

## CHAPTER - II

### WOMEN IN THE WORKING FORCE IN INDIA

In the foregoing chapter I have discussed on the theoretical aspect of women studies in general and also highlighted the necessity of women studies particularly in the industrial labour force in India. The present chapter deals with the women's position in the working force in India in general and specifically in the plantation labour force. This will provide us with an answer to the question : why one should put his interests in the study of plantation women workers ? In the organised sector of industry, plantations occupy a unique position due to its agro-industrial features and highest percentage of women's employment. Women's employment situation in India differs from that of men. To study this situation it is essential to examine the sex-wise composition of the Indian labour force in terms of occupation, employment status and place or sector of work.

#### The Trend of Women Labour Participation

It has been observed from the census figures that the rate of women work participation varies from region to region, whereas in case of men it remains more or less constant. The employment of women in various occupational sectors

reveals the trend of de-industrialisation of women work force. The proportion of women in agriculture showed an increase from 67 per cent in 1901 to 74 per cent in 1961. Employment outside agriculture indicated a steady fall from 23 per cent in 1901 to 13.7 per cent in 1961.<sup>1</sup> The number of women workers declined in food, textile, leather and ceramic industries over the 1901-61 period. In the total working force of women a constant decline had been recorded since the early part of this century ( Table : 1 ). In 1901 the female work participation rate was 31.70 per cent and by 1951 it came down to 23.30 per cent. The percentage of women workers changed from 23.30 in 1951 to 27.96 in 1961. The change was mainly due to the change in the definition of a worker from "earner" in 1951 to "worker" in 1961.

Ambannavar pointed out that during 1911-51 the number of women workers in the non-agricultural sector decreased by 2.5 million while that of men workers increased by 6.4 million. During 1951-61 there was an increase in non-agricultural sector, 8.1 million for men but only 1.5 million for women. The proportion of men workers in agriculture decreased while that of women workers increased substantially.

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1. Sinha, J.N., "The Indian Working Force : Its Growth and Changing Composition" in Census of India, 1961, Vol.1, Monograph No.11, Office of the Registrar General, India, Ministry of Home Affairs, New Delhi, 1972, pp.113-126.

Table - 1

Percentage distribution of women  
workers in various occupations  
( 1901-61 )

Year	Female working popula- tion	Cultiva- tors women workers in total	Agricul- tural labourers	Mining, planta- tion, etc.
1	2	3	4	5
1901	31.70	14.44	8.17	1.02
1911	33.73	14.73	10.34	1.17
1921	32.67	16.52	8.15	1.17
1931	27.63	8.95	11.02	1.16
1951	23.30	10.59	7.31	0.78
1961	27.96	15.59	6.67	0.56

Source : Census of India, 1961, paper No 1 (p.396). See also, Srivastava, V., Employment of Educated Married Women in India, National Publishing House, New Delhi, 1978, p. 15.

Note - Workers here cover all categories of workers, viz., employers, employees, independent workers and family workers. Except in 1961, household industry was included in manufacturing and mining, etc. Percentage of workers to total female population regardless of age.

Table - 1 Contd.

House- hold industry	Manufac- turing other than household	Construc- tion	Trade and commerce	Trans- port, storage and commu- nication	Other servi- ces
6	7	8	9	10	11
-	3.95	0.21	1.87	1.03	1.95
-	3.54	0.24	1.83	0.06	1.95
-	3.01	0.24	1.78	0.05	1.75
-	2.41	0.21	1.41	0.04	2.43
-	1.62	0.17	0.66	0.07	2.10
2.20	0.37	0.11	0.38	0.03	2.05

It seems that only agriculture has increased employment potentialities for the women workers.<sup>2</sup> The work participation rate of urban women is significantly lower than that of rural, and the work participation rate of literate women is always lower than that of illiterate women.<sup>3</sup> The proportion of workers in the low prestigious occupations is higher among women than among men.<sup>4</sup> ✓

### Rural and Urban Occupational Structure

Women constitute nearly a third of the working force in India. In 1961, out of a total working force of 188.67 million, 59.6 million or 31.5 per cent were women. The great majority of women workers ( 55.4 million ) lived in rural areas and worked in agriculture and allied occupations. In urban population there were 26.48 million workers - 22.42 million men and 4.01 million women. Women had increasingly been attracted to the jobs of industrial and non-industrial sectors which were formerly considered exclusively for men.

