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Editorial

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Women constitute half of the global population as well as the population of every country in the world. However, due to various forms of discrimination in the social, cultural, economic and political fields, they have not been able to contribute to the advancement of the human race to their full potential. Fundamentally, gender inequality is a result of unequal power distribution between women and men, aggravated by discriminatory socio-cultural practices, weaknesses in laws, policies and institutions that perpetuate unequal social relations that normalise inequality. In addition, violence against women undermines a community's social fabric and prevents women from achieving social and economic equality. In order to address this global concern, the United Nations, which represents the global community of all sovereign nations, has taken several initiatives, including the celebration of International Women's Day and ensuring global mechanisms such as the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Similarly, the Millennium Development Goals (2001-2015) tried to address this issue by urging all countries "to promote gender equality and empower women". Now, the Sustainable Development Goals (2016-2030) seeks "to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls". This ambitious goal seeks to provide women and girls with equal access to education, healthcare, decent work and representation in political and economic decision-making processes in order to create sustainable economies that benefit societies and humanity at large. Gender equality is about equal opportunities, rights and responsibilities for women and men, girls and boys. Therefore, efforts at gender equality tries to address the unequal power relations and unequal gender norms that constrain women and men from realising their full potential as individuals and in society. These power relations encompass legal and informal rights, access to resources, and pursuit of knowledge and personal goals across most spheres of human life, including familial, cultural and institutional sphere. It also refers to control over societal and household resources and decisions, cultural and religious ideology, and one's own and others' bodies.

Studies have shown that gender equality and empowering women could contribute to global growth, development and stability. Women could increase their income by up to 76 per cent if the employment participation gap and wage gap between women and men did not exist. Besides, better

educated women have fewer, healthier and well educated children, that reduces dependency burdens and increases savings. Further, global gross domestic product could rise to as much as 2 per cent if women and men entrepreneurs could participate equally in the economy. Studies have also shown that female farmers provided with equal access to resources could reduce under-nutrition for an estimated 100 to 150 million people. In addition, greater gender equality has the potential of contributing to stability and peace by preventing disputes escalating into armed conflicts. Involving women as soldiers, police and civilian personnel could be instrumental brokering ceasefires in conflict situations and engaging in peacekeeping operations. Over the past couple of decades, gender equality and women's empowerment have been explicitly recognised globally as two sides of the same coin and a key to the health of nations. Progress towards gender equality require women's empowerment and women's empowerment require gender equality in every sphere of life.

In India, the goal of achieving gender equality is an uphill task. National Family Health Survey (NHFS) data reveals that there is strong evidence of decline in sex ratio, which suggests a strong preference for male child is leading to sex selection of birth and abortion of the female foetus. In addition, the child mortality of children reaching the age 1 year is much higher for girls than for boys. Educational attainment levels of women and girls continue to remain lower than boys indicating gender disparity in education. In terms of Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR), the female LFPR is half of male LFPR and the wage rate for women is less than that of men again indicating that there is gender disparity in the labour market in India. Women have lower per capita resource access than men. They also have lower access to media than men. Women's freedom of movement is curtailed and they face a number of hurdles to access services like health care. A majority of women do not have bank accounts or any disposable income to spend as they wish. These are some indicators that point to the extent of gender inequality that prevails in the country. However, gender roles are socially constructed and can change over time as societal needs, opportunities and customs change.

The articles in this issue of Social Action tries to highlight the issues of gender inequality and tries to promote ways to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment. One of the major gender issues in India is low female LFPR. Reena Kumari tries to address this in her article "Determinants of Female Labour Force Participation in India: An Empirical Analysis" by analysing the relationship between LFPR and economic

