

CHAPTER III

Women's Workforce Participation and Structural Changes in Labour Market of India

3.1. Introduction

Despite some important advances in a number of areas of theory, the failure of economics to adequately incorporate gender into its models and concerns remains a fundamental weakness. This results in inaccurate analysis and inappropriate policies in relation to women's economic roles and activity (Palmer, 1992). Yet, gender inequality in labour markets remains a persistent phenomenon, albeit to varying degrees depending on regional, national and local contexts. Women continue to disproportionately face a range of multiple challenges relating to access to employment, choice of work, working conditions, employment security, wage parity, discrimination, and balancing the competing burdens of work and family responsibilities. Labour market gender gaps are more pronounced in developing countries like India, and often exacerbated by gendered patterns in occupational segregation, with the majority of women's work typically concentrated in a narrow range of sectors, many of which are vulnerable and insecure. Women are also increasingly migrating in larger numbers for work due to limited labour market opportunities at home. In addition, women are heavily represented in the informal economy where their exposure to risk of exploitation is usually greatest and they have the least formal protection. The informal economy provides a vital source of livelihoods for masses of women and families, including during tough economic times.

A proper analysis of women's participation in economic activities and the status or position of women requires an accurate understanding of the economic and socio-cultural aspects prevalent in the society. Changes in production conditions and the differential impact of development policies given the pre-existing economic and social stratification creates contrary tendencies for participation of women in the labour force outside the domestic arena.

3.2. Women' Status and Position in History of India

We observe from history that status of women saw ups and downs during different period of history started from ancient to modern. Status of women during the ancient period can be presented under different sub periods as Vedic period, the period of Jainism and Buddhism and the Age of Dharmashastras. The period between 1500-1000 B.C. is identified as the early Vedic or the Rig Vedic period. Though we cannot clearly state that this age was characterised by total equality between men and women, but the status of women was based on liberty, equity, mutual respect and co-operation and many liberal attitudes and practises pertaining to women existed during this period. Women took part in religious and social activities and they had some freedom to choose their partner in marriage. The Rig Vedic Aryans were patriarchal. The position of a husband was considered superior to that of his wife. A widow was permitted to marry as is demonstrated by the prevalent practice of a widow marrying the younger brother of her deceased husband. In short, it can be said that to an extent women in the early Vedic Period lived in a liberal social atmosphere.

Jainism and Buddhism took roots around the 6th century B.C. Both the religions emerged as potent religious reform movements. The post vedic varna(caste) divided society and the ritualistic domination of the priestly class of the Brahmans led to the emerge of Jainism and Buddhism as protest movements. Jainism made the first serious attempt to mitigate the evils of the varna order. Women were admitted to the religious order and could give up family life to become ascetics. In Jaina literature there are references to women who had achieved remarkable success as ascetics. Buddhism permitted women to participate in religious discourses and seek membership in Sangha. On an occasion the Buddha, speaking of the value of a woman to the world, said "woman is the commodity supreme because she is indispensable utility, there is no doubt that they did occupy a very high position in the intellectual and social life of the country (Ambedkar, 1988).

The high status women enjoyed during the early Rig Ved period, gradually started deteriorating in the late Vedic period between 1000 and 500B.C. Women began to be confined to the household as the importance given to values such as purity (ritual cleanness) and pollution (ritual impurity or contamination), women began to be

considered impure during certain periods of their life. They were kept away from many religious and social occasions. The strong belief of the day was that only a male heir could save his parents from the cycle of rebirth as daughter left her parental home after marriage. As the economic and social status of sons began to rise, lineage begun to be traced in the male line and sons were the sole heirs to family property. A woman's place was the home and her primary responsibility was to bear sons and ensure the continuity of the family lineage. A woman was kept constantly under male control and lost her right to seek knowledge and the position of women saw a steep decline. But there were still instances of women intellectuals who showed great scholarship, Gargi and Maitreyi are the most well known women scholars of this period. But by and large the position of women went on witnessing a steady decline and reached an all time low during the age of Dharmashastras.

During the age of Dharmashastras codes of conduct, which served as the base for prescribing behaviour norms also for women were evolved. These belong to a large body of secular literature, compiled in 500-200 B.C. This period saw the exclusion of women from both economic and religious sphere. Since education was virtually denied to women they had to be dependent on men for their survival and maintenance. The concept that women were inferior to men ground and women were pushed to a state of utter despair and ignorance. The two most important authoritative law codes of this period were Manu Smriti and Yagnavalkya Smriti. Manu Smriti upheld the view that a woman did not deserve freedom at any point of time in her life. Manu's view was that 'a woman, in her childhood is dependent on her father, in her youth on her husband, and in her old age on her son'. This is a statement which is in clear contradiction of his pronouncement about women not deserving any freedom. During the period of Dharmashastra, child marriage was encouraged and widow marriage looked down upon. The practise of Sati became widespread because of the ill treatment meted out to widows.

It was during the period of Dharmashastra the status of women completely deteriorated. Women led a life of total subjugation and had virtually lost all hopes of emancipation. This situation continued more or less until the 19 th century when the social reform movements launched a struggle to improve the conditions of women.

The Indian woman's position in the society further deteriorated during the medieval period when the Muslim conquest in the Indian subcontinent brought the purdah practice in the Indian society. Among the Rajputs of Rajasthan, the Jauhar was practised. In some parts of India, the Devadasis or the temple women were sexually exploited. Polygamy was widely practised especially among Hindu Kshatriya rulers. In many Muslim families, women were restricted to Zenana areas.

During medieval period, practices such as polygamy, sati, child marriage, ill treatment of widows those already prevalent in the Dharmashastra age gained further momentum. Since women were denied the right to education and kept away from participation in life outside the home, they could neither know the reality nor questioned the existing practices.

The modern period began with the onset of the 19th century. The British came to India in 1600 A.D. During the British Raj, many reformers such as Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Jyotirao Phule etc. fought for the upliftment of women. Traditions among some communities such as sati, jauhar, and devadasi have been banned and are largely defunct in modern India. However, some cases of these practices are still found in remote parts of India. The purdah is still practised by Indian women among some communities, and child marriage remains prevalent despite it being an illegal practice, especially under current Indian laws.

The British period saw the rise of social reform movements which took up the issue of gender inequality, primarily by passing laws that removed barriers to women's emancipation. Though widespread changes did not take place, the stage was definitely set for launching a struggle for creation of a gender just society or a society in which laws give equal treatment to men and women. The pre-independence era of the twentieth century was also remarkable for one more reason. The large scale participation of women in the freedom movement both as visible and invisible freedom fighters was a standing testimony not only to their courage but also their capacities.

After India got independence the Constitution of India laid the foundation for creating a social order where men and women are treated as equals. A number of laws were also implemented for liberating women from oppressive social customs and protecting their

rights. These are such as, the Hindu Marriage Act 1955, the Hindu Succession Act 1956, the Dowry Prohibition Act 1961, the Maternity Benefit Act 1961, the Equal Remuneration Act 1976 etc etc. Constitutional provisions and a series of laws have equally paved the way for bringing about major changes in the lives of women but still there are gaps in such areas of access to healthcare or work participation.

