



Research Article

Changing patterns of female work participation in rural and urban India: A study of 21st century India

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ABSTRACT

Females are an integral part of overall development of any economy. Their contribution remained immense in different stages of economic development. The contribution which they make are measured only when they are actively participating in economic activities. In India the greatest problem that the country is experiencing is that female is either exiting from the work or shifting to the newer areas of work. The basic reason is that they want to be engaged in paid jobs. After the period of economic reform inclination of female towards paid job is faster than the earlier period. This preference is not only in urban areas but in rural areas as well. The main purpose is to improve the living standard of not only of self but enhance the overall family income to have better living condition. Today's women are busy exploring new areas of work. They are trying to improve their qualification and working hard towards skilling themselves. But in the midst of all these efforts from their side there are many constrains which are proving as hurdle in their work participation. These bottlenecks need to be removed to provide them better opportunities so that they can enhance their abilities to adapt themselves with the changes in the internal as well as external environment.

The status of women in India has been subject to many great changes over the past few decades. The objective of my paper is: to know the pattern of female work participation in rural and urban India; to examine the areas from where they are exiting; to know the areas where they are shifting; what needs to be done to stop their exit from the work and how to provide them work preferences so that their potentialities can be utilized for the overall growth and development of the economy.

KEY WORDS

Workforce, Rural urban, Potential, Economic reform, Economic development, Economic activity

India's policies on liberalization, privatization and globalization initiated in the early nineties and more than two decades of reform-induced economic growth have driven the economy to a high growth.

Mehta and Awasthi (2019), wrote about the structural shift in women's employment from farm to non-farm jobs in services and industries. They highlighted the fact that there is steady rise of women in high skilled or 'new economy' sectors like information and communication technology, electronics and telecom; and in low skilled work such as domestic work, particularly in urban areas. Mehrotra and Sinha (2019), argue that, A continuous and sharp decline in the already depressed female labour force participation rate in India post 2005, particularly in the face of its rapid economic growth raises questions about the inclusiveness of the growth process. Ratho (2020), finds that, the 'feminization of labour' is a phenomenon where there is a palpable rise in female labour force participation alongside a fall in men's participation; moreover, a higher number of females are entering certain jobs that are traditionally the 'domain' of men. This is recently being seen in India. Another emerging pattern is that jobs with lower wages seem to be increasing with female participation. India needs to nurture an environment where women, whether in formal or informal labour, are given the appropriate employee benefits and risk-free working environment. Phadke, Ranade and Khan (2013), find that, in recent years, while women have been present in increasing numbers in higher education and the workforce and even in political office, this has not

translated into equal access, much less rights to public space for women.

Hussain and Dutta (2015), find that, as globalisation introduced Indian society to Western lifestyles and allowed access to luxury goods, the desire to work became less guided by the need to survive and more by the demands of consumerism. Work also became a manifestation of the women's desire for personal space and self-fulfilment outside the family. The changes in family structure, lifestyle and motives for working escalated the role conflict between the woman as worker and provider of care services. From the traditional role of women as caregivers and sustainer of the home, middle class women gradually shifted to a supervisory and planning role within the household. Jhabvala and Sinha (2002), believe that, in a way, the change in economy has brought about a visibility for the woman worker which did not exist before. The term 'feminisation of labour' is now widely used and women are becoming more visible in many areas of work which was traditionally barred to them. Deshpande and Deshpande (1992), note that, the NEP in operation since July 1991 involves devaluation, deregulation and deflation. These measures and their corollaries affect directly or indirectly the volume and quality of employment that will be generated in the future. Deflation, will increase unemployment among women in two ways. Firstly, some women will be laid off as a part of the cut back in production and employment. Secondly, as men lose jobs, their wives and children—in India, the female children—will be forced to enter the labour force to keep the pot boiling. If deflation is accompanied by reduction in subsidies on essential consumption, the fall in real income will increase the pressure on women to work for the market.

