

UNDERSTANDING GENDER INEQUALITIES IN WAGES AND INCOMES IN INDIA

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This paper highlights the weak potential of economic growth and increasing women's economic participation towards eliminating gender inequalities in incomes and wages, unless supported by concerted efforts at altering attitudes towards women's roles and contribution that are harboured by different agents within the labour markets. The discrimination and biases against women witnessed in social spheres gets mirrored on to economic spaces not only through direct, legitimate routes but also via the resilience in perceptions and mindsets among the agents of the labour markets that reconfigure to retain elements of gender imbalances. The space for unbiased consideration and gender based comparison is not only constricted by data inadequacies but is nullified due to the perceptions derived from the patriarchal role stereotyping that precedes any deliberation on women's contribution to the economy, necessitating the recognition of these elements as precursors to such analysis on gender inequalities.

I. INTRODUCTION

The focus of this paper is on issues concerning gender disparities in incomes and wages in the context of Indian labour markets so as to examine the nature of prevalent discrimination and biases against women. While wage differentials are found across regions, occupations, sectors and so on, the inequalities across men and women workers differ since there is an element of discrimination involved in such variations. Consideration of wage inequalities in the context of Indian labour markets, wherein one half of the workforce is involved in self-employed activities and a majority are involved in informal, unorganised sector work, necessarily needs to go beyond simple monetised payments and wage calculations.

In order to examine gender dimensions within remunerations and income earnings in India, the context of gendered participation of female labour supplies in its entirety needs to be accounted for. The dimensions affecting pre-entry conditions that influence capabilities, human capital traits and labour supply characteristics; aspects of in-market discriminations and gender biases against women in terms of hiring, promotion, segregation, gender relations and remuneration; and factors influencing women's work time distribution among paid and unpaid activities, own and hired labour, extended SNA (System of National Accounts) activities of household maintenance, care-giving, socially derived, traditional roles and sexual division of labour that influences the different agents of the labour markets have to be explored to understand the nature of gender-based wage inequalities in India.

This paper highlights the multi-dimensional context of gender inequalities prevalent in Indian labour markets stemming from the socially derived structures, division of labour, sex segregation and labour market segmentation that provide the basis for propagation and perpetuation of wage and income inequalities, while examining the economic aspects to assess the credibility of oft-repeated justifications offered in lieu of these imbalances in wage earnings across men and women.

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Does educational attainment and human capital attributes differentiating labour supplies explain differential returns to workers, or are such variations an offshoot of superimposition of social status and valuation of work on to economic, labour market spheres? Have there been any major changes visible in the trends of female employment and what are the implications for their levels of vulnerability? Are the compulsions of poverty induced, survival oriented livelihood still operational? If so, can economic growth and women's increasing labour market participation propel wages upwards?

Wages and incomes in India have been rising over time; however, the gender inequalities have not been bridged (Jose, 1987; Dev, 2002; Maatta, 1998). Changes in women's workforce participation have influenced the remuneration and returns due to them; however the wage imbalances across men and women remain. An examination of the trends in the economy reflects the stubborn persistence of the structure of inequalities in the sphere of occupational concentration, where women continue to be concentrated at lower end jobs, thereby receiving lower wages. The discrimination and biases against women witnessed in social spheres gets mirrored on to economic spaces not only through direct, legitimate routes but also via the resilience in perceptions and mindsets among the agents of the labour markets that reconfigure to retain elements of gender imbalances. This paper highlights the weak potential of economic growth and increasing women's economic participation towards eliminating these inequalities, unless supported by concerted efforts at altering attitudes towards women's roles and contribution that are harboured by different agents within the labour markets.

The theoretical formulations/frameworks for explaining wage formation/determination within labour markets have proved to be inadequate, and posed many challenges for understanding the prevalence of wage differentials and inequalities (McCormick, 1969; Wootton, 1955; Jose, 1987; Remesh, 2000; Bhalla, 1992 among others). Section II of this paper briefly deals with the economic theories that relate to issues of wage determination. The unique characteristics of labour supply is the one pertaining to human beings as social as well as economic agents, whereby non-economic considerations are introduced, including non-monetary calculations that enter into the sale of labour services (Smith, 1937; Rottenberg, 1968 for a detailed exposition on these issues).

Factors influencing women's labour supply deployment, such as age, marital status, fertility, household or domestic responsibilities; resource and asset position, poverty levels; education, skill/training and so on are discussed in Section III. The actual labour market participation, sectoral distribution and job location of women within employment hierarchies will be presented in this section, since these aspects affect the disparities in incomes across working women and men.