3.3. Transitional Changes of Women's Position over Plan Periods

The principles of gender equality are enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties, and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. Government programs for the protection of women workers began from the enactment of the Indian constitution with Congress's welfare approach claiming equal rights for all men and women and a planned, socialist economic approach. Realizing that Constitutional Rights are not enough to safeguard women's interest and provide them enough opportunities to make them economically independent, the national policy makers and planners are trying their best to translate these rights in the form of formal policies, legislations and affirmative action plans. Gender-mainstreaming and development has been a priority goal in the country's development efforts since the starting of the first Five Year Plan. The gender-mainstreaming exercise, however, has been a process of learning and refinement throughout the planning process.

Women's inclusion in the planning of development in India preceded Independence (1947). For example, in 1939, a sub-committee of women was set up to outline Women's Role in Planned Economy (WRPE), as part of the structure of the National Planning Committee, which in turn was to chart the course of future planning in India. The sub-committee was to "deal with the place of woman in the planned economy..." ranging from family life, employment, education and social customs that prevent women's participation in the economy. The chairperson of the Committee was Rani Lakshmbai Rajwade, and the members were influential leaders such as Sarla Devi, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Begum Zarina Currimbhoy, Sarojini Naidu, Durgabai Joshi and Dr. (Smt.) Muthulakshmi Reddy.

The First to Fifth Five Year Plans treated development of women as a subject of 'welfare'. The Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) was set up in 1953 to promote welfare oriented activities for women and children through involvement of voluntary agencies at the grass root level. The First Plan (1951-1956) focused on women's role in the family and in the community and emphasized the need for adequate welfare services. A social welfare department was set up to look after women and child welfare.

The Second Plan (1956-1961) retained the welfare approach to women's issues, taking cognisance of the plight of women workers on account of the social prejudices, and the need to provide and implement maternity benefits, protection from injurious work, crèches, and equal pay for equal work policies.

The Third Plan and the Fourth Plan emphasized on women's education and women's welfare within the family, bringing down the birth rate, and increasing expenditure on family planning. In these planning years, health services were geared to maternal and child welfare and also health education, nutrition and family planning.

The Fifth Plan (1974-1978) marked the beginning of a shift from the welfare approach to the development approach with the scope of social welfare expanding to cope with the problems of the family and the role of women – integrating welfare with developmental services. It further emphasized the need to expand and diversify education and training opportunities to women. It was this plan period a Women's Welfare and Development Bureau under the Ministry of Social Welfare was established to coordinate programmes of other ministries relating to women.

The shift from welfare to neo-liberal model began in the Sixth Plan (1980-85) that adopted a multi-disciplinary approach with specific attention to women and work. Sixth Plan also had special thrust on the three core sectors viz., health, education and employment. Under Indira Gandhi, the Sixth Plan targeted women with regards to poverty and alleviation. Hence, the Sixth Plan included a chapter on women and development and attributed the low status of women to the lack of income-generating opportunities. Indian women were seen as active partners in development rather than passive subjects for welfare. Employment was the critical goal and bringing in data on women's position in the occupational classification of India's labour and other such

information was a big leap forward. The plan focused on extending assistance to help women overcome poverty, highlighted the need to improve women's accessibility to assets and recommended that women receive joint titles to land and property. To raise the economic standard of Special institutions for women were set up during this time – one was the National Committee on Women under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister.

The Seventh Plan (1985-1990) acknowledged the important role of women in agriculture and allied sectors and the gap between social reality and its perception by society at large. The strategy was to organize women around socio-economic activities, with the twin objectives of making their projects economically viable and adding to their social strength for the overall enhancement of their status by bringing them into the mainstream of national development. However, in identifying concrete strategies, there was a tendency to slide back into women specific-sectors.

The Eighth Plan (1992-1997) was to shift emphasis from women's development to women's empowerment, to 'ensure that the benefits of development from different sectors do not bypass women and special programmes are implemented to complement the general programmes.' It reiterated the formation and strengthening of grassroots organizations to articulate local women's needs and play an important role in decentralized planning and implementation. It emphasized the convergence and integration of services offered by health, education, employment and welfare programmes at the grassroots level. Human development was a major focus of the Eighth Plan (1992-97). It not only encompassed the strategy of enabling women as equal partners and participants in the development process but also ensuring that women were not bypassed from the benefits of various developmental programmes. Eighth Plan also had special programmes for women to complement the efforts of the general development programmes. Some major initiatives undertaken during Eighth Plan for women included (i) setting up of the National Commission for Women (NCW) (1992) to work towards safeguarding the rights and interest of women, (ii) setting up of Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) (1993) to meet the microcredit needs of poor and assetless women, (iii) Adoption of National Nutrition Policy (NNP) (1993) in conformity with the constitutional commitment to ensure adequate nutritional standard of the people, (iv) launching of the Mahila Samridhi Yojana (MSY) (1993) to promote thrift activities

amongst women, (v) setting up of National Crèche Fund (NCF) (1994) to provide crèche services to the children of working mothers, and (vi) launching of Indira Mahila Yojana (IMY) (1995) basically for awareness generation and economic empowerment through women Self Help Groups. The Indira Mahila Yojana was subsequently renamed as Integrated Women's Empowerment Programme (Swayamsidha) in 1999 and Mahila Samridhi Yojana was merged with it.

The Ninth Plan (1997-2002) made a significant change in the conceptual strategy of planning for women that drew attention to the absence of training policies aimed to provide greater employment benefits, social security, and better work conditions. In the Ninth Plan, a new process was tried out. In 1996, the Planning Commission, the UN system, civil society organizations and the Government of India came together in a process to engender the policy and planning process. UNIFEM created a think tank to bring the concerns and experiences of women, from a gender perspective, to the Ninth Five-Year Plan. An effort was made to get women from all parts of India in different walks of life to participate. The concept of Women's Component Plan to identify and ensure the flow of benefits to women in every development sector was initiated and became a mandate. Some special initiatives taken during Ninth Plan included launching of an externally aided scheme of Swashakti (1998) for socio-economic empowerment of women through self reliant self help groups, instituting Stree Shakti Puraskars (1999), setting up of a Task Force under the Chairpersonship of Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission to review existing women-specific and women-related legislations (2000), adoption of National Policy for Empowerment of Women (2001), celebration of the year 2001 as Women's Empowerment Year, recasting of Indira Mahila Yojana as Swayamsidha (2001), launching of Swadhar (2001) to extend rehabilitation services for women in difficult circumstances etc.

The same civil society initiative was taken forward in the Tenth the focus for women was on the creation of self-help groups and the Plan suggested strategies, policies and programs for the empowerment of women. Empowerment of Women' as Agents of Social Change and Development was continued in the Tenth Plan Plan (2002-2007). Towards this a Sector-specific 3-Fold Strategy was adopted based on the National Policy for Empowerment of Women (2001). They were as follows: a) Social empowerment - to

create an enabling environment through various affirmative developmental policies and programmes for development of women besides providing them easy and equal access to all the basic minimum services so as to enable them to realize their full potentials. b) Economic empowerment – to ensure provision of training, employment and income generation activities with both 'forward' and 'backward' linkages with the ultimate objective of making all potential women economically independent and self-reliant; and c) Gender justice to eliminate all forms of gender discrimination and thus, allow women to enjoy not only de-jure but also the de-facto rights and fundamental freedom on par with men in all spheres, viz. political, economic, social, civil, cultural etc.