A question becomes pertinent to be raised and addressed through this work: Do India experience higher female work participation in the post economic reform era? If not then what are the factors responsible which are barring them to participate in economic activities? Changing patterns of women's participation in the work force is an important issue for India's economic development as India is now in the phase of "demographic dividend", where the share of working - age people is particularly high, which can propel per capita growth rates through labour force participation, savings and investment effects. But if women largely stay out of the work force, this effect will be much weaker and India could run up labour shortages in key sectors of the economy.

India experienced a period of strong economic growth in the 2000s, for an extended period of time. There was a distinct strengthening of the growth momentum during 2003-07 that is the reason why this period is also known as "The golden era of growth." In the wake of successive waves of economic liberalization, the 'condition of India- when thought of in terms of economic growth has

improved dramatically. But the trend (table 1, figure 1) shows that it was volatile throughout the period. In the year 2008 GDP per capita growth rate dipped drastically which shows the severe impact of Global slowdown on Indian Economy.

Table 1: India's GDP and per Capita annual growth rate

Year	GDP growth (annual %)	GDP per capita growth (annual %)
2000	3.840991157	2.021088695
2001	4.823966264	3.027377624
2002	3.803975321	2.064875058
2003	7.860381476	6.093705485
2004	7.922936613	6.193653448
2005	7.923430621	6.231948516
2006	8.060732573	6.403284515
2007	7.660815065	6.04817406
2008	3.08669806	1.587598136
2009	7.861888833	6.351088711
2010	8.497584702	7.042346887
2011	5.241344743	3.893930345
2012	5.456358951	4.165499831
2013	6.386106401	5.134956907
2014	7.410227605	6.186731983
2015	7.996253444	6.797039412
2016	8.256305844	7.082848187
2017	7.043820855	5.912397886
2018	6.119586841	5.024473331
2019	5.023873428	3.963162537

Source: World Bank Database, updated on 20-8-2020

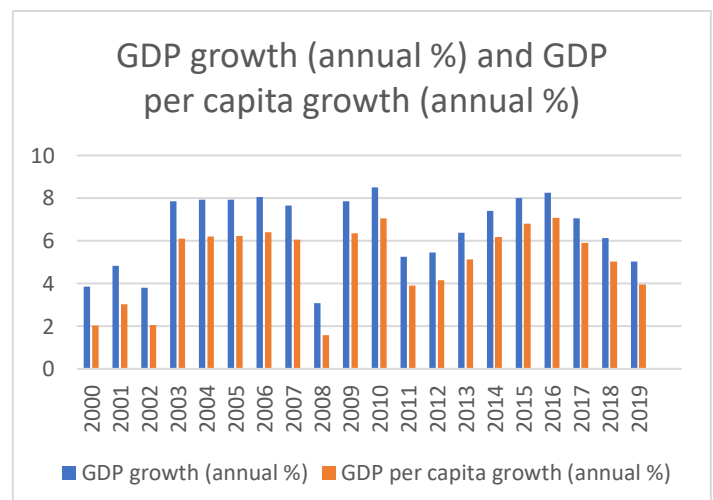


Figure 1: India's GDP and per Capita annual growth rate

2. Value addition to GDP (%) by the Three Sectors of the Economy in Post-Liberalization Period

Growth during this period was broad-based. All the three key sectors- agriculture, industry and services- contributed dismally.

Table2: Value addition to GDP (%) by the Three Sectors

year	Agriculture, forestry, and fishing, value added (% of GDP)	Industry (including construction), value added (% of GDP)	Services, value added (% of GDP)
2000	21.60896	27.32583	42.73293
2001	21.6205	26.48778	43.80896
2002	19.5367	27.66065	44.72883
2003	19.58061	27.47411	44.70465
2004	17.81469	29.21911	44.11486
2005	17.62021	29.53376	44.44293
2006	16.80944	30.92724	44.04324
2007	16.75012	30.90324	44.00816
2008	16.79094	31.13672	45.88255
2009	16.74427	31.12137	45.98488
2010	17.02651	30.72508	45.03375
2011	17.19197	30.16168	45.44214
2012	16.84538	29.39853	46.30115
2013	17.14842	28.4049	46.69871
2014	16.79193	27.6564	47.82241
2015	16.17451	27.34739	47.78375
2016	16.3638	26.619	47.7494
2017	16.35781	26.47881	47.89239
2018	15.40673	26.12788	48.81249
2019	15.9646	24.88101	49.8775

Source: World Bank, 2019

All the three key sectors- agriculture, industry and services- contributed dismally (table 2, figure 2). Since 2000 Value addition from the Agriculture sector to GDP has a declining trend. Industry showed a positive trend till 2011 after that this sector also experienced declining trend in terms of Value addition to GDP. It is only the service sector which gave a boost to economy in significant manner.

