CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION
1.1 Introduction

In an ever changing world changes in almost all aspects of life are taking place, from the personal to the economic front. One constant and outstanding feature however continues to be the disparities that exist within and amongst countries. This is propelling policy makers and researchers alike to find ways and means and to undertake measures in favour of growth and development. At the outset, it must be pointed out that any policy aimed at growth and development would not be possible without adequate and equal attention being paid to all members of the society. This point assumes importance due to the fact that in developing countries gender disparities continue to permeate such societies. The disparities encompass diverse aspects of the everyday lives of people. As we shall see in the subsequent chapters disparities among men and women continues to persist, more so in the case of India.

While accepting that women are a discriminated lot, especially in developing countries, the United Nations declared the decade 1975 to 1985 as the ‘Decade of Women’. The declaration aimed at uplifting the status of women and abolishing discriminatory treatment against them (UN, 1982). Prior to this, with the creation of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in 1919, the principles of promoting the status, education, development and employment of women and their integration into the economic and civic life of the country was embodied. Numerous policy declarations were subsequently adopted to alleviate their position and protection from discrimination especially in developing countries as they lagged behind in respect of employment, poverty, education, training and status. It was also pointed out that special measures are
required to stimulate the equal access of women and their integration into the work force (ILO, 1980).

These initiatives and guidelines assume importance against the backdrop of a large number of countries becoming economically vibrant and a greater integration of not just individuals but also workers is increasingly witnessed in this age and time. It is imperative, however, that we examine the historical trend in terms of the role played by women to give us an insight into the role that they could play in the future growth and development of not just their individual and family life but also of their country.

1.2 Nature of Work of Women

From the early stages of civilization to modern times, women have been playing a much diversified role and had undergone much change since then, evolving over time to suit the prevailing circumstances.

Going back prior to the pre-industrial societies, women’s role and their contribution was primarily limited to toiling the fields to supplement the much needed labour and home-based activities. Women’s labour in the fields was largely ancillary to their household work (Davies, 1975). Their main responsibilities were largely concentrated on household chores like cooking, cleaning and caring for the young, the old and the infirm. Hence their status was no more than subservient (Blau and Ferber, 1986).

Industrialization brought about a number of changes in the work roles of women. It represented the big female labour force, able to perform work outside the house (Butschek, 2006). The domestic production unit disappeared and home and paid work
became physically separate (Lown, 1990). This shift from home to work in factory and offices also changed the dimension of work of women. Gender roles became more pronounced as men and women performed different economic roles and tasks. Women in the initial stages of industrialization exhibited lower participation in the workforce, owing to factors as low skill and jobs being technical in nature (Goodman and Honeyman, 1991).

With continued industrialization and progressive modernization more changes were ushered in women’s work roles in the labour market. Coupled with the increased level of educational attainment and skill acquisition, women became more actively involved in paid work leading to their increased participation in the labour force (Blau and Ferber, 1986). The expansion of the service sector and the declining fertility levels also made it possible for women to work (Fukuda, 2006).

In the case of developing countries, however, women roles remained largely limited to agricultural and home-based activities and have not evolved much over the years. Right from their childhood days women were fed on the idea that their place was home and continues to remain so (Shanmugasundaram, 1993).

In India, for instance, Seth (2001) noted that traditionally Indian women appeared to have had a dependency syndrome as far as employment and participation in paid employment was concerned. The Indian society being largely and strongly tied to traditional roots, women’s roles was naturally limited. Taking care of the family and other domestic duties was largely viewed as the domain of women and activities outside the home were limited. While men undertook the major part of the work and were the
primary bread winners, women undertook only subsidiary work. This did not give them enough flexibility to make a higher income and improve their economic condition. With respect to her status as a wife there was little control over the family income as the major decision for family expenditure depended on the husband—the income earner of the family (Ramu, 1989).

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The Human Development Report (UNDP, 1995) stressed on investing in women's capabilities and empowering them as a way to contribute towards economic growth and overall development. Thus as human development takes centre stage; gender equality and gender equity are emerging as major challenges in today’s context. At the same time a greater need for integration of women into development is also emphasized. The need therefore would be to raise the status of women to enable them to participate effectively and improve their decision-making power, both at home and outside.