The concluding Section IV is based on the discussions in the paper and highlights the gender based discrimination prevalent in wage compensation and earnings as being an outcome of attitudinal and perceptual notions reflected in the behaviour of various agents—employers, state, contractors and workers themselves. Unless these stereotypes are changed or women's position and status in society undergoes significant alteration, the wage shares and payments will continue to be imbalanced and unequal despite the legislative provisions such as Equal Remuneration Act. Any effort to alter these circumstances have to aim at addressing gender inequalities from a multi-dimensional perspective which accounts for changing perceptions and notions regarding women's roles and contribution prevalent among different agents of the labour markets, in addition to economic growth and enhancement of women's employment.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS : SCOPE AND INADEQUACIES

This section provides the theoretical frameworks available in the literature related to wages in brief to highlight their scope and inadequacies to explain observed wage behaviour and especially gender wage differentials in Indian labour markets. Different wage rates define job hierarchies, and the presence of varied labour use forms accommodates different wage systems and modes of payments. Multiple wage rates prevail simultaneously for different sectors, occupations and tasks within any local labour market, be it in rural villages or urban towns and cities. The organised, public sector, government jobs have a predetermined wage scale structure, and in the private sector organised jobs, payments are closely and loosely tied to these wage scales. In the village rural labour market context, the daily wage rates for casual labourers in agriculture are closely tied to the daily wages paid in non-agricultural activities.

Wages are paid as time rates, piece rates, fixed contracts for specific tasks, in cash or in kind or a combination of both. Labour with different human capital attributes are also paid same or similar wages, contesting the potential of labour supply capability traits as an explanation for wage differentials. Under these circumstances, gender differentials in wage payments, especially among workers with same levels of educational attainments and for undertaking similar jobs are a clear indication of discrimination against women due to non-economic considerations (Becker, 1957; Phelps, 1972; Stiglitz, 1973; Rubery, 1987).

Notionally set wage bands with upper and lower limits based on employers and employees considerations respectively defines the range within which actual wages are determined (see Hicks, 1932; Dobb, 1928; Fonseca, 1975; Hunter and Mulvey, 1981). The perfect competition models may be appropriate for explaining long run trends in wages and labour allocation, in as much as changes in the demand for and supply of labour are seen as determinants of wages and, in turn, changes in wage rates influence both labour demand and supply. However, they fail to account for the persistence of unemployment, and for understanding short run wage determination and labour allocation due to presence of multiple wage rates for different occupations, operations, and types of contracts. Extended to the context of labour market segmentation or where gender based division of labour locates women in certain specific occupations or tasks, differential wage payments defy easy explanation and challenge these theories (Craig *et al.*, 1985; Bardhan, 1985). The simultaneous presence of downward pressure on wages due to the availability of surplus labour and employers' attempt to avoid adverse selection that tends to push wage levels upwards makes it unclear whether wage rates ought to move upward or downward.

Wage determination is in fact a complex phenomenon which abounds in informal contracts and arrangements, peculiar to particular employment contexts (Binswanger and Rosenzweig eds., 1984; Dreze *et al.*, 1986; Fonseca, 1975; Rustagi, 1999). Varying degrees of power in the social, political and economic arena, segregation and segmentation, collusion among employers, and group formation or bargaining by labourers, directly or indirectly through their impact on the forces of supply and demand may exert the dominant influence on wage movements.

Among the theories of wage determination advanced in the literature are the efficiency wage, subsistence based wage and bargaining theories of wage. There are also other theoretical developments which bring in incentives, moral hazards and uncertainty to account for imperfections, in the latter case due to incomplete markets.

The efficiency wage hypothesis seeks to provide explanation for differential wage structures and the existence of involuntary unemployment, thereby indicating why employers

try to keep wages above the reservation wage (Stiglitz, 1976). The micro foundations of these models emphasise the link between wages and productivity. The arguments proposed have been based on nutrition; gift exchange and adverse selection (see Leibenstein, 1957; McCormick, 1969; Rodgers, 1975; Remesh, 2000).

Studies on Indian labour markets which seek to link wage rates within marginal and/or average productivities of labour, remain inadequate to explain the variations in wage rates across occupations as well as across regions (see Jose, 1989; Unni, 1988; Bhalla, 1992, 2000 among others).