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2. For J.P.Ambannavar's statement see A.Mitra, The Status of Women-Literacy and Employment, ICSSR, Allied Publishers Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, 1979, pp.52-54.
  3. Nath, K., "Women in the working force in India" in Economic and Political Weekly, Vol, III, No.31, August 3, 1968, p. 1205.
  4. D' Souza, V.S., "Family Status and Female work participation" in A. de Souza (ed.), Women in Contemporary India and South Asia, Monohar, New Delhi, 1980, pp. 125-126.

The census data of 1961 showed that a great majority of women workers were engaged in agriculture, traditional rural industries and service occupations. In rural sectors there were 93.27 per cent women workers and in urban sectors there were only 6.73 per cent. The great majority of men workers (82.50 per cent) were also in rural areas, but the proportion was higher among the women ( Table : 2 ).<sup>5</sup>

Table : 2

Distribution of men and women workers  
in rural and urban sectors in 1961

	Total (in million)	Rural	Urban
Persons	188.67 (100.00)	162.24 (86.00)	26.43 (14.00)
Men	129.17 (100.00)	106.75 (82.50)	22.42 (17.50)
Women	59.50 (100.00)	55.42 (93.27)	4.01 ( 6.73)

In most cases the women workers in rural areas are particularly engaged in agriculture and other allied activities. There are several reasons for this : (a) most agricul-

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5. Nath, K., op.cit., p. 1206.

tural operations are simple and do not require any training or skill, (b) womens' employment in agriculture is seasonal in nature and does not require working away from home for a long period, (c) in agricultural works the wage paid to women workers are generally less than the wages paid for men labourers, (d) women probably can be absorbed in works for extra hours much more easily, (e) one of the important reason is that the rural family structure is often such that mothers have less responsibility for childcare, (f) it may be easier to take a child along with them to an agricultural job than to an office or factory. The nature of agricultural occupation is that the household responsibilities can be easily combined with productive works. In the rural sector most women work as family labourers.<sup>6</sup>

Women work participation rate in rural areas was much higher than that of urban areas in all the states during 1961 and 1971. Only exception was Punjab where urban participation was higher than that of rural in 1971. This was due to the high incidence of women workers found in the services of teaching, caretaker, cleaner, nursing, pharmacist, etc. in urban Punjab.<sup>7</sup> One explanation for the higher

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6. Gulati, L., "Female Work Participation" in Economic and Political Weekly, Vol-X, No.1 and 2, January 11, 1975, p.36.

7. Mitra, A., L.P.Pathak and S.Mukherjee, The Status of Women-Shifts in occupational participation 1961-71, Ashinav Publications, New Delhi, 1980, p. 67.

work participation of women in rural India could be that women find work easily on the family farms or in the household industries in the rural sector. Even when work has to be done outside family they find it in the close neighbourhood. In the urban sector on the other hand, the scope of women's entrance into the labour force is possibly more restricted, because their participation in work is largely outside the home, and very often away from the home.

Between rural and urban areas there are always differences in occupational patterns, because education has more influence on women's employment in urban areas than in rural areas. In urban India the occupational structure is more diversified and there is a slow emergence of a new middle class educated working women. Their number has been progressively increasing though the rate of urban women workers is significantly lower than that of rural women.<sup>8</sup> There are also differences in the pattern of services between rural and urban areas. Some major groups in non-household industry command higher rates of women work participation in urban areas. There are a number of occupations and industries in urban area where women are being employed in increasing number. They are usually teachers, nurses, social education and welfare workers, pediatricians, health service workers,

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8. Nath, K., "Urban Women Workers" in Economic Weekly, Vol. XVIII, No. 37, September 11, 1965.



doctors, white-collar workers in manufacturing and other service industries like accountants, book keepers, secretaries and other professionals. The peculiar feature is that there is high percentage of educated women in urban occupations as well as illiterate urban workers are distributed almost equally among the occupational groups such as household and manufacturing industries and sanitary services, etc. In urban area the situation is not much different than that of rural area. Employment pattern of women in both the cases is such that women constitute a very small proportion of all the workers. Out of a total employment the majority of the women workers are engaged in low prestige occupations. A number of city surveys show that the most urban women workers are also uneducated, unskilled and participating in manual occupations. Yet there is gradual but promising increase in modern occupations like teaching, nursing, modern industries, offices, etc. <sup>9</sup> The corresponding level in women work participation in urban India varies from state to state. There was high participation of female workers in urban Punjab in 1971 and was the same in the case of West Bengal also. Whereas in other states such participation was low. This was due to the dominance of women in teaching, building caretaking, nursing and health service occupations both in Punjab

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9. Gadgil, D.R., Poona : A Socio-Economic Survey, Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Poona, 1945.  
Sen, S.N., The city of Calcutta - A Socio-Economic Survey, 1954-55 to 1957-58, Calcutta, Book land, 1960, p. 86.

and West Bengal.