Female and male employment scenario in all the three sectors also reflects a dismal trend (table 3, 4 and 5 and figure 3, 4, and 5). Female and male employment declined in agriculture, forestry and fishing since 2000s. But still female employment is greater in this sector in comparison to male since 2000s. This draws the fact that economic reform has not brought much changes in the situation of women employment. This constraint was from both the sides. On one hand employer was not able to absorb the female workers due to emerging market structure where the work requirements were different and on the other female workers were not able to prove

their suitability for the work due to their skill and qualification related issues.

Value addition in GDP by Agriculture, forestry and fishing, and Female and male employment

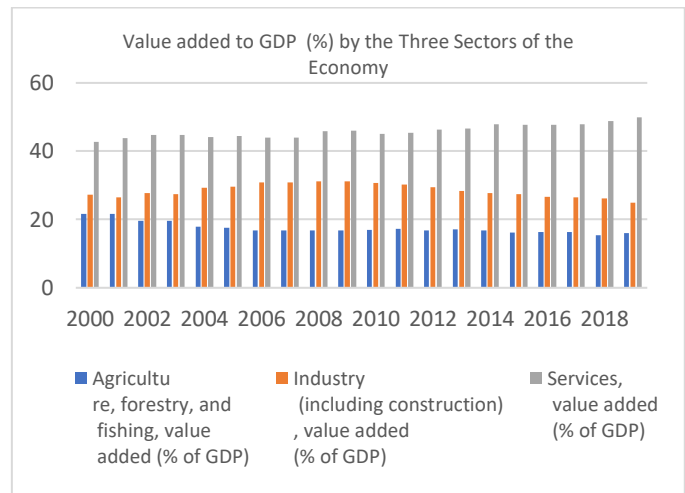


Table 3: Value addition in GDP by Agriculture, forestry and fishing, and Female and male employment (in %)

YEAR	Agriculture, forestry, and fishing, value added (% of GDP)	Employment in agriculture, forestry and fishing	
		female (% of female employment)	male (% of male employment)
		FEMALE	MALE
2000	21.60896	74.387	54.56200027
2001	21.6205	73.937	54.19499969
2002	19.5367	73.284	53.59500122
2003	19.58061	72.886	53.07300186
2004	17.81469	71.734	51.38899994
2005	17.62021	71.053	50.59199905
2006	16.80944	70.441	49.8730011
2007	16.75012	69.443	48.76100159
2008	16.79094	67.997	47.60599899
2009	16.74427	67.899	47.66999817
2010	17.02651	66.981	46.9129982
2011	17.19197	63.318	44.92300034
2012	16.84538	59.964	43.52099991
2013	17.14842	59.221	42.93999863
2014	16.79193	58.622	42.48600006
2015	16.17451	58.352	42.38100052
2016	16.3638	57.681	41.91500092
2017	16.35781	56.44	40.89099884
2018	15.40673	55.528	40.23699951
2019	15.9646	54.539	39.32699966

Source: Modeled ILO Estimate, 2019

Figure 3: Value addition in GDP by Agriculture, forestry and fishing, and Female and male employment (in %)

