CHAPTER - 10

CONCLUSION

10.1 Revisiting Findings

Main finding of the thesis is that the participation of women in labour force varies across economic classes, social groups, religions, regions and the rural urban divide. Labour force participation is the outcome of both the supply-side factors and the demand for labour. Factors determining labour supply decisions of women are different from those of men. Interconnectedness of female employment with other social parameters which are outside the realm of the standard labour market analysis gets highlighted in the dissertation. This is responsible for creating puzzling trends and patterns in employment data. It is also responsible for the gender gap in labour force and workforce levels as seen in Chapter 5 of the thesis. Social and religious background is an important determinant of labour market participation for both men and women. Relative influence of social and religious background is much higher for females (Neetha, 2013), which is evident in Chapters 7, 8 and 9. The differences in male and female participation rates, controlling for demographic variables, skill and education is partly explained by this peculiarity of female employment. In fact, women belonging to different social, cultural and religious backgrounds exhibit varying participation rates in the activity statuses enumerated by NSS data. This fact has been corroborated in Chapter 7 of the thesis where econometric analyses have revealed that women belonging to different socio-economic and socio-religious groups have varying participation rates in the workforce. Large anecdotal evidence suggests that female behaviour in labour market is dramatically affected by their and their household’s religious beliefs (Pastore and Tenaglia, 2013), a fact which gets highlighted clearly in chapter 7. Results of this chapter depict that socio-religious groups are significant determining factors for workforce participation.

Multiple layers of the society are referred to as ‘Social Stratification’. The thesis has presented an empirical picture of labour market inequalities for women, within the framework of such overlapping stratification in rural India. Analysis is based on secondary data, where the emphasis is not only on measurement of quantitative variables, but also on the interactions between various qualitative, socio-economic and socio-cultural dimensions which have an implication on female participation in the labour force.
Women’s position has historically been and continues to be disadvantageous. A lot of research has been done on gender inequalities which mention that women typically have worse jobs, get less pay and are likely to be poorer. Empirical research in the area of gender inequalities in employment clearly demonstrate that major continuities of inequality still confront women in the labour market. This fact is corroborated in chapters 4 and 5. Looking at the NSS macro data for the years 2004-05 and 2011-12, from the EUS reports, it is noticed that the labour force and workforce levels of women are lower than men. Urban areas record a lower participation than rural areas. In rural areas participation is more prevalent in subsidiary status implying the transient nature of work which women perform. There is prevalence of a significant gap in the participation levels in all the states and union territories of India, thus emphasising the universality of the problem.

Motivation to take up such a study for doctoral work was provided by recent research which reveals a shift of emphasis towards issues of diversity, complexity and contextual specificities in the reshaping of gender relations in employment within the hierarchies of class, caste, social and religious groups. Consequently, Chapter 6 elucidates the factors which play an important role in female labour supply decisions in the 68th round, 2011-12. Such an exercise has been performed within the stratification of the economic class. Separate sub group regressions have been run for each land-ownership class to verify if the deciding factors are different for each of the class. What has also been endeavoured is to check if there is a uni dimensionality in these factors. The hypothesis has been nullified and results have established the significant role of interplay of social, cultural and demographic factors. For each land owning class it seen that a host of varying factors are significant in determining the probability of participation for the women workers. So the importance of intersectionality has been established in this part of the research.

The thesis has provided a glimpse of the female labour supply process as chronicled in the employment-unemployment surveys of the National Sample Survey Office. The decline observed in rural female labour force participation in India, during the 68th round, 2011-12, is due to a complex mix of several forces working simultaneously. While the focus of studies on female employment is on ‘education effect’ and ‘income effect’, findings in this thesis reveal that the interplay of economic, social, cultural and demographic factors has forced women to stay out of the labour force. Their restricted mobility and social constraints hinder the labour supply process and thus cause a drop in labour force participation.
In chapter 7 where Participation under Overlap of class, caste and religion (community identity) has been explored, it is observed that:

- There is no inverse relationship between landownership and female work participation rate, as seen clearly from the micro results when only landownership classes are considered, including ‘unpaid work’ done by female workers. Revisiting the ‘income effect’ as a cause for the falling participation rates of female labour force participation, the hypothesis in this chapter was, ‘an increase in the land owned by the household would imply a better economic position and hence would cause a withdrawal of female labour force participation’. But the hypothesis does not hold when ‘unpaid work in own farms and enterprises’ is included in the data set. This result gets reversed and an inverse relation is seen to exist between the two variables when ‘unpaid work’ is not taken into consideration.

- Thus the socio-economic factor is not the sole important determinant in labour supply decisions of female workers. There is an interaction of the factors at play. In this situation the interaction is not between economic class, caste and religion; rather it is between the class and the type of work performed by the women. The effect of belonging to a particular economic class is manifesting itself in the kind of work that the women does. The importance of the other social variables do not play an important role.

- Again one mentionable fact is that, this situation is not the same in the 61st round, 2004-05 and the 68th round, 2011-12. The thesis does not strive to make a comparative analysis of both the rounds, the interest is only in seeing the emergent gender relations emerging from the employment process. So, in 61st round, 2004-05, it is observed that the interplay is between economic and social factors and type of work is irrelevant. What needs to highlighted from these two results is that female labour supply decisions are a by-product of myriad intersecting variables which need to be studied in greater detail.

As a natural consequence of this observation the next vision was to investigate if the employment pattern of women workers, as exhibited in rural India, re-enforces the already existing gender inequality. A major gap in the existing literature is the limited attention paid to the representation of class (as proxied by Landownership) and of Caste. Class

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90 Reason has been cited before
considerations have been represented in the form of technological change in agricultural methods or in the form of income classes of the household as represented by monthly per capita expenditure. But the idea that land ownership is a form of wealth which decides the economic class of the household has yet to be exploited in studies. Land holding size (from NSS) has been used as one of the many determinants of female labour force participation in studies before but the stratification of social hierarchy in terms of land ownership has been attempted few and far between.

In an attempt to close research gaps, effort has been made to look beyond the quantitative aspects of female participation and focus on the relationships being created in the process of female employment. Chapters 8 and 9 serve the purpose in proving the fact that women are relegated to the lower paid and unpaid work, mostly within the confines of the household. There is a greater propensity towards participation in self-employment and casual work among women workers. The most disappointing fact is that this is more prevalent among women belonging to affluent classes. The patriarchal set up of the society as well the varying levels of economic development of the different regions may be responsible for such a situation. Women from minority social groups like Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are seen to be more likely to take part in paid work. Such a situation has two implications:

(i) casualization of female labour and

(ii) distress push.

Such castes generally being disadvantaged in terms of education and economic welfare, an increase in the number of women from their households doing paid work, highlights the fact that most of such work is in the informal sector. Various studies of the ILO and World Bank have reported the increased representation of women in such sectors where the nature of work is highly precarious. In the Indian case, one implication of the dominance of the self-employed work for women, as a category, as observed in Chapter 8, is that the household is much more likely to be a site of production and consumption, with women’s unpaid labour spanning a wide range: from care work to managerial work such as the supervision of farm labour.

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91 A study by Gita Sen and Chiranjib Sen (1985) has studied the female employment pattern with respect to unpaid work within the land holding sizes of the households.
The overlap or intersectionality validates the fact that there is multi-dimensionality in the participatory process in female employment. Chapter 9 mentions that the combination of evidence based on land-ownership and socio-religious groups provides support to the hypothesis that the composition of female employment is influenced by the social hierarchies woven around gender. It leads to a substitution by women of ‘economic activities’ in and around the home in place of work done outside the home.

Relegation of women to unpaid work is a major issue. Regional differences in the female work pattern are significant. Social and cultural factors remain the principal driving factors of keeping women outside the labour force and in crowding them into activities which are non-remunerative but socially acceptable. Beyond analysing labour force participation, it is also important to look at the nature of women’s employment as attempted in Chapters 8 and 9.

