CHAPTER - I

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WOMEN AND ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

'One of the vital developments in recent decades is the growing awareness about the status of women.' The role played by women in all important social spheres is widely acclaimed both by the planners and social scientists. Their contributions in the economic, social and other vital areas of national life have been recognised as important organs leading on to the path of comprehensive development. 'Women's traditionally defined, subordinate, passive and modest roles have been challenged and the discrimination in terms of life opportunities, questioned. 'In essence, woman is said to share the development partnership with man in all walks of life.'

'Women's work has been in controversy in recent years both in terms of its nature and content.' In most societies what counts as work depends not only on the nature of the task completed but also on who actually
does the work. Such a normative structure forms the basis for man's rationale of why traditionally housewives have been excluded from the category of workers although they contribute over 60 hours of work on an average in a week in most societies, both rich and poor.

Women's work is typically characterised by some vital features. These features are important in studying the impact of women's work on their development vis-a-vis that of society. Such features in general terms are:

i. They perform a large variety of tasks during a single day

ii. They work for a longer period in comparison with their male counterparts both at home and in the workplace

iii. They also work for longer hours than their female counterparts who do not work outside the home, and

iv. They have only a very modest economic value attached to their output at home as well as at the workplace. Infact, from the point of view of the
Marxist Economics women globally function for the 'reproduction and servicing' of the work force and in that they subsidise capitalism which has survived mainly due to this unpaid services of "Breeder-Feeder" role.¹

An important point to be noted in this regard is that when women enter into the labour force, their work is not very different from their traditional household work. They tend to get concentrated into work portions as an extension of their 'Breeder-Feeder' roles. Nurses, teachers, typists, domestic servants, baby sitters, servants, and the like serve as typical instances. These and such other jobs not only pay them less but also make them relatively less mobile in terms of geographic movements and occupational climbings. In other words, not only are women found in low-paid, and low status jobs, but they are also more likely to remain there. Mobility of women in the job market in most

cases is lateral; for instance, women may move from domestic service, street selling or helping men in plantation or on the construction site but rarely from an unskilled job to a skilled, professional job.

It has been observed by scholars that women in general are often caught in a vicious cycle because of their economic dependence on men and their lack of contact with the work world; and their being tied down to the house restricts them, to a great extent from the kind of decisions over which they can claim expertise and, ultimately, control. For instance, in the case of Indian women workers, studies by Hate.¹ and others found that the main problem of Indian women workers is their economic dependence and the role-conflict stemming from their dual responsibilities.

It has been established by studies that women who work outside the home have relatively greater physical mobility and flexibility; however, as workers, women

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are enforced with social controls that are much stricter than those prescribed for men. Alternatively, it also has been accepted that labour force participation in itself does not significantly influence women's status at home or in the fields as long as women's claims over resources continue to be appropriated by their men. In such a situation, their hopes for equality and equal opportunity remain a long shot. Putting it succinctly, it is argued that women's economic subordination is multifaceted and, therefore, requires simultaneous analyses on many fronts in relation to home making and employment.

CHANGING NATURE OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN ECONOMY

Women form a large part of the reserved army of labour in the unorganised sector. This has a great relevance over the total production system and the resultant social relations in the Indian context. Coupled with this, the low and inferior status of women's social, structural and process related aspects of our society make the problem relevant today.
Some theorists argue that men have bounded women in their institution of subjugation in various aspects, although this discrimination is by no means universal, nor inevitable. Hartmann,¹ for example, in her article links the development of patriarchy with the development of capitalism. She forwards the argument that working class men have been bought by the capitalists through the institutional system of job segregation. In other words, through this institution men place women in a low level position and thus satisfy the middle class value of patriarchy. This furthers the argument that on lines with class, caste and racial stratification systems, gender becomes an important form of stratification and subjugation.

The interesting counter question that has been asked in this context since decades is whether women themselves are prejudiced against other women. Although

there seems to be a divided opinion on this research question, some studies have indicated acceptance of such hypothesis. For example, Philip in his studies found that women tend to rate the same work as lower in quality when it is ostensibly completed by a female than appeared to have been completed by a male. However, this can be taken as an indication of the power of socialisation rather than anything else. Further, the research is far from being conclusive in this regard because studies in this area have not succeeded in establishing proofs for generalisation and general validation.

Economic independence at home and in society is often proposed as pivotal for women's upliftment, and employment is considered important in this regard. One of the limitations of women's access to many occupational categories in the organised sector is their exclusion from network of information and recruitment to those occupations for a variety of reasons. And once

women attain a high occupational status, they are likely to run into institutional problems including a degree of ambiguity in their reward for achievement. That is, often women are not rewarded in proportion to their achievement, and their rewards may be considered as validating the role that clashes with their other roles.