In a recent study on women's employment pattern based on 1961 census data Mitra, Srimany and Pathak have pointed out to a markedly declining trend in the participation of Indian women in household and non-household industrial activities in both rural and urban areas.<sup>10</sup>

In certain traditional occupations the urban women's work participation was lower than the rural one both in 1961 as well as in 1971. In 1961, rural occupations shared most of the women workers and urban occupation shared only a small portion of the total women workers. During 1971 there was fair participation in traditional occupations in rural sector, but in urban area most of the occupations had low and medium shares. A study of the growth rate of the women work force between 1961 and 1971 showed that in a number of modern urban industries the number of women workers increased six to ten times, as in the manufacture of machinery, electrical appliances, medical and scientific instruments and in trade and banking. At the same time women work force suffered a serious decline in sectors like horticulture, food processing, dairy, jute and textiles. Between rural and urban areas, however, there were differences in the pattern. Educational

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10. Mitra, A., A.Srimany and Pathak, Status of Women : Household and Non-household Economic Activity, Allied Publishers, ICSSR, Programme of Women's Studies, New Delhi, 1973, pp. 1-9.

and scientific services and medical and health services occupied third and fourth places while these represented twenty-fifth and tenth positions in rural sector. These findings perhaps imply that education has more effect on women's employment in urban areas than in rural. The higher participation rates of women in some of the traditional activities, however, are almost uniform in both rural and urban areas.<sup>11</sup>

During the last few decades there was an overall decline in the proportion of women workers in the urban sector. In 1951, nearly 11.86 per cent of the total urban women was workers. By 1961 and 1971 this had come down to 11.10 and 10.4 per cent respectively. Although the process of decline was very slow, it represented a clear trend of change in the women work participation.

So far, in the foregoing paragraphs, I have discussed, in general terms, the trend of women work participation. However, this does not differentiate the women work participation in the unorganised and organised sectors of occupations. As my study is concerned with the industrial women workers in tea plantation it is necessary here to discuss in some details the women work participation in the organised sector. At the same time women work participation in the unorganised sector is dealt with in brief for a comparative perspective.

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11. Mitra, A., I.P.Fathak and S.Mukherjee, op.cit., p.50.

## WOMEN IN THE UNORGANISED SECTOR

The unorganised sector is characterized by the absence of protective rules and regulations for workers. As they are generally unregulated no exact information about the terms and conditions of work is available.<sup>12</sup> The workers of the unorganised sector are generally low paid and insecured in employment. They do not have any welfare facilities, but are bound to work more hours.<sup>13</sup> This sector includes agriculture as well as various industries and services. A large number of women are employed in unorganised, small-scale and household industries and occupations.

The 1971 census data showed that there were 31 million women workers of whom 25 million were in agriculture, 2 million in the organised sector, and the remaining 4 million in non-agricultural occupations in the unorganised sector. (This steep fall in the number of workers from 1961 to 1971 had been undoubtedly due to some measure to changes in definition of worker in the two censuses). From this it is seen that 29 million, i.e, 94 per cent of the women workers were

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12. For details see Karnik, V.B., Indian Labour-Problems and Prospects, Minerva Associates (Publications) Pvt Ltd, Calcutta, 1974, p. 73.

13. I.C.S.S.R., Status of Women in India, Allied Publishers Pvt Ltd., 1975, p. 68.

engaged in the unorganised sector of which 80.1 per cent were in agriculture and the rest were in non-agricultural occupations. These agricultural women workers constituted 87 per cent of the women work force in rural areas and 17.5 per cent<sup>14</sup> in urban areas.

### Women in Agricultural Occupations

The proportion of women workers to total workers is higher in the agricultural sector than in the non-agricultural sector. All the women workers in the agricultural sector are either cultivators or agricultural labourers. The majority of men workers are also in the agricultural sector, but the proportion is higher among the women workers. It is interesting to note that in most of the developed countries the picture is reverse where agriculture is primarily a male activity and the proportion<sup>of</sup> women workers in the non-agricultural sector is much higher than that of men. In India the proportion of women labour force in agriculture showed an increase from 67 per cent in 1901 to 74 per cent in 1911 and 82 per cent in 1961. Employment outside agriculture recorded a steeper fall from 23 per cent in 1901 to 13.7<sup>15</sup> per cent in 1961.

