis of trends and patterns in status of employment helps us to understand exclusion and marginalisation better.

A distinct feature of female employment at the aggregate level is the importance of self employment. Not only does the self employed category form the largest segment of women workforce but also have closely been associated with the fluctuations in female work force participation rates. Thus, the share of self employed increased in 2004-05 and declined in 2007-08 and 2009-10 in accordance with the shifts in WPR (Table 3). With regular employment accounting for a very small proportion of female workers, the opportunities/ availability of casual employment emerged as central to the shifts in nature of employment. The shift between casual and self employment is evident in the employment data and analysis of this trend suggest a compulsive and desperate move of poor households between these categories (Abraham, 2009). Given the differential economic backgrounds of diverse social groups, these shifts at the aggregate level would have been an outcome of varied changes across these categories. Further, an understanding of the social composition of the self employed category is especially important as in discussions on the promotion of self employment alongside women; other marginalised and excluded groups also find extensive focus. The Sachar Committee's findings of a large proportion of self employment amongst Muslim women have geared in serious consultations on the possibilities of promoting self employment among Muslim women. Though the share of self employed among under privileged social groups such as SC is lower (a reflection of lack of assets), promotion of self employment is often high up on the agenda in all the discussion on poverty as well as their economic and social empowerment. Thus, various governments have over the years initiated several measures, particularly for the SC and ST groups, encouraging and supporting their direct participation in the private economy as entrepreneurs and capital holders. These policies mainly include preference in allocation of sites for business, supply of capital, training in entrepreneurship skill and incentives for market development⁴. While public policy continues to support entrepreneurship among the SC/ST groups, there are also other initiatives to develop a positive policy on development of entrepreneurial culture that can enable dalits to participate in the private sector and informal economy (Thorat and Sadana, 2009).

Self-employment is more likely among those who own land, especially in rural areas. This is not a surprising pattern since farming is the default occupation of those who own viable cultivable land or possess other investable assets. The share of self employed among the caste/religious groups does show considerable variation with scheduled castes showing the lowest share. This, as discussed earlier, could be largely on account of lack of assets such as land and other productive resources, which is essential for being self employed. Since different pattern are visible in rural and urban areas even among same social categories reflective of different processes, the analysis is carried out separately for these locations.

**Table 3:
Distribution of female workers in various caste/religious categories
across status of employment - Rural**

Period	Category	ST	SC	OBC excluding Muslims	Muslims	Upper castes excluding Muslims
1999-00	Self Employed	53	37	60.6	70	74.9
	Regular workers	2.1	3	3	2.6	4.6
	Casual workers	44.9	60	36.4	27.4	20.6
	Total	100	100	100	100	100
2004-05	Self Employed	58.2	46.4	67	75.1	78.4
	Regular workers	2.4	3.6	3.6	2.8	5.7
	Casual workers	39.4	50	29.4	22.2	15.9
	Total	100	100	100	100	100
2007-08	Self Employed	53.6	38.7	62.5	68.3	76.7
	Regular workers	2.6	3.8	3.7	5.3	6.8
	Casual workers	43.9	57.5	33.8	26.4	16.5
	Total	100	100	100	100	100
2009-10	Self Employed	53.6	38.8	58.2	64.9	73.4
	Regular workers	2.5	4.9	3.9	3.8	7.2
	Casual workers	43.8	56.3	38	31.3	19.4
	Total	100	100	100	100	100
Difference between 1999-00 & 2009-10	Self Employed	0.7	1.8	-2.4	-5.1	-1.4
	Regular workers	0.4	1.9	0.8	1.2	2.6
	Casual workers	-1.1	-3.7	1.5	3.9	-1.2

Source: Unit-level data, various rounds, NSSO.

Among the self employed in rural areas the highest proportion of self employed is among Non-Muslim upper castes followed by Muslims. Among upper caste, 74 per cent of employed was into self employment in 2009-10, while for Muslims it was 65 per cent. This concentration of Muslims in self employment is well acknowledged -with Sachar Committee also supporting this finding. Though self employment has always been acknowledged as the primary status among upper caste women, in the absence of any data on this category excluding OBCs, the share of self employed among this category is often assumed to be less than that of Muslims. This assumption of highest shares of self employed among Muslims leads to the conclusion that mobility restrictions are higher among Muslims compared to Upper castes Hindus (given that the largest chunk of self employed women are involved in family labour). This notion however is problematic when one looks at the data for rural areas.

An overall decline in the share of self employment during the period 1999-00 to 2009-10 could be noted, not only for all women but also for Muslims, Upper castes and OBCs. In analysing these trends in self employment there is a need to acknowledge sectoral concentration and differences among social groups. Thus while agriculture is the most important sector of self employment, for some social groups artisanal/handicraft production are also equally or more critical. Though a large number of women from these communities would be contributing to household farm production, an important point that needs special attention is their role in traditional artisanal/handicraft manufacturing. With the opening up of the economy coupled by changing consumer demands many of these traditional industries have lost out in competition. The decline in share of self employment for Muslim women and some segments of OBCs could be on account of this imminent crisis in these sectors. While men could move out of these crisis-ridden industries more easily, women partly due to the lack of requisite skills for alternate work and largely because of cultural restrictions are forced to continue. This is another issue that needs attention apart from falling shares. The onus of running these household industries is largely on women with returns nowhere matching their effort and time spent. Women in agriculture also face similar issues with agricultural income declining resulting in an increase in the mass of poor self employed women.

Proportions in casual employment across social categories reveal interesting insights on the distinct divisions that exists among women workers. The proportion of casual employment for SC was the highest and it is the only social group

which has more than half of its women workers in casual employment. Apart from cultural differences, landlessness, lack of assets and human capital are factors that are understood for their higher presence in casual work while the social group with better economic conditions shows a different pattern. Thus the proportion of casual workers is the lowest among upper caste non Muslims. However, it is significant across OBC categories and Muslims. This favours the economic explanation over the cultural position.

As regards regular employment- in rural areas, this accounts for only a small share of women across all the social categories. However closer examination shows upper castes shares to be the highest, followed by SC - the two revealing of different processes. While higher SC share could be on account of reservation policies in public jobs, in the case of upper castes it is reflective of their access to such regular employment because of their social and economic situation.

The data also shows the inverse interconnectedness of self employment and casual employment – a rise in the share of one definitely reduces the share of the other, visible across various social groups. Regular employment on the other hand shows a stable picture though its shares in many categories are very low. Thus the substitution is between casual wage employment and self employment. The huge increase in self employment during 2004-05, alongside a decline in casual work, has been a matter of much interest and discussion at the general level. Based on earnings of self employed, it was argued that this shift reflects lack of opportunities for wage employment forcing many to turn to self employment as a livelihood option. It was also suggested that in the context of lack of assets, such shifts to self employment are likely to be more of a short term phenomena and compulsion, than a permanent feature or arising out of choice. The drop in self employment in the subsequent periods is thus in accordance with the above argument. What is important in understanding these is its impact on different social categories. Increase in opportunities for casual wage employment is likely to benefit women from lower social classes compared to other categories, given their poor asset status and human resource endowment such as education and skill. Even during a period of crisis of wage employment though many from these categories may also move towards self employment, the viability and sustainability of these enterprises are issues. The argument of a cultural premium among Muslims in terms of self employment and its preference over wage work is yet to be established by any empirical study. On the other hand, the growing demands for reservation in regular jobs do suggest the interest

and anxiety among the community in accessing regular salaried jobs- though the gender dimension is not clear.