During the preparation of the Eleventh Plan (2007-2012) the Planning Commission set up a Working Group of Feminist Economists with specialized knowledge on women in the economy and with strong connections to the women's movement in the country. The report of this working group seeks to describe the feminist economist intervention as a new voice in public opinion on macro-economic policy in India and argues that it is the unfolding of sharply accurate facts and analysis by this new actor, woman, as the growth agent that might provide the ideas and voice for restoring coherence in the economic policy arguments. It makes a contribution to feminist understanding of concepts such as mainstreaming gender, eradicating poverty (especially women's poverty) and developing new measures to understand progress and gender equality. It is hoped that this monograph will be useful in three ways: as the record of the procedure of engendering the national development planning processes; as a best practice guide to mainstream gender in these processes; and as a template and tool for the preparation of the State Plans.

The most current strategy for women workers is the National Empowerment of Women Policy (2001) offers various goals for the economic advancement of women in India. Its goals include poverty eradication in through mobilization of poor women to enhance their capabilities; micro credit mechanisms so to ensure adequate flow of credit through existing financial institutions is available to all women below the poverty line; reinterpretation and redefinition of work to reflect are women's contribution as producers and workers; extension of training women in agriculture; and support for women in industry as currently women cannot work in night shifts in factories if they wish.

3.4. Gendered Distribution of Work: Experiences of World Economy and the Indian Economy

An analysis of international statistics (ILO, FAO, NPC) was carried out by Dixon (1982), which showed that women constituted 38 per cent of the agricultural labour force in developing countries. For nineteen countries of South and South East Asia, Dixon (1982) estimated that 45.3 per cent of the agricultural labour force consists of women. Even this figure is an underestimate, due to defects in data collection methods which included undercounting of the contribution of unpaid family labour, underestimate of seasonality of women's labour and the self-reporting bias of the interviewees who are by and large male.

Women's ability to get decent work in market economy is closely linked to the gender roles and division of work in the home. An examination of the interaction between market and non-market activities in the economy, particularly in the allocation of time spent between productive and reproductive work, is crucial for a comprehensive assessment of gender inequalities in the labour market.

First, the time spent by a person in growing food for subsistence, gathering fuel and water, doing childcare, sick and elder care, and performing domestic chores is co-determined by the time spent in paid, market work. Thus, reproductive work time directly affects individuals' labour market options. Second, unpaid work also affects the rate at which time in paid work is rewarded, by limiting women's time available for work and their ability to specialize. Third, unpaid work activities such as domestic chores, fuel and water gathering, subsistence production and care work in the household are crucial to the production of the labour force, generation of knowledge and overall social reproduction. The household members that perform the unpaid work of daily domestic chores and caring activities assume important costs of producing the labour force and social fabric in society.

Finally, the interrelatedness of paid and unpaid work is reinforced by the complementarity and substitution between goods and services purchased with earned income and the non-marketed goods and services produced with unpaid labour. Market-produced goods and services (e.g. vegetables, flour, soap, tools) are inputs in household

production of meals, clean clothes, and kitchen gardening. Households which can afford them also make use of purchased goods and services as substitutes for home production, thereby reducing unpaid work. Although increasing numbers of women in most of the world have become income earners in the last few decades, the majority of them continue to perform their traditional roles as household managers and care providers. In some countries such as Australia, United States, Norway, England and Sweden there is evidence that men have increasingly taken on more household chores. Nevertheless, the bulk of unpaid work at home and in the community still falls on women.

Whether women are engaged in paid work or not, they spend: (a) more time in unpaid care work than men and (b) more total time in paid and unpaid work combined. In other words, their lower time allocation in paid work is more than compensated in unpaid work contributions. The following Figure-3.1 paint a grim picture, not only for developing countries, but also in OECD countries; while a woman's total workload is higher than men's. These figures indicate the extent of undervaluation and invisibility of unpaid workload and the undervaluation of women's work in the labour market.

Figure 3.1: Time Spent on Total Work (hours per day)- Selected Developing and OECD Countries



Sources: Tabulated from UNDP Human Development Report (2006)

A recent study on selected Latin American countries shows that over half of the women aged 20 to 24 stated their responsibilities at home as *the main reason* for not seeking a job in the labour market (ECLAC, 2007). This group is larger than those unable to find jobs due to lack of education. The study also reports that having someone in the

household engaged exclusively in housework (i.e., another relative or domestic worker) does not have much impact on the amount of time that men spend on unpaid domestic work, but it has a major impact on women who report a positive effect on time spent on other activities, including work in the labour market. The study validates the fact that women's domestic unpaid work forms a barrier in seeking or keeping a paid job.

Although individual characteristics have been shown to be important for hours of domestic work, men and women make their domestic work-related decisions in the country where they live, with its own economy, policy regulations, and culture.

Similarly in India, women do most of the unpaid reproductive work strongly affects their ability to be available for paid work. When women do participate in the labour market, family responsibilities affect the amount and type of work that women can undertake. The prevalence of women in part-time work is linked to their other responsibilities, especially raising children. While labour available for performing paid (market) work seems to be directly related to the time use in reproductive and domestic (non-market) activities among women on average, this is not necessarily the case for men. Regardless of their position in the life course, a study using 1992 Australian time use data shows that men's weekly hours of unpaid work tend to be a fixed quantity. Hence a reduction in men's paid work hours generally results in greater leisure time, so that men literally can choose between (paid) work and leisure. For women, however, it is more likely to be a choice between paid and unpaid work. While men have compensated for some of the time that women are now working outside the home, women are likely to accommodate increased labour market participation by reducing leisure time and by doing simultaneous activities. Women, thus, increase not only total work hours but also work intensity.

The level of household production and the gender division of household labour are not static, however. They change in response to changing wages and conditions in paid work, to policy reforms and to a host of demographic, economic and social forces. Changes in educational attainment, technology, and relative returns to different skills cause households and individuals to shift time between activities and change how labour is used. Macroeconomic conditions, labour and social policies and social services also affect the level and distribution of unpaid work in a household. Demographic and social

changes such as urbanization, migration, fertility and divorce rates can influence the allocation of labour time as well.

In the Indian situation, however, it is unclear how effective bargaining theories can be in explaining the socioeconomic status of wives within their family. It may be that customary social relationships in India provide little scope for the application of bargaining theories of the family, apart from the possibility that wives lack any effective bargaining power in their family. Among rural households in India, it is widely believed that it is prestigious for a Hindu woman to cook and serve food to her family and any guests that may come (Dube, 1988). In rural areas for these women to do domestic work only and nothing else is relatively rare. Instead, doing a range of paid and unpaid work, including some tasks that we call 'extra-domestic work', is more common. The tendency of naming a woman *as being overall a housewife* is very popular. A high status is generally associated with the role of housewife in parts of the country that have implicit cultural values associated with Sanskritisation, Brahmanical gender norms, and/or the habit of observing *purdah* (Chakravarti, 1993; George, 2002; Poitevin and Rairkar, 1993).

