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Exploring the Female Employment Scenarios in India across the Ethnic, Caste and Religious Sub-Groups during 1983 to 2011-12

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Abstract:

Caste has been the basis for the division of labour in Indian society since the age of Vedas. The paper seeks to analyse trend and pattern of women employment during the pre- and post-reform periods at the cross roads of caste, ethnicity and religion. Feminine industries and the quality of such jobs are also examined here. The entire analysis revolves around the All-India level considering the employment-unemployment survey disaggregated data for the period 1983-2012. The analysis indicated at reviewing the existing employment generating programs targeting the females and new policies must be adopted by taking into consideration the linkages borne by the caste and religious status of a person on their employment scenarios.

Keywords: Employment, Caste, Ethnicity, Women, Sectoral Distribution, Quality of Jobs.

Introduction: Historically, the concept of 'jati' or caste emerged in the 6th century B.C. as a result of the combination of factors – the hereditary nature of crafts and occupations, the assimilation of tribal groups into the larger Brahmanical fold and a social system that privileged birth and regulated hierarchy through marriage rules and endogamy. Occupational differences played a deterministic role in the formation of these social classifications (the Chaturvarnya order: *Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra*) in the Indian society. While Brahmans and Kshatriyas were referred to as high 'jati's, the low 'jati's included Chandalas, basket makers, hunters, charioteers and sweepers (Singh, 2015). Thus, 'jati' bears a clear connection with the occupation of a person.

This stratification of occupations in the Indian society, which is the result of the caste system, will not allow Hindus to take to occupations where they are wanted if they do not belong to them by heredity. By not permitting readjustment of occupations, caste becomes a direct cause of much of the unemployment that was seen in ancient India. Again, it must be borne in mind that although there are castes among non-Hindus, the social significance of it

varies between the Hindus and the non-Hindus. The non-Hindus do not regard caste as a religious dogma (Columbia University Centre, 2004).

However, it is unlikely that Muslim and Christian dalits will be substantially different from their Hindu, Sikh or Buddhist counterparts, at least in so far as their social status and standing in the community is concerned (Bapna & Deshpande, 2008). Also, the presence of the caste wise variation in the occupational structure among the Muslim and Christian communities has been repeatedly mentioned in the literatures. Again, the Pali texts have spoken about the existence of varnya order and their linkage with the vocations practised by the Buddhists and Jain as well.

Thus, there lies no difference of opinion in this regard that the caste has been the basis for the division of labour in Indian society since the age of Vedas. In other words, the occupational structure of a person has been a function of his/her affiliation to a particular region and caste community in our society.

Keeping this in mind, this paper specifically attempts to:

- 1) Examine the trend and pattern of women's employment at the all-India level during the pre- and post-reform periods at the cross roads of caste, ethnicity and religion.
- 2) Observe the sectoral distribution for the female workforce in India (up to 2-digit of NIC) and also identify those sectors/industries which are feminine in nature during the period 1983 to 2011-12.
- 3) Understand the quality of women's employment for each socio-religious community in the pre- and post-reform periods.

This study is divided into six sections. After the introductory part in Section I, Section II narrate down the sources of data and adjustments made to it for comparing the employment estimates over the years. Section III examines the trend of women employment at the all-India level during the pre- and post-reform periods considering her socio-religious identity. Section IV identifies the variation in the pattern of employment for women belonging to different socio-religious communities. The qualitative scenarios of employment for these females is reported in Section V. Finally, the concluding section VI presents the summary of main findings.

Data Sources and Methodology: The main source of data in this study has been the Employment-Unemployment surveys conducted by the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO). This study uses the data for four years: 1983 (38th round), 1993-94 (50th round), 1999-00 (55th round) and 2011-12 (68th round). In this study, the periods 1983 to 1993-94 and 1993-94 to 2011-12 represents the pre- and the post-reform periods respectively. Also, it must be mentioned that the employment estimates of this study are based on NSSO's Usual Status approach (US-PS+SS).

It also needs to be mentioned that an industry or sector is considered to be 'feminine' if the women employment share of the concerned sector exceeds the overall women WPR by five or more percentage points (following Beller's [1982] relative measure approach). The

National Industrial Classification (NIC) has been used up to two digits for obtaining a more detailed picture.

