

Working Paper 540

**Locating Married Women
in Urban Labour Force:
How India is Faring in
21st Century**

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LOCATING MARRIED WOMEN IN URBAN LABOUR FORCE: HOW INDIA IS FARING IN 21st CENTURY

Jyoti Thakur* and Reimeingam Marchang**

Abstract

Female workforce participation rate is a key indication of women's economic empowerment, as well as their agency at home and in the workplace. This paper highlights the complex nature of women's labour force participation in Urban India with a focus on married women. Using unit level data of NSS quinquennial rounds and PLFS, firstly, the paper examines the prevalent gender gaps and changes over time in the urban market and secondly, pattern and trends of labour force participation of married women between 2004-05 to 2018-19 and later, a cross examination with marital status, age, education level, work status and occupation is investigated. Finally, the paper explores the activity engagement of women who are out of the labour force and its relation with education levels.

Introduction

Women's participation in work is an indicator of their status in a society. Paid work offers more opportunities for women's agency, mobility and empowerment, and it usually leads to greater social recognition of the work that women do, whether paid or unpaid. Nevertheless, the account of women's labour force participation in India has been always associated with precarious decline and low participation, especially after the 1990s (Chaudharu & Veric, 2014; Klasen & Pieters, 2013). The ability of women to access economic opportunity in the liberalised economy has remained marginalised. Worse still, even today, India is not only behind most of the countries, when it comes to the economic performance, it has been an appalling tragedy. According to *The Global Gender Gap Report* (2019) India's performance has been abysmal and the country is, in fact, amongst the five worst performing countries in the world. However, these declining trends tell only one half of the story. The other half barely gets any attention. The decline among the rural women's participation, which is a major driver of the decline in aggregate FLFP, is palatable as the structure of the Indian economy has changed from agriculture driven to service sector driven. However, the other half of the story is the story of urban women's economic participation which, as a matter of fact, is even more hapless but unfortunately less discussed. It is hard to fathom that urban women's labour force participation in India has stagnated at around 18 per cent since 1980 (Klasen & Pieters, 2013). This presents a strange conundrum – Why in spite of making strides in female education, an exceptional reduction in fertility rates, and achieving high economic growth, India is still not able to achieve gender equality in the labour market. Why are women still not able to access their fair share in the labour market?

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In the first two decades of the 21st century, India has made significant strides in closing the gender gap in education. However, in the labour markets, the gender gap is still glaring. This gap becomes more pronounced among the married population. In the Indian urban labour markets, the likelihood of married men participating in labour markets is far more than that of their female counterparts.

The institution of marriage is a universal phenomenon in a country like India. As a consequence, four out of five women in the productive age group are married. But they hold less than a one-fourth share in the labour market. Analysis points out that while never married women stay out of the labour force for pursuing education, in the case of married women, primacy of domestic work, irrespective of educational achievements, is affecting their economic participation.

In Indian society, married women's labour force participation is driven by economic necessities and they are predisposed to work in low quality and vulnerable jobs. Only half of the working women have the security of salaried jobs in the urban labour market. However, the incidence of casual labour among married women has decreased in the analysis period, but still, a sizable population of married women are working as unpaid family workers. It seems that married women in the urban labour market are still not able to break the proverbial glass ceiling and their presence as employers is negligible.

To provide insights into these critical issues, this paper used the most comprehensive labour data sets collected by the Indian government. The EUS (Employment and Unemployment Survey) and PLFS (Periodic Labour Force Survey) are analysed to highlight the trends and changes in labour force and this paper also tries to engage in the question of how married women as workers have fared in 21st century urban India. The cross-sectional analysis is done across marital status, age groups, educational levels as well as occupational status and work status.

Brief Literature Review

According to ILO (2018) report, only 48.5 per cent of women worldwide are officially in the labour force while for men, this rate is 75 per cent. Thus, globally, women's share in the labour market is 26.5 percentage points less than that of men. However, emerging countries¹ (India is also in this group) have the widest gender gap in labour force participation at 30.6 percent followed by developed countries at 16.1 per cent. Developing countries are reported to have the smallest gender gap in labour force participation, but this high participation is often driven by economic necessity.

Female labour force participation is one of the drivers of growth and therefore, participation rates indicate the potential for a country to grow more rapidly. However, the relationship between women's engagement in the labour market and broader development outcomes is complex. Nam (1991) observed that the demand for female labour will increase in third world countries with the increase in economic development as well as in international trade. However, other studies show that in developed countries, a positive relationship between female labour force participation and economic development is observed but in the case of developing countries, this relationship is not universal in nature

¹ IMF defines "emerging countries are countries with low to middle per capita income that have undertaken economic development and reform programs and have begun to 'emerge' as significant players in the global economy."

(Chinchilla, 1977). This variation is driven by a variety of economic and social factors, which include economic growth, education and social norms. The socio-economic factors which can affect the participation of women in the labour force are level of economic development, educational attainment and social dimensions such as social norms influencing marriage, fertility, and women's role outside the household, access to credit and other inputs, household and spouse characteristics and institutional setting (laws, protection, benefits) (Verick, 2014).