The subsistence theory stresses determinants of real wages which pertain to certain physiological and societal norms such as biological needs, socially acceptable minimum wages, the concept of fair wages, historically determined notions about appropriate harvest shares and so on. Although these norms are themselves not strictly nor uniformly defined, the upshot is that all variants of the theory consider real wages to be determined by factors extraneous to labour market conditions, that is, other than the opportunity cost of time, supply and demand relations, and bargaining power (see Bardhan, 1984, Binswanger and Rosenzweig eds., 1984).

Bargaining theory portrays wage outcomes as dependent on the abilities of the negotiators or the powers of the parties involved. There are also theories which bring in incentives, where wage differentials serve to draw out the different abilities of labourers (Lazear, 1981) and moral hazard and uncertainty, where the complete set of markets required for first-best efficiency cannot be organised (Arnott and Stiglitz, 1985). These theories are developed as imperfect competition models to account for asymmetric information, uncertainty leading to barriers for contracting and problems of enforcement (Arrow, 1985; Kotowitz, 1987). They focus on risk sharing and income smoothening.

Incentive contracts are fundamentally built around the concept of trade-offs such as that between work and leisure. To forego leisure some compensation must be offered. Different types of contracts are visualised with their strengths and weaknesses and the participation in the labour market selects a set of institutions in the process of trading off between them. Typically such contracts are visualised in a context where sustained relationships between employees and employers are the norm. In the context where most workers do many different kinds of work involving many different employers within a relatively short span of time (Das, 2000; Hirway, 1999; Rustagi, 1999), the relevance of theories involving incentive contracts appears to be limited.

Moral hazard is defined as agents' action to maximise their own utility to the detriment of others, in a situation where they do not bear the full consequences of their action. These models are developed on the premise that markets are not as yet fully understood, especially the social responses to them, which is certainly the case for Indian labour markets.

In the presence of surplus labourers, it seems that employers ought to be able to exercise monopsonistic powers in local labour markets, yet wage rates exhibit downward rigidity. The efficiency wage models attribute wage cut resistance to employers. This, however, is contrary to what is found from field survey experiences. Dreze *et al.* (1986) among others typically attribute downward rigidity to labourers' behaviour. In fact, employees do not accept work for substandard wages for fear of initiating a downward wage spiral, which could be to the detriment of all labourers (Kannan, 1988). Moreover, workers of differing abilities, which are known to the employers, are paid the same wages.

The phenomenon of a uniform wage rate, observed in numerous research studies cannot be explained by resort to efficiency wage theory, nor is it consistent with bargaining theory or

incentive wage contracts. The imperfect competition theories applied to labour markets focus on collusion of the monopolistic power of employers in general. Employer's collusion is discussed in the context of preventing wages from rising. The failure of employers to collude successfully due to asymmetric incentives has been pointed out by Kandaswamy (1964), Kannan (1988), among others. Instances of the failure of explicit collusion reflect the conflict relations among employers which may rule out any implicit collusion (see Mattick, 1981; Binswanger and Rosenzweig eds., 1984).

These theoretical arguments available in the literature display inadequacies in their explicatory potentials to understand wage determination processes in the Indian context. Nevertheless, often some of these are extended to justify or explain gender wage differentials, such as women's labour productivity or efficiency levels being lower than that of men undertaking similar work, or that the physical/biological nutritional requirements for women being considered lower than that for men serve as a justification for relatively lower wage rates being assigned to women as compared to men (NCSEW, 1988; Papola and Sharma (eds.), 1999). This forms the basis for minimum wage calculations that display gender differentials, in addition to the notion that women are perceived as secondary workers or supplementary earners.

The assumption of gender neutrality in spheres of employment, remunerations and related calculations implicit in economic thinking being erroneous, the comparisons and assessments of gender inequalities remain inappropriate. Women being exceedingly employed in low productivity, low value tasks on the one hand, and the active choice of employers in hiring women for these tasks at times to prevent wage costs from increasing, on the other hand, dictate the gendered context of labour use in India.

An increase in labour demand for jobs predominantly undertaken by women ought to lead to increasing wages of women; instead the observed pattern is for jobs to switch from manual to mechanised production, stimulate substitution of women by more 'committed' and 'productive' workers, that is, male workers (Rubery, 1987; Unni and Rani, 2003). The coining of the term 'feminisation' of labour, especially in the post-liberalisation era since the 1980s when women's participation in export oriented industries showed remarkable increase came to be associated with a regressive form of employment, whereby their utilisation was found to be located in parts of the production chain which are the poorest paid (Ghosh, 2001).