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14. Ibid., pp. 63-65.

15. Sinha, J.W., op.cit., pp. 113-126.

All the women workers in the agricultural sector are either cultivators or agricultural labourers. In 1961, 55.7 per cent of such workers were classified as cultivators and the remaining 28.86 per cent as agricultural labourers. In other industrial categories, namely, mining-quarrying-livestock, household industry, manufacturing other than household industry, construction, trade-commerce, transport-storage-communication and other services there were 2 per cent, 7.85 per cent, 1.33 per cent, 0.41 per cent, 1.37 per cent, 0.11 per cent and 7.35 per cent of women workers respectively. Within the agricultural sector, women workers constitute a higher proportion of total workers among agricultural labourers than among cultivators.<sup>16</sup> A sharp decline was visible in the number of women cultivators from 18.3 millions in 1951 to 9.2 million in 1971. This can be attributed to increasing pauperisation leading to the loss of land, and inadequate growth of productive employment opportunities on family farms leading to withdrawal of women from active cultivation. There was an increase in the number of women agricultural labourers<sup>17</sup> from 12.6 millions in 1951 to 15.7 millions in 1971.

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16. Nath, K., op.cit., August 3, 1968, p. 1207.

17. I.C.S.S.R., op.cit., p. 65.

## Women in Non-Agricultural Occupations

In 1961 nearly 20 per cent of the women workers were in non-agricultural occupations in the unorganised sector. This remained constant in the urban sector whereas in the rural sector it declined from 16 to 13 per cent in 1971. There were 46 women workers which came down to 21 in 1971.<sup>18</sup> It seems that women are better represented in the typical household industry or small scale industry. Very recently Mitra, Pathak and Mukherjee on the basis of 1961 and 1971 census data have shown that the work participation rates among the Indian women is very low, and even if they are in employment they are relegated to very low earning sectors of the economy, demanding strenuous drudge work in low skill and low technology sectors of low productivity.<sup>19</sup>

Among the non-agricultural occupations, household industry provides largest number of employment to the women workers being 39.1 per cent, and lowest number of workers are found to be employed in transport, communication and storage industries.<sup>20</sup> Employment of women in household industries is

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18. Mitra, A., L.P. Pathak and S. Mukherjee, op.cit., 1980, p. 63.

19. Ibid., p. 48.

20. Nath, K., op.cit., p. 1207.

proportionately higher than that of men. In 1961, the total number of persons at work other than those in cultivation was 57.5 millions of which there were 45.4 millions men workers and 12.1 million women workers. Out of 45.4 millions men workers 7.4 millions (16 per cent) were in household industry, whereas 38 millions were in non-household industry (84 per cent).

The share of women in household industry was 4.7 millions (38 per cent), and the remaining 7.4 millions (62 per cent) belonged to non-household industry.<sup>21</sup> The rural-urban distribution of men and women workers during 1961 in household industry are given below ( Table : 3 ).

Table : 3

Rural-urban distribution of <sup>persons in</sup> household industry, 1961 (in millions)

	Persons in the household industry		
	Total number of persons	Men	Women
Total	12.1	7.4	4.7
Rural	10.0	6.1	3.9
Urban	2.1	1.3	0.8

21. Mitra, A., A.K.Srimany and L.P.Pathak, opcit., p. 5.



The construction workers constitute a significant portion of the unorganised occupational sector. According to the census of 1971 the number of women workers in this occupation was 0.2 million as against 2 million men. Women workers constituted 9.2 per cent of the total workers in this industry and they were employed to perform certain types of labour works. The most important of the unorganised sector where women were employed in large number was the Bidi industries where women constituted about 50 per cent of the total labour force.<sup>22</sup> Chikan industry also absorbed a good number of women workers. Besides there was a good number of women workers who were self employed either as producers or as retailers.

#### WOMEN IN THE ORGANISED SECTOR

The organised sector includes all public sector establishments and non-agricultural private sector establishments employing ten or more persons. This sector however includes a very small proportion of the women workers in the country. Women have been moving from agriculture into industries and services, and though they now constitute a conspicuous portion of Indian labour force in absolute terms their number is very small. Only 6 per cent women workers in India are found in the organised sector.<sup>23</sup>

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22. Karnik, V.B., op.cit., p. 73.