Table 4:
Distribution of female workers in various caste/religious categories across status of employment - Urban

Period	Category	ST	SC	OBC excluding Muslims	Muslims	Upper castes excluding Muslims
1999-00	Self Employed	31.9	38	49.1	67.2	39.5
	Regular workers	24.6	25.7	26.5	17.4	52.5
	Casual workers	43.5	36.3	24.3	15.4	7.9
	Total	100	100	100	100	100
2004-05	Self Employed	38.7	34.1	52.5	70.1	42.9
	Regular workers	26.9	38	28.9	18.7	49.7
	Casual workers	34.5	27.9	18.6	11.2	7.4
	Total	100	100	100	100	100
2007-08	Self Employed	31.6	30	46.6	64.2	37.3
	Regular workers	34.6	36.2	30.9	19.9	54.7
	Casual workers	33.8	33.7	22.5	15.9	7.9
	Total	100	100	100	100	100
2009-10	Self Employed	30.7	32.6	44.3	61	36.7
	Regular workers	33.9	35.9	32.3	21.4	57.5
	Casual workers	35.5	31.5	23.3	17.5	5.8
	Total	100	100	100	100	100
Difference between 1999-00 & 2009-10	Self Employed	-1.3	-5.4	-4.8	-6.2	-2.9
	Regular workers	9.3	10.2	5.8	4.1	5
	Casual workers	-8	-4.8	-1	2.1	-2.1

Source: Unit-level data, various rounds, NSSO.

A completely distinct pattern is visible in urban areas with self employment accounting for the highest share of workers only among Muslims and Non Muslim OBCs (Table 4). Self employment accounts for 61 per cent of Muslims which is much higher than that of OBCs (44.3 per cent) which also has a significant share of self-employed. For the upper castes unlike other social categories the share of regular workers is clearly high with 57.5 per cent of women. Further, it shows an increase across the periods against declines in self employment and casual

work. Though there has been an increase in the share of regular employment across all social categories with SC and ST showing the largest increases the fact that the share began with a smaller number leaves them with smaller proportions under regular work compared to that of upper castes. Regular work, as defined by NSSO reflects only regularity in employment and does not guarantee better terms and conditions of work. This points to the need to look at changes in the proportions of regular employment for different social categories distinctively as regular employment in different sectors indicate diverse terms and conditions of work. Thus, the high share of regular employment of upper caste at the beginning of structural economic changes may suggest their presence in formal employment. On the other hand, the increase in regular employment share in the post liberalisation in all possible contexts cannot be that of formal employment conditions but will be of availability of employment without breaks. This is an issue which needs further investigation and is attempted in the subsequent section through sectoral and occupational analysis.

Self employment is not a homogenous category and unless one examines the various subcategories, it is impossible to analyse the implications of changes in self employment. The disaggregation becomes all the more important in the context of various caste and religious categories given the differential impact of economic changes on various social groups. Self employed persons are further categorised into three groups: own account workers, employers and helpers in household enterprise⁵. The data shows that one of the most striking features of self employment is the extremely high share of unpaid work by women that may be found in both rural and urban areas (Neetha 2009). Trends in the unpaid work of women apart from its revelation of some general household and social conditions are also indicative of the related possibilities for economic independence or empowerment (or lack of them) (Mazumdar & Neetha, 2011).

The data shows that unpaid work accounts for a giant share of self employed across all social categories in rural areas (Table 5 & 6). Its share is the highest among ST and OBCs. Given the social restrictions on women's mobility and the preponderance of self employment among Muslims, it is often assumed that a larger share of women would be unpaid workers. In contrast, Muslims show the lowest share of unpaid workers questioning some of the existing assumptions of women's employment in this community. However what needs to be noted is the increase in the share of unpaid workers over time among Muslim women which is evident in both rural and urban areas. An overwhelming proportion of

unpaid worker are engaged in agriculture (Neetha & Mazumdar 2006). However, among Muslims, large sections are also engaged in household enterprises. The only other community which shows an increase is ST. Not only is the increase among STs, half of that of Muslims it is also limited to rural areas. What makes this trend particularly challenging from the perspective of women's status is not the interdependent status of employment but the lack of financial dependence for a large section of women workers. This has strong implications on women's position differentiated by their location in the caste hierarchy.

Table 5:
Distribution of female workers in various caste/religious categories
across sub categories of self employed- Rural

Period	Category	ST	SC	OBC excluding Muslims	Muslims	Upper castes excluding Muslims
1999-00	OAW	19.2	30.5	23	46.3	27.6
	Employer	0.3	0.3	0.7	1.4	1.3
	Unpaid	80.5	69.2	76.3	52.4	71
2004-05	OAW	15.4	29.8	21.8	36.1	27
	Employer	0.4	0.2	0.8	2	1.4
	Unpaid	84.2	70	77.4	61.9	71.7
2007-08	OAW	14.6	29.7	22.1	40.4	27.5
	Employer	0.3	0.2	0.8	1.7	1.6
	Unpaid	85.1	70.1	77.1	57.9	70.9
2009-10	OAW	15.3	35.6	26.3	39.5	31
	Employer	1	0.5	0.7	1.6	1.8
	Unpaid	83.7	63.9	73	58.9	67.2
Difference between 1999-00 & 2009- 10	OAW	-3.9	5.1	3.3	-6.8	3.3
	Employer	0.7	0.2	0	0.3	0.5
	Unpaid	3.2	-5.3	-3.2	6.6	-3.8

Source: Unit-level data, various rounds, NSSO.

Note: OAW- Own Account Workers

Table 6:
Distribution of female workers in various caste/religious categories
across sub categories of self employed- Urban

Period	Category	ST	SC	OBC excluding Muslims	Muslims	Upper castes excluding Muslims
1999-00	OAW	53.2	54.2	47.3	56.7	55.2
	Employer	0.2	0.3	0.9	1.3	2.6
	Unpaid	46.6	45.5	51.8	42.1	42.2
2004-05	OAW	43.5	58.8	42.3	45.1	59.2
	Employer	1.1	0.7	1.5	1.3	2.3
	Unpaid	55.4	40.5	56.2	53.6	38.5
2007-08	OAW	56.6	58.9	46.8	62.5	60.5
	Employer	0.8	1	1.1	0.1	2.9
	Unpaid	42.6	40.1	52.1	37.4	36.6
2009-10	OAW	59.4	67	52.6	51.9	65.3
	Employer	2.4	0.5	1.4	0.7	2.2
	Unpaid	38.2	32.6	46	47.4	32.5
Difference between 1999-00 & 2009- 10	OAW	6.2	12.7	5.4	-4.8	10.1
	Employer	2.2	0.2	0.5	-0.5	-0.4
	Unpaid	-8.4	-12.9	-5.9	5.3	-9.7

Source: Unit-level data, various rounds, NSSO.

Note: OAW- Own Account Workers

The distribution of other categories of self employed throws more light on the changes that are taking place. The declines are in own account work for both the social categories. The closing down as well as crisis in traditional household manufacturing which characterised the new economic regime seems to have pushed women to the status of unpaid workers. In the event of crisis, it is possible that families are redefining and consolidating their economic status compelling women to give up their own account status and become helpers or unpaid workers in family enterprises of male members. The increasing proportion of ST workers is also suggestive of changing gender relations in tribal communities with their integration to the larger economy.

Another thought provoking aspect is the increase in the share of own account workers among all other categories. The highest increase is for SC followed closely by upper castes. Available empirical evidence suggests large scale migration of male members from small land owning households given the lower returns from agricultural production. The subsequent taking over of such work by female members could be one reason for the increased proportions of upper caste women as own account workers in rural areas. It is quite possible that the same processes are at work in household industries both in urban areas with men taking up other jobs leading to the increased proportion of women as own account workers. However, while this could be true of upper caste women, in the case of SCs, the move to own account work reflects acute economic crisis of households where the loss and uncertainty of male employment during this period has been widely documented. In this context, compulsions for family survival women would be trying out various options of self employment that are less capital demanding such as street vending leading to an increased proportion reporting as own account workers. There are no evidences of any impact of state supported self employment drive in pushing the numbers of women own account workers. In fact, available studies suggest male domination even in state proposed self employment creation with women accounting only for 2 per cent of such employment (Jodhka, 2010)

IV: Widening Segregations through Markets: Trends in Paid Work

The differentiation within the status of self employed suggests the biased picture that total female employment often brings out. The inclusion of unpaid work in any analysis and discussion on employment masks the actual patterns and issues that confront women workers both at the overall level as well as at the disaggregate level (Mazumdar & Neetha, 2011). In this context, to understand women's employment alongside caste/religious intersections there is a need to separate unpaid work from total employment. This is not to suggest that women's contribution to unpaid work is not important. Women's unpaid work is very central to agriculture and household industries and their contribution to household livelihoods are fundamental. Production relations differ across paid and unpaid work, and hence the criteria for evaluating quality of unpaid work, its social and legal status and the identification of policy interventions require diverse approach from that of wage employment. In paid employment whether regular, casual or

self employed the role of the market is central. Thus the site of paid work is most appropriate to engage with exclusionary labour market practices given the existing social and gender constructs. The table (Table 7) shows the difference in participation rates for different social categories when unpaid work is removed from total employment.

