

Full Length Research Paper

Female work participation in the emerging labour market- Case study of Sarhali village of Tarn-Taran district

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The work participation scenario is changing in case of women workers due to changing living standards and growth of consumerism more and more women are joining the work force and opt for either jobs or self employment. Women are working because of gross economic necessity, to raise standard of living, to make use of their qualification, to pass their idle time or to earn their livelihood. This article takes into consideration three aspects of working women: their social characteristics, working characteristics and how work affects their livelihood and decision making power. This study has tried to examine the socio- economic conditions of the women workers. The primary data had been collected through questionnaire from 60 respondents of village Sarhali of Taran-Taran district of Punjab state. The main purpose of the study was to examine the socio-economic background of the women workers and to assess the empowerment of women workers through their economic independence.

Key words: Women workers, economic independence, decision making power, self employment

INTRODUCTION

Liberal economic policies, pursued by the government of India since 1991, were expected to help overcome, in the long run, the financial crisis facing the country. However, it was predicted that the likely effects of the policies on the labour market, in the short run, would be negative, almost devastating. The census of India reveal female work participation to be declining since 1921, both as a percentage of workers to total female population and as a percentage to total labour force. The percentage of female to total labour force decreased from 34.44 in 1911 to 31.53 in 1961 and further to 17.35 in 1971. Since 1970's the promotion of women into the workforce has been accompanied by ideologies that associate employment with female empowerment. Regardless of their ability to implement real changes, notions of female empowerment are now part of government vocabulary at national and state levels. Meanwhile, the percentage of female workers to total female population decreased from

33.73 to 27.96 and again to 11.87 respectively (ICSSR, 1988). The 1981 census showed a marginal improvement to 13.8% and further to 22.5% in 1991. The occupational structure of female work participation shows that about 80% of them are still engaged in primary sector (Economic survey, 1995) Indian women workers are heavily concentrated in this low productivity activity. In case of women workers, ever since India formally switched over to the new economic policies of globalization and structural adjustment (SAP), the academic community as well as activists in the women's movement has been particularly concerned about its likely impact on Indian women workers.

Globalization has and continues to have differential impacts on men and women (Basu, 1995). Since the mid 1980's India has pursued a policy of economic liberalization, which is a dramatic reversal of earlier policies of protecting industrial capital. It has been argued that privatization of public sector enterprises, reduction in public sector investment and lower government expenditure on poverty eradication programs have not served the interests of women.

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Table 1. Characteristics of sample units.

Age (years)				
Up to 25	25 - 35	35 - 45	45 and above	
35	10	9	6	
(58.33)	(16.67)	(15)	(10)	
Marital status				
Married	Unmarried	Widow/ Divorce		
30	26	4		
(50)	(43.33)	(6.67)		
No of children				
1 - 3	4 - 6	More than 7		
19	10	4		
(55.8)	(29.4)	(11.7)		
Educational status				
Illiterate	Below primary	Below middle	Below secondary	Secondary and above
15	10	15	15	5
25	16.6	25	25	8.3
Par/husb education				
Illiterate	Below primary	Below middle	Below secondary	Secondary and above
20	15	10	10	5
33.3	25	16.6	16.6	8.3
Working conditions				
Seasonal			Annual	
40			20	
66.6			33.4	

women workers due to changing living standards and growth of consumerism more and more women are joining the work force and opt for either jobs or self employment. Women are working because of gross economic necessity, to raise standard of living, to make use of their qualification, to pass their idle time or to earn their livelihood. This article takes into consideration three aspects of working women: their social characteristics, working characteristics and how work affects their livelihood and decision making power. The objectives of the study are:

1. To examine the socio-economic background of women workers;
2. To study about their living and working conditions;
3. To identify reasons for their becoming workers and;
4. To assess about the empowerment of women through economic independence.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this study it was tried to examine the socio- economic conditions of the women workers. The primary data had been collected through questionnaire from 60 respondents of village Sarhali of Taran-Taran district of Punjab state. This village was purposely selected because it falls in the backward part of the district. Respondents were visited personally to study the economic and

social life of women and to examine whether their economic status has improved through empowerment of women.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first part of our study is related to the socio-economic characteristics of these working women. Our results (Table 1) depicted that most of the working women that is, 59% of them fall in the age group of less than 25 years of age. The reason being that they are young women who are interested in doing work and feel less burden of their family so that they can manage to work. Further, half of them were reported to be married and 43% of them were unmarried. 56% of workers had up to 3 children in their respective families so it was said that majority of the respondents believe in small family norm. But we do observe cases (12%) where more than 7 children were there. Further, when asked about type of family, it was observed that maximum (67%) of the respondents live in nuclear families while 34% live in joint families. Education provides awareness to women about their rights and prepares them for diverse occupational jobs. If we include all the four categories that is of below primary (17%), primary but below middle (25%), middle but low secondary (25%) and secondary and above (5%) it revealed that large majority that is, 74% of the respondents were

Table 2. Characteristics of work.