The subordination of women and patriarchal mindsets as operative in the system of social organisation serves to reinforce the structure of wages in the productive spheres. Thus, increasing women's participation, the rising levels of education and skill content over time have not been able to eliminate the gender imbalances in wages and incomes in India.

III. DIMENSIONS OF WOMEN'S WORK AND GENDER INEQUALITIES

In order to understand or examine gender inequalities in wages and incomes, the context of women's labour market participation as compared to that of male workers and all the varied dimensions associated with it have to be considered. The difficulties associated with recognising women's contribution to economic activities on the one hand, and their participation in labour market activities on the other hand define the widespread spectrum and nature of women's work.

Factors determining women's labour supply are not adequately explained by the individual oriented work, effort, leisure or even wage remuneration based considerations. In fact, in most cases labour supply decisions especially for women need to be seen from the household point of view, since women have the additional responsibility as domestic care givers (Tinker ed.,

1990; Agrawal, 1993). Women's labour supply behaviour is distinct from that observed for male labour in terms of age of entry, inherent human capital attributes, marital status and social class position affecting their mobility in public spaces, fertility or reproduction and so on.

Despite the increasing work participation among women over time, far fewer women than men enter the labour market as workers and the age of entry among women is later than that noted for men. The reasons for such behaviour relate to the socially defined roles within the household and the gender division of labour. A substantial number of women enter the labour markets in their thirties, generally after completion of their reproductive roles of child bearing and rearing.

A part of the delay in age at entry into the labour market also relates to the educational pursuits among women as well as men (Sundaram, 2001). The labour force participation rates among men and women, both in rural and urban areas have registered a decline over 1993-94 to 1999-2000 (see Table 1). The circumstances under which women and men offer their labour services differ due to their socially defined roles within the household and the family's relative levels of emphasis upon human capital investments for boys and girls based on their future

Table 1
Age Specific Usual Status Labour Force Participation Rates and Worker Population Ratios

Age group	Rural male		Rural female		Urban male		Urban female	
	1993-94	1999-00	1993-94	1999-00	1993-94	1999-00	1993-94	1999-00
<i>Labour force participation rates</i>								
5-9	11	7	14	7	4	3	4	2
10-14	139	93	142	96	71	52	47	37
15-19	598	532	371	314	404	366	142	121
20-24	902	889	470	425	772	755	230	191
25-29	980	975	528	498	958	951	248	214
30-34	988	987	587	557	983	980	283	245
35-39	992	986	610	579	990	986	304	289
40-44	989	984	607	586	984	980	320	285
45-49	984	980	594	566	976	974	317	269
50-54	970	953	543	515	945	939	287	264
55-59	941	930	468	450	856	811	225	208
60+	699	640	241	218	443	402	114	94
All	561	540	331	302	542	542	164	147
<i>Worker population ratios</i>								
5-9	11	6	14	7	5	3	5	2
10-14	138	91	141	96	66	49	45	36
15-19	577	503	364	304	356	314	123	105
20-24	859	844	456	409	674	658	180	155
25-29	957	950	525	491	904	883	224	194
30-34	983	979	585	555	964	960	301	235
35-39	989	984	608	579	983	975	301	285
40-44	987	983	606	586	981	974	320	283
45-49	983	980	594	566	973	969	317	267
50-54	970	953	542	515	942	935	286	262
55-59	942	929	467	450	856	809	226	207
60+	699	639	241	218	442	402	113	94
All	553	531	328	299	521	518	155	139

Source: NSSO, different years.

expectations from them. Since boys are brought up with the expectation that they will grow to become 'breadearners' and employed adults, investment on their educational and training pursuits are considered essential, while discounting the same for girls who are viewed as future 'homemakers' rather than paid workers in the labour markets (PROBE, 1999; Tilak, 2002).

The educational levels of the labour force by sex reflect the high proportions of illiterate workers both in rural and urban areas. This continues to be the scenario in spite of the improvements noted over the years. The gap among male and female graduates and above category in urban areas is gradually shrinking. This positive outcome is reflected in direct beneficial increases in women's organised sector jobs even displacing men in these sectors. Except for this minuscule inversion, not much other change seems to be visible (Srivastava, 1999; Divakaran, 1996).

In the labour force, 17 per cent rural males and 43 per cent urban males are educated above secondary levels, while the corresponding female proportions are 5 per cent and 32 per cent respectively (NSS, 1999-2000). The proportion of illiterate labourers by sex reflects the high magnitude of gender disparity (see Table 2).