Table 7:
Paid work participation rates across caste/religious categories

Sector/Social group	Paid Work Participation Rates (PWPR)				Difference between 2009-10 & 1999-00
	1999-00	2004-05	2007-08	2009-10	
Rural					
ST	25.1	23.7	21.6	19.7	-5.4
SC	24.2	22.5	22.4	20.1	-4.1
OBC excluding Muslims	16.9	16.7	16.1	16.2	-0.7
Muslims	10.2	9.5	9.1	8.7	-1.5
Upper castes excluding Muslims	11.5	12.9	11.1	11.1	-0.4
Urban					
ST	17.4	19.2	17.6	17.8	0.4
SC	15.3	17.3	14.7	15.9	0.5
OBC excluding Muslims	12.5	13.8	12.2	12.4	-0.1
Muslims	7	7.6	7.5	6.6	-0.4
Upper castes excluding Muslims	9.4	11.7	10.3	10.3	0.9
Rural + Urban					
ST	24.3	23.2	21.3	19.6	-4.7
SC	22.6	21.5	20.8	19.3	-3.3
OBC excluding Muslims	16	16.1	15.3	15.3	-0.7
Muslims	9.1	8.9	8.5	8	-1.2
Upper castes excluding Muslims	10.7	12.4	10.8	10.8	0

Sector/Social group	Difference between PWPR & Work force Participation Rate (WPR)			
	1999-00	2004-05	2007-08	2009-10
Rural				
ST	-18.7	-22.8	-18.1	-16.1
SC	-8.3	-10.8	-8.3	-6.6
OBC excluding Muslims	-14.5	-18	-15	-12
Muslims	-5.9	-8.3	-5.9	-5.4
Upper castes excluding Muslims	-13.1	-16.5	-13.2	-10.8
Urban				
ST	-3	-5.2	-2.8	-2.4
SC	-3.2	-2.8	-2	-1.9
OBC excluding Muslims	-4.3	-5.8	-3.9	-3.2
Muslims	-2.8	-4.6	-2.4	-2.7
Upper castes excluding Muslims	-1.9	-2.3	-1.6	-1.4
Rural + Urban				
ST	-16.9	-21.1	-16.8	-14.9
SC	-7.4	-9.3	-7.1	-5.7
OBC excluding Muslims	-12.4	-15.5	-12.6	-9.9
Muslims	-4.9	-7.1	-4.7	-4.5
Upper castes excluding Muslims	-9.1	-11	-8.5	-6.9

Source: Unit-level data, various rounds, NSSO.

Comparison between the two participation rates across social categories shows a narrowing down of differences across various social groups. SC and ST women have the highest participation rates when unpaid work is excluded, though the rates are much below that of usual WPR. The difference between paid work and unpaid work participation rates are highest for STs and OBCs. With this, there has been some realignment with SC clearly showing higher participation rates than OBCs. Though the participation rates of Muslim women by both accounts are the lowest among all social categories, the difference distinctively comes down when unpaid work is removed.

The distribution of paid work across status of employment suggests a skewed pattern of nature of employment across social categories (Table 7). Paid self employment accounts for the largest segment of women workers among Muslims and upper castes. However the data over time show some change in this pattern with share of regular work increasing across all social categories. The increase has been especially high for upper castes where this increased by 10 percentage points during the ten year period. This is matched by a decline in casual work. Casual work shows a regular retreat with movement along the social ladder with the proportions of SC and ST women in casual work accounting for the largest

chunk of women workers. Their proportions in paid self employment and particularly in regular work are much below that of other categories. The proportion of OBC and Muslim women in regular work is also smaller, being less than half of that of upper castes.

Paid self employment has shown a decline or stagnation for most of the social groups, except for SCs. As explained earlier, during the period of globalisation and opening up of markets, there has been a crisis in many of the traditional sectors owing to increased competition. The non -viability of home based and tiny enterprises in this context seems to have affected the prospects of self employed leading to their withdrawal from such employment , which could explain the decline over the period. The increase in paid self employment among SCs as discussed earlier could be a reflection of livelihood driven self employment, the prospects of which is highly debated. Available studies indicate that women entrepreneurs are concentrated in petty trading with about 85 per cent engaged in small grocery shops (Jodhka, 2010).

Table 8:
Distribution of female workers in various caste/religious categories across paid work categories

Period	Status of employment	ST	SC	OBC excluding Muslims	Muslims	Upper castes excluding Muslims
1999-00	Self Employed	18.2	16.5	27.5	53	40.4
	Regular workers	5.7	7.5	10.4	9.2	26.4
	Casual workers	76.1	76	62.1	37.8	33.2
2004-05	Self Employed	18.3	21.1	31.7	53.1	43.6
	Regular workers	6.9	11.2	13.3	11.9	30.3
	Casual workers	74.7	67.7	55.1	35	26.1
2007-08	Self Employed	15.1	16.6	27.9	49.1	40.5
	Regular workers	7.2	10.2	13	14	33.9
	Casual workers	77.7	73.2	59.1	36.8	25.6
2009-10	Self Employed	16.3	19.6	27.8	43.7	39.8
	Regular workers	7.3	12	13.3	12.9	34.5
	Casual workers	76.4	68.4	58.9	43.4	25.7
Difference between 1999-00 & 2009-10	Self Employed	-1.9	3.1	0.3	-9.3	-0.6
	Regular workers	1.6	4.5	2.9	3.7	8
	Casual workers	0.3	-7.6	-3.2	5.6	-7.4

Source: Unit-level data, various rounds, NSSO.

Overall, the data makes it clear that if one removes unpaid women workers from the category of self employment, it appears that casual wage employment is the overwhelmingly predominant form of paid work among women, especially for the SCs, STs and even OBCs. While paid self employment dominates among women from Muslim communities, regular wage work seems to be getting more and more predominant among women from upper castes. Given the advantageous position that women from upper castes have in terms of education and accessibility to job markets, such a trend may suggest a tendency of continuation and strengthening of structural inequalities with economic changes. These differential patterns clearly bring out the need to evolve differentiated policy formulations and interventions to address the issue of employment for different segments of the female population.

V. Social Islands in the Making: Sectoral and Occupational Dimensions

Apart from the restrictions on participating in the labour market, constraints exist on the sectors of employment that women can be associated with. Accordingly, women from certain caste groups may be concentrated in certain industrial sectors owing to cultural, economic and other social factors. This is further affected by the existing gender based segmentation in the labour market and also the caste/religious based stereotyping of employment in different sectors. The labour market outcome for women across various caste/religious categories will thus be determined by interplay of gender and caste/religious based segmentation of the labour market as well as caste/religious prescriptions of women's work.

Since employment availability and the social (both gender and caste – religious) understanding of work are influenced by location of employment the analysis are carried for rural and urban areas separately. Though in rural areas the traditional caste based economic divisions are getting blurred, existing studies suggest the prevalence of a marked tendency for certain castes to cluster in particular occupations (Panini, 1996).