Reasons for work			
Economic necessity	To be independent	To utilize idle time	Interested
35	10	5	10
58.33	16.66	8.33	16.66
Source of information			
Husband	Parents	Self efforts	Others
15	15	20	10
25	25	33.3	16.7
Vocational training			
Yes		no	
20		40	
33.3		66.7	
Nature of work			
Skilled	Unskilled	Semi-skilled	
40	5	15	
66.6	8.3	25	
Wage payment			
Time rate		Piece rate	
5		55	
8.3		91.6	
Period of Wage Payment			
Daily	Monthly	Weekly	
40	5	15	
66.6	8.3	25	
Conditions of work			
Skilled		Unskilled	
40		20	
66.6		33.3	
Problems faced			
Raw material problem		Lack of guidance	Any other
30		25	5
50		41.6	8.3

educated and only 25% of respondents were uneducated. Education of husbands/parents also play an important role as it acts as a source of motivation and awareness for children and here in our survey 67% of the respondent's guardians were educated.

As far as working conditions of these women workers are concerned, 67% of them work in seasonal jobs while 33% of them worked for whole year. Further, when asked about the reasons for taking up the work, it was found that 58% of women worked because of their financial problems, 17% of them like to be independent, 5% want to utilize their idle time. Thus, the major chunk of them reported that improvement in the economic position of their family induced them to work. Majority of the workers (33%) have got into work through their self efforts. Moreover, the information relating to the vocational training possessed by the respondents was also collected and it was found that about 67% have joined their work

without seeking any vocational training while 33% have gone through this process before joining a job. The classification was also made according to the nature of work of the respondents which was classified as skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled. It was observed that about 67% of the respondents were totally skilled, 25% of them were semi skilled and only 8% of them were unskilled in their work (Table 2).

The third part of our study was concerned about the indicators of empowerment of women (Table 3). When asked about the their spending of income, it was revealed that 42% of them contribute to family for day to day expenses while only 17% kept their earnings with themselves to meet their personal obligations. It was further noted that majority hat is, 59% of respondent's standard of living had reasonably improved after joining the work while 33% responded that their standard of living had drastically changed after joining work. When asked about

Table 3. Indicators of empowerment

Spending of income		
Contribute to Family	Keep themselves	
50	10	
83.34	16.66	
Change of standard of living		
Drastically changed	Same	Reasonably improved
20	5	35
33.3	8.34	58.3
Freedom in marriage decision		
Yes	No	Yes within caste
10	15	35
16.6	25	58.3
Freedom to spend time		
Yes	No	
35	25	
58.3	41.6	
Nature of job		
Boring	Interesting	
40	20	
66.6	33.4	

their husbands/fathers attitude towards their work, it was revealed by the majority (83%) that their attitude towards work was found to be affectionate and encouraging. It was stated that 59% of them had full freedom to spend their money and time with their friends while only 33% do not feel so. Further, 83% of women workers felt that working has enhanced their economic and social status and power in the family as well as in the society. They are participating more in the decision making of the family and are given more respect by other members of the family. This has not only enhanced their status but has also made them more confident persons and in the process they have been participating in the various activities of the family and of the village. This kind of change can go a long way in implementing the reform process through wider participation of women folk in implementation of various programmes. Many empirical studies have revealed that the contribution of women in the decentralized planning process have been negligible in the form of their non participatory approach in the village panchayats (where 33% women reservation has been made). Empowerment of women through economic independence will help the economy in enforcement of its various programs like that of population control, eradication of the malice of female feticide, improving the health status of women and their off springs etc.

The main purpose of the study was to examine the socio-economic background of the women workers and to assess the empowerment of women workers through their economic independence.

The main factors which were noted to be responsible

for women's work participation particularly in rural areas are:

1. The estimated population below the poverty line is much higher in rural areas. Inadequate incomes earned by the males often force women to join low paid, unskilled and low productivity occupations. In rural areas women's work participation is considered as necessity due to poverty.
2. The low level of female literacy is one of the major reasons for high rural female work participation rate in unskilled low paid rural activities.

Although, in the rural areas we find that women work out of necessity but still the employed women enjoy a higher status than unemployed women in all spheres. They feel through their work they participate relatively more in different family affairs and decision making process. As a result various changes have occurred in their standard of living and status. The participation of women in economic activities is necessary for the development of the country and also for creating self confidence, and the ability to think, act and live independently. By and large, economic independence of women is providing them more freedom and higher status which in turn leads to their empowerment. Today, given an opportunity, women are more than willing to seek new opportunities, accept tougher challenges and constantly strive to improve their surroundings. This need to prove themselves must be recognized by the government and other non-governmental organizations, and all efforts must be directed

towards sensitizing the society towards the needs of women workers for providing them healthy atmosphere to work, which in turn contributes towards the social and economic development of a country.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The position of women in society is the true index of its cultural and spiritual attainments. With the beginning of 20th century the women's movement in India had rapidly spread to every corner making definite efforts in the fields of education and health. Education can be used for empowering women. Now the literacy rate has also increased among women and the participation of women in economic activities, particularly outside the home has also increased.

Women can become role model to their children but she can do so only if she has her own place and identity in the family and society. A positive change in the attitudes of the oppressed women, belonging to a lower income

and status group in India can be brought about by giving education and empowering them. Strong evidence now exists to prove that emancipation of women is more successful and attainable through entrepreneurship.

It is only when the upliftment of a woman takes place that the women move forward, then the family moves, the village moves and the nation's economy moves. In the words of Swami Vivekananda we can conclude that "Country and Nation have never become great, nor will ever be in future... if you do not raise the women who are living embodiments of the divine mother. Don't think you have any other way to rise."

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