Women still do most of the housework. Indeed according to some social scientists like Oakley, A.¹ household work has become an ideology by itself to exploit free female labour. This ideology is accepted in the global market economy because through her household work woman looks after man virtually free of charge to the employer. Contrastingly, she receives the least care in terms of health and maintenance, including her food intake, low in calories as well as nutrients.

Historically, women always worked, but most often without wage. Until recently most of women's labour was not only unpaid but also was considered low in esteem.

For instance, the wife works for her husband and children for a good part of the day without any monetary benefits or other remuneration. Worse still, this work does not even get its recognition due. The common argument based on an equally commonsensical assumption that women are inferior biologically and otherwise to men is a testimony to the power of culturally women and unconsciously rooted ideology of man's dominance. Further, women's earnings and the property they own are often regarded as the property of their men. The assumption here again is that man is the bread-winner who has the absolute right over movable and immovable property of the family.

As noted earlier, one such ideology used as an effective tool to control woman and her work and her earnings is patriarchy. This idea in general simply means the rule by the father, or father figure. This ideology is effectively used to check women's upward social mobility and an egalitarian society. Such an ideology becomes specially relevant when woman's work and work-related aspects are under research investigation.
Women's work may be examined in two contrasting perspectives. The first one relates to participation in traditionally defined family set-up with domestic duty as the main focus. Centering itself around the members of the family the second kind of work concentrates essentially on economically gainful, person-centered work. These two work contexts bring forth two distinctive roles namely that of a housewife and an employee, the former rooted in traditional values to achieve group goals whereas the latter concentrating on personality development and benefits at the individual level. In the changing Indian social context women within these two milieu are on a slippery ground. The conflict of roles and value generalisations become apparent here. Any research on female labour participation in India must take cognizance of this sociological fact and the resultant sociological insights.

The relationship of women to work as a social institution and to economy as a part of total structure is a special problem area while considering the development of women in India. This is so because a
good deal of women's work is invisible in our society and its exact nature and quantity are not measured in terms of its real value. Moreover, valuation of women's work is generally subjected to influences and forces which are different from the valuation of similar and comparable work carried out by men. In other words, female labour is treated as a special category and the nature and terms of women's work are determined by their position in society. These workers bear special responsibilities not shared by others, they face cultural taboos and are bound by norms which place them with unique disadvantages. As a category of workers they, therefore, need to be analysed with special attention because of this exceptional situation.

WOMEN AND ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION IN INDIA

What is true elsewhere is true in the case of Indian society all the more. The rich and bountiful resources of India including human resources need to be exploited to the fullest extent so that an individual can develop and flourish. However, what is true of man does not hold equally true with women. Woman's social
status in India as compared to that of man was so low in prestige and value that until recently social legislation prevented the women from entering into vital services on the pretext that such work can be hazardous to their health and life. In other words, the social assumption of men in India that they can make use of all possible life opportunities whereas women cannot look after their own self interest free of male protection and intervention has been upheld time and again. The consequences of this viewpoint in historical terms will be discussed in Chapter III.

The organised sector in the Indian economy mainly consists of public sector establishments and services in addition to non-agricultural private sector establishments which employ a minimum of ten workers. The organised sector is governed by rules and regulations relating to industries, services, and other occupations as framed by the government from time to time. This sector has grown steadily over the last few decades until mid 1980's. It witnessed a special rise during 1970's with the process of privatisation receiving a raw deal by the Central Government. Contrasting this, 1990's have
given a raw deal to the public sector in the country.

The proportion of women employed in the organised sector has never been considerable inspite of various legal measures to enhance female labour force. For example, the growth of woman workers in the organised and unorganised sectors since independence has shown a remarkable breach both in terms of number and quality of work life. Although the Government services and institutions recorded some growth in terms of women's participation numerically, the growth has been negligible in the fields of industry and plantations. Similarly, facilities, perks, and wage rates also have registered no appreciable improvement in real terms during the last few years.

It is estimated that over 80 percent of women in the developing world live and work in rural areas. It is also estimated that over 250 millions of them work on land for their basic source and survival. The workplace of the rural women is often a small farm or a large plantation situated outside the network of transport and communication facilities away from urban
centers. The labour laws and organised union activities generally have little impact on their work. Even where there are such supports and associations, women are rarely given opportunities to participate in the management and decision making with regard to their work; such opportunities are mostly controlled and managed by men.