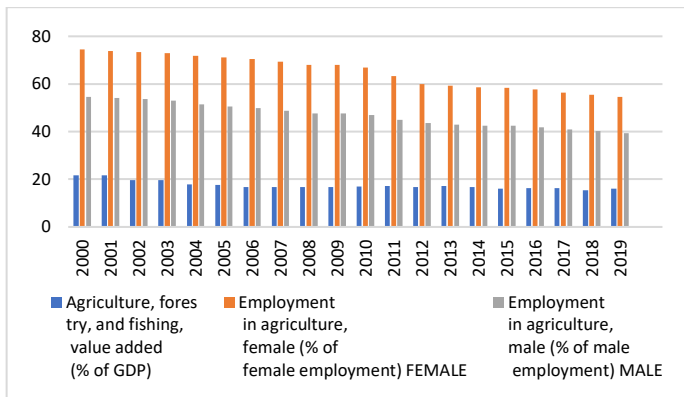


Table 4: Value addition in GDP by Industry and Female and male employment (in %)

Year	Industry (including construction), value added (% of GDP)	Employment in Industry female (% of female employment)	Employment in industry, male (% of male employment)
2000	27.32583	11.654	17.929
2001	26.48778	11.811	17.9
2002	27.66065	12.134	18.198
2003	27.47411	12.367	18.37
2004	29.21911	13.235	20.124
2005	29.53376	13.65	20.655
2006	30.92724	13.868	21.193
2007	30.90324	14.442	22.341
2008	31.13672	15.179	23.458
2009	31.12137	15.075	23.066
2010	30.72508	15.533	23.677
2011	30.16168	17.358	25.23
2012	29.39853	18.77	25.856
2013	28.4049	18.594	26.132
2014	27.6564	18.277	26.197
2015	27.34739	17.676	25.717
2016	26.619	17.337	25.694
2017	26.47881	17.435	26.554
2018	26.12788	17.278	26.893
2019	24.88101	17.604	27.583

Table 5: Value addition in GDP by Services and Female and male employment (in %)

YEAR	Service sector, value added (% of GDP)	Employment in service sector female (% of female employment)	Employment in service sector, male (% of male employment)
2000	42.73293	42.73293	27.51
2001	43.80896	43.80896	27.905
2002	44.72883	44.72883	28.207
2003	44.70465	44.70465	28.557
2004	44.11486	44.11486	28.487
2005	44.44293	44.44293	28.752
2006	44.04324	44.04324	28.934
2007	44.00816	44.00816	28.898
2008	45.88255	45.88255	28.936
2009	45.98488	45.98488	29.264
2010	45.03375	45.03375	29.41
2011	45.44214	45.44214	29.848
2012	46.30115	46.30115	30.623
2013	46.69871	46.69871	30.927
2014	47.82241	47.82241	31.317
2015	47.78375	47.78375	31.902
2016	47.7494	47.7494	32.391
2017	47.89239	47.89239	32.555
2018	48.81249	48.81249	32.87
2019	49.8775	49.8775	33.09

Source: Modeled ILO estimate, 2019

Figure 5: Industry value added and Female and male employment (in %)

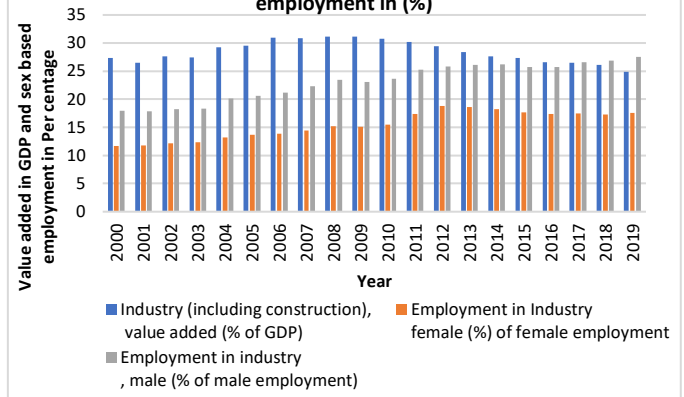
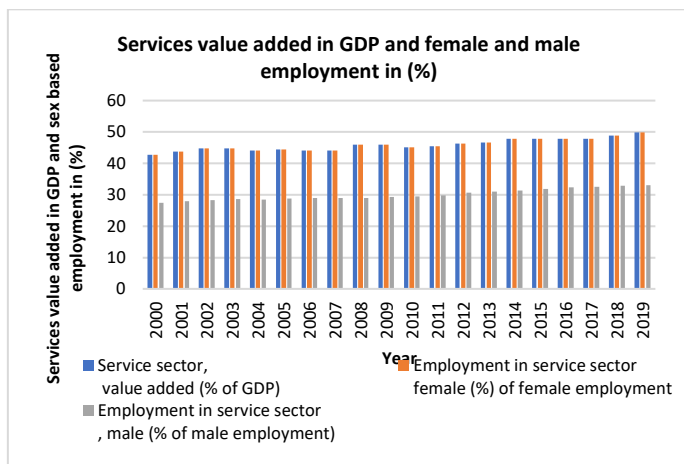