Table 2
Percentage Distribution of Labour Force by Educational Status

	1987-88		1993-94		1999-2000	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
<i>Rural</i>						
Illiterate	48.3	82.3	43.2	78.0	39.6	73.9
Literate but upto primary	29.6	12.0	28.2	14.2	27.4	15.7
Middle	11.6	3.2	13.9	4.4	16.0	5.8
Secondary	8.4	2.0	11.3	2.8	13.5	3.6
Graduate & above	2.1	0.4	2.8	0.6	3.4	1.0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Urban</i>						
Illiterate	19.6	51.8	17.8	45.9	15.9	41.2
Literate but upto primary	30.5	19.0	25.3	19.0	21.9	17.0
Middle	16.4	7.3	17.6	8.9	18.8	9.7
Secondary	21.8	12.3	24.7	14.0	26.4	15.7
Graduate & above	11.7	9.6	14.5	12.2	16.9	16.4
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note: Figures relate to usual status of individuals and population aged 15 years and above.

Source: NSSO, different years.

At higher educational levels, women are outperforming men (Rustagi, 2003) and yet the gender disparity in the educational status of the labourforce is more skewed as compared to the overall population due to the association with income status. Women belonging to relatively better-off households pursue higher education but may abstain from entering the labour force, whereas for the poor illiterate women there is no choice but to work on whatever terms and conditions. The comprehension regarding this vulnerability dimension provides the employers and contractors with opportunities to pay lower wages. The necessity to survive explains women's labour supply being characterised by low literacy, employed in low technology, manual, low-skill requiring jobs which are inevitably low paid.

Among educated and qualified women, not all seek employment. Of those who do, most of them enter the traditional stereotypical jobs such as teaching, nursing, administrative and clerical jobs or repetitive monotonous manual chores for which women are considered well-suited. The differentiation begins prior to entry into labour markets as women are prone to choose subjects which land them into such professions and courses which are 'women-oriented' (Kabeer, 1994; Tinker ed., 1990).

Pre-entry differentiation is visible from the subjects and professional courses women pursue, not so much due to their capabilities but more due to the socially accepted appropriateness of it. These compulsions affect the women and girls themselves, their parents, teachers, and other agents who have a role in their educational endeavours howsoever remote that may be. Vocational training instructors and policymakers often make provisions for girls to pursue the stereotypical skills that are influenced by their notions of what is 'meant' for women (Raju, 2004; Duraisamy and Duraisamy, 1999).

The social upbringing and environment influences girls into aspiring for certain stereotypical jobs, and even a few of them who are free of such encumbrances face constraints in pursuing employments viewed as being male-oriented (Dev, 2002). Shifts in such notions are visible albeit slow and gradual. Entry of women into activities such as drivers, mechanics, pilots, policewomen, security personnel and so on are some instances. The association of women with the 'domestic', 'private' spheres is also linked with fear for their physical security.

Table 3
Industry Distribution of Women's Organised Sector Employment

NIC code	Industry	Women's employment		% change 1991-1998
		1991	1998	
0	Agriculture, hunting, forestry & fishing	493.16	472.12	-4.3
1	Mining & quarrying	70.35	68.69	-2.4
2 & 3	Manufacturing	1039.89	1011.24	-2.8
4	Electricity, gas & water	44.09	44.66	+1.3
5	construction	67.79	76.07	+12.2
6	Wholesale and retail trade and restaurants & hotels	44.20	44.41	+0.5
7	Transport, storage & communication	172.61	177.99	+3.1
8	Financing, insurance, real estate and business services	225.87	232.57	+3.0
9	Community, social and personal services	2622.39	2687.36	+2.5
Total		4780.35	4815.11	+0.7

Note: In thousands as on March, 31.

Source: DGE&T (1999).

Vulnerability of women in the social arena extends to the premium laid on their chastity and security from violence and sexual harassment. The weaker position of women within gender relations in society transmits into work spheres as well, where male bosses exercise superiority over female subordinates. The difficulty in accepting women as superiors or bosses as it challenges the traditionally acceptable gender relations is often witnessed in the biased behaviour of decision makers and employers during recruitment, promotion and so on (Stromquist ed., 1998; Divakaran, 1996; Duraisamy and Duraisamy, 1998).