growth in India. It has been found that LFPR exhibits a U-shape during the process of economic development. The article argues that the promotion of greater participation of women in the labour force as well as their inclusion in key power positions will not only lead to gender equality but also sustainable economic growth and development. K Gulam Dasthagir examines gender inequality in irrigation management systems in his article “Engendered Rights beneath Gendered Irrigation Institutions: An Analysis of Masculine Domination that Eclipses Empowerment of Women Farmers in Pani Panchayats”. After analysing patriarchal tendencies that control irrigation systems, he advocates for greater participation of women in the governance of irrigation systems and the institutionalization of women’s empowerment in Pani Panchayats across India. The article on “Work Life Balance of Women Security Guards in Delhi: An Exploration” by Bindiya Narang and Eisha Choudhary is an outcome of an empirical study which reveal a stressful work life balance for these low-paid women workers which bring to focus the need for gender-friendly work spaces for women. The article by Reema Gill on “Gender Stereotypes: A History of Nursing in India” analyses the historical development of the nursing profession in India and points out to socially constructed gender roles that feminises nursing and care work resulting in institutionalised discrimination in wages and working conditions. Mrityunjay K. Singh’s article on “Maternal Mortality and Women’s Right to Development in Assam” highlights the need to address the high Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) in India, especially in Assam. He points out that more attention is paid to civil and political rights of women including violence against women, but little attention is paid to economic, social and developmental rights of women. In the article titled “Education, Employment and Empowerment: Reflections on Muslim Women in Kerala”, Ramshina and Nagaraju Gundemeda argues that for Muslim women, higher education is aimed to achieve symbolic capital rather than empowerment as it is the marriage market and ideal Islamic practices that shape their educational aspirations and employment opportunities. B. Radha’s article on “Women in Higher Educational Institutions: A Gendered Discourse on Empowerment” highlights the patriarchal structures and gender inequality in Higher Educational Institutions in India, especially in Tamil Nadu, which hinders the empowerment of women academicians. The last article by Neelam Tyagi on “Revision and Reforms in the Family Laws through Uniform Civil Code: An Unfinished Agenda towards Women’s Empowerment and Gender Justice” evaluates the various family laws in India and discusses the possibility of the introduction of Uniform Civil Code in bringing about gender justice by reforming these family laws.

It is hoped that these articles will ignite the minds and hearts of readers to grow in greater awareness of the various dimensions of gender inequality and gender discrimination that exists in various spheres of life and explore ways to fulfil the SDG Goal 5 of achieving gender equality and empowerment of women and girls by the end of the next decade.

Denzil Fernandes

Determinants of Female Labour Force Participation in India: An Empirical Analysis

Reena Kumari*

Abstract

This article examines the relationship between female labour force participation and economic growth in India for the period 2004-05 to 2015-16. The econometric model has been used so as to estimate the effects of income changes, education and demographic factors on female labour force participation. For this study, Pearson's correlation is used to examine the establishment of relations between different explanatory variables with female labour force participation. The key findings emerging from the examination of literature show that female labour force participation rate exhibits a U-shape during the process of economic development. Demographic factors (include fertility, migration, marriages, child care), economic factors (include unemployment, per capita income, non-farm job, infrastructure) and other explanatory variables which include the regulatory context encompassing family and childcare policies, tax regimes, and presence of subsidized health care for workers determine the female labour force participation. Previous study documented a broad-based picture about female work participation. However, this type of research which deals with the link between economic growth and female labour force participation, gender wage disparity and their determinants has been unexplored.

Keywords- Economic growth, Female labour force participation, Gender-wage disparity, Determinants

1.Introduction:

Researchers have long tried to understand the influence that economic, social and region-specific factors have on the participation of female in labour force. The female labour force participation rate is the percentage of working age women who are either working or looking for work. A woman's decision to participate (or not) in the labour force will have a direct effect on the supply of labour. The neo-classical theory of the allocation of time describes labour supply decisions (to participate or not to participate in the work force) of individuals. Labour force participation of women remains woefully low in India, and this could be a major drag, not just on the empowerment of women but on the India growth story as well. While male participation is high, female labourforce participation has been dropping at an alarming rate. According to data from National Sample

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Survey Organisation (NSSO), female labour force participation fell from a high point above 40 percent in the early-to-mid 1990s to 29.4 percent in 2004-05, and 22.5 per cent in 2011-12. These efforts were meant for ensuring economic stability in the country and equal opportunity for all. However there is also a large gender wage gap and only a small proportion can be explained by gender differences in education, work experience or job characteristics. There exist significant disparities among men and women work participation and similarly the ratio of women labour force has been declining. Different explanations are offered for the existence of gender disparity but a significant explanation can be given in terms of cultural practices that vary from region to region. Cultural restrictions still are changing, and women are free to participate in the formal economy, though the shortage of jobs throughout the country contributes to low female employment.