Figure 5: Value addition in GDP by Services and Female and male employment (in %)



Data from this period suggests that employment growth is minimal - consequently, some analysts described this as a period of “jobless growth”. “Growth -Job- Puzzle” in India is the declining trend in female participation, notably in rural areas.

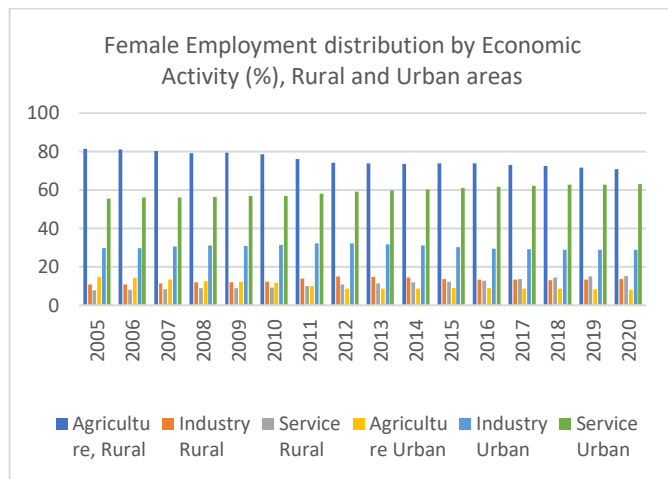
Table 6: Female Employment distribution by Economic Activity (%), Rural and Urban areas

Year	Agriculture, Rural	Industry Rural	Service Rural	Agriculture Urban	Industry Urban	Service Urban
2005	81.396	10.704	7.9	14.706	29.696	55.598
2006	81.081	10.856	8.063	14.153	29.802	56.045
2007	80.338	11.314	8.348	13.413	30.529	56.058
2008	79.128	11.964	8.908	12.463	31.224	56.313
2009	79.298	11.831	8.871	12.273	30.907	56.82
2010	78.61	12.211	9.179	11.684	31.33	56.987
2011	76.186	13.805	10.008	9.9	32.105	57.996
2012	74.123	15.079	10.798	8.562	32.167	59.271
2013	73.821	14.791	11.387	8.571	31.786	59.642
2014	73.702	14.386	11.912	8.63	31.179	60.191
2015	73.987	13.737	12.276	8.803	30.16	61.037
2016	73.804	13.347	12.849	8.828	29.429	61.743
2017	72.941	13.348	13.71	8.652	29.271	62.077
2018	72.475	13.125	14.4	8.593	28.779	62.628
2019	71.632	13.447	14.921	8.326	28.844	62.83
2020	70.83	13.755	15.415	8.084	28.92	62.996

Source: ILO modelled estimates 2020

The data on Rural and Urban India indicates that Female employment in Agriculture is declining but it is increasing in Industry and service sector since 2005 (table 6, figure 6). Female of rural India is now aspiring to acquire new skills and opt for higher studies. Once they get higher degrees the attitudinal changes automatically take place. They start taking agriculture as inferior area to work and prefer to work either in service sector or industrial sector even though paid less. MGNREGA is playing an important role in igniting them to shift by providing them job opportunities away from agriculture. In urban area the scenario is entirely different. Female solely entering in service sector, leaving agriculture and industry behind. The decline is faster in Industry. Now the question arises as the agriculture sector embraced the huge labour power in India for long time and still is the greatest source of livelihood for many will the service sector would be able to do the same. The future is bleak as this sector is in need of either highly qualified and skilled or low skilled and low qualified. The sector is having wage duality as well as gender-based duality due to safety, security and risk related issues. Our female workforce of rural and urban India is not ready at this point in time to meet their standard of upper level. Thus, being part of contractual job at the lower level they are facing the burnt of being hired and fired on daily basis. Their apathy has heightened at the time of COVID in 2020. They are not only facing the work place related violence but domestic violence as well.