Table 9:
Distribution of female workers in various caste/religious categories
across Industrial Categories, 2009-10- Rural

Sectors		ST	SC	OBC excludin g Muslims	Muslims	Upper castes excludin g Muslims
1	Agriculture and related service activities	85.2 (16.1)	78.9 (22.5)	80.3 (41.4)	59.5 (4.5)	81.2 (15.6)
2	Mining and quarrying	0.2 (13.8)	0.4 (38.2)	0.1 (22.8)	0.5 (10.6)	0.2 (14.6)
3	Manufacturing and recycling	3.3 (6.6)	7.7 (23.1)	6.9 (37.6)	26.9 (21.2)	5.7 (11.5)
4	Electricity, gas, and water supply	0.0 (13.9)	0.0 (13.7)	0.0 (44.8)	0.0 (5.5)	0.1 (22.2)
5	Construction	7.5 (21.4)	6.1 (26.6)	5.2 (40.7)	4.2 (4.8)	2.2 (6.4)
6	Trade and hotels and restaurants	1.3 (7.3)	2.0 (16.5)	3.3 (48.5)	3.9 (8.3)	3.5 (19.3)
7	Transport, storage and communications	0.4 (26.7)	0.2 (21.6)	0.2 (41.7)	0.1 (4.1)	0.1 (5.9)
8	Financial intermediation, real estate and business activities	0.0 (0.2)	0.3 (37.6)	0.2 (42.5)	0.1 (1.9)	0.2 (17.8)
9	Community, social and personal services	2.0 (7.4)	4.3 (23.6)	3.8 (37.2)	4.8 (6.9)	6.8 (24.9)
	Total services	3.7	6.9	7.5	9	10.7
	Total	100 (15.0)	100 (22.7)	100 (41.1)	100 (6.0)	100 (15.2)

Source: Unit-level data, NSSO.

Note: Figures in columns are proportions to column wise total while figures in parentheses are proportions for the row.

The data shows a high concentration of women in the agriculture (in rural areas) across all caste/religious groups (Table 9). The concentration is highest for STs and is lowest for Muslims. Interestingly, SCs show a smaller share in agriculture compared to OBCs and upper caste women. The consistent decline in the share of agriculture which is generally an outcome of economic development though is seen across all social categories the declines are more than the total average for all social groups except OBCs. Manufacturing accounts for a considerable proportion among Muslims with more than one fourth of them employed in the sector. What needs to be noted is the increase in the proportion of Muslim women in manufacturing during the period, when traditional handicrafts industry has

reported enduring crisis (Table 10). Movement of male members out of such industry could be a factor that must have led to an increase in the proportion of women. Construction is one sector where social segregations are clearly visible with women employment in the industry largely limited to manual work. Consistent decline in share of the sector could be seen as per social hierarchy with the proportion of ST women showing the highest value and upper caste the lowest. However, across the period, this is the only industry where there is noteworthy increase in the proportion of women across all social categories. The lack of any alternative employment for the poor across all caste categories seems to have resulted in this increased share of the sector. Whether this is indicative of the blurring of caste differentiation among the poor or an evolving renegotiation of tasks along caste divisions needs further empirical probing.

Table 10:
Difference in the proportions of women in various caste/religious
Categories across Industrial categories between
1999-00 & 2009-10- Rural

	Sectors	ST	SC	OBC excluding Muslims	Muslims	Upper castes excluding Muslims
1	Agriculture and related service activities	-5.4	-7.5	-4.7	-9.9	-7.1
2	Mining and quarrying	-0.1	0.2	-0.2	0.2	0.1
3	Manufacturing and recycling	-0.6	0.8	-0.8	4.4	1.6
4	Electricity, gas, and water supply	0	0	0	0	0
5	Construction	5.4	4.9	4.4	3.9	1.7
6	Trade and hotels and restaurants	0.4	0.6	1	0.7	1
7	Transport, storage and communications	0.3	0.1	0.1	0	0
8	Financial intermediation, real estate and business activities	0	0.2	0.1	0.1	0
9	Community, social and personal services	0	0.6	0.1	0.6	2.6
	Total services	0.7	1.5	1.3	1.4	3.6

Source: Unit-level data, NSSO.

Services' show clear concentration among some of the social categories with upper caste women showing a higher share. Trade, hotels and restaurants is

one industry within services which seems to accommodate women from all social categories. However, for SC & ST, the share of the sector in overall employment is much less compared to other categories evidencing the argument of assetlessness. Other services which include, public administration, education and health etc. account for the second largest share of female workers among upper castes which is only next to agriculture. The share also shows an increase over time by 2.6 percentage points. This is an expected outcome given the increased access of these caste/religious categories to public sector jobs and educational institutions both on account of educational advantage and exposure to such opportunities.

Table 11:
Distribution of female workers in various caste/religious categories
across Industrial categories – 2009-10- Urban

	Sectors	ST	SC	OBC excluding Muslims	Muslims	Upper castes excluding Muslims	Total
1	Agriculture and related service activities	24.2 (6.8)	16.0 (20.2)	20.9 (53.7)	7.8 (5.6)	6.5 (13.6)	14.4 (100)
2	Mining and quarrying	0.4 (5.1)	0.4 (26.7)	0.4 (51.9)	0.0 (0.2)	0.1 (16.0)	0.3 (100)
3	Manufacturing and recycling	9.3 (1.3)	26.0 (16.3)	32.0 (41.0)	57.3 (20.7)	19.9 (20.7)	29.0 (100)
4	Electricity, gas, and water supply	0.6 (7.0)	0.2 (11.5)	0.3 (34.6)	0.8 (22.5)	0.3 (24.5)	0.4 (100)
5	Construction	13.9 (11.6)	8.8 (32.9)	5.2 (39.4)	2.5 (5.5)	1.7 (10.6)	4.9 (100)
6	Trade and hotels and restaurants	13.2 (4.3)	11.3 (16.3)	13.7 (40.2)	9.9 (8.3)	12.9 (31.0)	12.6 (100)
7	Transport, storage and communications	0.8 (2.3)	1.5 (19.1)	0.6 (17.1)	0.4 (2.7)	2.7 (58.8)	1.4 (100)
8	Financial intermediation, real estate and business activities	5.1 (4.3)	2.3 (8.5)	3.3 (24.7)	0.8 (1.8)	9.8 (60.6)	4.9 (100)
9	Community, social and personal services	32.5 (4.1)	33.5 (18.9)	23.6 (27.2)	20.5 (6.7)	46.0 (43.1)	32.2 (100)
	Total services	51.5	48.4	41.1	31.6	71.5	51.2
	Total	100.0 (4.1)	100.0 (18.2)	100.0 (37.1)	100.0 (10.5)	100.0 (30.2)	100

Source: Unit-level data, NSSO.

Note: Figures in columns are proportions to column wise total while figures in parentheses are proportions for the row.

A glance into the urban distribution helps in the exposition of how social relations get transferred into as well as affect employment outcomes in a system of production relations that are largely based on markets (Table 11). Agriculture, even in urban areas, emerges as a key sector of employment of women with peri-urban agricultural activities still being an important economic activity in the economy. Though the sector accounts for 14 per cent of urban employment the importance varies across social categories as understood, with Muslims and upper castes showing smaller shares. The STs and OBCs show higher shares - with OBCs accounting for about 54 per cent of urban female employment in agriculture.

Table 12:
Difference in the proportions of women in various caste/religious categories across Industrial categories between 1999-00 & 2009-10- Urban

	Sectors	ST	SC	OBC excluding Muslims	Muslims	Upper castes excluding Muslims	Total
1	Agriculture and related service activities	-5.1	-9	-1.2	-3	-3.9	-3.7
2	Mining and quarrying	-1.4	-0.3	0.2	-0.1	0	-0.1
3	Manufacturing and recycling	-7.2	8.4	4.6	8.5	3.8	5.3
4	Electricity, gas, and water supply	0.6	0.2	0.1	0.8	-0.1	0.2
5	Construction	3.5	-0.2	-0.5	0.4	0.4	0.1
6	Trade and hotels and restaurants	2.2	-2.8	-4.9	-8.1	-4.1	-4.1
7	Transport, storage and communications	-0.2	-0.2	-0.5	0.1	-0.8	-0.5
8	Financial intermediation, real estate and business activities	3	1.4	1.9	0.4	4.7	2.5
9	Community, social and personal services	4.6	2.4	0.3	1	0.1	0.4
	Total Services	9.6	0.8	-3.2	-6.6	-0.3	-1.7

Source: Unit-level data, NSSO.

Manufacturing is the most significant sector for Muslim women (57 per cent) concentrated in the sector accounting for about 21 percent of women workers in the sector. The proportion also showed an increase of 8.5 percentage points over the ten year period. The concentration of Muslim women in manufacturing and its increase, as discussed earlier, needs to be seen in the context of crisis affecting tiny and cottage industries, especially in handicrafts and artisanal production. What is particularly striking over the period is the decline, by about 7 percentage points in the proportion of ST women engaged in manufacturing (Table 12). The decline of traditional household handicrafts industry among the tribal population which is highly women centric is an issue that needs specific attention in this context.