It has been pointed out that tasks, jobs and occupations carried out by women are rarely counted economically; even when they are considered, women hardly reap the benefits. The phenomena that rural women work for longer hours with heavier work load associated with low wages or no wage at all is yet to acquire a serious dimension in the national life of the Third World societies. To an observer of the rural scene it becomes clear that women have unequal access to land, finance and technology, the core elements of modern productivity. It needs no emphasis that rural women neither own nor control resources or output. This reality requires to be transferred from the academia to the policy formulation level.
It is apparent, therefore, that the first step towards understanding the process of development in rural areas is to redefine and reanalyse women's work. What is urgently needed is to quantify their contributions and critically reflect on their roles and position in rural communities vis-à-vis the institution of work. In describing such contributions to economy and making women's work visible socially, new meanings will need to be given to the notions of "labour" and "paid jobs" the components of employment and productivity. A large majority of these women work in a world where definitions of "market", "money" and "machines" acquire a different and culturally specific meaning.

While discussing the work environment for women in India it may be appropriate to point out that in the last eighty years little structural change has taken place in terms of female employment. This fact goes contrary to commonly held opinion in this regard. Not only has no transfer taken place from agriculture to industry and service sectors during this period but also renewed concentration in agriculture and plantation
seems to be taking place. Succinctly, Indian industrialisation process has not significantly attracted women in terms of economic measures even after Independence and planned economic development for over four decades. A large majority of women workers in rural India even today find their place either in agriculture or in plantations. Even those who are fortunate to cross over to the industrial and service sectors in urban areas find themselves in low-paid and low-status jobs. This implies that the nature of female employment is characterised by insecurity and unprotected nature of work associated with labour intensive output and poor value added production, that is, long hours of work with relatively meagre rewards. For example, in a study conducted by Sinha\(^1\) it is reported that 72 percent of women in Mines and Plantations work in unskilled category, receiving low wages and toiling for relatively longer hours of work. Report of Second Occupational Wage Survey (1963-65) points out that in tea, coffee and rubber plantations

out of a total 7 categories of jobs available, more than 50 percent of female workers were concentrated in only 2 types of jobs namely plucking and field work. This fact is a pointer to the present conditions of the female work force in India, especially in the rural sector.

Historically, women in ancient India were equal in social position with men during the early years of this civilization. This was generally true in almost all primitive, pastoral and hunting societies. However, as the human race advanced from agrarian to urban and industrial societies women became victims of cultural prejudices. Today these prejudices are expressed in varied forms including unbalanced division of labour, patriarchy, subordination by religious dogma and dictums, imbalance in familial power distribution and the caste system.

An analysis of the sources of this sexual inequality and the resultant expectation of women shows multiplicity of causal factors. The facts of past discrimination (for instance, poor educational
opportunity for women), direct exclusion from certain jobs, keeping women as reserved army of cheap labour are some of these factors. Prescribed remedies for this malady like compensatory strategies, reservation for women, discrimination in terms of legal sanctions, etc., are only of marginal help because factors such as teacher's lower educational expectations of girls, facts of earlier socialisation (and the resultant inferiority and self-labelling), evasion of legislation through "tokenism" (for instance, by appointing a Judge, Parliament Member or Director on the Board) and the like have had little impact on the overall improvement in the situation.

In an interesting study of women workers in urban Karnataka¹ it was found that even in the case of those employed, domestic responsibilities such as cooking, child care and other house works remained women's forte. This entails a 'double burden' for working women. The study found that though husbands in most dual-earner households were aware of this fact, they made no efforts

to reduce this burden by sharing the domestic responsibilities.

The same study also proved yet another significant fact. Working women showed higher level of acceptance of traditional norms regarding the objectives of marriage and roles of an ideal husband and an ideal wife. Domestic chores and traditionally defined role responsibilities are accepted as if they are natural to men and women.

While examining the economic role of women and their contribution to national development in the Indian context it is vital to consider the processes that define access to work and livelihood. Further, an indepth examination of agrarian economy and rural work organisation situation should be done keeping also in mind the urban industrial economy and work organisation so that a comparative picture can emerge. An important thing to be recognised here is that the labour market, both rural and urban, generally stratified in its core, is structured not only on the basis of specific production systems, but also in the system of
interaction. Further, the social character of the relations between the employer and the employed on the one hand and the male and the female labour at the work place on the other also need to be considered carefully.

Some important observations may be made by analysing various studies in the field of women's problems at this juncture. First, despite the efforts of government agencies and voluntary organisations especially women's organisations, the development process is yet to guarantee equal opportunities for women on par with men; second, it is also felt that a mere increase in the participation rate in paid labour force does not necessarily bring economic equality for women; third, enlightened social policies and legislations providing for benefits like maternity leave, childcare, health facilities, minimum wage protection etc., by themselves do not produce gender equality in public life. Further, it is also noted that women's decision making power at the micro-level does not necessarily reflect the same at the macro-level. In a nutshell, the analysis of women's problems in relation
to the existing socio-economic structure and processes in society like India presents a very complex and dynamic scene requiring a holistic perspective of understanding.

