

Changing Perspective of Women's Work in India: The Case of Andhra Pradesh*

1. Introduction

The recent employment statistics from National Sample Survey (NSS) data reveals a staggering picture of women's employment in India. Women's labour force participation rate has been declining over the years and it becomes a widely debated topic among academicians and policy makers. The declining trends surprised many and all of them asked the same questions. Why the participation is declining? In addition, what are the reasons for the decline?

The large set of literature that discussed the low and declining employment trends agree that women are missing from the labour force and are more pronounced in the rural sector than the urban. As Kannan and Raveendran (2012) described this was primarily the result of the slowdown of employment in agriculture and the decline of self-employment. They report that a net reduction of 36.35 million workers in the agriculture sector and 4.59 million in manufacturing during 2004 to 2009. For self-employment, the reduction was primarily for those workers engaged in unpaid family works and own account works. This raises an important question as to why women in self-employment and low paying employment have declined because many of them in rural areas resort to these activities for a living. Srivastava and Srivastava (2010) aptly say 'the rural economy has been largely stagnant over the years and the opportunities have not grown' may be an explanation for the decline of women's employment in rural area.

However, we focus on the major puzzles related to employment and unemployment situations in the country where the jobless growth has widely been debated because it explains the low employment generation during times of high growth. During the 1990s, the economy was growing at an average of 5.9 percent per annum while the overall employment during the period (1993-94 to 1999-00) grows at around 1 percent per annum. Similarly, the employment growth has further plummeted to 0.1 percent between 2004-05 and 2009-10 and this period was the best ever in terms of real GDP growth – 8.1 percent per annum. The second puzzle is linked to women's employment where it has continuously been declining

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Both in the rural and urban areas. The rural participation rate, according to usual status, has declined from 34.2 percent in 1983 to 25.3 percent in 2011-12 whereas the urban trends remain very low at 15.6 percent during the same period. There are a number of reasons suggested for the decline and scholars such as Choudhury (2011), Chandrasekhar and Ghosh (2011) Rangarajan et.al (2011) and Kannan and Raveendran (2012) have argued that the increase in the demand for higher education is the prime reason for the decline but all of them agreed that the increase of women in this category does not fully match decline in participation. Moreover, majority of the studies that deals with women's employment scenario discusses the national trends, heavily drawn from NSS data, have not given a state level analysis. Therefore, the present examines the changing perspectives of women's work and existing employment pattern in the rural areas of the new state of Andhra Pradesh.

2. Objectives of the study

The main objectives set out for the study are as follows:

- To understand the trends and structure of women's labour force participation in rural Andhra Pradesh.
- To examine the factors contributing to the changes in participation and to understand the determinants of women's labour force participation in rural Andhra Pradesh;
- To identify the various institutions which have an influence on women's labour supply decisions and the coping mechanism that every women or household adopt to manage the institutional influence in rural Andhra Pradesh;
- To understand the impact of state intervention on women's labour supply across various social groups in rural areas and to understand the time disposition pattern of women in rural Andhra Pradesh.

Keeping with these objectives in mind, the study will make an attempt to understand women's role in the household and society and how employment empowers them to achieve gender equality in our society. Our conclusions and suggestions will be more policy oriented nature with a view to achieve gender equality.

3. Methodology, Data Sources and Study Area

The present study, with its very objectives, has examined the widely debated topic of declining labour force participation of women in India. Contrasting to similar studies that discussed the topic, the present exercise have stimulated by adopting a field based experience in three states of India, namely Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and Arunachal Pradesh. In Andhra Pradesh three districts, namely, East Godavari, Guntur and Kurnool, have been selected and from each districts three mandals or blocks have been chosen for the survey. Further,

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each of the mandals three villages (total of nine villages) have been identified for household survey and a total of 450 households are canvassed. A pre-tested structured questionnaire has been used to conduct the survey. In addition to this, focus group discussions have also been conducted to gather information about the general perspectives of people on women's employment in each village.

Andhra Pradesh is the first state in India formed on the linguistic basis on November 1st 1956 with 23 districts. However, the Andhra Pradesh Reorganization Act, 2014 has paved the way for the bifurcation of the state and as a result; the number of districts has come down to thirteen. Even though the study is primarily based on primary data collected from selected districts of the state, a macro picture of the employment pattern of women are carried out from the NSS data on employment and unemployment. This has helped us to identify the problem and developing the objectives of the study.

In order to understand further dynamics of women's employment, we classified the labour force participation of women by the regions. There are three NSSO regions in the state of Andhra Pradesh, i.e. coastal northern, coastal southern and the inland southern. The coastal northern experiences low participation compared to other two regions. This region includes five districts namely Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam, East Godavari, and West Godavari. Inland southern regions comprises of four districts of Krishna, Guntur, Prakasham and Nellore and inland southern region comprises of Anantapur, Kurnool, Kadapa and Chittoor.

We have classified districts wise information of all the three districts from primary census 2011 for the selection of mandal/block. We have estimated percentage of women working and categorized mandals into groups. For East Godavari the classification is 0 to 20 %; 20.01 to 40 % and 40 and above. For Guntur and Kurnul it is 0 to 40 %; 40 to 50 %; and more than

50 %. Based on this criterion we have selected three mandals from each district. Similarly, we estimated the percentage share of women working in each of the villages from the selected mandals and followed the same procedure to pick out villages for the survey.

4. Findings and Conclusion

Main findings of the study are as follows:

Compared to all India, women's LFPR is substantially high in rural Andhra Pradesh but it declined recently. It declined from 46 % in 1999-00 to 42.8 % in 2011-12. For all India, it declined from 30.2 % to 25.3 % during the same period.

In 2011, East Godavari and West Godavari have the lowest participation rate with 23.9 % and 32.7 % respectively but Kurnool and Anantapur stands top in rural participation with 50.6 % and 48.9 %.

In Andhra Pradesh, the employment grow 1.57 percent per annum from 1999-00 to 2004-05 and has declined to 0.15 percent per annum from 2004-05 to 2011-12.

The total workforce in rural Andhra Pradesh (based on usual status) has increased from 179.5 lakh in 1999-00 to 186.8 lakh in 2004-05 and declined thereafter to 180.8 lakh in 2011-12. For women it declined from 79.4 lakh in 2004-05 to 73 lakh in 2011-12.

The economy of Andhra Pradesh grows at a rate of 7.17 percent per annum during the period 1999-00 to 2011-12 but the employment grows at a mere rate of 1.57 percent per annum during the same period.

Among the three NSS regions, coastal northern represent low women's participation. This region consist of five districts namely Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam, East Godavari and West Godavari.

The cross section pattern of women's employment trends broadly coincides with the participation rates (UPS) across the NSSO regions with East Godavari (north coast) having the lowest rates and Kurnool (inland south) having highest.

In usual principal status east Lakshampuram in East Godavari represent lowest participation with 35.3 % and Gulamalibad in Kurnool district has recorded highest with 61.8 %.

The female labour force participation rate (UPS) is high in villages with high proportion of ST households (Thantikonda (agency village) in East Godavari and Gulamalibad in Kurnool). In villages predominated by other (upper) castes the FLPR is mostly in the secondary status.

The structural underpinnings of the problems described here highlight certain common things about women's labour force participation in rural Andhra Pradesh. The major hypothesis tested here includes how income or wealth of the family affects women's labour force participation in rural areas. The study has used empirical findings to show the validity of this argument but it is not fully supporting this hypothesis. We have seen that the slow structural transformation in rural Andhra Pradesh may be the reason for this phenomenon.