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EMPLOYMENT PROFILE OF WOMEN IN AN
INDUSTRIAL STATE**

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A Case Study on Education – Employment Profile of Women in an Industrial State

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Abstract – Women constitute around forty-nine per cent of the available human resource in India. Out of which a significant percentage, i.e. 22.7 per cent are represented in the work force and play crucial roles in the production processes in all sectors of the transitional economy. However, the form and extent of their productive work participation have changed over the years, mostly because of the changes in the methodology of production caused by the various phases of industrialization, urbanization, the emerging techno-economic environment of the country and specific professional requirements of the labour force, viz. education, training, etc.

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INTRODUCTION

In India for long period of time, the nature of women's economic activity has been centered around traditional activities, viz. Agriculture, fishing, household industry, etc. Since the economy was based on the traditional self-sufficient village community system of production, women's economic activities were mostly home-based. However, following the large-scale destruction of the self-sufficient village communities and village industries that followed the coming of the British, women's traditional economic activities received a severe blow. It was only in the middle of the 19th Century, with the initiation of a new phase of industrialization and urbanization that an urban industrial force emerged in India. Since then a significant section of the women work force has been a part of the urban labour force, especially in the urban industrial sector.

The extent of female work participation has always remained lower in urban areas in comparison to rural areas. According to 1991 Census, female work participation in urban areas was only 9.2 per cent of the urban total female population. Whereas in rural areas, this was 26.7 per cent. This is mostly because of the fact that the overwhelming majority of the female workforce in India is engaged in agriculture. However, of the total female workers in the urban areas in 1991, a total of 79.57 were in nonagricultural sectors (household industry, service, trade, commerce, manufacturing etc.

India is a tradition bound pluralistic society. The nature and extent of women's work participation here is widely affected by the broad socio-cultural matrix, viz. the traditional norms and values, beliefs, attitudes and expectations of the society, among other factors. For

ages, these normative arrangements in society by and large have been instrumental in shaping women's work participation. The situation is broadly reflected in a traditional sectors such as agriculture, handicraft and cottage industries.

However, a significant number of the small industrial units are in a phase of transition and belongs to the modern sector in terms of the items produced and technology used. It has been observed in recent years that working skill, educational background and the labour market structure have come to play more important roles in women's participation in the small industrial units than the predominance of traditional norms and values that used to largely determine women's work participation in the traditional sectors of economy.

SSI's have been categorized into traditional and modern sectors depending on terms produced and tools and machinery used by them in the manufacturing processes. Traditional small industry sector produces items using traditional tools, technology and skills, and thereby maintains the traditional crafts and culture of the country. On the other hand, modern small industry sector meets the contemporary demand by producing sophisticated items like electronics goods, T.V. sets, etc. with appropriate modern technology. This industry adopts up-to-date innovations of technology which come through research and development. The traditional SSI units are found to be more labour intensive in comparison to modern SSI units. However, one of the inherent weak points of the traditional SSI units is that in spite of their more labour-intensive quality they are not in a position to provide employment throughout the year. Employment in these units is mainly seasonal and of part-time in nature. On the other

hand, the modern SSI units though less labour-intensive, ensure full-time employment throughout the year.

A small scale industry unit like any other firm transforms inputs like labour, material and machine into output. In the process of such transformation, it adds utility to its product and generates surplus. Such transformation process defines the economic activity and technological process of the firm, which further depends on its operational efficiency.

Since the basic assumptions of economies of scale indicates the increase in output more than proportionate increase in all inputs with static state of technology, fixed factor proportion and at a given price, the factors which contributed to the increase in output are of crucial importance. The factors contributing to the economies of scale are broadly categorized into specialization, dimensional effect, and indivisibility.

Specialization, which includes the reorganization of task among the labour force, changes in their skill, changes in the technology of production and shifts in the proportion of labour and capital inputs and Rosezger are applicable to the firm engaged in large scale production. Studies conducted in various parts of the world accepted that the large scale firms avail the advantages of economies of production due to the specialization effect.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

In recent years, a significant body of literature has emerged on women's studies especially focusing on the issues of discrimination of women in society and women's work participation in the industrial sector. An important section of these studies has made social and historical analyses of the various bases of discrimination of women in the society. On the other hand, another category of studies based on empirical investigations has generated enormous data on the form and extent of women's work participation, the various facets of gender-based wage discrimination, impact of technology on women's work participation, relation between women's education and work participation, women's access to legal protection and women's participation in trade union activities and so on. One of the important bases of discrimination of women has been that of the institution of division of labour. The earlier Marxists believed that women's economic discrimination has resulted from their disadvantaged position in the labour market following household responsibility.

