Chapter- V

Comparative Assessment

Gender-based discrimination is universal and enduring; it was prevalent at the labour market in Russia and India since early times and was practiced in the recent past too, even after significant political and economic changes took place in both these countries. Gender-based discrimination predates capitalism. Though socialist economy reduced it to some extent, but it could not eliminate this practice altogether. The discrimination and unequal treatment of women has a lot to do with patriarchy.

A comparison between women at the labour market in Russia and India is relevant because of their shared experiences at the labour market and its consequences on the social and economic sphere. Women's circumstances in the two countries have been quite similar, inspite of their cultural differences. There were many similarities found in regard to women's labour market status in both these countries, though in certain spheres, variations were also apparent. Women's status in both these countries in occupation and income were also almost the same. In both the nations, substantial gap existed between men and women in the employment and unemployment structure. In my research work, I have
shown many common factors at the same time certain differences found were also highlighted.

The subordination of women in the family has led to their subordination in the labour market also. Women were seen overcrowded in low-paid, dead end, insecure and in short, "low" jobs in both these countries. Women in general were found investing less in their education and training, this process lead to a sexual division of labour, which ascribed to women the role of housekeeper and to men that of the breadwinner. The sexual division of labour weakens women's commitment to the labour market but it maximizes the welfare of the household. Consequently, when women enter the labour market they get the leftovers.¹ Women were seen paid less than men in both these countries, even when they were as productive as men.

It has been observed that in both these nations a large number of women had been traditionally recruited in some specific sectors like in medicine and teaching. Their participation in other professional and technical fields is a more recent phenomenon. However, women have generally remained under-represented in the professional fields that required higher skills or higher responsibilities. Women of both these

countries were known to face several constraints in the labour market such as higher levels of unemployment, longer waiting time to secure a job, sectoral and occupational segregation and wage discrimination. The prime reason for women not being able to climb up the job ladder to achieve high paying jobs was the lack of specialised skills, due to their comparatively lower education, household responsibilities and societal pressures. Even with higher educational qualification Russian, and even many Indian women, faced alarmingly higher rate of unemployment than men and had a lower probability of getting jobs; they also encountered longer waiting period for jobs than men. Women who managed to secure jobs were usually found to be clustered in low paid occupations. There were clear evidences, which showed gender gap in earnings and the nature and extent of occupational segregation.

It is a well-established fact that gender-discrimination existed in all sections of societies. The discrimination within the household and workplace in both these countries was due to the dominance of patriarchy. Though men of different classes, races or ethnic groups held different places in this patriarchal hierarchy but they are all seen as united in their shared relationship of dominance over women in all spheres of life. Patriarchy constructed the concept of women in such a
way that women were placed in a lower rank in society. Different laws, institutions and beliefs, which were actually made by the patriarchy for their own benefit, bound the women. The major benefit of patriarchy was to get the unpaid household services from women, which could be seen as an universal aspect. Patriarchy created the gender-division of labour within the household in such a way that the women were bound to perform household activities which they thought was their natural duty. Household activities were not valued in market terms, or to put it differently patriarchy has devalued the household works in which women received no income. So, they were economically depended on their counterparts and this economic dependence became the root cause in the case of sustained discrimination. Women in general in both Russia and India have been engaged in the low wage sectors of the labour market. They have been doing stereotype jobs. Which required skills similar to household tasks. Thus, the gender-division of labour within the household was manifested in the work field too.

Women in both these countries were not provided opportunity to compete with the male-counterparts in the high skilled formal jobs. The male dominated society created a gender-division of labour in such away


that household maintenance and child caring activities became socially
the prime responsibility of women.\textsuperscript{4} Therefore, they were bound to take
only such jobs, which were flexible in nature, so that the labour market
activities could be performed keeping the household performance intact.

In Russia, lately, capitalism became responsible for gender-
discrimination against women. Under socialism, housework was
collectivised and women were relieved of their double burden in many
ways. But after transition in Russia there was a good combination found
between patriarchy and capitalism.\textsuperscript{5} In the case of India, exploitation of
women has a long history and economic exploitation was prevalent since
early times.\textsuperscript{6} Here also an intertwined relationship between capitalism
and patriarchy was found and both these factors were responsible for all
kind of gender-discrimination, which flowed from household to the
workforce or vicevers. In India, the observation shows that the
household was also an economic site where production, appropriation
and distribution were taking place. Within the household woman
produced surplus, which were appropriated by their husbands, which in
turn became an economic process. It was found that within the
household there existed a feudal class process also to a large extent. The

most pervasive gender process was that women were solely responsible for the household activities. This gender process moulded the system in such a way that it became "natural" for women to take up household responsibility as a "natural phenomenon".