WOMEN IN INDIAN PLANTATIONS

Plantation in India is considered a part of the organised sector. In fact, plantation is called an 'industry' in social science literature. However, plantation has features which make it distinct from and dissimilar to other industries. It may be more appropriate to compare plantation with agricultural practices because it shares its features with agriculture more than industry in terms of the nature of work, employment, technical and technological skills, demographic features of its working population and style of management; plantation is in many ways nearer to agriculture in the unorganised sector than to industry.

There are various explanations of the word 'plantation' but there is no one standard definition of the term. We may adopt a working definition of the term plantation considering plantation as an economic
unit producing agricultural commodities other than staple crops for sale and employing a relatively large number of unskilled labourers whose activities are closely supervised. Plantation differs from other kinds of farms in the way in which the factors of production, primarily management and labour are combined.

A general look at some of the important studies on women workers in plantation provides insights worth noting. Jain's study of Assam tea gardens\(^1\) is an important study for the present research work. The study focuses on gender relations and work in the tea plantations with a special emphasis on economy, marriage, family and the world view of the workers. This study concludes that, in spite of poverty and subjugation, women workers on the tea gardens of Assam possess a level of independence sufficient to enable them to live on their own. This independence, the study warns, is likely to be eroded if it is not viewed as an

asset to mobilise action for socio-cultural and socio-economic change. Other such studies\(^1\) provide data to generally support this conclusion. A historical account of the socio-economic status of coffee workers in Karnataka is provided by Nagegowda\(^2\). A report on the family budget of workers\(^3\) and another report on the worker's conditions\(^4\) are quite illustrative and insightful in this regard.

Since the early years of the 19th century, growing number of Europeans established plantations (also known as 'estates' and 'gardens') in the hilly areas of Kerala, Karnataka and Assam to try to grow crops

valuable in Europe and U.S.A. They seldom came with their own capital; rather they raised the required financial resources by borrowing from Indians and European servants of the East India Company. With the growth of Joint Stock Companies in India, Indian business houses also began to take increasing interest in the plantation industry. Availability of labour was a problem both for tea plantations in the East and Coffee plantation in the South. In South India the landlords and planters of Mysore and Malabar advanced money to agricultural labourers who often were to work for a definite period until these loans were cleared. In south India the arrangement to contract hire workers through a middle-men was known as "Kangani". Exploitation was at its severity in this system. During the period of such a contract, the position of the workers resembled that of slaves. As time passed by and as agricultural labour became more attractive than plantation work, women workers were increasingly absorbed into the plantations.

Plantation labour remained practically unorganised till the end of World War II. The planters on the other hand formed associations to consolidate their legal rights. For a very long time coercion of the labour was a major technique to improve labour productivity and workers had no say in wage fixation or other benefits. However, once the plantation workers started organising themselves during 1940s, they were able to question the existing system based on coercion, migrant labour, isolation of the workplace and political support. After Independence, the organised plantation labour forced the National Government to enact legislations to prevent continued exploitation to some extent. Despite such legislations, indirect coercion, exploitation and dominance is still a common feature in plantation work.

2. S.K. Bhomik "the plantation as a social system", *Economic and Political Weekly*, September 6, 1980.
In general, plantation workers face problems which are similar to those of agricultural labour in the country. These problems range from monitory benefits to leisure time and working conditions. What is true of plantation workers in general is true in a more acute and intense sense in the case of women workers due to the sex-based division of labour and inequalities meted out to woman in general at the macro-level. Women's contributions to plantation labour, as in other spheres of economy, become invisible due to the social structural arrangements primarily based on the production relations within the present Indian social system. For example, in the plantations of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Kerala, female employees, are considered as efficient and reliable as male employees, if not more. Yet, United Planters Association of Southern India's (UPASI) systematic survey of these plantations confirmed the commonly held notion that women are generally paid lower wages as compared to men. Further, the survey also indicated that women's wages almost invariably are investments on household expenses while the wages earned by men go for their comforts and pleasures. Mies points out with reference to the
Indian social context in general that woman in the Indian Society

"are treated basically as second earners on the labour market. That is, they are granted access only to low-paid work on short-term contracts. This makes it virtually impossible for woman to live alone - especially with children-without being dependant on men. The fact that women need protection means that husbands and fathers have the power to force women to perform unpaid labour thus overburdening them, so that they are unable to undertake a full-time paid job. This protector has a dual face as women are especially exposed to direct violation in marriage"¹.