Engels (1976) blamed private property as a root cause of the initial oppression of women in human society. To him, increase of wealth in the society created entirely new social relationships depriving women of their traditional rights. The communistic households recognized the supremacy of the mother in the house," just as the exclusive recognition of a natural mother as

high esteem for women" in society. In the communistic household, he writes: "Women occupied not only a free but also a highly respected position among all savages and all barbarians of the lower and middle stages and partly even of the upper stage".

Nevertheless, as a result of the development of economic conditions of life, introduction of pairing families (one man and one woman) through monogamous marriage and possession of private wealth by the pairing families, the status of women and especially the concept of mother-right was severely affected. To quote Engels, "Pairing marriage had introduced a new element into the family. By the side of the natural mother, it has placed the authenticated natural father. according to the division of labour. The procuring food and the implements necessary thereto, and therefore, also the ownership of the latter, fell to the man; he took them with him in case of separation, just as the woman retained the household goats. Thus ... the man was also the owner of new instrument of labour ... the slaves".

According to 'mother-right', however, children could not inherit from their father. The children belonged to their mother's genes, and inherited from the mother. When the owner of the herd died, his properties were inherited by his brothers and sisters and their children or by the descendants of his mother's sisters. Hence Engels writes "as wealth increased, it on the one hand, gave the man a more important status in the family than the women, and, on the other hand created a stimulus to utilize the strengthened position in order to overthrow the traditional order of inheritance in favor of his children. But it was not possible as long as descent according to mother right prevailed. It has therefore to be overthrown and it was overthrown. The overthrown of mother right was the world historic defeat of the female sex. The man seized the reins in the home also, the woman was degraded, enthralled the slave of man's lust, a mere instrument for breeding children".

CONCLUSION

The SSI sector have played a crucial role not only by providing employment to a large section of women workers specially from the economically lower strata of the society but also providing the avenues for the fulfillment of one's aspiration to be an entrepreneur. In the present context of expansion of education, rural-urban migration, spread of communication network and technological changes, the importance of SSI sector has increased not only being producers of specific items but also being the employers of a significant section of marginalized groups of our society.

Gender bias, however has been clearly depicted in the SSI units especially in the pattern of recruitment of women labour force. It is only a few types of SSI units that recruit women workers viz. electrical, electronic, garment industries. They are also recruited only in the specific types of activities (mostly in the assembly line)

where gender roles are required. Again gender bias is clearly reflected in the pattern of job allocation. As a result women workers are mostly concentrated in the unskilled/ semiskilled activities which are usually low paid. The employers have also taken full advantage of the low economic condition of women workers by keeping them as temporary, paying low wages, denying maternity benefits etc.

The low economic condition has shown a positive relationship with women workers and their low level of education. It is the poor economic condition that has compelled them to be drop outs from the school system. Again this poor economic condition associated with various social and economic compulsions which have pushed them to join the labour market to substantiate the family Income.

Their educational background was helpful in getting employment in SSI units. They also found them to be helpful for the performance of regular duties. The relatively higher educated women on the other hands found them to be miss-matched in the SSI units. These workers were dissatisfied. A large section of these workers are dissatisfied with the exploitative condition of work.

However, this dissatisfaction has not got the scope of immediate expression mostly because of non-availability of alternative employment, household compulsion, poor economic background and their non-involvement in the trade union. The educational and economic background of the women entrepreneurs, however have been helpful in initiating and sustaining entrepreneurial activities in the SSI sector. for them it was not compartmentalization of traditional background from modern education, but assimilation of the two that have been helpful to be the successful entrepreneurs.

Women in the SSI sector are put in a paradoxical condition. While the upper strata women (though very few in number) have used this sector as an instrument for the fulfillment of their aspirations. The lower strata women have used the employment in this sector as their survival strategy. The upper strata women have used the traditional resources (money, network, etc.) for their better utilization and economic empowerment. The traditional background and insecurity of the lower strata of women workers are used by the employers to keep them marginalized in the labour market. Because of the labour intensiveness of SSI , more and more women workers join this sector for employment. More women entrepreneurs also will take part in this sector as the trend shows.

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