3.5. Structural Changes in Indian Labour Market and Women

Globalization has transformed the structure and concept of labour by informalizing as regular, full time wage labour, contract labour, casual labour, part time labour, homework etc. but all this kind of workforce falls beyond the protection of labour laws. The era of globalization is a process of restructuring of an international sexual division of labour in which third world women serve both as producers of surplus value of cheap manufacture and as objects of (sexual) consumption (through prostitution) for First World men.

Roland Robertson defines globalization as a "compression of the world" due to increased global (international/interregional) interdependence. As far as the labour force is concerned, it is becoming more fragmented into irregular, temporary and subcontract workers, informal workers and home based workers, with the globalization of capital and flexible employment. Thus, globalization brings the feminization of labour, especially as cheap labour because it is accepted that women are less demanding, obedient and respectful towards their authority.

When the SAPs were adopted in 1991, the policies were designed for industrial market were blind to the need for equity amongst a largely impoverished Indian population criticized largely as structural adjustment implies an intra- and inter-sectoral redistribution of resources in order to increase the efficiency of the economy and make it more competitive on a global scale. SAPs represent not only a change in the country's economic paradigm but also specific changes in processes of production, the sectoral breakup of the economy, the role of the State within the new economy, and the introduction of a new culture of consumerism.

The major concerns affecting women under the liberalization process include reduced employment opportunities in the formal sector, adequate protection in the labor force, and the feminization of poverty (Arora, 1999; Basu, 1996; CWDS, 2000; Dalal, 1995; Dewan, 1999). The trade liberalization policies have attempted to integrate women into the global economy, particularly through employment in export-processing industries and the expansion of export-processing zones. However, women's job security is threatened by the prohibition on unionization and decentralization through subcontracting (Dalal, 1995). On one hand, it is likely that the unorganized sector will grow due to the lack of labour legislation, making it attractive for employers to recruit women. On the other hand, in the agro-processing industry where women work in large numbers, the import of modern technology in firms that are to be taken over by corporations such as Kellogg's, Pepsi, Nestle, and General Foods will reduce employment in low-skilled jobs (Mathew, 1995). Yet there does not seem to be any prospect of women being offered training and technical skills as education now is premised on user-pay principles, which limits the access of poor women. While Dalal (1995) argued that the present policies encourage displaced rural women workers to migrate to overcrowded urban areas, Basu (1996) suggested that moves toward privatization and a market economy will weaken the already inadequate services for rural women.

Changes in production processes constitute the most visible effects of the SAPs. Shifts of focus from agriculture towards higher skill based industries, the formal services sector and non-farm employment in agriculture affect women's employment disproportionately and leading to the marginalisation of female workers To analyse the gender impact of SAPs, it is necessary to assess each of these policies individually, or at least by sector,

acknowledging that while these policies do not act in isolation, their effects are distinct and can be measured. The increasing commercialisation of agriculture, the shift of emphasis to industry and the increasing use of technology in the manufacturing sector have different impacts on men and women, rural and urban areas, and formal and informal sectors.

Women of the third world are seen as the most flexible of the world's labour force. Lower supply price of these women provide a material basis for induction of poor working class women in the export industries such as electronics, garments, sports goods, toys and agro-industries (Moser, 1978). The relationship between the formal sector and decentralised sector is a dependent relationship where the formal sector has control over capital and markets and the so-called 'informal' sector works as an ancillary (Harriss, 1982), 96 percent of the female work force in India is in the decentralised sector which has high degree of labour redundancy and obsolescence. These women have less control over their work and no chances for upward mobility due to temporary, routine and monotonous work. In the agrarian sector, the cash-crops-fruits, mushrooms, flowers, vegetables are replacing the traditional subsistence crop where women had an important role to play. This process has also intensified immiserization of toiling women in the rural areas and created tremendous food-shortages (Patel, 1982).

Table 3.1 shows that the greatest increase in the numbers of female and male casual labourers in rural areas was between 1987 and 1994, right at the time of the SAPs. Rates of increase of female casual labour are much higher than those of men, indicating that women are being forced to enter casual employment in order to supplement falling rural incomes and lowered government support. The gap in growth rates of casual labour between men and women is attributed to the shift towards non-farm employment in the agricultural sector that has seen to be prevalent among men. The lack of female mobility between sectors renders them even more vulnerable to policy change. Various factors like socio-cultural barriers, lack of adequate skills, gender bias in hiring etc. may be responsible for this lack of mobility.

Table 3.1: Percentage of Total Workers Engaged in Casual Labour

NSS round (Year)	Rural		Urban	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
1993-94	34.6	16.7	45.3	28.1
1986-87	32.1	14.6	40.2	26.5
1983-84	29.9	15.3	42.2	30.9
1997-78	27.0	13.9	40.0	27.0

Source: National Sample Survey (NSS), Govt. Of India

In keeping with the paradigms of economic liberalisation, there has been a shift from the production of food crops to cash crops in rural areas. The commercialisation of agriculture is leading to the marginalisation of female workers, who are unable to gain employment in these emerging sectors due to a lack of skills and a lack of mobility. The shift to commercial agriculture often requires access to micro-credit, possible relocation and establishing business relationships with suppliers and distributors of new inputs; all problematic for many rural women who face familial pressures against such business interactions and gender discrimination in access to credit and other inputs within the interactions themselves. Foreign investment in food processing industry, for example, has displaced women from a traditionally female source of employment. Under the SAPs, the changing face of agriculture is proving particularly harmful to women due to their lack of labour mobility.

3.6. Trends and Patterns of Women's Work Participation in India

Work participation rates [WPRs] – defined as the proportion of women or men who are economically active, compared to their total number within the population - are nevertheless commonly used as a measure of the economic roles of women in society. Since much of the work they do is unpaid, WPRs of women in India are generally low compared to male WPRs in both rural and urban areas. Over time, there has been some increase in rural WPRs for women, mainly because of their increasing participation in irregular or marginal work. Particularly in rural areas areas however, where agricultural or artisanal activity is carried out collectively by family labour, women contribute considerable amounts of unpaid labour towards tending livestock and crops and also to crop harvesting and post-harvest activities. While not classified as activities that generate personal income, the unpaid labour contributions of women enter the practical definition

of work and any woman so engaged is notionally a worker. However, since her work contributions do not result in direct income for her, she is not classified as a worker under the Census. Thus a woman *marginal* worker under Census definitions will have secured less than six months of paid work in the year immediately preceding the Census, while a woman *main* worker will have secured more than this quantum of paid work. In general, because of their gender-typical roles as carers and home-makers, many women do not enter the Census definition of 'workers' at all. Of those that do, many perform marginal rather than main work, because they continually have to balance family commitments against livelihood opportunities. Under such rigid definitions, many women are therefore perceived as being unproductive and idle, since their participation in paid work is much lower than that of their male counterparts. Among the more affluent sections of society that reside in urban areas, the economic pressure on women to go out and seek paid work is much less. Therefore their participation in paid labour activity is much less than that of poorer women who reside in rural areas.