Both in Russia and India, laws that existed to protected women were also the ones that discriminated against them. For example, the religious institutions, preached that performing household activities were the holy duty of women; educational institutions, preached about biological essentialism and the media, all comprised of the political process that reinforced their stereotypes. The political process participated in the subsumed ideological process. This created the power relation through which men got the superior positions and women were discriminated. Women were restricted within the household and were compelled to take up the feudal serf class position. They were exploited through the feudal class process and oppressed through the political and gender process. Exploitation and oppression both constituted the discrimination and practiced in both Russia and India.

Women in both Russia and India who joined the workforce faced discrimination within the household as well as within the workplace.

Actually, woman who participated in the workforce took up two class positions. One, within the household feudal serf and the other within the workforce labourers. Therefore, they were confronting to feudal exploitation within the household and capitalist exploitation at the work place. Thus, they were doubly burdened.

**Similarities and Differences Observed in Historical Background**

The evidences from history show that in both Russia and India since very early times, women have been involved in productive economic activities of their countries and have participated actively in the labour market. But the kind of jobs that women did and the levels of their skills and earning have continued to keep them invisible and even under-remunerated and unrecognised by the government and society of their countries. The historical background of women at the labour market both in Russia and India shows that there have existed similarities as well as differences between the two countries.

Though, there were certain major political and economic differences between these countries, yet, in case of women workers and the labour market conditions for women, many similarities have been observed. For example, agriculture was the central economic activity for the women of both these countries. Russian and Indian women both were engaged in
an appreciable number in agricultural activities, in which they tilled the soil, sowed the seeds, cultivated and harvested the crops. The female agricultural labour forces used to perform unskilled and physically demanding tasks.

However, the differences found among Russian and Indian women agricultural workers were that, in Russia the largest group of women agricultural workers were engaged in collective farms, while another big proportion of women workers were engaged in State firms and a small group were engaged in private subsidiary agricultural farms. This particular group constituted mainly of those women labours, who cultivated private garden plots for home consumption and sometimes for the local markets too. But in India, most of the women agricultural workers were engaged in their private agricultural farms, where they helped their husband's, fathers or sons in the agricultural activity. They mainly performed heavy manual agricultural labour.

Within the industrial activity the differences among the Russian and Indian women were quite distinct. The Soviet regime in former USSR explicitly undertook to increase the number of women in the industrial

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labour force, which had a political significance behind it more than economic. So, Soviet regime tried to improve the qualification of female labours and tried to draw women into industries. The rapid industrialization in Soviet Union during the First Five-Year plan in 1928 required enormous increase in the size of the labour force. So, during that period women labours were encouraged and their proportion in total number increased rapidly.\(^\text{10}\) In India the process of industrialization started in the second half of the nineteenth century and women were mainly involved in small-scale sectors. Indian women were also not encouraged by the political or social forces to join the industrial sector or upgrade their skills.\(^\text{11}\) Moreover, during the Colonial rule, due to the decline in the economy, the small-scale as well as big industries were badly effected. Furthermore, the mechanization of these industries replaced women by men.

Similarities were also observed in the absorption of women labour force in Russian and Indian labour market. Women labour force in both these nations was in demand and was absorbed in the work force when there was a paucity of male labour force. In Russia, women entered the labour force in great numbers during the World War II, to replace millions of


men who were mobilised for military services.\textsuperscript{12} However, the return of surviving males in the civilian lives in the post-War years again reduced the proportion of women. Intensive efforts to recruit women for the growth of economy was also launched in Russia during early 1960's, in response to extreme labour shortage and due to the declining manpower reserves. Demographic pressures also intensified an additional impetus for mobilization of women. The mobilization of women in the labour market was seen as a way to enhance the economic capacity of the Soviet system and therefore women were welcome addition to the labour supply during that period.\textsuperscript{13} Thus, the demographic and economic factors became the real determinants of female employment in Russia. In India, too, the situation was similar. The intake of female labour force was similar to that of Russia's. Women were encouraged to participate in the labour force when there was a lack of male labour but were replaced and deprived on their return. In India, they were encouraged to involve in those works which male labour did not prefer to perform. Women were seen recruited mostly as temporary workers and very often seen replaced by men and machines.