This is vividly and clearly reflected in the plantation labour.

It has been pointed out earlier that plantation 'industry' is significantly different from other industries due basically to a lower level of technology, dependence on manual labour and its general isolation from urban influences. Within this framework of unique identity of plantation industry, the changing nature of women's economic participation needs to be understood. Out that women workers in plantations exhibit several

It is appropriate at this juncture therefore to point distinctive features from their counterparts in other industries. These workers are said to constitute well over 50 percent of the total plantation work force in South India making this problem area critically significant.

Studies have recorded that women workers have not only a double burden of work but are also doubly exploited, that is by the employers and by their own men. Often their wages go directly into the hands of male members of their family. The cultural values dictate that even when women get their earnings directly, the sum is expected to be submitted passively to the male members in the family or at best be spent for family matters in consultation with men. In this process, women continue their traditional role of unpaid workers in their own house and in the farms, plantations or industries. In other words, women continue to be subservient and self-affacing, finding their worth in being useful to men both at home and on the paid job.
Studies have also pointed out occasional cases of sex harassment and sex exploitation in plantations. Being secluded estates, plantations pose the danger of such a harassment as a part of the syndrome of discrimination in general. In addition and more often, women become vulnerable subjects of violence by their male counterparts as well as the male members in the family. The result is the latent feeling of insecurity and inferiority of women plantation workers. While balancing the burden of dual roles of the wage earner and the house keeper, a precarious balance between the processes of production and reproduction, these women cannot harness their total abilities and skills in relation to production.

Another important area which needs to be looked into is the concept of leisure. The literature available on this subject is scanty. As mentioned earlier, plantation work attracts a large number of migrants who often feel themselves as rootless, culturally or otherwise. For men, evening and 'shandy' days provide some form of leisure and change of activity, but for women life in the plantation and at
home is nothing else but the routine. Thus the idea of leisure beyond work does not exist in reality in most cases. The dominant cultural ideology, drawing its strength from the power of tradition and male biased legal structure, provides little opportunity for women workers in plantations to develop their personality potential and to join the mainstream of national productive life.

An additional important factor which influences the status of women in modern societies is said to be the state of technology. Although this argument may seem contrary to common sense, empirical evidences demonstrated that technology in agricultural and plantation economy is used to the detriment of woman's productivity and to the benefit of man's. Expressing it differently, although technology is expected to remove gender discrimination at the workplace, it seems to play a role that is contrary to this objective. Interestingly enough, the modern technology in agriculture, industry and plantation has, in reality, increased gender discrimination at the workplace in terms of employment, productivity and earnings between
men and women. For instance, men change over from unskilled to skilled jobs with the change in technology whereas women remain with a greater disadvantage than they possess them in general.

There are other interesting observations as well. In India the complex nature of unemployment and under-employment has had a negative impact on women's employment situation. As pointed out by Chatterji\(^1\) "the preparation of adult women considered economically active dropped from about 28 percent in 1961 to 11.87 percent in 1971 though it is now slightly on the upswing at around 14 percent. The percentage of women workers in the organised sector is falling which means that there is a fall in women's employment in terms of absolute number also". For instance according to Census Statistics, between 1961 and 1971 the number of women in the working group increased by 21 percent but the number of employed women came down by 41 percent.

Contrasting this picture it may be noted that a large part of the domestic savings in the Indian economy comes from women as housewives and mothers. Women in India today do the maximum utilisation of the available resources to the maximum output. In fact, this may be of interest to note that the word economics is derived from two Latin words 'oikeu' and 'names' which literally mean 'Rule of Housewives'. This word is symbolic in the sense that women as housewives are directly responsible for the family profit and national investment to a considerable extent.

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION IN INDIA;

ANCIENT, MEDIEVAL AND MODERN TIMES

Indian women are placed in a vicious cycle. The low wage and income of a woman worker is mainly due to her lower social status. It is in turn true that status in a capitalistic setup is largely determined by the earning capacity of the individual. The man is on a higher plank of the socio-cultural ladder than the woman and, therefore, woman's wages are generally lower so long as she continues to halt at an inferior social position. This is despite the Equal Remuneration Act of
1976. Twenty years after the enactment of this law, women have rarely taken the help of the law.