The evolution of female labour force participation rates in modern India has differed by state. Furthermore, female labour participation in India was lower in 2001 than in 1901-1951, when the participation rate ranged between 28 and 34 percent. While women in the middle classes do not tend to participate in the labour force, women from poorer households cannot afford to not engage in productive activity outside the home. However, women in the upper classes are increasingly free to participate in the labour force, especially in the cities.² This suggests the existence of a U-shaped relationship between female labour participation and development as documented in Goldin (1994), who argues that the initial decline in female participation is because of an income effect—due to the change from home production to manual work market production, against which a social stigma (what in this paper we call *social norm*) exists—while, as economies develop, women enter the labour force through white-collar work, against which no social stigma exists. Therefore female labour force participation in India is most likely the result of the interaction between social norms (enforced by social stigma that obliges men to provide for their families) and economic conditions.

In the literature on labour-force participation, standard sources begin with the supply of labour (Ellis, 1993) and quickly move on to mention human-capital aspects of labour

supply (Mathur, 1994). As per to 1981 figures, 19.7 percent of Indian women were recorded as paid workers, of whom over 87 per cent were in the unorganised or informal sector of the economy. The work participation rate of women in 1991 and 2001 were 22.3 and 25.7 percent, respectively. The increase in the work participation of women during the decade 1991-2001 is mainly due to the increase in the proportion of marginal workers (6.3 percent to 11 percent) in the total female work force. The proportion of the main workers, in fact, decreased from 15.9 percent to 14.7 percent. *Sarvekshana* (the Bulletin of the National Sample Survey Organisation, 2001-6; Jacob, 2001) shows a declining female labour force participation rate when comparing 1993-94 and 1999-2000 using NSS. Specifically, over this period as per NSS data the rural percentage in the labour force fell by 10 percent among women and by 4 percent among men. The urban percentage in the labour force fell 11 percent among women and there was no change among men. (*ibid.*, p. 55).

Table 3.2: Work Participation Rate in India (1971-2001)

	1971			1981			1991			2001		
	Total	Male	Female									
Rural	35.33	53.78	15.92	38.79	53.77	23.06	40.24	52.50	27.20	41.97	52.36	30.98
Urban	29.61	48.88	7.18	29.99	49.06	8.31	30.44	48.95	9.74	32.23	50.85	11.55

Source: Compiled from census data

Notes: 1. Excludes Assam where the 1981 Census could not be held and Jammu & Kashmir where the 1991 Census has not been held.

The following table(Table-3.3) indicates the labour force participation rates for women and men for selected years for the period 1972-73 to 2004-05. According to the Table, women's labour force participation has steadily risen since 1983, but has declined until 1999-2000 and risen again in 2004-05. Thus Indian women tended to be marginalized in the process of development and industrialization.

According to Census 2001, in urban areas total population of workers is 92.28 million, of which only 16.10 million are females. In rural areas, out of 310 million, 111 million are females. 42.95 percent of the rural female working population is involved as agricultural labour (not in cultivation). Women constitute 90 per cent of the total marginal workers of the country. As per NSS, in 2004-05, the workforce participation rate of females in rural sector was 32.1 while that for males was 54.6. In Urban sector, it is 16.6 for females and

54.9 for males. According to Quarterly Employment review, Ministry of Labour, the total employment of women in organized sector was 18.7 percent in 2004.

Table 3.3: Workforce Participation Rate (1972-2005)

Year	Rural		Urban	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
1972-73	31.8	54.5	13.4	50.1
1977-78	33.1	55.2	15.6	50.8
1983	34.0	54.7	15.1	51.2
1987-88	32.3	53.9	15.2	50.6
1993-94	32.8	55.3	15.5	52.1
1999-2000	29.9	53.1	13.9	51.8
2004-2005	32.1	54.6	16.6	54.9

Source: National Sample Survey Organisation

Note : Figures for all the years are based on usual status approach and includes principal status and subsidiary status workers of all ages.

Female work participation rate (FWPR) exhibited a moderate rise in the 2001 census reaching 25.68 percent, up from 22.73 percent in 1991. In 2001, the gender gap in work participation ranged between 41-48 percent across various Indian states. The community, social and personnel sectors employed 55.6 percent of women workers, followed by manufacturing (20.7 percent) and agriculture and allied occupations (10.9 percent) and finance, insurance, real estate and business at 4.7 percent.

The National Sample Survey further shows that during 1999-2000, the self employed accounted for 55 percent of male employment and 57 percent of female employment. About 36 percent of employed males and 40 percent of employed women were casual laborers. Only 9 percent of the employed men and 3 percent of employed women were regular employees. In urban areas in 1999-2000, the share of regular employees was 42 percent for men and 33 percent for women.

In the age group of 30-44 yrs, there is highest labour force participation of females in rural areas (58.5 percent). In the urban sector, the female labour force participation is 25.9 percent. There were substantial gender differentials in the WPR for different levels of education in both the rural and urban areas. Nearly 72 percent of the males with education level of 'secondary and above' were employed while only 22 percent for females of ages 15 years and above were employed in the same educational category. In the rural areas, the WPR for females of age 15 years and above was highest for illiterate females whereas in the urban areas it was highest for females with education post

graduation and above. In the urban areas, the under-employment for females has narrowed to 2 percentage points against 11 percentage points in rural areas. (NSS (July-June 2005-06))

Table 3.4: Labour Force Participation Rates by Age group, Sex and Residence

Year	Total		Age 15-29		Age 30-45		Age 45-59		Age 60&Above	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
1977-78	39.7	86.1	49.2	99.0	41.6	95.9	16.0	64.6	30.5	63.7
1983	37.2	82.8	46.0	98.6	40.8	95.2	15.6	64.2	29.1	62.6
1987-88	36.9	79.7	47.6	98.7	42.2	95.7	16.3	64.9	29.2	61.4
1993-94	32.2	77.7	42.7	98.8	40.1	96.4	17.3	68.3	27.2	63.0
1994-95	31.2	77.0	43.3	98.5	39.6	96.6	19.6	72.1	23.8	55.3
July 95-June 96	32.2	78.1	43.5	98.7	40.0	97.1	17.8	69.9	23.6	55.0
Jan- Dec 97	30.0	77.0	40.4	98.8	38.5	97.2	18.0	67.3	22.4	55.0
Jan-June 98	28.4	74.9	38.4	98.3	37.5	96.2	17.5	70.7	21.2	54.3
July1999-June2000	31.6	75.9	44.5	98.4	40.7	95.4	17.4	62.4	23.5	53.3
January-June 2004	29.4	75.2	44.9	98.4	41.6	94.7	17.7	61.6	23.3	54.0
July 2005-June-06	38.5	75.7	58.5	98.8	54.6	97.1	24.6	65.0	31.4	56.1
Urban India										
1977-78	21.9	73.6	27.2	98.9	24.1	93.6	10.5	50.5	17.1	60.1
1983	17.2	72.9	23.9	98.6	23.0	92.8	11.6	48.8	14.8	60.3
1987-88	17.2	69.7	23.9	98.7	22.4	93.1	9.3	46.6	14.6	59.6
1993-94	16.5	67.4	23.6	98.4	23.2	93.4	9.2	43.0	14.8	60.1
1994-95	14.7	64.4	20.8	98.4	19.6	92.9	6.8	43.7	11.7	53.4
July 95-June 96	13.6	67.3	19.8	98.6	19.5	92.3	7.4	40.4	11.1	54.4
Jan- Dec 97	14.3	66.4	21.4	97.1	19.3	92.5	7.7	41.5	11.7	53.7
Jan-June 98	12.4	64.0	19.9	97.8	19.2	92.0	6.4	41.7	10.8	53.4
July1999-June2000	14.9	65.9	22.9	98.1	22.0	92.3	8.2	38.6	12.6	53.9
January-June2004	15.9	67.7	24.3	98.4	20.8	91.5	6.7	34.7	13.3	55.7
July 2004-June-05	17.8	67.3	26.6	98.4	21.9	92.7	8.6	35.6	14.8	56.6
July 2005-June-06	19.1	66.9	25.9	98.5	22.3	92.2	7.7	37.3	15.2	56.6