Both in Russia and India similarities were found in the economic sectors and the professions in which women predominated. In both these countries, women were mainly predominated the teaching jobs, clerical work, light industry and in medical professions. But, there existed certain differences too. Though in India the demand for the women medical profession grew in late nineteenth century and early decades of twentieth century, but it was not too congenial a period as there were disparities between the British women and an Indian woman apart from the gender discrimination.14 In Russia "Engineering" in particular was a field where women have entered in large numbers. But in India very few women entered in this profession.

Similarities were observed between the married women of both Russia and India as they experienced additional difficulty in finding employment, because in most of these sectors they were not preferred and considered non-productive workers and entitled for too many privileges from the work place (like maternity leave child care facilities etc). Another major similar factor which came as an obstacle on their way to get suitable job was their family's place of residence, which was usually determined by their husband's job.

In both Russia and India women were found in inferior positions in terms of wage levels, employment status and in the intensity of work in relation to male workers. Opportunities for upward occupational mobility were also virtually non-existent for women workers in both these countries. There was a common assumption that women's income was a second income. In the family, women's time spend on household and child rearing tasks was viewed as "women's work" and hence working women in both Russia and India were seen doing "double shifts". In both these countries many case studies have confirmed that women's placement were generally followed in a well-defined hierarchical pattern, where women were typically found as unskilled workers with very little access to skill upgradation or positions of authority and decision making. However, between Russia and India there was a considerable difference, which existed in terms of women's welfare, like maternity benefits, child care and health facilities. The centralised political and economic authority of Russia felicitated the welfare programme for women workers. Like maternal benefits, childcare facilities and also provided comparatively better educational opportunities for Russian women. Whereas in case of India, soon after independence, India chose the path of planned economic development for considerable time and the planning

process tended to take rather a narrow view of women's welfare in terms of maternal benefits, childcare, health, education and family planning.

Thus, the comparative assessment of the historical observation showed that the gender-biased attitude of the labour market was prevalent in both these countries since the very beginning. History shows that both in Russia and India women were always seen having lower income and lower economic status as compared with men. Women at the labour market were seen being exploited and discriminated since the early times. They were not provided opportunities for their economic and professional growth. Rather they were most of the times deprived and replaced by men or machines. Their contribution to the labour market was considered insignificant. Despite of their best efforts, they were always considered as the secondary workers at the labour market in both the nations.

**Similarities and Differences Observed in Women's Employment at the Labour Market Since 1990**

Since 1990, both in Russia and India many political and economic changes took place. Though the seeds of these changes were sown in both these countries in 1980's by introducing *Perestroika* and *Glasnost* in Russia and economic liberalisation, privatisation and structural
adjustment policies in both Russia and India, but the actual process of these changes/reforms shaped up in these countries from 1990 onwards.

In Russia, the political and economic changes have accompanied with Russia's emergence as an independent state followed by the demise of USSR, which has brought a massive drop in living standards for many Russian women. In this chaotic period of change women have been the major losers in Russia. The privatisation of production process and liberalisation of labour market along side with realization of structural adjustment programmes caused serious distortion in women's employment in Russia. Though, as compared with Russia, in India the political changes were not as drastic, yet with the process of liberalisation, structural adjustment policies, and globalisation in vogue in the last quarter of the twentieth century there was deterioration in women's economic position and labour market conditions. The study showed that in the last decade the similarities existed among the women of both these countries in the sense that they bore the burnt of poverty, underemployment and destitution. They were also subjected to different kinds of economic and sexual exploitation. Their low economic status

became a major factor for their low status in social and other fields, which remained at the lower level inspite of the introduction of various reform policies. Rather, in the post-reform period in both Russia and India, women workers employment opportunities have decreased and their problems have increased further. It has been observed that the policies of liberalisation, market economy and SAP have basically benefited the big capital. The mobility and freedom of capital has only increased.\textsuperscript{18}

The WTO and MNC lead economic reforms in Russia and in India have aggravated the conditions of poverty and marginalisation of people in general, and women in particular. Similarities were observed in the post-reform period in both these countries, as women either had to increase their skills and qualification and try to maintain their position in the labour market, or to sink in the tidal wave of changes. With the lack of stability in the political and economic sphere, the gender-related asymmetry of the labour market became more and more evident in the post-reform Russia and India.