Scholars have pointed out that the status of women in a given society must be studied in the total context of the material and non-material culture of the society concerned. Keeping this in mind, a brief historical sketch on the status of women in India at different periods of development may be appropriate at this juncture. Speaking of the status of women in ancient India, one finds the gradual decline of their position from one of nobility to extreme inferiority. Although woman were placed relatively at a higher position during the Vedic period\(^1\), The Hindu law givers in the later

\(^1\) Some scholars attempted to establish that the economic development of any society was linked with the position of women in that society. For example, Jayaswal contended that society in the Rig-Vedic period was pastoral and nomadic and hence it did not produce enough surplus to allow sharp strata in terms of dominance and submission. See Jayaswal S. 'Position of Women in early India'paper presented at the First Congress of Women's Studies, 1981.
times have increasingly enforced restrictions on women. It is not only the "Manu Smruthi" which enacted severe restrictions on the freedom of movement and the exercise of power by women in community life, the 'Bhagawadgitha', one of the most sacred Hindu texts, placed woman, 'Vysya' and 'Shuara' in the same category having sinful birth. According to 'Parashara Smruthi', punishment for the murder of a Shudra or a woman are identical. The growth of a class society manifesting itself in the form of 'Varnas' and the decline in the status of women seem to have occurred almost simultaneously. Patriarchal values and norms established during this period still persist, though in a changed form. The roles of mother and the ideal of faithful, loyal, self-sacrificing wife are still projected as important for a woman. Though the lowering of the female sex ratio, growing domestic violence, increasing number of sex harassments, dowry deaths and rape cases, etc., are as clear as a crystal, the status of woman remains at the bottom stratum of the society, even in modern times.
'Manu Smrithi' provided Indian society of that age an ideological legitimation for keeping women at a low social position through the pattern of social structure which lasted for well over a thousand years. The arrival of a daughter in the family, unlike that of the arrival of a son, was being considered a disaster during the post-vedic period; and 'upanayana' or the 'sacred thread ceremony' was prohibited to women and Shudras, keeping both of them out of the category of 'dwija'—twice born. As Das has aptly pointed out, "Women were literally seen as points of entrance, as 'gateways' to the caste stem. If men of ritually low status were to get sexual access to women of higher status, then not only the purity of women but that of the entire group would be endangered. Most groups solved this problem by the custom of puberty marriage". An interesting development in this context is the recognition of

1. Das, Veena, "'Indian Women': Work, Power and Status" in Nanda B.R(Ed) Indian Women, Vikas publishing House, Delhi, 1976. Also refer Desai Neera, Women in Modern India for elaboration on such a viewpoint.
woman's right to property, especially 'streedhan'. It is argued that even this liberal interpretation of woman's property rights was linked to the growth of individual right on land in a feudal society developed during the early medieval period. Even Budhism which allowed greater freedom and mobility to a "bhikuni" exercised discrimination inside the 'Sangha'. The Mughul period was in no way different. Things remained as they were until the Western influence with the onset of the British rule.

The commonly held view is that the rapid expansion of industries and the process of modernisation have absorbed a significant number of women into regular paid labour force; however, the reality seems to be the other way round. In spite of the progressive legislation and increasing social movements and agitations on this issue, India still holds a considerably lower work participation rate of women. Between 1901 and 1981 the percentage of economically active women has gone down from 31.7 percent to 20.9 percent presenting the ratio at only 504 women workers in comparison to a thousand working men. Studies have established that the
participation rate for women in different occupational categories has been significantly lower than that of men ranging between one forth to one half of the male participation rate. The relatively low level of work participation rate among women is observed in almost all developing countries, South Asian countries being no exception to this rule. As pointed out before, the social system of caste which still has a dominant influence on Indian social life, also has significantly affected the status and the prospects of women in our society. The caste system, as is well known, is based on the hierarchical order of social stratification and the caste regulations place severe restrictions on woman's social movement, occupational mobility, leisure time activity, etc. The caste norms have prevented women from participating in the mainstream of Indian social life on the pretext that such a participation, by coming out of the family regulations, may have catastrophic effects on the normal functioning of the society itself. Participation in the production process by women certainly was influenced by the heterogeneous processes of culture, economy and polity all through Indian history and into the modern era. To
be brief, legislative measures regarding equality of wage and treatment for women do not seem to have resulted in any appreciable improvement in the status of working women in India. The sanctions to Article 39(a) of the Indian Constitution guaranteeing equal pay for equal work irrespective of sex have not been very effective in practice. The Report of Committee on the Status of Women itself provided ample evidence to the argument that wage discrimination is practiced all over the country in varied forms. For example, fixing lower wage rates for women workers as compared to men, is commonly practiced in both organised and unorganised sectors. Even in economically developed States like Punjab and Maharashtra, the wages paid to women are far lower than those paid to men. The minimum wages fixed for men and women themselves speak out not only the ongoing exploitation of workers in general, but specifically point out to the unfair treatment meted to them.