Further, it must be noted that OBC was included as a separate social group for the first time on and from the 55th round survey of NSSO. Thus, for the sake of inter-temporal comparisons, we have combined the employment estimates for the two social groups – OBC and Others under the head *General* for the years 1999-00 and 2011-12. Also, the estimates on employment for the religious groups: Jain, Sikh, Buddhist and Zoroastrian has been clubbed together, for the sake of analytical convenience, under the religious community ‘others’ across all the years of study.

Employment Trends: In this section, we attempt to look into the employment trend of women affiliated to a particular socio-religious group during the pre- and post-reform periods. The first thing to note is that the rate of participation in the labour force (LPR) and work force (WPR) of the economy is higher for the males compared to the females across all the socio-religious groups- the differences were wider in urban areas than in rural areas throughout the pre- and the post reform periods (1983 to 2011-12). Also, the rural-urban differentials existed in the female LPR and WPRs, in all the years, with LPR and WPR in rural areas being on the higher side for all the major socio-religious groups.

Labour force Participation Rates of Various Socio-Religious Groups

As can be seen from the table below, in the rural areas, among Hindus, for females in the ST category, LPR hovered around 37 to 45 per cent during the post-reform period (1993-94 to 2011-12) (45 per cent during 1999-00 and 37.4 per cent during 2011-12) while during the period prior to 1999-00 (the pre-reform one represented by 1983 to 1993-94) it was around 49 per cent (49.2 per cent in 1993-94 and 48.8 per cent in 1983). Similarly, LPR for the SC women of the Hindu families declined in the post reform year 2011-12 (26 per cent) compared to the pre-reform year 1983 (38.4 per cent). Contrary to this, LPR was the highest in the year 1983 (33 per cent) and the lowest in 2011-12 (24.6 per cent) for the rural Hindu women belonging to the social group ‘*general*’.

Parallel to this, LPR has increased in the year 2011-12 compared to the year 1983 only for the tribal women of the Muslim households; while it has declined for the remaining social groups. Among the Muslim women in the SC category and the social group ‘*general*’, in the rural areas, LPR was the highest in the year 1983 (24.1 per cent for the SCs and 20.4 per cent for *general*) and the lowest in 2011-12 (0.3 per cent for the SCs and 15 per cent for *general*); while in both the years 1993-94 and 1999-00 it was nearly 21 per cent for SCs and 16 per cent for ‘*general*’. Further, among Christians, for females in the ST category, LPR was nearly 30.7 per cent in 2011-12 compared to 40 per cent in the year 1983; while for the SCs it was around 35 per cent in 2011-12 compared to 41 per cent in 1983. Among the women of the social group ‘*general*’, LPR was the highest in the year 1983 (38.6 per cent) and the lowest in 2011-12 (27 per cent). On the other hand, among the religious group ‘*others*’, for the females belonging to the social group- SC and *general*, LPR was the highest

in the year 1983 (33.8 per cent) whereas for STs it has been the highest in the year 2011-12 (40.7 per cent).

In the urban areas, among Hindus, for females in the ST and SC category, LPR declined in the post-reform year 2011-12 (20.2 per cent for STs and 18.3 per cent for SCs) compared to the pre-reform year 1983 (30 per cent for STs and 21 per cent for SCs); while for the social group 'general', female labour force participation remained at 15 per cent in all the years. On the other hand, among Muslims, women LPR remained at 11 to 12 per cent for all the social groups throughout the period 1983 to 2011-12. In fact, among the STs, it has been the highest in the year 1999-00 (14 per cent) and the lowest in the year 1983 (0.87 per cent). Among the Muslim women in the SC category and the social group 'general', LPR was the highest in the year 1983 (22.8 per cent for the SCs and 13 per cent for general) and 1993-94 respectively; while it has been the lowest for the two groups in the year 1999-00 (in fact the rates of female labour force participation for these social two groups coincided with each other at 10.6 per cent during 1999-00).

Among Christians, for females in the ST category, LPR was nearly 20 per cent during the pre- and post-reform years; while for the SCs it was around 31 per cent in 2011-12 compared to 24 per cent in 1983. Among the women of the social group 'general', LPR has increased continuously over the years and was seen to be the highest in the year 2011-12 (29 per cent) and the lowest in the year 1983 (25 per cent). On the other hand, among the religious group 'others', the female LPR was the highest in the year 1999-00 (12 per cent) for STs, in the year 2011-12 (20 per cent) for SCs and in 1993-94 (12.9 per cent) for 'general'.