Figure 6: Female Employment distribution by Economic Activity (%), Rural and Urban areas



Colatei and Harris-White (2004) observe that female workers in rural areas are able to gain employment in the agricultural sector only when male workers were employed in better remunerated non-farm sector.

The decline in women's employment was mainly driven by the decreasing ability of the agricultural sector to absorb labour, which previously employed nearly 68% of all female workers (Mazumdar and Agnihotri 2011). While the decline in demand for female Labour in agriculture is expected given the decline in agriculture's

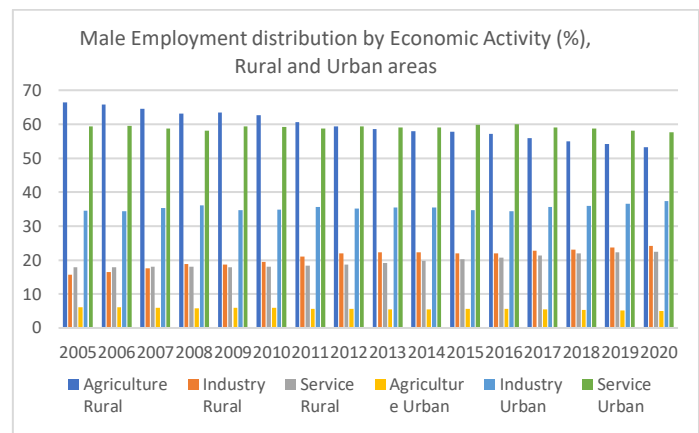
contribution to gross domestic product (GDP), employment opportunities have not expanded, at not sufficiently, to absorb women workers (Shirisha, EPW, November 5, 2016).

Table 7: Male Employment distribution by Economic Activity (%), Rural and Urban areas

Year	Agriculture Rural (%)	Industry Rural (%)	Service Rural (%)	Agriculture Urban (%)	Industry Urban (%)	Service Urban (%)
2005	66.467	15.692	17.84	6.05	34.579	59.371
2006	65.715	16.403	17.882	6.036	34.447	59.516
2007	64.457	17.575	17.968	5.932	35.346	58.722
2008	63.141	18.747	18.112	5.814	36.133	58.053
2009	63.402	18.67	17.929	5.985	34.715	59.3
2010	62.599	19.421	17.98	5.959	34.789	59.252
2011	60.574	21.076	18.35	5.706	35.637	58.657
2012	59.302	22.016	18.682	5.575	35.091	59.333
2013	58.542	22.25	19.208	5.538	35.439	59.023
2014	57.949	22.326	19.725	5.525	35.449	59.026
2015	57.82	21.979	20.2	5.587	34.625	59.789
2016	57.215	22.016	20.77	5.565	34.433	60.003
2017	55.863	22.746	21.392	5.42	35.577	59.003
2018	55.004	23.057	21.939	5.356	35.955	58.689
2019	54.102	23.66	22.238	5.184	36.65	58.166
2020	53.257	24.231	22.512	5.027	37.32	57.653

Source: ILO Modelled estimate, 2020

Figure 7: Male Employment distribution by Economic Activity (%), Rural and Urban areas



Employment in India did grow, both during the earlier period and more recently, but it grew mostly for men and mostly in urban areas (table 7, figure 7) -at the same time women in rural areas withdrew themselves from the workforce. It is also true that most of the new jobs created in India were informal-either in the unorganized sector or even in the formal sector -as a result of the rise of contract labour.

This pattern emerged as India has been undergoing structural transformation, by which we mean the shift of labour and overall economic activity in a developing economy out of agriculture and into manufacturing and service sectors. This has important implication for jobs. For example, in East Asia in the 1st and 2nd half of 20th century, that shift was accompanied by rapid job creation in manufacturing, jobs that were more productive and could pay higher wages.