The basic concept of work has undergone a change in the recent period, followed by the introduction of new economic reform policies in Russia

and India. One of the key problems of an economy in transition observed both in Russia and India was the need for the work force to switch from old jobs to new ones. This turned out to be one of the major market bottlenecks of the 1990's in both these countries. Entry into and exit from the work took place at various points in working women's life in the last decade in both Russia and India. A peculiar and identical characteristic observed in women's employment in these two countries during the nineties was that of complete absence of any "continuity". The place of employment and the type of work constantly changed, often several times a year, for women workers. A general drop in the employment continued in both these countries. Reports covering the last ten years show that for individual women worker in Russia as well as in India essentially meant for short, sporadic period followed by uncertainty, which created not only economic but social consequences too for women workers.

One of the major differences found between these two countries' working women was that in Russia, women had a higher educational level than Indian women. In India, women were not provided enough opportunity to increase their educational qualification or vocational skills. This is actually the task of the State and the Government, but this task has not
been taken care of.\textsuperscript{19} Huge difference in illiteracy rates between women and men in India indicated that Indian women were not even given the chance to prepare them to serve the country at par with their male counterparts. Due to women's inferior educational quality there was a distant gap observed between male-female earning at the work place.\textsuperscript{20} Unlike Russia, in India women were not allowed to get training in many technical and vocational fields. It was said that women were unfit to do hard work. So, it was useless to provide training facilities for them. By denial of such training to them, the Indian women were deprived of jobs in most of the manufacturing industries in the organised sector. In other countries women were seen successfully operating milling machines, crane, spinning machines, public bus and trams and controlling traffic without assistance of male counterparts, but in India they were considered unfit for all these. Depriving them jobs in these spheres. However, inspite of higher educational and technical skills among Russian women, the similarities observed in their duration of unemployment and dynamics of inflows and outflows of the unemployed. Which showed women in the marginal position in the labour market and showed similar pyramidal structure with Indian women, which clustered them in the unskilled low wage jobs.

The similarities were observed in the preference of young unmarried women in the labour market in both these countries. As married and older women were considered to have more family responsibilities less regular and obedient than the young unmarried women, the latter were preferred at the work place. In the last decade, in both Russia and India, more women were forced to accept extreme exploitation and discriminatory working conditions in the name of flexibility in the labour market and were also seen as the first victims of retrenchment and downsizing by the employers. The similarities were also observed in the sectors, which were being set up with foreign collaboration. In these sectors, the major shift in the production process effected women employees the most as they became more and more victimised and exploited. The data showed that whenever there were changes in the production process or technological upgradation for the purpose of increasing the productivity, women in both Russia and India were seen as the first to be retrenched or replaced.

The differences observed among the older women in Russia and India were that, women of 35-40 years age group in Russia were earlier mostly involved in scientific and academic professions. But, these women were seen in the recent period as selling cigarettes or home made products outside the metro stations or in the street corners. Because, most of
these women lost their jobs and multiple employment appeared to be an economic response of the threat to survival for them. Thus, they were forced to make money either from existing hobbies or from newly acquired handwork skills. Whereas, in India, such scenario is not prevalent in the post-reform period. Women of this age group who were working as an academicians or in the scientific professions remained working in the similar professions and were not required to change their profession neither had to take up multiple employment for the survival.

Another major difference observed between Russian and Indian labour market for women in 1990's was that in Russia, with the demise of USSR, the sex industry, which had been developing a pace under Perestroika, was given an added fillip by the advent of the market reforms. The rapid development of glamour modeling, pornography and both overt and undercover prostitution developed faster. Although amongst young Indian women the keenness to enter this world of glamour also increased in the recent period and apparently also boomed up by the beauty contests, but the scale and reason behind entering this sphere varied among both these countries. In Russia, this mainly started due to the growing feminization of poverty, lack of security, high cost of living and underemployment. This type of women's labour migration

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started drastically in Russia and thus thousands of young Russian women accepted diminishing labour conditions and migrated to foreign countries voluntarily in search of jobs because they did not have better means of survival in Russia. In India too women's labour migration increased in the last decade but the migration was mostly from villages to the cities. Moreover, women took up prostitution mostly out of compulsion rather than out of choice.

Differences observed between the Russian and Indian labour market for women was that, in Russia, during the Soviet-period the protective policies towards women and the family rested with the employing enterprises, which was not there in India. But, when enterprises in Russia started dealing with uncomfortable new economic realities, they started reducing all these social benefits and as they were reluctant to provide such benefits to women workers, women workers were targeted for redundancy or for administrative leave. In Russia, many sectors in which women were heavily concentrated such as health and education, which were primarily publicly funded, also saw massive drop in pay relative to other sectors. All these factors have contributed to a steadily growing feminisation of poverty in Russia.