Work Force Participation Rates of Various Socio-Religious Groups: In rural areas, among Hindus, WPR for the females in the ST category was nearly 37 to 45 per cent during 1999-00 to 2011-12 while during the period prior to 1999-00, it was around 49 per cent. For the females in the SC category and the category 'general', WPR has declined in the post-reform period (1993-94 to 2011-12) compared to the pre-reform period. Further, looking at the WPR for the women of the Muslim community, it appeared that the rates for the social groups- SC and general have declined continuously over the years; whereas, for the STs, WPR has increased in the post-reform period (28 per cent in 1999-00 and 27.2 per cent in 2011-12) compared to the pre-reform period (22 per cent in 1983 and 19 per cent in 1993-94). Among the Christians, WPR for the females across all the social groups have declined in the post-reform year 2011-12 (29.2 per cent for STs, 35 per cent for SCs and 25 per cent for general) compared to the pre-reform year 1983 (40 per cent for STs, 41 per cent for SCs and 37 per cent for general).

In urban areas, among the Hindus, WPR for the females of the backward groups (SC/STs) has declined continuously throughout the period 1983 to 2011-12. Among the Muslims, WPR declined in 2011-12 compared to 1983 for the females of the SC households (WPR was 14 per cent in 2011-12 compared to 23 per cent in 1983 for SCs); while for STs, it was 11 per cent in 2011-12 compared to 0.74 per cent in 1983. On the other hand, WPR

for the Muslim women of the social group others remained at 11 per cent throughout the period of study. Further, among the Christians, WPR was the highest in the year 2011-12 for all the social groups (20 per cent for STs, 31 per cent for SCs and 26 per cent for general); in fact their rates of work force participation has increased for all the social groups during the post-reform period.

Who participates more in the labour force and the work force: Among the women of the Hindu households, both in the rural and urban areas, the rate of labour force and work force participation has been the highest for the STs followed by SC and the social group 'general' all through the period 1983 to 2011-12. In case of Muslims, the rate of labour force and work force participation for the rural females was the highest for SCs in the pre-reform period and for the STs in the post-reform period; whereas, in the urban areas, the LPR and WPR has been the highest for the SC women of the Muslim communities in both the years 1983 and 2011-12. On the other hand, these females belonging to the social group 'general' remained at the bottom in this regard (both in the rural and urban areas) throughout the post-reform period.

Among the Christians, both in rural and urban areas, the SC women participated in the labour force and work force of the economy in highest proportion during 1983-2012. However, these rates of labour force and work force participation for the women of the Christian households appeared to be the lowest for the social group 'general' in the rural areas and for the STs in the urban areas throughout the pre- and post reform periods.

Further, the SC/ST women of the religious communities- *Jains, Sikhs, Buddhists and Zoroastrians* (combined as 'others') recorded low rates of labour force and work force participation compared to the non-SC/STs, both in the rural and urban areas, all through the period 1983 to 2011-12.

Occupational Distribution: As far as the women dominated, i.e., 'feminine' industries, in principal and subsidiary status, is concerned, in the rural areas, agriculture topped the list in this regard for all the social groups within the different religious communities throughout the period 1983 to 2011-12. In the primary sector, the tribal women of the Hindu households consistently dominate crop and animal production, forestry, logging and related service activities and fishing both during the pre- and post-reform periods.

However, the ST/SC women of the remaining religious groups (i.e., Muslims, Christians, Jain, Buddhists, Sikhs and Zoroastrians) confine themselves only in crop and animal production across all the years. In addition to this, the manufacturing sector appeared to be feminine in nature for the two social groups- SC and general within the Muslim communities during the year 2011-12. Among the Muslims, the women of these two social groups dominate in the manufacturing of food products, beverages, and tobacco and textile items. Additionally, a good proportion of these Muslim women belonging to the social group general are engaged in the manufacture of luggage, handbags, saddler, footwear ; products of wood, cork, straw, chemical products, rubber and plastic products; items of glass, jewellery, sports; medical and dental instruments.

In the urban areas, the tribal women of the Hindu families are seen engaged in the cultivation of perennial and non-perennial crops, mixed farming, hunting, trapping and related service activities in maximum proportion throughout the period 1983 to 2011-12. Parallel to this, these ST women of the Hindu families also dominate the manufacturing of non-metallic products, textiles; services like laundry collection, beauty parlours and marriage bureaus; while SC women mainly work in private households as employers of domestic personnel. On the other hand, the Hindu women of the social group general in maximum proportion are performing jobs related to residential care activities like nursing, care for the elderly and disabled persons, orphans etc.