23. I.C.S.S.R., op.cit., p. 63.

In the organised sector of economy, the employment of women increased rapidly after 1950. The number of women employed in this sector increased from 1.37 millions in 1962 to 2.14 millions in 1973, i.e., an increase of 56.2 per cent, and this increase was faster than the growth rate of total women's employment in India. The women's proportion in the total employment remained practically constant at 11 per cent during 1962-'73, whereas women's employment in the organised sector had been steadily growing.

The higher rate of women work participation is found in the household industries and the industries related to textiles, tobacco, etc., whereas the higher rate of women's participation can be found in the non-household industries like water supply and sanitary services, educational and scientific services, medical and health services. Women's employment in the organised sector was 6 per cent in 1971, of which 2.7 per cent was in industry and 3.3 per cent was in services and professions. Although proportion of women workers is low in the total employment but in the organised sector it has been regularly increasing. It increased from 11 per cent in 1971 to 12 per cent in 1977.

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24. Mitra, A., op.cit., p. 59.

25. I.C.S.S.R, op.cit., p. 68.

26. Mitra. A, L.P.Pathak and S.Mukherjee, op.cit., p. 50.

### Women Workers in Services and Professions

There had been a marginal increase in the women's work participation rate in some white-collar or semi-white-collar occupations, namely, clerk, typists, nurses, pharmacists, stenographers, shop assistants, teachers, cooks and maids as well as in a number of technical and professional sectors.<sup>27</sup>

About 7.35 per cent of the women workers were in services like public service, medical and health, education and in other miscellaneous professions. However, employment of women in the government services increased by almost 90.50 per cent during 1951-61.<sup>28</sup>

Marginal increase in the number of women workers in various services and professions was low during 1961-71, and the increase of women workers was mostly in urban occupations except teaching. However, decline was noticed in women work force in the organised and unorganised sectors during 1961-71.

In public sector, the number of women employees had been continuously increasing since 1960's. The number of women workers in administrative, executive and managerial services increased from 10,000 in 1960 to 12,000 in 1966. In the

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27. Mitra, A., I.P. Pathak and S. Mukherjee., *ibid.*, p. 77.

28. Srivastava, V., Employment of Educated Married Women in India, National Publishing House, New Delhi, 1978, p.14.

clerical and allied jobs their number went up from 37,000 in 1960 to 79,000 in 1968. Their proportion to total workers in the same year went up from 4.2 to 7.6 per cent. The number of women workers in transport, storage and communication had remained steady. In services, sports and recreation, their number went up from 5,000 to 13,000 during 1960-68, i.e., from 1.1 per cent to 2.4 per cent. The number of women unskilled office workers decreased from 25,000 to 16,000.

In the private sector the number showed a steady increase in clerical and allied jobs, sports and recreation work and school teaching. The decline was marked among administrative, executive and managerial workers from 5,000 to 1,000 and professional, technical and related workers from 55,000 to 21,000 during 1963-70.<sup>29</sup> There were a number of occupations and industries where number of women workers had been gradually increasing. Such occupations, where reservations for females were often maintained, were the jobs of teachers, nurses, community health workers, pediatricians, nutritionists, social education and welfare workers, blue- and white-collar workers in manufacturing, construction, trade and commerce, transport and service industries, etc.

It is difficult to give a correct statistical profile of women in services and professions. From the available

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29. I.C.S.S.R., op.cit., pp. 75-76.

data two trends are clearly visible : (I) there is a concentration of women in the teaching and medicine and (II) certain low prestigious jobs in the clerical services are suited to women. <sup>30</sup>

### Women in the Organised Industry

In India women have always been employed in factories, plantations and mines. During the last few decades there had been a continuous decline in the number of working women in the organised industries ( Table : 4). The total employment of men and women in various industries during 1961 was 24,97000 which gradually increased up to 41,60,000 in 1970. But the average employment of women gradually decreased during this period. In 1961 there were 3,72,334 women workers and in 1970 <sup>31</sup> their number decreased to 3,69,198.

In the organised industries a constant decline in the percentage of women to the total workers has been recorded during the last several decades ( Table : 4). A marked decline in textile, cotton and jute industries has been attributed to technological changes in the manufacturing processes in which women are considered unsuitable. However, a decline in the daily average employment of women in manufacturing industries as well as in some other industries which can be safely called

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30. I.C.S.S.R., *ibid.*, p.76.

31. Indian Labour Statistics, 1972, p. 37.

urban in nature confirms that a substantial decline is taking place in the urban sector. The decline in the factory employment is accompanied by an increase in the service group such as public service, medical and education and the large chunk of miscellaneous categories.