Women’s work force participation is conditioned mainly by the economic need of her household. Whether a woman is working may be driven, on the one hand, by poverty (as evident among the Schedule Castes and Schedule Tribes in the data set under analysis) and, on the other, by demographic factors like age (women of older age cohort, 30-59 years, are seen to be working more), marital status (divorced, separated and in certain cases widowed women are seen to have maximum participation), women’s increasing educational attainment (education level of the female worker has a significant positive impact on labour force participation. An increase in the education level of the woman causes a higher probability of labour force participation) and the opportunities to work (by providing reliable care facilities; as the dependency level of the household causes a lower probability of participation for women). From the research in this thesis it is evident that such participation alone cannot improve women’s status in society. They are silent workers who are struggling to balance their paid as well as unpaid work both within and outside the work force. If the society had to pay for the whole domestic, extended domestic work and the free labour provided by women in the agricultural land of the rural families, then their real worth could have been realized.

The overall picture that emerges is one of greater disadvantage for women workers in general and those belonging to rural areas, thus re-in forcing gender inequality.

Another important aspect to be noted is that, textbook labour supply model assumes that labour markets are competitive. However, it is quite plausible that labour markets do not function competitively in developing countries like India, especially for women (Mammen and Paxson, 2000) and;
- There may be costs associated with women working outside the family farm or non-farm family enterprise.

- There may be social norms and laws restricting women from working outside the home or from accepting paid employment, especially in manual jobs.

- The amount of land and other productive assets owned by her family and the numbers and skills of family members who are available to work on a family enterprise will influence her labour supply decisions.

- As men move out of agriculture and into paid employment as a result of migration and increased pace of urbanisation, family farms and enterprises are left for women workers to take care. This can be an explanatory factor behind their increasing participation in self-employment.

It is essential that policy makers move beyond the standard labour supply models and the set determinants of labour-force participation rates for women. It should be of more concern that women are able to access better quality of work and take advantage of the new labour market opportunities. Policy initiatives should be undertaken for reducing inequality in the labour market which will in turn help in enhancing the generation of human capital and empowering women’s participation in household-decision making process. Among the various mechanisms of reducing the inequality, one very important form is ‘increased and easy access to institutional credit’ and ‘property rights’ to women which can result in women’s empowerment in decision making process (Agarwal, 1994). It is essential to identify and isolate the complexities and diversities to meaningfully understand the world of women’s work (Agarwal, 1994) and to delineate the relations emerging thereof.

**10.2 Future Research Ideas**

The thesis is a study of female employment process and the gender relations emerging within the overlap of economic class, caste and religion in rural India. It is established that the relationship between evolving socio-economic and demographic factors and how women participate in the world of work is multifaceted. The inter relationship of factors determining female participation is the most important aspect in ascertaining the gender relations evolving around their employment. At the micro level the disaggregation shows a very different scenario than the macro level (thus the variance in results of this study with the published facts, especially about 61st round, 2004-05). An extension of this study would be to examine
the effect of further disaggregation which can be made possible by the methods of intersectionality. As the disaggregation has been done by economic class (land ownership classes) and type of work (paid and unpaid work) in the present dissertation, similarly disaggregation can be done by education levels, MPCE (Monthly Per Capita Expenditure) levels (which will be another manifestation of economic class). The overlap of education and economic class within thin the socio-religious groups can create an overlap within another. This analysis will capture the complete pluralism of the myriad factors affecting female supply and the relations being created in the process. Econometric methods of estimating the impact of intersectionality as improvised by Sen et al. (2009), can be used for a better analysis as it enables the study of the individuals who are in the middle of the spectrum. Present methods (logistic analysis) enables one to analyse the situation of the individuals who are at the extreme ends of the data set.

All the opinions and the suggestions in the entire dissertation are the author’s own and the author remains fully responsible for them.