An assessment of the status of women would be tantamount to an analysis of the roles that they play. Women’s work participation and occupational distribution have been taken as indicators to assess the impact of economic development (Tansel, 2002). The presumed importance of women’s participation in the work force is mainly due to their ability to bridge the supply gap in employment especially in a growing economy and narrowing the gender gap. The ILO (1980) also emphasized on the role of women workers as indispensable agents for the achievement of economic and social development.
Women have never been a privileged lot, especially in the developing and underdeveloped world (Beneria, 1981; Klasen, 2002; Klasen and Wink, 2003; Boserup, 2008). They have not been treated at par with men in almost all aspects of living - from education to participation in decision making at home or outside. This naturally limits their opportunities to serve as positive agents of change as they are bounded by familial and societal roles and pressures. Gender discrimination continues to permeate such societies further narrowing the favourable chances for women.

Economic growth and the development process require a strong commitment from both government and society at large. Development strategies therefore need to address these core issues relating to overall improvement in the position of women in the society. Recognition of men and women as agents of change for the progress of the country requires attention of immediate urgency. Provision of equal rights and opportunities, as well as access to resources to all sections of women becomes an essential aspect of the development process.

India has around 48 million women with just 38 per cent of them recorded as workers (Census, 2001); there is still a lot that could be expected out of them. Being a developing country, however many issues relating to the promotion and improvement in the lives and status of women in terms of their work participation does not appear to have seen much breakthrough. Work participation rate (WPR) is not just an input but also an output of the development process. The incorporation of women into the work force represents a challenge for the attainment and fulfillment of the goals of
contemporary welfare states not only from a quantitative but also a qualitative point of view.

In view of the importance of women’s work participation in contributing and promoting overall development, there is scope to examine this issue in the Indian context, which we propose to carry out in this study. This study is an attempt to examine the trends of women work participation in India for the period 1983 to 2004-05 and the determinants thereof.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of our study are listed as follows:

i. To examine the disparities in the work participation rates among men and women in the rural and urban areas of India

ii. To examine the variations in the disparities in the work participation rates among women across states in India

iii. To examine the disparities in the work participation rates of women by different social and religious groups, and

iv. To identify the determinants of the participation rates of women at various levels of disaggregation.

The above objectives would be analysed using data from secondary sources, covering a period of twenty (20) years i.e., from 1983 to 2005.
1.5 Hypotheses of the Study

We propose to test the following hypotheses:

i. With higher educational attainment by women, there will be an increase in the participation rates of women in the work force.

ii. Participation of women in the work force is unaffected by various kinds of segmentations in the labour market such as religion or caste.

1.6 Outline of the Study

In this section we provide a brief structure of the organization of this dissertation. The dissertation comprise of six chapters. Starting with the present chapter, it introduces the objective of our study as well as a statement of the problem that we intend to investigate into. It also details the hypotheses related to the objectives of study.

Chapter 2 provides a detailed account of the existing literature related to our area of study. In this chapter an attempt has been made to review the contribution of authors and researchers on the various factors that impact the participation of women in the labour force in different countries. It also reviews the linkages between economic development and female labour participation. Further the role of education and its subsequent impact on the participation rate of women workers is also reviewed. A brief review is also made on the role and impact of demographic factors, such as age and marital status. Finally the relation between women participation in the work force and their social and religious characteristics is highlighted.

Chapter 3 deals with the data and methodological issues related to the present study. This chapter discusses the secondary sources of data that are used in the study. It
also spells out the methodology that is undertaken to carry out the study. A profile of the area of study is also highlighted in this chapter.

Chapter 4 gives an account of the profile of women workers in India in terms of the magnitude and extent of WPR in India by gender and place of residence. Consequently, it looks at the distribution of women workers and the variation in the participation rates of women according to education, age, marital status and their social and religious identity.

Chapter 5 evaluates the determinants of women work participation using the probit analysis. The probit analysis is carried out using STATA (8).

Lastly, Chapter 6 summarizes the main findings as well as the limitations of the study. It also provides the policy implications and the suggestions emerging out of the study.