The following table gives us information about the number of women employed in factories and their percentage to the total number of employees for the years 1929, 1934, 1939 1946, 1951, 1955 and from 1960 to 1970.

Table : 4

Average daily employment of women  
in factories

Year	Number of employees ('000)	Percentage of women to total employees
1934	220.86	14.85
1939	243.52	13.90
1946	272.00	11.75
1951	290.0	11.43
1955	295.1	10.96
1960	367.3	10.90
1961	372.3	10.64
1962	394.1	10.80
1963	400.4	10.37
1964	409.1	10.16
1965	394.5	9.57
1966	364.7	8.96
1967	394.0	9.50
1968	346.0	9.00
1969	382.0	9.00
1970	369.0	9.00

It is seen from the above table that, though the

32. Srivastava, V., op.cit., pp. 14,16.

33. Ibid., p. 16.  
Karnik, V.B., op.cit., pp. 70-71.

number of women employees increased, the percentage went down from 14.85 per cent in 1964 to 9.00 per cent in 1970. It is also interesting that the number which went up to 4.09 lakhs in 1964 came down to 3.69 lakhs in 1970.

Though total employment in factories has been increasing steadily, women's employment in the organised sector of industry has been decreasing since 1961 ( Tables : 5, 6, 7 ). While the number of total employees has increased, the number of women employees has declined. Employment of women in major factory industries in 1961 was 4,20,090 and in 1970 it came down to 2,32,293. The number of women workers in 1961 in industries allied to agriculture was 49,480 and in food industries it was 1,06,250, in tobacco industries it was 84,165, in textiles it was 67,979 and in miscellaneous industries it was 77,692. In the year 1970 these numbers came down to 43,423 in industries allied to agriculture, 1,15,245 in food industries, 64,769 in tobacco industries and 10,855 in miscellaneous industries. Only in case of industries related to chemical and chemical products the number of women increased from 14,548 to 20,629 and in non-metallic mineral industries their employment increased from 22,976 to 26,213 ( Table : 5 ). In mines their number declined from 109,000 to 75,000 during 1961 and 1971, whereas the total

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24. Indian Labour Statistics, op.cit., p. 36.

Table - 5Women employed in major factory  
Industries

	1961	1970
1. Process allied to agriculture	49,480	43,483
2. Food (Except Beverage)	1,06,250	1,15,845
3. Tobacco	84,165	64,769
4. Textiles	67,979	51,039
5. Chemicals and Chemical Products	14,548	20,689
6. Non-metallic Mineral Products (except petroleum and Coal Products)	22,976	26,213
7. Miscellaneous Industries	77,692	10,855
	4,20,090	2,32,893

employment increased from 549,000 to 630,000. The number of women workers in mines declined from 21.1 per cent to 11.9 per cent, in coal mine this decline was more, i.e., from 55,000 to 2,000. The ban on employment of women in underground mining from 1951 must have been partly responsible for the decline of women work participation in mines.



From 1952-1969 there was a decline of women in the mines  
( Table : 6 and 7 ).<sup>36</sup>

Table - 6

Decline of women workers in mines  
( in percentage )

Mines	Year	
	1952	1962
Coal mines	14.8	8.9
Iron-ore mines	35.6	26.7
Mica mines	21.1	8.4
Manganese mines	42.4	39.9

Table - 7

Employment of women in mines  
( in thousands )

Year	No. of women (in thousands)
1961	106.3
1966	100.3
1967	90.9
1968	84.3
1969	78.0

Besides mines, women's employment declines considerably in textile and jute industries. The process of heavy mechanisation which have taken place in such industries have deprived the women workers from employment. The women workers have been alienated due to lack of skill in handling modern machines.<sup>37</sup> Industries with capital intensive technology displace women rather than men. process of displacement is justified on the ground that as women are illiterate they are unwilling to learn new processes and skills. In the labour intensive industries like plantations there has been no displacement of women.<sup>38</sup>

Women Workers in Plantation

In most Asian plantations with a family employment policy, women and children work together with the men workers. In Ceylon and Vietnam women account for over 50 per cent of the labour force in plantations. In Malay and India the share is over 40 per cent and in Pakistan and Philippines it is around 35 per cent.<sup>39</sup>

The special feature of Indian plantation industry is that it not only employs the men members but also women and

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37. Karnik, V.B., op.cit., p.71.