Among Muslims, the sectors which turned out to be feminine were Manufacturing (tobacco and wearing apparels), Construction and Community, Personal and Social services (CPSS) (beauty parlours, pet care services) for STs; CPSS (personal service activities) alone for SCs and Manufacturing (tobacco products and items of sports and jewellery) and CPSS (education services) for general in the year 2011-12. Further, among Christians, CPSS alone emerged as women dominated for all the social groups (the STs are mainly engaged in residential care activities, the SCs and women of the social group general are working in educational services) in the post-reform period.

Further, among the four religious groups- Jain, Sikh, Buddhist and Zoroastrian (renamed as others), it is seen that three sectors, agriculture, manufacturing and CPSS were feminine in nature for the social groups- SCs and general in the year 1983. Additionally, trade and transportation services were also seen to be dominated by the tribal women within these religious communities in 1983. However, the tribal women within these religious communities in maximum proportion were working in cafeterias, beverage serving activities; retail trade in specialised and non-specialised stores; maids, cooks; while the women belonging to the social group general dominate in activities like fashion designing, computer programming, interior decoration, graphic designing and photography during the year 2011-12.

Employment Quality: In the rural areas, the proportion of self-employed to total workers is seen to be the highest for the females of the two social groups – ST and general among all the religious communities throughout the period 1983 to 2011-12. However, the SC women within all the religious groups, barring the Muslims, are engaged in maximum proportion in low quality casual jobs both in the pre- and post-reform years. Nevertheless, the presence of these rural women in regular jobs has been the least, irrespective of their socio-religious identities, across all the years of study.

In the urban areas, among the two religious communities – Hindus and Muslims, the women belonging to the tribal groups are employed in casual jobs in maximum proportion both during the pre- and post-reform years. Contrary to this, the employment share of the SC women belonging to these religious communities in casual jobs declined in the post-reform period. In fact, a major proportion of these SC women are found employed in regular jobs during the post-reform year 2011-12. Parallel to this, the Hindu and Muslim

women belonging to the social group general are mostly own-account workers; while their presence in casual jobs has been the least all through the period 1983 to 2011-12. In addition to these, the incidence of regular employment has been the highest and that of casual employment is the lowest for the women across all the social groups among Christians, Jain, Sikh, Buddhists and Zoroastrians throughout the period of study.

Conclusion: The preceding analysis clearly indicated that the rate of female labour force and work force participation vary significantly across the ethnic and caste based identities within the different religious groups both during the pre- and post-reform periods. Among the Hindus, women from tribal groups have recorded the highest rate of work participation both in the rural and urban areas during 1983 to 2011-12. In case of Muslims, women's work participation has been the highest for the STs in the rural areas and for the SCs in the urban areas. Again, the SC women among Christians have participated in the workforce in maximum numbers during the period of study.

Again, in the urban areas, although women's work participation among the Muslims and Christians has been the highest for SCs yet the rate of participation for the Christian SCs have been much higher than that of the Muslims SCs in all the years. Thus, the rates of labour force and work force participation for the females have also varied across the religious communities within a social group over the years.

Also, the type of activities performed by the women workers of a social stratum in an industry which is feminine in nature across the various religious identities is also not uniform. As seen in the urban areas, Community, Social and Personal Services (CPSS) has been feminine in nature for the SCs both among the Muslims and Christians in the post-reform period. However, the Muslim women of the SC households are engaged in educational services in major per cent; while personal service activities is dominated by SC Christians during the post-reform years.

Further, the status of female employment in the rural areas has more or less remained the same across the social groups within the religious communities during 1983 to 2011-12. However, in case of urban areas, it has varied over the years. In fact, the variation is visible across the religious communities within a social group as well. Again, there goes a widely accepted view in the literature that "As compared to other workers, Muslim workers (especially women) are concentrated more in self-employed activities" (Basant, 2007; GOI, 2006). Our study has concluded precisely that the incidence of self-employment is highest only for those Muslim women who belong to the social group 'general' in all the years of study.

Thus, religious and social identity plays a vital role in determining the quantity and quality dimension of women's employment. In other words, the existing employment generating programs targeting the females must be reviewed and new policies must be adopted by taking into consideration the linkages borne by the caste and religious status of a person on their employment scenarios.

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