Construction in urban areas, as compared to rural, shows distinct pattern across social categories with the proportion declining with upward movement in the social category. This suggests that in the context of alternative employment possibility, there is an aversion to manual casual work among the socially privileged groups. The industry accounted for about 14 per cent of ST population in 2009-10 with an increase of 3.5 percentage points over the period. SC/ST population accounted for about 45 per cent of female workers in construction industry. Another 39 per cent belonged to OBCs.

Services emerge as the single largest employer of women in urban areas during this period with other services dominating the proportion. However, the social composition of the sector is evident with upper castes having larger shares (71.5 per cent) of their women in the sector while Muslims have the lowest share (31.6 per cent). About half of the SC/ ST women are also concentrated in the service sector. The disaggregation across broad divisions provides interesting insights into the emerging enclaves of urban labour markets for women. *Financial intermediation* account for 9.8 per cent of upper caste women and their share in total female employment in the sector is more than 60 per cent. *Other services* accounted for 43 per cent of total women workers with 46 per cent of upper caste workers taking up this industry. The domination of upper caste women in urban service sector based employment is clearly evident from the data supporting the argument of creation of caste and religious based enclaves in the emerging areas of new service sector employment. More than caste/religious based identity creation; the income prospects and the potential for job mobility are issues that need attention. The factors that contribute to the emergence of and continuation of such segregations demand empirical research, which would help in policy interventions.

The broader classifications across industries do not reveal segmentations within specific industries. In the following tables a disaggregated pattern is given across major industrial sub divisions, which constitute for the major sub-sectors of women's employment in each caste/religious category. The analysis is limited to the 66th (2009-10) round of employment data.

Within agriculture, growing of food grain crops (cereals and pulses) account for a large segment of women workers from all caste/religious groups with differing levels of concentration. However, women from upper castes show a relatively dispersed pattern with many women falling into the sub sector '*growing of commercial crops*' – which would definitely have a bearing on the earnings that accrue to them.

Manufacturing which accounts for a relatively high proportion of women workers, reveals caste/religious segmentation within its broad divisions (Table 13). SC women show a spread out pattern compared to other social categories with *Manufacture of wearing apparel, dressing and dyeing of fur* accounting for the largest share at 18.2 per cent. What is specific to women workers from the SC community is their high share in *Tanning and Dressing of Leather; Manufacture of Luggage, Handbags Saddlery, Harness and Footwear*, substantiating the evoking of non-market based relations and constraints to the realm of markets. This also points to the inability of these women workers to come out of the traditional caste based sectors. Their share is also high in the *Manufacture of Tobacco Products* and *Manufacture of Other Non-Metallic Mineral Products* which are again at the lower end of manufacturing industries in terms of pay and working conditions.

Manufacture of Tobacco Products together with *Manufacture of Textiles* account for 69 per cent of Muslim women workers in manufacturing. These are again traditional sectors where members from this community is concentrated which tend to suggest that there have not been much changes in the structural pattern of employment across various caste/religious groups. In the case of upper castes there are segments of clear concentrations with *Manufacture of Wearing Apparel; Dressing and Dyeing of Fur* accounting for the largest segment. Here one needs to note that this is the sector which has seen feminisation of the work force in the context of globalisation. *Manufacture of wood and products of wood and cork* etc emerged as the most important sector of employment of ST women workers suggesting the possibility of women's involvement getting limited to household industries based on family labour, which is evident in the earlier analysis.

Table 13:
Distribution of female workers in various caste/religious categories
across sub-categories of Manufacturing - 2009-10

	Rural & Urban	ST	SC	OBC excluding Muslims	Muslims	Upper castes excluding Muslims	Total
1	Manufacture of food products and beverages	7.8	7.5	11.7	6.9	15.7	10.3
2	Manufacture of tobacco products	18.4	27	20.3	37.2	12.4	23.9
3	Manufacture of textiles	9.7	13.8	22	31.8	17.7	21.2
4	Manufacture of wearing apparel, dressing and dyeing of fur	6.2	18.2	20.3	15	32	19.9
5	Manufacture of wood and of products of wood and cork etc	37.9	11.4	3.1	1	2.4	5.8
6	Manufacture of other non-metallic mineral products	7.9	10.9	6.8	1.8	2.1	5.9
	Total	88	89	84.2	93.7	82.3	87

Source: Unit-level data, NSSO.

Women in the construction industry across all caste/religious categories are largely concentrated in the highly informal segment of the industry which is captured in the data as *General construction (including alteration, addition, repair and maintenance) of residential buildings, carried -out on own-account basis or on a fee or contract basis*. Nevertheless, the data reveals some signs of segmentation across caste/religious lines. The most disburbed as well as relatively better placed are the upper caste, with their increased presence in non-residential general construction and construction of water ways and water reservoirs. Construction activities in these sectors are organised largely by construction companies providing relatively longer periods of employment with comparatively better pay and working conditions. A significant share of construction work under the category *Construction and maintenance of roads, rail-beds, bridges etc* is undertaken under government programmes for employment or poverty alleviation, where SC women show concentration.

Table 14:
Female employment distribution within the Industrial Category
***Financial intermediation, real estate and business activities* and its**
Religious/caste dimension – 2009-10

	Sectors	ST	SC	OBC excluding Muslims	Muslims	Upper castes excluding Muslims	Total
1	Financial intermediation, except insurance and pension funding	41.1 (5.1)	34.1 (14.8)	19.6 (18.1)	18.2 (1.1)	33.4 (60.9)	29.7 (100)
2	Insurance and pension funding, except compulsory social security	9.1 (2.4)	19.1 (17.7)	15.0 (29.5)	19.3 (2.5)	12.3 (47.9)	13.9 (100)
3	Real estate activities	21.5 (12.5)	10.1 (20.4)	5.4 (23.3)	0.6 (0.2)	5.1 (43.6)	6.3 (100)
4	Renting of machinery and equipment etc.	1.2 (1.9)	1.7 (9.8)	3.6 (44.2)	4.5 (3.7)	1.6 (40.3)	2.2 (100)
5	Computer and related activities	3.8 (0.6)	9.0 (4.9)	27.1 (31.7)	44.6 (3.4)	25.7 (59.3)	23.5 (100)
6	Research and development	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.4 (100.0)	0.2 (100)
7	Other business activities	23.3 (3.6)	26.0 (13.9)	29.3 (33.4)	12.8 (1.0)	21.5 (48.2)	24.1 (100)

Source: Unit-level data, 2009-10.

Note: Figures in columns are proportions to column wise total while figures in parentheses are proportions for the row.

The disaggregation of financial intermediation (Table 14) though at the risk of small sample interpretation is worth analysing to understand some of the emerging enclaves of upper castes female employment⁶. Upper castes dominate all sectors with varying degrees of concentration. All caste categories other than upper castes and OBC are virtually insignificant in many categories. This is further suggestive of an exclusionary employment generation that is happening in many of the modern service sector industries.

Community, social and personal services, which account for the largest share of women workers after manufacturing in the non- farm sector, reveal the segmented nature of modern service industries (Table 15). Education is the primary source of employment for all social categories in rural areas. Within education however, *Primary education, including pre-primary education* accounts for the largest share of women from all caste/religious categories. But what

needs to be noted is their presence in other sub-sectors of education which are advanced. The share of sectors of higher education among upper caste women was roughly 50 per cent, while the negligible presence of SC/ST women was noted in this sector, reaffirming the existing and dominant social understanding of caste/religious dimensions of higher education. The proportions for Muslims were also much lower compared to that of OBCs and upper castes.