38. I.C.S.S.R., op.cit., p. 74.

39. Boserup, E., Woman's Role in Economic Development, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1970, p. 76.

children above the age of 12 years of the families, and women have an important role to play. The reason for this are :

(a) the plantation work is only a special kind of agricultural work and is therefore, familiar to Indian women, the vast majority of whom live in rural areas, (b) facilities have been given to male workers to settle on, or in the vicinity of the plantations and to take their wives and families with them and (c) under the old system, labour contract was based on the principle of utilising every able bodied persons of the family of labour and fixing the wage rates accordingly; many women had to seek employment in order to balance the family budget; although the contract system has been abolished, the wage system and the need for supplementary earnings still remain.<sup>40</sup>

Plantation is the only non-household industry in the organised sector where women's employment has not declined. In tea plantation the number of women workers increased from 250,000 to 270,000 between 1954 and 1962, i.e., an increase from 46.1 per cent to 49.2 per cent. A marginal increase in the number of women workers was also noticed in coffee<sup>and</sup> rubber plantations.<sup>41</sup> It is interesting to note that the increase in the number of workers in the labour force recorded in tea

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40. ILO (International Labour Organization), Industrial Labour in India, Series A, Industrial relations, No.41, Geneva, 1938, pp. 35-36.

41. I.C.S.S.R., op.cit., p.72.

plantation is due to the increase in the number of women as well as men workers. But the increase of women's employment is more than that of men ( Table : 8 ).

In 1961, the women workers constituted 44 per cent of the total labour force in tea plantation. They constituted 45.3 per cent of the total labour force in coffee plantation and there were 21.4 per cent of women workers in the total labour force in rubber plantation. But in 1970 these figures changed to 47 per cent for tea, 44 per cent for coffee and 35 per cent for rubber plantations. From this it is clearly seen that during the period from 1961 to 1970 the number of women workers in tea and rubber plantations increased but in coffee plantations their number decreased. Therefore in tea plantation there had been 3 per cent rise in the number of women workers from 1960 to 1970.<sup>42</sup> It is also seen that the women work participation is generally high in all types of plantations, the highest being in the tea plantation. These figures are also higher than the percentage of women employed in any other industry or mines ( Table 4 and 6 ). In comparison to other industrial sectors tea industry experiences regular increase of women labourers since its establishment. Several factors work behind it. Recruitment of the tea labourers is made

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42. Ibid., p. 165.

mainly from among the Adivasis of neighbouring states. As the tea industry is agro-based the Adivasi women do not find much difficulty to adjust themselves in the new working environment. On the other hand, as tea industry requires limited mechanisation there is a constant rise in the number of women workers. The limited mechanisation in tea industry always suits to the physical strength of women labourers. Plantation industry generally prefer to recruit family members of the workers so that it helps to develop the occupation as a family unit. This has resulted into the regular recruitment of the women workers in this industry. The other important reason, however, is the traditionally accepted lower wage rate for women workers in the tea industry.

In 1961, the plantation work was a major women employing occupation in Assam, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu. In Assam, more than 95 per cent of the women workers in the organised sector were plantation labourers. West Bengal provided the largest chunk of non-agricultural women workers being 19 per cent. Almost 80 per cent of these women were labourers in tea plantations.<sup>43</sup> In Assam their number rose to 70 per cent in 1971 achieving the status of topmost women employing non-agricultural occupation of whom most were labourers almost entirely in tea industry. In Tamil Nadu

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43. Mitra, A., L.P. Pathak and S. Mukherjee, op.cit., 1980 p. 106.

and West Bengal women work participation rate in non-agricultural occupations had also increased.

Table - 8

Estimated number of labourers employed  
in tea plantation in India in 1973 and  
1977 ✓

Areas	Average daily number of labourers employed			
	1973		1977	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
West Bengal	85,032	92,901	87,289	96,255
North India	275,314	277,354	277,358	278,531
South India	55,461	81,924	68,080	80,475
All India	341,775	359,278	345,438	359,006

From the above table ( Table : 8 ) it is revealed that although there was a slight decline in the number of the plantation women workers from 359,278 in 1973 to 359,006 in 1977 at the all India level, in case of West Bengal their number had increased, i.e., 92,901 in 1973 to 96,255 in 1977. A similar trend was also noticed in North India. But in

44. Tea Statistics, Tea Board of India, 1976., pp. 100,103; 1978-79, pp. 112,115.

South India number of women workers in tea plantations declined during the same period. On the other hand, in all these regions as well as at the all India level number of men workers in tea plantations increased steadily. The increase in the number of plantation women workers as well as men workers in West Bengal had been due to some reasons. This was due to an extensive labour movement among the tea garden workers in West Bengal in 1969 leading to a total strike for sixteen days and the major demand was for increasing labour force in tea gardens. The trade unions demanded that a land-labour ratio of 1.5 workers per acre of land should be maintained. However the compromise was made on 45 1.1. The result of which was the new recruitment followed by slight increase in both the men and women labour force in West Bengal since 1973 onwards.