However, in India the growth of manufacturing has not mimicked that path.

Women want paid jobs. The 2011 National sample survey found that over a third of women in urban India and half in rural areas who engage mainly in housework want a paying job. Ongoing research and India spend own on the ground reporting suggests a complex web of constraints that keep women away from the workplace.

Men do not need permission to work but for girls and women taking permission is must from their father, brother, husband and in some cases even from village panchayats in order to work or even learn skills that will make them employable.

Patriarchy, cultural and social attitudes exist all over India, but in many states in the north, there is feeling of 'shame' if a man's wife works, says Pronab Sen, Country head for the International growth Centre's (IGC) India Central Programme and the country's first chief statistician.

Unsurprisingly, Bihar, Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab report the lowest rates of female labour force participation, whereas hill states such as Sikkim and Himachal Pradesh where men have historically migrated out for work, leaving women in charge of village economies, female labour force participation is high.

Family and responsibility for household work are other serious constraints, women either don't accept jobs, or quit because of 'family reasons' found a 2016 study of young, single women by evidence for policy design, a team of Harvard Faculty Researches from the Harvard Kennedy School.

The 2011 Indian Human Development Survey finds that a sizeable number of women need to take permission from a family member to even go to the market or health centre, said Rohini Pande of Harvard Kennedy School. "In the end, it's pretty difficult to look for a job if you can't leave the house alone", she said. Even when women are 'allowed' to work, there are conditions that must be met. Is the job close to home? Are there fixed working hours that will allow her to be back in time to cook the dinner and put the kids to bed? Is safe and inexpensive public transportation available? Safety is emerging as a key concern, says Farzana Afridi, associate professor with the Indian Statistical Institute. There is dire shortage of infrastructure, for instance, hostels for working women and crèches for their children. All women work, much of it - fetching firewood and water, cooking and cleaning, taking care of children and the elderly in India - is unpaid and unrecognized. Very often, women seek employment when there is poverty and they must contribute to the household income just to survive. But when household incomes increase, they might consider the option of quitting paid work. Typically, when economies expand and the services sector grows, they get back into the workforce.

Labour supply and labour Demand factors to examine this reason. Farzana Afridi and others (why are few married women joining the work force in India? A Decomposition Analysis Over Two Decades) focus on supply factors. Piritta Sorsa (why do so few women in India work?) from the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) also focuses mostly on supply issues analyzing data from 1987-2012, the study find a strong income effect, a negative (but over time declining) effect of husband's education, a U-shaped own education effect, a negative effect of children, marriage and presence of in-laws and positive effects of access to finance and infrastructure and access to Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) employment. Labour demand variables, (imperfectly) proxied by local employment structure, do not display a large impact.

What needs to be done

Expansion of MSMEs. It can help women to get paid jobs if they are not willing to work in agriculture areas and want some paid alternatives to enhance their and overall family's income.

Manufacturing sector needs to get a boost so that it can bring more labour-intensive opportunities.

Strengthening Physical infrastructure to ensure amicable work environment for women and enhance their comfortable mobility to workplace.

Social sector development is the need of hour. Bringing health and education at the doorstep will not only save time of women in upbringing of their children and take care of entire family but will also provide opportunities to them for enhancement of skill and qualification.

Co-operative banks should come forward to assist women of all class and sections especially in rural areas if they show interest in starting their own ventures at any level.

Raising the share of public expenditure to improve childcare facilities and other basic service facilities such as working women hostels, transport facilities, availability of food at the workplace, facilities of recharging electronic devices, changing rooms etc.

Diversification of jobs so that reach of job should be for each female, highly educated or medium to low educated or uneducated.

Creating a healthy, safe, and hygienic work atmosphere for dissolving the taboos and insecurities associated with women working.

Treating female at par with men in terms of wages for the same job.

Thus, changing pattern of female work participation is related to their exit from the workforce or shift to other sectors away from agriculture in both rural and urban areas. It can only be stopped and tapped well by

formulation and execution of strong policies at centre and state levels. Here the role of decentralized governance is of far more importance. Both Centre and states have an important role to play.

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