A few studies examine the potential and actual conduct of women as decision-makers and bosses to show no lacunae in leadership, execution of work and so on. The only parameter

Table 4
Average Wage/ Salary Earnings (Rs. Per Day) Received by Regular Wage/ Salaried Employees of Age 15-59 Years and Female to Male Wage Ratio by Broad Education Category (Rural-Urban) , 1999-2000

Education category	Rural			Urban		
	Male	Female	F/M ratio	Male	Female	F/M ratio
Not literate	71.23	40.32	0.57	87.63	51.83	0.59
Literate and upto middle	91.63	161.48	1.76	105.08	64.41	0.61
Secondary and higher secondary	148.23	126.09	0.85	168.16	145.73	0.87
Graduate and above	220.93	159.92	0.72	281.55	234.74	0.83
All	127.32	114.01	0.90	169.71	140.26	0.83

Source: NSS (1999-2000).

Table 5
Average Wage/ Salary Earnings (Rs. Per Day) Received by Regular Wage/ Salary Employees of Age 15-59 years by Sector (Industry) of Work and Sex in Rural and Urban Areas and Female Wage to Male Wage Ratio, 1999-2000

Sector/ Industry	Rural			Urban		
	Male	Female	F/M wage ratio	Male	Female	F/M wage ratio
Agriculture	70.12	49.29	0.70	154.08	64.54	0.42
Mining & quarrying	147.21	46.28	0.31	264.60	153.81	0.58
Manufacturing 2	87.86	34.44	0.39	103.00	54.89	0.53
Manufacturing 3	99.68	49.96	0.50	168.47	124.99	0.74
Electricity, gas & water	197.10	219.84	1.12	248.70	211.93	0.85
Construction	104.49	110.26	1.06	133.31	139.94	1.05
Trade	65.13	59.93	0.92	98.09	129.95	1.32
Transport & storage etc.	112.68	91.94	0.82	160.19	191.16	1.19
Financial services	160.99	92.79	0.58	262.41	272.72	1.04
Personal services	178.37	172.55	0.97	218.98	169.02	0.77
Private HHs with employed persons	72.93	32.92	0.45	72.99	35.03	0.48
Others	0.00	320.00		1001.51	295.00	0.29
All	127.32	114.01	0.90	169.71	140.26	0.83

Source: NSS (1999-2000).

which is identified as a deterrent is self-esteem. The psychological undermining of women themselves derived from their upbringing in a patriarchal set up affects their self-perception more than their potential (Agrawal and Rao, 2004).

Excessive concentration of women among the organised employment is in community, social and personal services and manufacturing (see Table 3). Even these are at the lower rungs of the job hierarchy implying lower incomes and relative statuses. While educational attainment ensures better wages for labourers, both men and women, across educational categories, the average daily wage/salary earnings calculations for regular employees of age 15-59 years display distinct gender wage gap with the wage/earnings of women being lower than that of men across all categories, except for rural women literates up to middle level education (see Table 4).

The wage calculations based on monetary payments of regular salaried employees are sensitive to the numbers falling in the sample under any category and hence may not be the best statistics unless further adjustments are made.

The sectoral average wage salaried earnings per day display gender discrimination against regular women employees, except for some categories (rural utilities and construction; and in urban areas construction, trade, transport and storage etc. and financial services) (see Table 5).

There are very few exercises undertaken to ascertain gender differentials based on macro data, since there are limitations in the availability of data that disallow comparison across men and women with similar traits. The data is available for broad categories which then calculate ratios or actual gaps to highlight wage differentials and gender disparities, with some scholars employing certain economic or statistical tools to estimate the inequalities (Glinskaya and Lokshin, 2004; Duraisamy and Duraisamy, 1995; Deshpande and Deshpande, 1999; Madheswaran and Shroff, 2000). All of these studies lend support to the persistence of gender inequalities in wages.

Table 6
Trends in Real Earnings of Rural Casual Labour by Gender and Activity (At 1993-94 Prices)

Activity	Males			Females		
	1993-94	1999-00	Growth	1993-94	1999-00	Growth
	(Rs.)	(Rs.)	(% p.a.)	(Rs.)	(Rs.)	(% p.a.)
Public works	24.65	30.89	3.83	18.52	24.87	5.04
Casual labour in agriculture	21.59	25.48	2.80	15.12	17.99	2.94
Casual labour in non-agriculture	30.15	37.49	3.70	17.46	23.49	5.07
Casual labour in all activities	23.18	28.65	3.59	15.33	18.51	3.19

Note: Adults = 15-59 years.

Source: Sundaram (2001).