Source : National Sample Survey Organisation

Note : The percentage of labour force in the population

A majority of women workers in India are employed in the rural areas, primarily as cultivators and contract labourers. In the urban areas a majority of women workers are employed in the unorganized sector, in household industries, petty trades and services, building and construction, etc. The employment of women in the organized sector (both public and private) totals about 4.9 million, constituting about 17.8 percent of the total organized sector employment, which registered an increase of 0.5 percent over the previous year.

The regional characteristics of rural work participation by men and women in districts of Northern Bengal (North Bengal) are delineated in the table (Table-3.5) below. Because of the dominating presence of men engaged in main work, the gender differential in the main workforce is overwhelmingly weighted in favour of men. Conversely, since most women workers in the districts are engaged in marginal work, the WPRs for marginal workers are strongly weighted in favour of women. Overall, this would indicate that while many rural women in the districts participate actively in economic work, the work opportunities available to them are still of a casual nature and do not offer them employment around the year. Consequently, many more women have to participate in marginal work. Even in the Malda and Jalpaiguri district where many women are able to secure main work because of the proliferation of home-based economic activities such as *biri* binding and sericulture, there are still many more women who can only secure marginal work opportunities because of the pressure of population on the avenues for non-agricultural work.

Table 3.5: Percentage of Total Workers (Main+Marginal) in the Districts of North Bengal

District	Marginal workers		Cultivators		Agricultural Labourers		Workers in HH Industry		Other Workers	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
U. Dinajpur	10.3	54.1	33.6	19.9	34.5	51.7	1.5	8.6	30.4	19.8
D. Dinajpur	9.8	54.3	37.6	15.3	30	50.9	2.6	9.5	29.8	24.2
Malda	14.8	53.5	27.6	7.2	30.5	31	4.7	37.1	37.3	24.7
Jalpaiguri	10.7	46.7	22	16.4	14.1	26.1	1.3	28.2	62.6	54.8
Darjeeling	10.7	28.3	13.7	16.7	8.9	13.5	2.2	3.6	75.2	66.2
KochBehar	8.3	58	39.9	31.1	24.2	43.5	2.4	7.9	33.5	17.6
WestBengal	12.7	51	20.8	13.4	22.6	32.4	4	18	52.7	36.2

Source: GOWB, *Statistical Abstract: 2001-2002, Table 8.1.*

Among women marginal workers however, the female WPR is 58 percent, by far the highest in Koch Behar district where both Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri have less percentage of female marginal workers than the other districts of North Bengal. In all districts of North Bengal, male marginal WPR is generally low but is accompanied by high WPRs for female marginal workers, implying that most available opportunities for main work are taken up by men. Evidently, rural livelihoods of North Bengal are still sustained primarily by agriculture which offers limited main work opportunities to rural women.

Since women's work in agricultural families is largely unpaid, it does not enter the Census definitions of main work.

The situation alters quite dramatically in the case of main work. Women, at the very least, constitute well over half of the marginal workforce in all districts, Male WPRs in main work, in comparison, are relatively high in all districts. This implies that the combination of economic and population pressures that compel the members of rural families to seek economic work are felt in equal measure by both men and women. However, for rural women, the opportunities for engaging in main work are strongly limited by the large presence of male workers seeking out opportunities for economic work. Consequently, many rural women are only able to work in a marginal capacity, and remain unemployed for the greater part of the year.

3.7. Women's Role in Agriculture

The roles of women in agriculture are heterogeneous across regions of the world, and agriculture is the dominant sector in the largest and poorest nations (Krishnamurthy, 1979). Women represent a third of the total agricultural labour force in high income countries and somewhat smaller proportion in low income regions. But among wage earners in agriculture, women have a large share in the less developed countries than in the high income countries. The shift in the composition of production and employment out of agriculture.

Both men and women play an important role in feeding the world. According to an estimate, women produce more than 50% of the total world food (FAO, 1995). Women's contribution in agricultural labour force in developed countries is 36.7 percent while, it is about 43.6 percent in developing countries (FAO, 1999). In Asian countries, women account for approximately 50.0 percent of food production overall in the region, with considerable variation from country to country. In the Philippines their participation in agricultural labour force is only 4.0 percent, while 35.0 percent in Malaysia, 54.0 percent in Indonesia and over 60.0 percent in Thailand. In Southeast Asia, women play a major role in rice production, particularly in sowing, transplanting, harvesting and processing (ESCAP, 1996). In addition to agricultural activities women often devote more time and

resources under their control towards improving household concerns related to food security as compared to men and their involvement was significant in term of decision making authority (Saito & Weideman, 1990; Thomas, 1990 & Quisumbing *et al.*, 1995).

With respect to crops, women's participation is particularly high in cotton, rice, pulses and vegetables. They are involved in various primary and secondary cotton operations, such as weeding and thinning, manuring, hoeing, cotton cleaning, stick removing and storage of seed cotton for domestic use .

Agarwal (1981) notes that although there is a vast amount of literature on the socio-economic implications of the new agricultural technology (HYV seeds, mechanical equipment, etc.) in India, the focus is on households, not on gender. Gender issues are in fact hardly mentioned, because the household tends to be treated as a unit of converging (and perhaps even homogeneous) interests, within which the benefits or adverse effects of technology are assumed to be equally shared by all household members. Some recent studies have pointed to the possible conflicts in interest between male and female members, whereby women could well be left worse off by technological change while the men gain. Agricultural technology consists not only of those innovations that affect crop production but also those that affect all the operations up to the marketing stage-including transport of the crop from field to storage place, and processing such as milling, ginning, etc. Even innovations in marketing techniques can affect the crop production cycle and also the processing cycle and thereby significantly affecting employment. In a recent comprehensive overview of research on agricultural technology and employment in India, Basant (1987) has delineated three broad components of the relationship between agricultural technology and employment: (a) effect on employment in crop production; (b) effect on employment in allied agricultural activities such as processing, animal husbandry, etc; and (c) effect on employment in non-agricultural activities indirectly supporting agriculture, through forward and backward linkages such as transport, repair facilities, etc.