Table 15:
Female employment distribution within the Industrial Category
Community, social and personal services and its religious/caste
dimension – 2009-10

Rural							
	Sectors	ST	SC	OBC excluding Muslims	Muslims	Upper castes excluding Muslims	Total
1	Public administration and defence, compulsory social security	15.7 (10.3)	11.0 (23.0)	7.1 (23.6)	13.7 (8.4)	15.7 (34.8)	11.3 (100)
2	Education	46.2 (7.0)	36.1 (17.4)	49.5 (37.6)	38.1 (5.4)	64.0 (32.6)	48.9 (100)
3	Health and social work	21.0 (11.8)	15.6 (28.1)	13.7 (38.8)	3.2 (1.7)	10.3 (19.5)	13.1 (100)
4	Other community social and personal services	2.8 (1.6)	17.9 (31.3)	21.4 (58.9)	9.8 (5.0)	1.8 (3.2)	13.5 (100)
5	Private households with employed persons	14.2 (8.0)	19.3 (34.6)	8.3 (23.4)	35.1 (18.4)	8.2 (15.6)	13.2 (100)
	Total services	100 (7.4)	100 (23.6)	100 (37.2)	100 (6.9)	100 (24.9)	100
Urban							
1	Public administration and defence, compulsory social security	10.8 (3.5)	14.8 (21.9)	11.9 (25.4)	7.1 (3.7)	13.4 (45.5)	12.7 (100)
2	Education	20.9 (2.0)	23.7 (10.6)	39.8 (25.7)	52.1 (8.2)	52.1 (53.4)	42.1 (100)
3	Health and social work	9.1 (2.7)	8.8 (12.2)	14.1 (28.1)	9.7 (4.7)	16.6 (52.3)	13.7 (100)
4	Other community social and personal services	6.5 (3.1)	16.8 (36.8)	9.1 (28.6)	6.3 (4.8)	5.3 (26.7)	8.6 (100)
5	Private households with employed persons	52.7 (9.5)	36.0 (29.8)	25.1 (29.9)	25.0 (7.3)	12.5 (23.6)	22.9 (100)
	Total services	100.0 (4.1)	100.0 (18.9)	100.0 (27.2)	100.0 (6.7)	100.0 (43.1)	100.0

Source: Unit-level data, NSSO.

Note: Figures in columns are proportions to column wise total while figures in parentheses are proportions for the row.

Among these industrial divisions, private households with employed persons, the sector which showed a substantial increase in urban female employment highlights not only the nature of employment generated during the high growth period but also the emerging social identity of the sector. Among ST women, this sector accounts for 53 per cent of all workers employed under community, social and personal services, though their share in the sector is not the highest. This increased presence of SC/ST women in domestic work has been highlighted by many micro-level studies and is an outcome of the social understanding of domestic work such as sweeping, mopping and other cleaning activities as menial with lower social status. However, the data also points to the changing social identity of the sector with women from all social categories accounting for considerable shares. The only community that has a smaller share is Muslims in urban areas. However, its share in rural areas is much higher than that of upper castes. Interestingly though the proportion of upper caste women is less, they too account for about one fourth of the total employment in the sector in urban areas. Thus, it seems that with increasing demand for domestic work, coupled with lack of alternate employment opportunities, many women -irrespective of their caste backgrounds- take up domestic work. The specialisations and diversifications (cooking and caring for children and adult versus cleaning tasks) in the sector also may have contributed to this changing social profile of the sector. This matter needs further investigation. *Sewage and refuse disposal, sanitation and similar activities* also account for a substantial share of SC women, clearly reflecting the traditional caste based occupational divisions.

The industrial distribution does not reveal the exact nature of occupation that different social groups are engaged in. Available studies suggest that the relative earnings of marginalised groups have been decreasing over the years, with the worst affected year being 2004-05 (Abraham, 2012). Also upward mobility to better-wage occupational categories has been slower for these workers in comparison to other workers, rendering widening earning differentials. The lack of mobility is attributed mainly to the preponderance of these workers in low wage occupations, rather than wage differences in the same occupations (Majumdar, 2007). Such concentrations can be better understood analysing the distribution across occupational categories. This has been examined for the latest round of data so as to give insight into the changing dimensions of segmentation based on caste/religion, if any. The analysis is done separately for rural and urban areas since the occupational segmentation follows a different pattern in both these locations.

Table 16:
Distribution of female workers in various caste/religious categories
across Occupational Categories - Rural (2009-10)

	Occupational Categories	ST	SC	OBC excluding Muslims	Muslims	Upper castes excluding Muslims	Total
1	Legislators, senior officials and managers	1.2 (10.3)	1.0 (13.0)	2.2 (52.0)	2.4 (8.3)	1.9 (16.4)	1.7 (100)
2	Professionals	0.3 (4.2)	0.9 (22.1)	0.9 (36.5)	2.2 (13.6)	1.5 (23.6)	1.0 (100)
3	Technicians and associate professionals	1.2 (11.4)	1.0 (14.9)	1.3 (33.0)	1.4 (5.1)	3.7 (35.5)	1.6 (100)
4	Clerks	0.1 (9.4)	0.2 (18.4)	0.3 (48.3)	0.1 (3.3)	0.3 (20.6)	0.2 (100)
5	Service workers and shop & market sales workers	0.9 (5.7)	1.8 (18.5)	2.5 (44.8)	3.0 (7.7)	3.5 (23.2)	2.3 (100)
6	Skilled agricultural and fishery workers	49.6 (15.9)	31.0 (15.0)	48.9 (42.9)	40.7 (5.1)	65.2 (21.1)	46.9 (100)
7	Craft and related trades workers	3.8 (8.8)	7.2 (25.0)	5.5 (34.3)	23.1 (20.8)	4.8 (11.1)	6.5 (100)
8	Plant and machine operators and assemblers	0.2 (7.5)	0.2 (11.5)	0.7 (60.1)	0.8 (9.3)	0.4 (11.7)	0.5 (100)
9	Elementary occupations	42.7 (16.3)	56.6 (32.8)	37.9 (39.7)	26.3 (4.0)	18.9 (7.3)	39.3 (100)
	Total	100.0 (15.0)	100.0 (22.7)	100.0 (41.1)	100.0 (5.9)	100.0 (15.2)	100.0 (100)

Source: Unit-level data, NSSO.

Note: Figures in columns are proportions to column wise total while figures in parentheses are proportions for the row.

The distribution across occupational categories shows the overall occupational profile in rural areas with the share of most categories being negligible (Table 16). Except for SCs for all other categories skilled agricultural occupation dominate the occupational profile which is clearly the picture that one expects. However, what is interesting is the proportion of various social categories engaged in the category of *elementary occupations*, which accounts for a mixture of jobs that falls at the bottom of the informal sector job ladder. The share of upper caste women in this category is 9 only per cent while that of SCs is 57 per cent- a clear indicator of caste based occupational segregation. Similarly, the proportion of upper castes in skilled agricultural occupation is 65 per cent while that of SCs is

only 31 per cent. The importance of craft and related trade work among Muslim Community is also evident from the data with 23 per cent of women workers in the community pursuing this occupation in rural areas.

Table 17:
Distribution of female workers in various caste/religious categories across Occupational Categories – Urban (2009-10)

	Occupational Categories	ST	SC	OBC excluding Muslims	Muslims	Upper castes excluding Muslims	Total
1	Legislators, senior officials and managers	4.6 (2.6)	3.1 (8.0)	7.4 (37.3)	8.2 (11.7)	10.0 (40.5)	7.3 (100)
2	Professionals	4.4 (1.7)	4.0 (7.2)	7.4 (26.1)	6.9 (6.8)	20.7 (58.2)	10.5 (100)
3	Technicians and associate professionals	7.1 (2.8)	6.0 (10.5)	8.4 (28.8)	6.7 (6.5)	18.6 (51.4)	10.7 (100)
4	Clerks	4.6 (3.0)	4.0 (14.0)	2.9 (20.0)	2.8 (5.3)	10.4 (57.2)	5.4 (100)
5	Service workers and shop & market sales workers	11.7 (4.5)	10.2 (18.0)	10.4 (35.9)	7.5 (7.3)	12.4 (34.3)	10.7 (100)
6	Skilled agricultural and fishery workers	11.8 (6.6)	5.3 (13.4)	10.3 (51.4)	5.2 (7.3)	5.3 (21.3)	7.4 (100)
7	Craft and related trades workers	9.4 (2.0)	18.2 (18.0)	22.0 (42.8)	37.9 (20.6)	10.7 (16.6)	19.1 (100)
8	Plant and machine operators and assemblers	1.7 (3.0)	2.4 (20.0)	3.1 (50.1)	2.4 (11.0)	1.2 (15.9)	2.3 (100)
9	Elementary occupations	44.7 (7.0)	46.8 (33.2)	28.1 (39.1)	22.4 (8.7)	10.8 (12.0)	26.6 (100)
	Total	100 (4.1)	100.0 (18.9)	100.0 (37.0)	100.0 (10.4)	100.0 (29.7)	100.0 (100)

Source: Unit-level data, NSSO.