The well acknowledged facts emphasised by these studies are as follows: the public sector pays better wage/salaries as compared to the private sector; women are unequally remunerated as compared to male counterparts; in the few industries where survey results have shown wages to be higher for women, further exploration reveals that this is due to longer years of work service, expertise, experience and so on (Mishra, 1999 and references cited therein). Irrespective of the type of activity and nature of employment (regular, casual or public works), gender differentials in real wages and earnings are witnessed (see Table 6).

Women spend a lot more time than men in economic activities that are not captured by conventional definitions and constitute the extended SNA activities (see Table 7). Nearly 20 per cent of their weekly time in the case of women is devoted to household maintenance and care giving activities, while the share of men's time is a miniscule 2 per cent.

Among the SNA activities too, the share of women's time spent on unpaid work is far higher than that of men's. Of the hours spent by women in economic activities under the SNA system, 51 per cent is spent on unpaid work that remains largely unrecognised and unremunerated. Men, who devote far higher number of hours per week on SNA activities—an average of 42 hours—spent one-third of this time on unpaid activities.

Since women's roles are defined to include domestic responsibilities, their labour market participation in sheer physical sense of the number of hours available to them to hire out labour supplies for paid work are limited by household work routines. Half of the women exclusively involved in domestic chores express their inability to participate in the labour markets, since there are no other persons in their households who can take up these activities. Nearly 36 per

Table 7
**Weekly Average Time (Hrs.) Spent on SNA, Extended SNA and Non-SNA
 Activities by Sex and by Sector**

	<i>SNA</i>	<i>Extended SNA</i>	<i>Non-SNA</i>	<i>Total</i>
Rural	32.72	18.40	116.89	168.01
Female	22.53	33.95	111.50	167.98
Male	42.31	3.74	121.98	168.03
Urban	25.77	19.26	123.03	168.06
Female	9.16	36.44	122.44	168.04
Male	41.06	3.44	123.47	167.97
Combined	30.75	18.69	118.62	168.06
Female	18.72	34.63	114.58	167.92
Male	41.96	3.65	122.42	168.03

Source: CSO (2001).

Table 8
**Number of Women Engaged in Household Duties Per 1000 Females
 (Usual Principal Status), All India**

<i>Age group</i>	<i>Rural</i>		<i>Urban</i>	
	<i>1999-00</i>	<i>1993-94</i>	<i>1999-00</i>	<i>1993-94</i>
0 – 14	66	99	38	51
15 – 29	565	592	589	601
30 – 44	547	565	761	755
45 – 59	550	562	716	711
60 & above	399	430	440	460
All	358	382	453	449

Source: NSS (1999-2000).

cent rural and 15 per cent urban women in 1999-2000 were engaged in household duties (see Table 8). The burden of these responsibilities reflect an increase over the 1990s for the 30 to 60 years urban females.

However, many of them expressed their willingness to undertake work within the household premises. Nearly 31 per cent urban and 26 per cent rural women who are involved in home-making exclusively are also keen on earning some additional income by utilising their labour supplies while undertaking the responsibilities bestowed upon them (NSS, 1999-2000). In a monetised context clearly women too recognise this need for income earning as a means to improve their economic status and its potential for their empowerment (Kalpagam, 1999).

The possibility of utilising their labour, however, becomes feasible in the circumstances where demand for homebased contractual labour exists. Instances of drawing out labour supplies wherever demand for it arises reflects the demand-driven nature of labour utilisation. Many of these contractual arrangements depend on male middlemen agents who wield the control and power in structuring the deals (Bose, 1996; Banerjee, 1999).

In rural agricultural labour activities, construction work or urban homebased manufacturing and certain services, the nature of work that involves women is commonly perceived to be either appropriate for them or something that they are adept at doing. Largely manual tasks, such that any individual, male or female can equally undertake to perform, over time define a pattern of labour utilisation. While in some cases women and even children are employed to lower labour costs, there are other instances of alterations in production processes

so as to include women's labour which is subsequently used to legitimise lower wages. Changes in labour utilisation forms, shift to contract based piece rated forms of labour use which minimise labour costs by cutting down hiring changes, worker's protection or security being completely or partly subsidised are some of the mechanisms adopted in general and for most women workers especially in the informal sector (Ghose, 2003; Kundu and Sharma ed., 2001).