While there has been significant amount of literature on these three aspects, especially in terms of inter-household differences, there have been very few studies that have paid much attention to the implications for women's employment, earnings and status. As Agarwal (1984) succinctly put it, the assumption of a household, in a particular socio-

economic class, as a unit of converging interests is not entirely valid given that there are significant differences between men and women in: (a) the extent and nature of involvement in agricultural work; (b) the extent and nature of involvement in non-field work such as cattle tending and rearing, poultry care, housework and child caring etc; and (c) the extent of control over pattern of distribution of household earnings and expenditure. Technological change in the context of these initial differences would necessarily lead to different implications for men and women in terms of access to agricultural and non- agricultural work and in the overall work burden as well as on the intra-household distribution of income/consumption.

The declining trend in overall number of days worked is confirmed for landless women agricultural labourers in some villages of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and West Bengal during the period 1979 to 1982 (Mencher, 1985). In most villages women had wage-work for less than six months. On a daily basis some women managed to get work for only an hour or less. In another study based on the Rural Labour Enquiry reports for five rice growing states, the authors conclude that wage-labour days as well as total labour days per year declined for females in all the states except Andhra Pradesh (Acharya and Patkar, 1985). Another important aspect of female employment that can be inferred from the evidence so far cited is that HYV technology has not eliminated seasonality of work and may have in fact increased the extent of seasonal fluctuations in female employment.

3.7.1. Feminisation of Agricultural Activities

The extent of female participation in agriculture in India is determined by a nexus of class/caste hierarchy and norms of patriarchal ideology. In an hierarchical society based on partilineal-patrilocal families, the location of a family in the caste/class hierarchy would determine the level and forms of women's productive work (Bardhan, 1985). Here it is important to note that while there is much importance given to the Sanskritisation process (withdrawal of women from manual work), the more crucial distinction is between the taboo against 'out- door' and 'indoor' work (Chakravathy, 1977). Apart from the households of the very rich landlords, manual work related to cultivation and processing is an integral part of the work performed by women of rural households. Most peasant women do significant proportion of the work involved in pre- and post-harvest

operations that are done in the home compound rather than in the field. While women of poor peasant households may in addition go for assisting in the field, women of households on the upper end of the hierarchy would never go for 'out-door' work. The importance of this distinction between 'outdoor' and 'indoor' work is clearly highlighted by the inventory of agricultural tasks provided by Kala (1976). She specifies for these tasks the distances involved, the distance allowed for women and the limits beyond which the work becomes 'outside' work and therefore not meant for women.

A study of female agricultural labourers (FALs) can be conceived as a study of women at a level where class and gender inequalities coincide. FALs in terms of class together with male agricultural labourers (MALs) are placed very low in the agrarian hierarchy; in terms of gender they feel the burden of poverty and exploitation more heavily than MALs. In theory it could be argued that technological change in agriculture could have both favourable and unfavourable effects on the position of rural women, that technology is neutral. Peasant women are not a homogeneous group. Women belonging to agricultural households fall into different classes, perform different kinds of work, and technological change has had a differential impact upon them. As Stoler has argued, the question of class relations is "analytically prior" to any investigation of male and female relations within classes. Sexual inequality must be examined within the context of class inequality for in a stratified society both gender and class determine access to strategic resources. "Female autonomy and social power are a function of access to strategic resources within the domestic and social sphere which is defined differently for each class within the peasant society". Some feminist writers have rightly pointed out that women's oppression should be traced not merely to the rise of private property and capitalism but also to the patriarchal system preceding capitalism. Bringing in the concept of "reproduction" to distinguish gender relations from those of class and using the household and family as the locus, they point out the importance of recognizing the two-fold process of production and reproduction in history and the dialectical relation between the two processes which creates "gender" as a social category for women. Thus, the sphere of production makes use of pre-existing gender hierarchies to place women in subordinate positions at each different level of interaction between class and gender. This viewpoint, while not diminishing the importance of class, shows how poor women are subject to a "double oppression".

Gender-based changes which have pushed women into the un- important, laborious, repetitive and low-paid agricultural tasks while men have moved into newer and better paid jobs. This has led to a "shift" between men and women within the agricultural cycle resulting in "displacement" and "marginalization" of women. These changes have perpetuated existing wage differentials.

3.7.2. Male-Female Wage Differentials in Agriculture

Gender differential has determined both work and wages in rural areas. Basically, this difference emanates from the ideology operating behind the evaluation of the work of male as compared to female agricultural labourers, their capacity to perform certain tasks and the awarding of this performance in terms of wages. The existing differential has been further affected by the differing effects of green revolution technology which has mechanised certain jobs performed by males and females, all of which have proved detrimental to the latter. For example, wherever mechanisation has occurred making the task easier, men have taken over those activities traditionally performed by women, like threshing and fodder cutting. Thus hand threshing is mostly done by women, but when power threshers or electricity operated fodder and chaff cutters are used, men take over with the women as active helper. Moreover men's work has been greatly simplified and the time spent on it reduced by machines, for example, in the case of ploughing.

Women's lesser participation in the labour market is part of the reason behind a gender gap in typical wages. Women with caring responsibilities tend to build up less labour market capital than men, have less time to commit to work-based training do not build up as much seniority and have fewer chances for promotion. Yet differently gendered participation profiles are only part of the picture of gender disadvantage in the labour market. Indeed, if participation were the only issue then women with continuous full-time labour market attachment would fare as well as men and have similar wages and, whilst staying in the labour market full-time and longer is undoubtedly associated with better wages for women even female full-timers tend to earn less than men due to other gendered dimensions of labour market inequality. Both the horizontal gender segregation of the labour market, in which women are over-concentrated in typically women's jobs

which are lower paying, and vertical segregation, in which men typically work in higher status occupations than women, contribute to women's lower earnings (Hakim, 1996).

The trends in agricultural wage rates during the post-Independence period, and analysis of the factors influencing the trend have generated considerable discussion among economists since the late 1960s. The average daily money wage earnings for all agricultural operations by agricultural labourers in rural labour household increased steadily and sharply between 1956-57 and 1977-78 for both males and females, at the all-India level and for all states [Unni (1988a; 1988b)]. This increase was much slower during 1964-65 to 1974-75 than during the entire period. The consumer price index for agricultural labour rose between 1956-57 and 1974-75, with a sharp rise in between 1964-65 and 1974-75, and then dropped in 1977-78. Between 1964-65 and 1974-75 the daily real wage earnings of adult males had actually fallen at the all-India level and in all states except Karnataka, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh. In 1977-78, with the fall in consumer price index for agricultural labour (CPIAL), daily real wage earnings for males increased above the 1964-65 level for the country as a whole and all states except Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and West Bengal. The average daily real wage earnings of female agricultural labourers had remained stagnant between 1964-65 and 1974-75 at the all India level and in Karnataka and Punjab. They rose during the same period in Kerala and Uttar Pradesh and fell in the other states i.e. Bihar, Gujarat, MP, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal. In 1977-78, the daily real wage earnings of females rose above the 1964-65 level for the country as a whole and in all states. Acharya (1989) attempted to construct a disaggregated agricultural wage series in India, for male and female workers separately, covering the period 1970 to 1985, for the 58 agro-climatically homogenous regions in the country, as defined by the National Sample Survey. Using the Agricultural Wages in India data, Acharya, found that gender wage gap continued to be 20 to 40 percent across different regions. The labour market has no specific gender biases in wage movement. In Punjab, the continued fall in female wages till 1977-78, could be due to the large immigration of male agricultural labourers which could have replaced the female labour.