The social and economic degradation and resultant dependence of Indian women on men manifests itself in three forms of exploitation. First, the family as a social institution exploits and subjugates its female members through the normative structure. Second, the working environment and its representatives in the form of industrialists and employers force degradation and dependence. Lastly, political leaders, pressure groups and even trade-unions are considerably responsible for such a subjugation of women.

In the working environment, wage discrimination has become a reality to be accepted by women as natural and a fact of life. Although the recent amendments in the labour legislations in India attempted to bring about some improvement in this direction, they could hardly make any dent. Experience shows that Labour unions often become tools in the hands of political parties and interest groups; little has been achieved by them to improve the quality of life of women. Such exploitation and illtreatment have been a vital cause for the sharp decline in the total female labour force. For example, the total number of women workers fell from 41.8 percent
in 1911 to 31.2 percent in 1971. In fact there is no evidence to prove that this trend has tilted. Women's percentage in the total labour force in India decreased from 34.40 in 1911 to 17.30 in 1971 (Source: Census Report 1971).

Since the past two decades 'women's studies' has become an established branch of social sciences. Scores of research studies have highlighted the problems of married women. Some major problem areas include marital adjustments, rearing of children, multiple-role strain and role conflict. Most of the studies have focused on the problems of middle-class women employed in the industrial and service sectors. However, despite a large number of published reports and books, the nature and extent of the problems of working class women have remained largely unattended and unexplored. Several of these studies on the organised sector focused on the attitudes, value changes, motivation and social mobility aspects of middle class working women in urban areas, and not many of them concentrated on the working class women and their problems in the agrarian settings. Works on the organised sector have mostly neglected
women working in plantations although this category is significant, both in terms of the number employed and the extent of exploitation.

Studies have occasionally pointed out the low level of participation of Indian women workers in the trade-union activities concerning their work environment. It has been noted that women workers are generally indifferent or less enthusiastic towards trade-union activities, but such an apathy has not been effectively linked to their status and power dimensions at the work place and in general. Research studies in this vein also have enough ground to cover.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The present study has taken into account these gaps in the field and has made an attempt to meet these needs. From the point of view of academic sociology and women's studies, this work gains significance. Further, this work becomes important in the field of Indian sociology because of two reasons. First, there are not many studies highlighting the implications of gender
relations in the plantations, still rare are these on coffee plantations. Whatever research material is presently available regarding workers in the plantation systems in India mostly concentrates on the socio-economic dimension of the workers. Sociological literature on the traditional pattern of gender relations and the consequences of such relations among the plantation workers is scanty. Secondly, the present study throws light on other important walks of life of Indian women workers such as family expenditure, power relationship, indebtedness etc., A study of this nature also has practical relevance to the growing concern of women to improvise on their economic and social conditions. This, in the ultimate analysis, is expected to have an impact on the increasing concern for the fair sex and to act collectively against the prevailing gender inequality. Such a collective action on the part of working women can act as a change agent or catalyst in lessening existing unequal relations. The study will have implications on forming and implementing worker-related policies in the Indian plantation sector.
Plantation is sometimes conceived as a total institution within which various institutions function and which cater to the functional demands of the group. For instance, the plantation workers not only play their 'worker role', but engage in other social interactions within the community such as in marriage and kinship. These roles and role related norms are developed within the social institutional context of plantation as a system. Conceived in sociological terms, these varied interactions group themselves to maintain and at times increase the hierarchical relationship between men and women. Viewed from this angle, this research work is a study of plantation as a total social institution.

The nature of plantations itself offers varied dimensions which cry for a detailed sociological analysis. Such an analysis will have policy implications both in terms of lessening the undesirable elements and enhancing the desirable. The plantation, therefore, represents the social universe around it with occupational, social and economic stratification and internal hierarchical order of the workers. Along with the work identity like their male counterparts, women
workers also have the roles of wife, mother or the bread-winner to play in poor households. This sociological analysis of Chikmagalur coffee plantation attempts to provide insights which can be utilised in other areas of the agrarian society too.

Such a study will have economic and gender relations as a mode of adaptation. From this perspective the study becomes important for the planners of this society as well as for women workers in general. A study of this nature also becomes important for the trade unions in terms of their effective functioning to achieve the desired results.