Although most women in India work and contribute to the economy in one form or another, much of their work is not documented or accounted for in official statistics. Women plough fields and harvest crops while working on farms, they weave and make handicrafts while working in household industries, sell food and gather wood while working in the informal sector. There are estimates that over 90 percent of working women are involved in the informal sector. It has been analysed that women have now not only found their place in work places but are also playing a role of good governance. In recent years there have been explicit moves to increase women's political participation. They are a significant entrepreneurial force whose contributions to local, national and global economies are far reaching. In addition, they produce and consume, manage businesses and households, earn income, hire labour, borrow and save, and provide a range of services for businesses and workers. They represent an increasing proportion of the world's waged labour force and their activity rates are rising. In Africa, Asia and Latin America, they are over one-third of the officially enumerated workforce (WISTAT, 2000). Although there are variations across countries, social norms strongly influence men's and women's work and working environments. Some tasks and jobs are considered more appropriate for men or women and overt or covert screening filters out applicants who defy these norms. These gender norms frequently underpin sex-segmented labour markets and activities. Highly sex-segmented labour markets typically confine women workers to low-wage low-productivity employment and can limit the responsiveness of labour markets to new demands for higher skilled workers. Sluggish or unresponsive labour markets can impede adjustment, distort human capital investment and inhibit a firm's ability to switch into

new activities and compete in a dynamic and globalizing market.

This paper is divided into five sections. Section 2 discusses the methodological aspect and database of the paper, Section 3 explores theoretical background and explanation of the different variables. Section 4 analyses the results of the paper and Section 5 concludes the study.

2. Methodology and Database

The literature offers a rich description on the economic and demographic characteristics like education, fertility rate, urbanization, unemployment and economic growth affecting female labour force participation (Kottis, 1990; Mishra and Russell, 2010; Tsani, et al., 2013). Similarly, a rich set of work documents the U-shaped relationship between female labour force participation and economic growth (see Table 1). Based on the theoretical background outlined above, this section provides further details of the data and research methodology in connection with the regression models used to analyse the determinants of female labour force participation in this paper. Thus, the existing literature on the determinants and the characteristics of female labour force participation has been employed for the development of the econometric model summarized as follows:

$$FLPR_{it} = b_0 + b_1 LGDP_{it} + b_2 LGDP_{it}^2 + \sum_{n=1}^{k-1} b_n X_{n,it} + e_{it} \text{-----(1)}$$

where *FLPR_{it}* is female labour force participation rate, *LGDP_{it}* is the log of the real GDP per capita, *LGDP_{it}²* its square, *X_{n,it}* is a set of n variables controlling for education, fertility, urbanization and unemployment rates. The study is based on secondary sources, that is, analysis of the official websites of the Government of India. Pooled time series cross-section data are employed for 28 Indian states (which cover more than 95 percent of the population of the country) for the period 2004-05 to 2015-16. The study excluded the Union Territories due to lack of information and unavailability of data on above mentioned variables. The detailed information about the data source and the definition of explanatory variables has been provided in Table 3.

With regard to methodological aspects, this paper is based on cross-sectional multivariate linear regression and the coefficient of determination points to a well-specified and useful base regression model with an adjusted R2 of more than 67.0 percent. To ensure the robustness of the results and to test for their sensitivity, the explanatory variables have been included and excluded

in various combinations in the regression table. Thus, the econometric estimations have been employed in the 2nd step so as to exogenously set the female labour force participation rates in the alternative scenarios. Also, descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation are used to analyse the data.

3. Theoretical background

This section focuses on documents that address the relationship between economic growth and women's economic activity; and how nature of growth matter in attracting more women to the labour force. The most celebrated theoretical proposition that links women's labour force participation with economic development, the U-shaped feminisation hypothesis, argues that when subsistence economies transform to developing economies, women withdraw from the labour force and thereafter beyond a minimum threshold the participation rates of women starts rising (Sinha 1967; Durand 1975; Goldin 1994; Cagatay and Ozler, 1995; Mammen and Paxson 2000; Tam, 2011; Abraham, 2013). Tansel (2002) reported that female labour force participation rate exhibits a U-shape during the process of economic development and the findings confirmed that the U-shaped impact of economic development; and unemployment had a considerable discouraging effect on female labour force participation while the impact of education was strongly positive. Also, a recent study by Sanghi et al., (2015) reported that when an economy transforms from an agricultural economy to an industrial economy, a decline in participation of female labour force is observed. Also, with an increase in family income and improvement in the education level of females, more and more females start entering the labour force, especially into non-manual or service-oriented jobs. Hoşgör and Smiths (2008) similarly, documented the U-shaped hypothesis in case of Turkish economy and predicted that with increasing modernization female employment first decreases and then increases. The findings show the effects of modernization are overshadowed by the strong influence of patriarchal ideology that tends to confine Turkish women to the private domain. While, Bloom et al., (2009) argue that there is the positive behavioural response of female labour force participation, which further increases labour supply per capita and income per capita.