Jose (1988) provided a comparative analysis of agricultural wages in various Indian states from the agricultural year 1970-71 to 1984-85. The principal source of data used in the

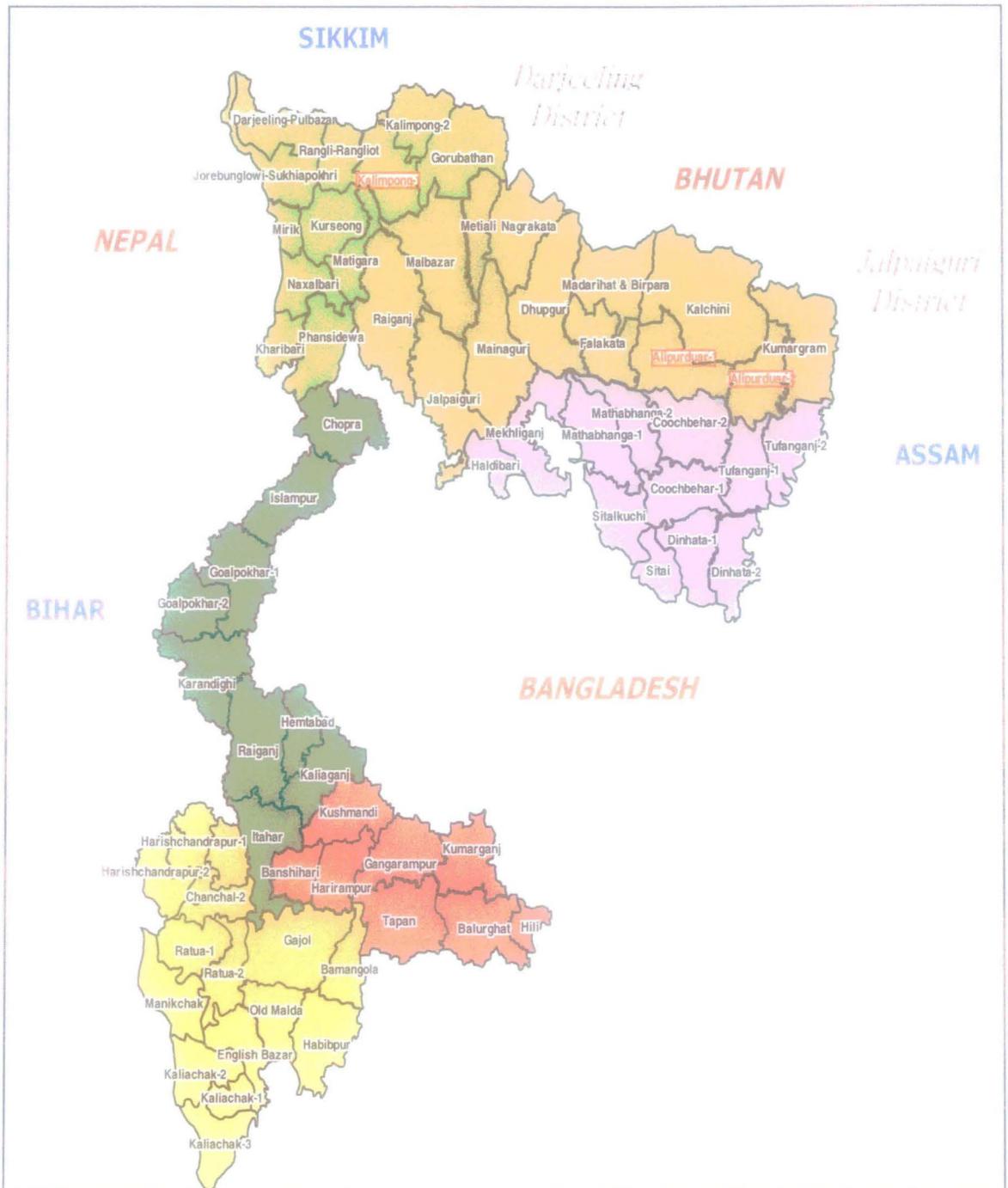
study was Agricultural Wages in India. During the period 1970-71 to 1984-85, it was found that among all the states the two north western states of Punjab and Haryana along with Kerala from the south showed a high average level of money wages. As for the male workers, the highest average for the year 1984-85 was reported from Haryana to be followed by Punjab and Kerala. Among the female agricultural labour, Haryana, Punjab and Kerala showed a relatively high level of wages during the period under review. Tamil Nadu reported the lowest wages throughout the period. The other low female wages states are Orissa, Karnataka and Maharashtra. Jose also attempted to get gender disparity in agricultural wages. Up to 1984-85, female wages stayed at less than 80 percent of the male wage rates in some 10 states. There is considerable variation across the states with regard to the incidence of such disparities. In states like Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu, female wage rarely exceeded 65 to 70 percent of the male wages while in the states like Assam, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, they remained above 80 percent levels. In most states, such as Bihar, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, there has been a tendency for the wage disparities to narrow down over time.

3.8. Conclusion

In the above analysis the study have shown that the participation rates in economic activity by women are largely a function of socio-economic conditions interlinked with the stage of development. On the whole, large sections of population from the oppressed social strata and lower consumption brackets offer themselves for jobs outside the domestic activities. In an economy differentiated along social and economic categories, no generalised features of the female labour force can be drawn up. Withdrawal of women from labour force also needs to be studied in relation to the segmented labour market for women. Wherever women do manage to pull themselves out of these social restrictions, lack of education and skill formations relegate them to the lower rungs of the job market as unskilled casual workers. In equal land distribution and increasing dependence for jobs in the farm sector leaves only wage labour open to these women. Even when women are involved primarily in domestic activities they perform a number of other activities which are not termed gainful and hence, not considered 'work' by the

data collection agencies. Over last four decades, female labour force is being dominated by casual wage labour at a much faster rate than of male labour force. Women keep getting in and out of the labour market due to seasonal nature of employment in the agricultural sector. Women seem to act as the reserve army of labour to be employed at peak times on low wages. Wage differential in male and female workers persists and has become sharper during the recent decades. The rate of increase in agricultural wages for male agricultural workers has been higher as compared to women workers.

Blocks of the Districts of North Bengal



Selected Blocks of Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling for the Present Study are Levelled in Red