Note: Figures in columns are proportions to column wise total while figures in parentheses are proportions for the row.

The category of *elementary occupations* is clearly the hub of economic opportunities for SC and ST, accounting for about half of the workers, even in urban areas, whereas other social categories show a much dispersed pattern (Table 17). Even for the OBC community this occupational category is the leading one with the profile much dispersed. The data shows a clear domination of

upper caste women, in skilled occupational groups such as *Professional, Technicians and associate professionals and Clerks* which are definitely white collar jobs. Strikingly upper caste women's shares in these categories are all above 50 per cent. Even in other white collar categories upper castes women's share is much above that of all other categories, suggesting a clear domination of this social group in better paid and regulated jobs. *Craft and related trades* is the dominant sector of concentration for Muslim women. This accounts for women in traditional small and tiny family-based manufacturing units. As discussed earlier, large shares of these workers are self employed workers (Das, 2005). The inability to find alternative jobs combined with social restrictions often creates a vicious circle with women trapped as low paid/unpaid workers in these sectors. Field level studies so far suggest that social and cultural capital (the complex and overlapping categories of caste, family background, network and contacts) plays a huge role in urban, formal sector labour markets, where hiring practices are less transparent though one may think it as neutral (Kumar et al, 2009).

The above analysis of industrial and occupational divisions reveals the extent of caste/religion based segmentation that exists in the labour market. The patterns at the overall level do not show any sign of major changes, with women from lower castes groups concentrated at the bottom end of the job ladder. Accordingly, the labour market seems to be reproducing age old social inequalities and is increasingly been guided by the existing social understanding of the roles and status of various caste/religious groups with very few exceptions.

VI. Labour Market Outcomes of Education

Caste/religious status are normally found to have a combined effect with other variables, especially education. Thus, in discussions on female employment and its relation to social structures, education is taken as a central variable, with contrasting experiences across various countries. Thus, while for developed countries a positive correlation is often established between the two, rooted in human capital theory for many developing countries the extent of relationship is found to vary, showing an insignificant or negative outcome. Studies in the context of India suggest a trend of decline in labour force participation rates with increases in education (Kingdom & Unni, 1997; Das & Desai, 2003). Two sets of explanations exist in the literature which analyses the above pattern. The first, which is well within the structuralist framework, highlights the lack of appropriate employment opportunities as the determining factor. Thus educated men and women are

found withdrawing from the labour market as they do not find employment matching with their educational attainments. Since women from upper castes have better access to education, a lesser number of women from these categories participate in employment in comparison to lower castes, in the absence of suitable jobs. The second, goes beyond the demand-supply framework and suggests the importance of social and cultural factors in determining female labour force participation (Kapadia, 1995), irrespective of levels of education. Women's participation in the labour market is often linked to the status based hierarchy of jobs, which is again, often determined by the religious/ caste positioning of the households. It is often found that though higher status households educate their women; these women are not allowed to participate in the labour market. On the other hand, women from lower social categories do participate in the labour market, despite their poor educational background as they do not have any other choice. Clearly the economic background of the households is decisive in explaining these differences. But the relationship is never direct and many factors do play out simultaneously. Education remains a critical variable in addressing inequality in opportunity which would balance out to some extent inequalities in access to land and other productive resources (Bhaumik & Chakravarty 2009). However, whether education can reduce outcome inequality is a debated issue with empirical studies suggesting inequalities in opportunities even in the case of highly qualified members from lower castes (Thorat & Newman, 2007). Since caste hierarchy has a strong bearing on the nature and forms of work that women can undertake, the educational background of women participating in the labour market can throw some insight into the dynamics of caste, educational and economic processes. In the following analysis educational backgrounds of women are classified into four broad categories- illiterate and those with no formal schooling, literate till primary level; middle and secondary education; and women with education above secondary.

The table (Table 18) shows a complex relationship between education, caste/ religious categories and female work force participation. What is striking is the high concentration of women who are illiterate or do not have any formal schooling across all the categories. This is an aspect which has been widely acknowledged in the literature on female labour force participation and the linkage is often established through the economic rationale where poor households do not have many options but to participate in employment. Among various caste groups within the illiterates, women from Scheduled Tribes followed by SC women

show the highest concentration again establishing a positive relationship between economic status and labour force participation rate. Without reservations in the public sector their shares in educated categories could have been much smaller.

The argument that women's work participation rate is inversely related to educational attainments does not seem to be true for women in general or from various social categories. The pattern that emerges from the data is one of high workforce participation rate for illiterates and the lowest for those who are literate but with less than primary education. Subsequently, the participation rates show an increase with those with primary and middle education showing a similar value. Again one sees a dip in participation rates at the level of *secondary education but below graduation*. *Graduation and above*, again shows an increase for all the social categories. What is interesting is that the same pattern prevails across various religious/caste groups suggesting that educational background does not contribute much to their entry into the labour market given their gender identity. However, while for most social categories, illiterate women show a higher participation rate, for Muslims and upper castes the participation rate is highest for those with graduation and above. For upper caste Non Muslims, the participation rate for the better educated was high and was only less to that of the illiterates. This could be both on account of economic reasons and due to restrictions on women's participation in labour market or a combination of both each reinforcing the other. Since many upper caste households may be better off economically, livelihood driven participation in employment may not be so rampant. While the same may be true to some extent with reference to Muslim community also, the relative weight of economic necessity and social restrictions may be different from that of upper castes. What is worth analysing is the lower participation rate among those with *secondary education but below graduation*. This apart from the demonstration effect related to social status could also be on account of the lack of appropriate employment opportunities to absorb the better educated, furthered by the discriminatory practices followed by many private sector institutions.

Table 18:
Proportion of female population participating in employment across
various educational and caste/religious categories

		ST	SC	OBC excluding Muslims	Muslims	Upper castes excluding Muslims	Total
	2009-10						
1	Illiterate	43.7	31.5	31.4	14.9	21.3	29.1
2	Literate up to primary	19.4	12.5	16.2	6.8	8.8	13.1
3	Primary	28.3	21.8	24.5	12.4	18	21.2
4	Upper primary / middle	28.9	23.1	23.1	13.1	19.2	21.3
5	Secondary and above till graduation	27.3	19.7	17.2	8.7	14.4	16.2
6	Graduation and above	31.4	28.5	30.3	23.3	25.2	26.9
	Total	34.6	25.2	25.2	12.5	17.8	22.8
	1999-00						
1	Illiterate	48.3	36.2	34.5	16.7	26.8	32.8
2	Literate up to primary	20.4	13.4	14.8	8.8	11	13.1
3	Primary	31.4	21.3	24.7	9.9	17.1	20.2
4	Upper primary / middle	29.6	20.7	22.3	11.6	16.9	19.2
5	Secondary and above till graduation	27.1	21.8	20.9	12.1	15.5	17.7
6	Graduation and above	37.5	32.5	28	26.6	27.3	27.9
	Total	41.2	29.9	28.4	14	19.8	25.8

Source: Unit-level data, NSSO.

The work force participation rate of women across caste groups and educational profiles helps in revisiting some of the existing findings/arguments on this issue. As in the case of workforce participation rates for all women, upper castes Hindus and Muslims show lower participation rates across all educational categories. This clearly reveals the importance of caste/religious prejudices irrespective of educational attainments. Since caste/religious divisions to a larger

extent are also reflective of the economic status of households, this difference may be on account of the necessity of women's economic involvement in poorer households; while in others the economic aspects may be overridden by the social status.