The theoretical structure of the present work will be gradually unfolded as the analysis of study data is taken up in the next few chapters. However, some important points may be stated succinctly to form the basis of the analysis to be followed. The argument that the rise of sexual domination of men over women was brought about by an economic change, chiefly the growth
of wealth\(^1\) is considered only as a partial explanation to this vital phenomenon. Further, the recent Marxian argument that women in capitalistic society play a crucial but hidden role in the economic system by "reproducing the labour force" endundates socio-cultural functions of the family. It is important to recognise that even working class men benefit by dominating women in their homes and improving the positions of workers per-se does not necessarily help women. It also needs to be pointed out that some sections of women have

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1. Refer to the works of Marx and Engels, especially Engel's *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* published in 1884. His argument is that in tribal groups such as the Iroquois (a red-Indian tribe) women were not alienated from the products of their labour nor from the central process of production, and hence enjoyed a higher status in society.
achieved improvements in their positions by organising as a separate interest group for their own rights and power. Neo-Weberian propositions on power dimensions of human relations need to be emphasised along with the economic dimensions for a better understanding of this problem.

This theoretical debate continues to be a vital one with live-wire consequences. While the feminist movement has had a considerable success in the lives and working of upper and middle-class women, there remains a huge sector of women in agriculture and plantations which constitutes the most underpaid and exploited sector of the Indian labour force. They are weak economically as well as in terms of power. Their control over their own living conditions and quality of life is feeble and shaky. The existence of such a power-less but numerically large category leads one to consider them as potential revolutionary force for national reconstruction. The economic strength along with the power of decision making seem to be key to high status and the resultant egalitarian social relations. Weber's basic theoretical premises are invaluable for
If must be stressed at the very outset that most empirical research on the problems of women has not been motivated by theory. In other words, most of the work on gender relations has been empirical in nature. Although there has been some theoretical development, theory at the macro-level focused on the explanation of societal variation, say between India and U.S.A., in the degree of gender inequality. Theory at the micro-level has focused primarily on the explanation of the

differences as the outcome of gender stereotyping and status ranking. Keeping this scenario in mind, the present work has been undertaken to analyse the unique aspects of gender inequalities and stratification, the empirical data reinforcing this particularistic orientation. If this is a limitation of the study, this holds true to the field of gender studies equally.

Blumberg proposes what she calls the "strategic indispensability" of women's work. The argument is that this affects women's relative economic power like the bargaining power of the labour force in general. After developing various factors which enhance this ability to influence, Blumberg notes "All the 'strategic indispensability' factors were developed from the standpoint of the general stratification. They are

hypotheses about the factors that enhance the leverage and bargaining power of any subordinate group". In other words, theoretical orientation to work on any aspect of gender relations is to be understood in the overall context of basic social process and therefore needs to be oriented to general theoretical development in Sociology. The present work follows this path.

NOTE ON THE CONTENT OF THE CHAPTERS

In conclusion, this chapter tried to introduce the concept of work as a social institution and economic activity in the lives of women. Discussion has concentrated on the changing nature of women's participation in economy in general and the Indian economy in particular. The chapter also stressed the need for and importance of the study of women and the different dimensions of female labour force in the plantations juxtaposing the issue with broader economic and socio-cultural problems of women in general. A note on the theoretical perspective adapted by the researcher also has been presented towards the end of the chapter.

1. see Blumberg, R.L. op cit. pp. 98
Chapter two deals with methodological aspects of the study including definition of terms used in the work, objectives and hypotheses, study area, research techniques adopted, sample and data collection and data presentation details.

Chapter three deals with the subject of women in Indian economy with a historical perspective. It covers such areas as nature of women's economic participation, entry of women into plantation sector, coffee as a commercial crop and nature of coffee plantation holdings.

The fourth chapter of the thesis provides a socio-economic profile of women plantation workers in Chikmagalur District. This chapter includes study of demographic and socio-economic variables such as age, educational status, marital status, religion and caste, and family size of the respondents. Factors like living conditions, nature of dwelling, amenities available in the colonies, income and expenditure of the family and extent of indebtedness among respondents are also discussed.
Chapter Five deals with the substantive question of life of plantation labour in the estates. This chapter covers nature and type of women's work in the coffee plantations, hours of work, rest, leisure and holidays, wage structure in plantations and total days of plantation employment and its consequences.

Chapter six analyses the varied and intricate aspects of domestic life of women workers on the plantations and problems at the work place vis-a-vis domestic life; Factors like patriarchy migration and cultural rootlessness and powerlessness are discussed within the context of family relations. Drinking and alcoholism, work related disabilities, sex based division of labour, women's health problems in relation to family and work are also analysed in detail.

Chapter seven discusses various welfare measures and attempts regarding the upliftment of women workers in India in general and women plantation labour in particular. Government response to the problems of plantation, role of labour unions and company managers are discussed and analysed.
The last chapter presents the concluding remarks. General observations and recommendations are presented in this chapter with policy implications for the future.