From the above discussion it is revealed that the great majority of women workers in India are engaged either in agriculture and traditional rural industries or in service occupations. Though the majority of workers in the agricultural sector in rural areas are men but the proportion of women workers is also very high. One of the plausible explanation for such high rate of women work participation in rural area could be that the rural women find themselves easily adjusted on the family farms or in the household industries in

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45. Bhowmik, S., Class formation in the Plantation System, Peoples Publishing House, New Delhi, 1981, p.8.

rural sector. On the other hand, in the urban sector the scope for women workers is much more restricted as in most cases the working places are situated long away from their home.

In diversified urban occupations there is a slow emergence of a new middle class educated women. Their number is gradually increasing though the work participation rate of urban women is significantly lower than the rural women. In urban area educated women are employed in large number in occupations like teaching, nursing, social welfare and education, medical practice, accountancy, book-keeping, secretaries, etc. Illiterate urban women are equally distributed in occupations like household and manufacturing industries and sanitary services, etc. In urban Punjab the women work participation is high in comparison to other states. It is also seen that there is a declining tendency of participation of women in household and non-household industrial activities and so also in horticulture, food processing industry, dairy, jute and textiles. During the last few decades there has been a declining tendency of women employment in the urban sector.

The proportion of women workers in the agricultural occupations of the unorganised sector is always higher than the non-agricultural occupations. The women's employment



in non-agricultural sector recorded a steep fall in between 1901 and 1971. In agricultural sector a sharp decline of women cultivators was visible in between 1951 and 1971 which came down from 18.3 million to 9.2 million. This may be due to loss of land, inadequate growth of productive employment opportunities in family farms. In non-agricultural occupations urban women workers remained constant where as the rural workers work-participation slightly declined. Women always better represented in typical household or small scale industry. In India the general work participation rate of women workers <sup>was</sup> low.

Women construction workers constitute a significant portion of the labour force and they are employed in large number in Bidi industries in the unorganised sector. Women constitute nearly 50 per cent of the labour force in Bidi industries. In the unorganised sector there is also a good number of women employed as producers or retailers.

In the organised sector in general, women work participation is appreciably lower than that in the unorganised sector. The employment of women in this sector increased rapidly after 1950 at a rate faster than the growth rate of total women work force though (in proportion to men their employment declined during this period ( Table : 4 ).

Women workers are mostly employed in tea, coffee, rubber and coconut plantations, tobacco curing and match industry, coir making, carpet weaving and food processing industry. They are also employed in certain occupations like sanitary services, educational and scientific services, medical and health services, etc. There has been a marginal increase of women workers in occupations like clerks, typists, nurses, pharmacists, stenographers, teachers, shop assistants, cooks and maids, etc. In services, sports and recreation their number is also increasing. At the sametime the number of women unskilled office workers is decreasing.

(There has been a marked and continuous decline in the number of working women in organised industry though total employment in factories has been increasing. There is a marked decline in the number of women workers in coal mine. The ban on employment of women in underground mining is partly responsible for this. Besides mine, there is decline of women's employment in major textile and jute industries which is due to heavy mechanisation of such industries. These capital intensive industries displace women rather than men whereas in labour intensive industries like plantations there has been no displacement of women workers. The whole family of the workers get their livelihood from this industry. In tea plantation there is a marked increase in the number of women workers and a marginal increase in coffee and rubber

plantations. Tea industry requires limited mechanisation and there is a constant rise of women's employment in tea industries. Specially tea plantation of Assam and West Bengal and coffee plantation of Tamil Nadu area a major women employing industry in the organised sector. In between the period 1973 and 1977 the number of women workers in tea plantations of West Bengal increased from 92,901 to 96,255. The trend was same in North India, but in South India it was declining. The growing number of women workers in tea plantation in West Bengal draw our attention in the study of women industrial workers in tea plantation.

In suming up the whole discussion it seems that barring a small number of white-collar jobs held almost exclusively by middle-class working women the vast majority of working women are employed in labour intensive jobs whether they are in factories and plantation or in agriculture. The demand for women workers remains constant or increases depending upon the state of development of these sectors. But if some degree of mechanisation sets in any industry it is the women who become the first victims of unemployment, probably because they are employed as unskilled labourers.