Table 19:
Distribution of female workers of various social categories across levels of education

		ST	SC	OBC excluding Muslims	Muslims	Upper castes excluding Muslims	Total
	2009-10						
1	Illiterate	64.6	62.6	53.8	54.6	31.9	53.4
2	Literate up to primary	10.2	8.3	10.6	10.1	6.6	9.3
3	Primary	10.9	11.9	13.1	14.5	14.2	12.8
4	Upper primary / middle	7.5	9.2	11.2	11.5	15.4	11
5	Secondary and above	6.7	8.1	11.4	9.3	31.9	13.5
6	Secondary and above till graduation	5.7	6.2	8.1	6	17.4	8.9
7	Graduation and above	1.1	1.8	3.3	3.3	14.4	4.6
	Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
	Difference from 1999-00						
1	Illiterate	-16	-16.9	-17	-14.6	-16.2	-15.9
2	Literate up to primary	3	1.4	2.2	-1.7	-3	0.9
3	Primary	5	5.7	4.2	7.2	2.6	4.5
4	Upper primary / middle	3.8	4.8	4.6	5.1	3.9	4.3
5	Secondary and above	4	5.1	6.1	3.9	12.7	6.2
6	Secondary and above till graduation	3.5	3.7	3.8	2.1	5.9	3.8
7	Graduation and above	0.6	1.3	2.3	1.8	6.7	2.4

Source: Unit-level data, NSSO.

The educational profile shows the bleak state of affairs as far as female workers are concerned: with illiterate women dominating the employment scenario across all social categories (Table 19). Their proportion is very high among the lower stratum of the hierarchy which declines with upward movement in the caste/ social hierarchy. Thus, illiterate women accounted only for 32 per cent of upper caste women workers while the proportion for SC/ST was over 63 per cent. About the same proportion among upper caste (32 per cent) were also those with an educational profile of *secondary and above*. The share of upper caste women in the category *secondary and above* was very high at about 55 per cent. When the two periods (1999-00 and 2009-10) are compared, for upper castes an increase of 12.7 percentage points are noted for secondary and above which is more than double of OBCs- OBCs among others shows the maximum increase over the period. This could be on account of the discriminatory policies (both direct as well as indirect) of many private sector firms on the basis of social and economic status. Available studies suggest the existence of discriminations, in private sector due to employer's prejudice on the qualities and skills of various social groups aggravated by gender divisions. Most recruitment in the private sector is through social networks, which would further worsen the social prejudices and discriminatory practices along caste and gender lines. The expanding role of the private sector in technical and professional education could similarly result in the contraction of the number of socially underprivileged in such professions, and especially of women.

Overtime, there is an almost similar decline in the proportion of illiterates across all categories of social groups. While this decline may indicate a positive trend of increasing education among women across social groups, in a period of overall decline in employment it also reflects the exclusionary pattern of modern labour markets. Consequently, it seems that the illiterate women are losing work. Given the concentration of lower castes within the category of illiterates, this would only further worsen the social inequality.

VII. Conclusion

Caste differentiations are often expected to weaken and eventually disappear with the process of economic development and urbanisation/modernisation. However, the analysis and discussions presented above indicate that social and cultural inequalities continue to have a strong bearing on employment outcomes even when the latter are determined by market forces. The market seems to operate within the existing

given structural inequalities of caste and religion and rather than altering these inequalities it worsens and reinforces such inequalities. As caste/religion are interrelated with other socio-economic variables, the relationship is often more complex. Caste is only one aspect of social stratification which gets more complex with the inclusion of other variables such as gender. Both these operate to create layers of exclusion and exploitation leading to status hierarchies based on caste and male –female identities. Concentrations in specific occupations thus appear to be less a matter of choice, and more an outcome of desperation given other social and economic conditions. The domination of upper caste women in the growing sectors of the economy and in better skilled and paid occupational categories signals the path of caste based consolidation. Empirical studies have clearly shown that poverty levels of various religious/caste groups are not uniform and are rendered more complex by gender. This has precise policy implications for employment and poverty mitigating intervention programmes.

In the literature on human development within the context of liberalization, education has been a central variable in the analysis of female employment. The present analysis suggests that the link between the two are not linear as previously assumed, though it could open up employment choices that women can undertake. Accordingly, increased education does not always get reflected in increased employment as this is determined largely by the existing structural inequalities. Thus, education is not a simple panacea for employment problems and what is required are concerted efforts to address the stereotyping of labour markets governed by the social understanding of women's roles in economic activities across various caste and religious groups. Economic growth not only needs to generate secure jobs but also has to recognise the social inequalities that affect recruitment to these jobs. These calls for state interventions in the form of reservations for women from specific social groups which could ensure that the benefits of growth are filtered downward and thus could be used as effective mechanisms to address structural inequalities in the long run. Reservation for women in employment across social categories is yet to be raised as a serious concern by any organisation or governmental bodies, though this could be a path to increase women's representation at the political level also. This could be partly due to the lack of adequate gender specific data across social and economic categories that could generate interest and debate on the subject. At the overall level though lack of interest on women's status remains an issue - the stereotypical assumptions on women's roles determined by their social status is the crux of the problem.

Discussions around the collection of caste data in the 2011 Census brought to the forefront the necessity of looking at caste based statistics in understanding economic changes. Though competing views are held by various groups concerned, caste- neutrality of the markets remains central to these discussions. The assumption of an inclusive modern economy leading to the blurring of occupational segregation was the highlight of some of the discussions which argued against any attempt to record caste status. There is a need to look at SC/ ST and OBC sub-categories separately given the heterogeneous nature of these categories as the existing categorisation disguises and suppresses the intra-group differences within these broad groups. There is also a location factor, with many state governments following different caste classifications. For instance, some castes listed under SC in one state may be listed under OBC in other states or OBC castes in one may be classified as upper castes in other states and vice versa (Raveendran & Naik, 2011). By identifying each socio-religious community's specific drawbacks, it would then be possible to direct the existing programmes in a more focused and targeted manner or to develop new and more effective and innovative measures to address group-specific problems. Analysis of macro data can only suggest broad patterns and trends. There is a need to unravel the multiple and often overlapping effects of caste and gender. Why and how have women from certain categories been able to achieve better economic status and greater mobility than others? What are the experiences of women, both as women as well as members of their community who have entered into spaces of upper caste men? Are these women able to negotiate prejudices and discrimination both in terms of their caste status and gender? These are some interesting questions that need further interrogation which could be realised only through micro level studies.

(Endnotes)

¹ As part of the 'sanskritisation process' – the term was made popular by M. N. Srinivas in the 1950s. It denotes the process by which castes at the lower rungs of the caste hierarchy seek upward social mobility by following the customs and practices of the upper/dominant castes.

² Since Census data does not record the caste identity of any respondent except that of SC and ST status, no further analysis is possible using Census data. The use of census data is also limited because of the non-publication of socio-economic data and working status by religion which allow for the politicisation of demographic changes without understanding their social and economic conditions (Thorat, 2011).

³ GOI, (2006). The committee not only was successful in raising the overall issues of the community but has also provided substantial inputs in initiating a discourse on women's economic status in the community.

⁴ The central government has set up the National Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Finance and Development Corporation, which supports the SC and ST groups in a number of ways to set up enterprises and businesses. Similar corporations have been set up in a number of states.

⁵ Own account workers are the self employed who operate their enterprises on their own account or with one or few partners and run their enterprises without hiring any labour. However, they may have unpaid helpers to assist them in the activity of the enterprise. Employers work on their own account or with one or a few partners and by and large run their enterprise by hiring labour but may also use unpaid help from family members. The third category is the unpaid workers or helpers in household enterprise are mostly family members who keep themselves engaged in their household enterprises as assistants working full or part time, and do not receive any regular salary or wages in return for the work performed. These workers could be engaged in either agricultural holding or family enterprises on an unpaid basis to produce products that are marketed or in the production of goods for household own consumption; including production of crops and livestock, basic food processing, gathering firewood and fetching water, making tools, utensil and clothes, construction of own houses.

⁶ The share of the category 'financial intermediation' is high for women belonging to ST and SC. Though this calls for further probing one needs to be careful while stretching this finding too much as the sample size is not that strong to arrive at any firm findings.

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