These tendencies are noted so frequently, even among subcontracted trading and marketing channels, so as to form notions that women's entry into certain spheres have the downward spiralling effect, since they are soft targets and do not follow workers ethics, thereby underselling or undercutting. The dictates of market and price sensitiveness of consumers are less easily considered than accusations being laid upon women participants. One of the reasons for this stems from the notion that women are more vulnerable, less competitive and ambitious than men. These perceptions, both their existence and operation are difficult to ascertain or examine (except perhaps through indepth qualitative perception surveys or participatory research tools and techniques). However, instances within certain organisations of women's entrepreneurship, ambition, skill and expertise are displayed par excellence and difficult to contest (SEWA, WWF, other cooperatives and so on) (Gopalan, 2002; Antony, 2001).

It may be true that employers hire women and children for certain tasks so as to be able to pay lower wages, which would be unacceptable to male workers. The relatively higher vulnerability level of women, the social perception based notion regarding their lower productivity and efficiency that influences the women, the employers as well as other agents in the labour markets lend support to such conduct being successfully executed with little objection to the lower remuneration.

A bulk of women's labour (main+marginal) in India is involved in agricultural activities – nearly 72 per cent as per the 2001 census. The share of agricultural labourers constitutes 39 per cent among total female workers, while another 33 per cent are enumerated as cultivators. The employment of women in the primary activities is associated with poverty-induced compulsion, peaking of labour demand and sudden spurts which can lead to pushing wages upwards or certain specific manual, arduous tasks which women are perceived to be better at or historically overtime such tasks segregation and gender division of labour has become established (as in rice transplantation, weeding, tea leaf plucking in plantations; dehusking, decobbing, depodding of variety of crops as off-farm activities and so on).

The supply of women labour as also that of others is in response to the demand for labour. That is to say, the Indian labour market is predominantly demand driven. Given the surplus supplies of labour, for majority of tasks, the wage rates become secondary in as much as they are not the crucial factor drawing labour supplies into the market. While it is true that the economic compulsion pushes poor women to work, which implies working for wages, this however cannot be viewed as the factor drawing out their labour supplies (Papola, 1986; Vaidyanathan, 1980). The factors affecting or influencing women's labour supply are more often than not household decisions as opposed to individual choice.

The rise in women's economic participation associated with economic development displays diverse elements which cannot be explained via-media any straitjacketed economic theorisation. Apart from the low end vulnerable women workforce who are compelled to work for survival, there are many other categories of female labour supplies that are forthcoming at

different socio-economic levels. The shifts of manual work into mechanised operations, the changing aspirations and preferences such as office shop-oriented jobs being preferred to farm based or field related tasks even if the latter may be generating higher returns (as among Kerala's literate women), and relative statuses associated with occupations determine who opts for what kind of work (Kalpagam and Narayan, 2004).

The objective basis for comparisons of wage earnings across gender are disturbed by numerous elements pertaining to the nature of women's labour market participation and the stereotypical perceptions associated with women's work that tends to undermine and devalue their contribution to the economy. Under these circumstances it becomes difficult to identify whether attitudinal notions are determining inequitous participation of women labour or the nature of their work tends to perpetuate these biased perceptions. Since patriarchal influences and conventional gender stereotypes affect women's work participation as well as their labour supply attributes, locating the origins of gender inequalities and the perpetuation of these biases against women therein cannot be misplaced, however the slow dispersal of these phenomena in the presence of widespread changes only emphasises the resilience of these mindsets among the different agents within the labour markets.

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The increasing participation levels of women in the paid labour market activities is viewed as a positive outcome for improving women's status by bridging the hiatus in this crucial sphere of economic involvement. However, mere increases in participation remain inadequate in altering the gender inequalities unless these are supported by the nature of work they undertake being decent, lucrative, equally remunerative and secure. If illiterate women are crowding into unskilled, manual labour requiring jobs, that are low paying and hazardous to their health and safety, such a situation can barely be lauded or appreciated.

Yet, if more women's labour supplies are being deployed and there exists a demand for their labour, it is of interest to consider the circumstances leading towards this employment. To some extent these may be due to heightening desperation and poverty induced compulsion that women are forced to enter paid labour markets, while at another end of the spectrum these may be outcomes of better educational attainments providing women with the opportunity to undertake jobs hitherto not accessible.

The consideration of women's participation in paid spheres of the labour market differs from that of males due to the stereotypical traditional notion that women's roles are limited to the private, domestic spheres. Since this kind of patriarchal role stereotyping precedes any deliberation on women's contribution to the economy, the space for unbiased consideration and gender based comparison becomes non-existent. A similar constriction or lack of viable options to assess and compare women's efficiency or productivity with that of their male counterparts within employed spheres limits an unbiased assessment of wage inequalities in India. This is further delimited by lack of adequate information to make such wage and income comparisons across equals feasible.

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