Another difference observed between Russia and India, due to the deteriorating labour market conditions during the last ten years since 1991, was that the birth rate reduced drastically in Russia,\textsuperscript{24} as a result of lack of jobs for women, and the feminisation of poverty. The employing enterprises also did not provide the social benefits to women workers in Russia. Consequently, many young women did not want to have children at all, as they were not sure that they would be able to provide acceptable standards of living to their children. The instability of employment condition caused these essential changes in reproductive sphere in Russia.

The similarities were found between the Russian and Indian entrepreneurs attitude in last decade. In both these countries, the entrepreneurs were seen having no intention to spend resources on social programmes, like the facility of child-care centers, pregnancy leave, etc. to combine the professional and public activities of women workers with their maternal and family duties. Thus, in both these countries government has also abdicated their responsibility to help women to combine labour outside the home with their domestic chores and motherhood duties increasing the "double burden" of women. Another similarity was that despite of their heavier contribution to productive labour, the domestic responsibilities in both the countries

\textsuperscript{24} Zhenschiny Rossii, "Informatsionny i Biuletens," no. 5, 1995, p. 2.
rested upon women only. As a result both in Russia and India the child and family responsibilities did influence access to women's employment. Hence they had to maintain the duel responsibilities of both "reproductive" and "productive" role.

Again, both in Russia and India, similarities can be found in the gender-discrimination in the labour market through government policies. In India the government introduced voluntary retirement scheme in public sectors enterprises and banks, which was in reality a new terminology of retirement but with a difference. In this scheme many women employees in India were frequently pressurized to give up their jobs and take up VRS. If any women employee, who was offered VRS, was seen reluctant to accept this, she was transferred to a distant place. Thus, when women had to choose between VRS and transfer they readily chose the former. In India, in many public sector organisations, woman employees were even told to give up their jobs in favour of their sons or son-in-laws or to take up golden handshake. In Russia too this type of discrimination between women and men employee were found in the organisations mainly during the 1990's when many elderly women were forced to take-up the retirement much before time. Protective legislation in the labour code including ban on women's employment in hundreds of occupations and a series of other limitations prevented women in Russia

from having equal rights and opportunities in the labour market. A majority of high paying jobs in Russia were found on the lists of restricted occupations.\textsuperscript{26} This type of direct discrimination and exploitation of women employees in the labour market increased with the process of liberalisation, privatisation and new economic policies, which did not provide women with equal opportunities and which created an overall uncertainty at the labour market for women. The labour market in both these countries acquired more gender-biased attitude in the last decade.

Gender based job segregation and wage discrimination in every occupation was a common factor in both Russia and India. It became one of the prominent and endurable aspects of labour market for women in the post-reform period. In both these nations, women's access to employment restrictions and segmentation existed in almost all the sectors. Though women workers in these countries were quite conscious of the discrimination meted out to them, they tolerated it due to the lack of alternative employment opportunities. The recent trends and the position of women labour in general have not been very encouraging in the changed perspective either. Thus, their marginalisation at the work

place in respect to wage and job was very much prevalent and practiced even in the post-reform period.

The comparative study of women at the labour market in Russia and India showed similarities and differences within both these nations. But similarities in the labour market for women in these countries were more visible between them. In both these societies masculine culture was seen as dominant feature of the labour market. In both Russia and India women were seen facing gender discrimination in the work place, due to which they encountered obstacles in advancing in their careers and also to maintain their jobs. Their voices and experiences were often neither recognized nor heard by the male dominated labour market structure, by virtue of their gender. Their knowledge and experiences were not given adequate value and their productive roles in the labour market were considered invisible. They were mainly given to perform the stereotype work in various occupations and continued to be discriminated and exploited in the labour market. Though the comparison showed certain difference between them mainly during historical period, as the socialist system in Russia provided certain welfare benefits for women workers and their certain policies were to some extend beneficial for women workers. But, since 1990, in both these countries the labour market conditions looked very similar, as working women in both these countries faced unfavorable working conditions for themselves, as a result of which
their living condition deteriorated. They went through severe psychological stress, which caused conflict in their private lives, making their families and individual personalities more fragile. Thus, the transition from centrally planned economy to the market economy in Russia, and the process of liberalisation, structural adjustment policies and economic reforms in India did almost nothing to improve the condition of women at the labour market. Rather, their status deteriorated making them the most disadvantaged group of the society. However, women in both these countries have continued their struggle with lot of courage and hope for the better future for themselves at the labour market.