Numerous studies, using cross-sectional pooled data, have affirmed the existence of the U-shaped phenomenon in their work. These studies examined the impact of female labour force participation changes on economic growth and it indicates the potential for a country to grow more rapidly (Veric, 2014; Tsani, 2013; Gaddis and Klasen, 2011; Luci, 2009), while large-scale studies argued no significant relationship (Lahoti and

Swaminathan, 2013; Mammen and Paxson, 2000). Voluminous studies used cross-sectional data across countries to test this relationship (Goldin 1994; Mammen and Paxson 2008). Employing cross-sectional pooled data similarly, Fatima and Sultana (2009) attributed the existence of U-shaped relationship with female education attainment, sectoral employment share, unemployment rate, wages and marital status. The results affirmed that high rate of economic development is encouraging female participation in the labour force by increasing the work opportunities for females.

A number of articles focused on other explanatory variables which include the regulatory context encompassing family and childcare policies, tax regimes, and presence of subsidized health care for workers and non-workers (Sundström and Stafford, 1992; Chou and Staiger, 2001; Jaumotte, 2003). Social factors that have also been found to explain female labour participation include sex-role attitudes, access to social capital such as friend networks (Aguilera, 2002), and cultural dimensions (Clark et al., 1991). Many studies that supported cultural factors determining the FLFP indicate that males are more aggressive and competitive and less gentle, tender-minded and concerned with home and family than females (Hofstede, 1980, 2001; House et al., 2004). The large number of studies on female work participation have investigated the extent to which education contributes to women's observed lower labour force participation and earning. A study by Srivastava and Srivastava (2010) illustrated negative influence of education for woman participation in work, but for women who are in the workforce, education is the most important determinant of better quality non-agricultural work. Vlasblom and Schippers (2004) pointed out that increases in the participation rates cannot be explained by changes in either educational level or in the number and timing of children, but it is mainly changes in behaviour that drive the increase in participation rates over the last decades. Likewise, Ince (2010) found that increasing the education of women can be considered to be related to decreasing fertility and mortality rates while it has a positive effect on female employment.

3.1 Theoretical introduction of the variables

This section focuses on the theoretical background of the dependent and independent (explanatory) variables and their underlying hypotheses, including the expected direction of influence in the regression models. The main goal of this paper is to establish an understanding of the empirical determinants of female labour force participation in the Indian labour market.

3.1.1 Female labour force participation

Female labour force participation is the dependent variable in the regression model. Female labour force participation is an important driver (and outcome) of growth and development. Women join the workforce in developing countries like India as a coping mechanism in response to shocks and thus participation rates indicate a country's potential to grow more rapidly. The labour force participation rate is a measure of the proportion of a country's working-age population that engages actively in the labour market, either by working or by looking for work (Verick, 2014).

3.1.2 Economic factors

The study tests the U-shaped hypothesis which describes the correlation of the female labour force participation rate with economic development (structural shifts in economic activity and changes to household labour supply and attitudes about women working outside the home). Thus, per capita gross domestic product is included as an explanatory variable at constant prices 2004-05. Extensive research studies (Semyonov, 1980; Edwards and Roberts, 1992; Goldin, 1995) find that economic factors such as national incomes, wages, part-time opportunities, demand for female labour, economic uncertainties, economic development, and labour experiences, have also been found to be relevant which determined female labour force participation. One stream of literature notes that actual employment rates of women (as well as an economic motivation of female employment as a contribution to household income) are primarily determined by changing economic circumstances and policies as well as the actual economic situation of women and their family (Haller and Hoellinger, 1994). Further, Weiss et al. (1978) pointed out that the level of industrialization and the degree of state corporateness positively influence the participation of women.

3.1.3 Educational factors

Human capital theory regards participation in education as an investment in human capital because of the expected returns later in life (Becker, 1964; Ince, 2010). Schultz (2002) emphasized the reasons why governments should invest more to educate girls. Specifically, increased female schooling is believed to be associated with decline in population growth rate due to reduced fertility rate, growth in per capita income due to increased income earning opportunities for women, increase in women empowerment due to increased control over economic resources, increase in child quality/welfare due to increased bargaining power for women in the household, and increase in available public resources for development due to increased