Cameron *et al* (2001) observe that Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) responds differently to education across different countries due to two prime reasons: wage effect and bargaining power effect. Higher wages encourage women to join the workforce because the opportunity cost of time at home rises. However, due to increase in the level of education, women's relative bargaining power will also increase, and women may prefer to not work, thus in this case increasing levels of female education could lead to a fall in women's labour force participation. Behrman *et al* (1999) observed that returns of education for females may rise in the labour market but they may not rise fast enough to counteract the rise in the returns to education in the marriage market and home production.

Studies on India show a gloomy picture of women's participation in the labour market. In comparison to countries such as South Korea, Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand, female labour participation in India is characterised by relatively low and stagnant rates (Mincer, 1962). FLFP rate has been declining for the last two decades (Mehrotra & Parida, 2017) and this decline is concentrated among 25 to 65-year-old married women (Afridi *et al*, 2016). Almost 94 per cent of total women workers are engaged in the informal sector, of which about 20 per cent work in the urban centres. A majority of women workers in the informal sector come from those sections of the society which need income at any cost (Geetika *et al*, 2011).

Klasen & Pieters (2013) found that in the Indian context, rise in female education actually resulted in decline of their labour participation. Due to high educational achievements, there is a rise in the preference for white-collar jobs as women get more education. Despite high growth rates, however, the economy has not produced enough employment of this kind to keep up with the growth of the high-skilled labour supply. This has resulted in a strong crowding-out effect of the increased high-skilled labour supply on female labour force participation. Klasen and Pieters (2012) found that for urban Indian women, participation in the workforce at lower education levels is dictated by economic necessity, and there is a pull factor coming into play for highly educated women entering the workforce.

Age is one among many reasons for the drop in FLFP rate in India. An Andres (2017) study highlighted that from 2004-05 to 2011-12, approximately 53 per cent of fall occurred among the 15 to 24 years old, 32 per cent among the 25-34 years old and 15.6 per cent among those 35 and above.

The participation of women is sensitive to the income of the household, and increase in the household income has a negative effect on the participation of women. Klasen and Pieters (2013) studied the decline in female labour force participation in urban India between 1987 and 2009, and found that demand and supply factors were at play. On the labour supply side, the main drivers were increasing household incomes, husband's education, and the stigma against educated women seeking menial work. On the labour demand side, they found that employment in sectors appropriate for educated women grew less than the supply of educated workers, leading to many women withdrawing

from the labour force. As 80 per cent of females in the productive age group are married, similar patterns and trends can follow for married women.

The socio-cultural milieu of Indian society exerts influences on women workforce participation. In India, societal norms, cultural trends, traditions and customs influence women's economic participation. Patriarchy has specified certain roles for women and men. And they have to act accordingly. Men are the bread earners in a family, while women's responsibility is only to do household work and serve the family (Kapur, 1970). Household and women's unpaid work also plays a very significant role in deciding whether women will enter the labour market or not. Women's normative responsibilities of care and domestic work impose a restriction on their mobility and employment (Mehrotra & Parida, 2017). Studies have shown that in various Indian states, women express the difficulty in taking up wage work mostly due to family responsibilities and certain social norms in some communities (ILO, 2018).

Women's labour force participation is a well-researched area in India. But a majority of the previous studies treated women as a homogenous identity. However, this paper argues that women are not a homogenous category. Single and married women have different patterns of labour force participation.

Data and Method of Estimations

From NSS unit level data levels, trends, patterns of labour force participation of married women were extracted and examined. Quinquennial employment and unemployment rounds of NSS survey used in this paper are 61st (2004-05) and 68th (2011-12) and PLFS (2018-19). There is a debate about the comparability of NSS Quinquennial rounds (EUS) and PLFS. Some scholars are of the view that there is very minute difference between these two surveys and hence they are comparable (Jajoria and Jatav, 2020) while others think that these two surveys should not be compared as the sample will be skewed towards the educated population (Ghose and Ghose, 2019). The basic difference between EUS and PLFS is the second stage stratum (SSS) where in EUS, the income levels were used to create SSS while in PLFS, education levels are used. Since other than these issues all the other aspects of the two surveys are similar, this paper is using both EUS and PLFS for analysis.

This paper has compared the principal status (ps) as well as usual status (ps+ss) of employment. This study is focused on the urban area. Thus, all the estimates are for the urban sector only.

For the purpose of analysis, some variables of unit level data were modified. The details are as follows:

- The Estimates are confined to the age group of 15-64 (productive age group).
- Marital status in this paper is categorised into three groups viz. Never Married, Currently Married, and Others. The 'others' category comprises widowed and divorced/ separated
- This paper is based on the first digit of NCO-2004 which divides occupations in nine divisions; each division represents the skill level required to perform the jobs in that category. For the sake of brevity, the nine divisions are clubbed to make four broader divisions (based on Baruah, 2016 classification). The new categories are High skilled (Legislators, Senior Officials and Managers &

Professionals), Middle Skilled (Technicians & Associate Professionals), Low skilled (Clerks, Service Workers and Shop & Market Sales Workers, Skilled Agricultural and Fishery Workers, Craft and Related Trades Workers & Plant and Machine Operators and Assemblers) and unskilled (Elementary Occupations).

The Formulas Used

- Labour force participation rate (LFPR) – The LFPR is defined as the percentage of persons in the labour force (employed +unemployed) out of the total population.
- Worker population ratio (WPR)- The WPR is defined as the number of persons/person-days employed out of total population
- Unemployment Rate – The Unemployment Rate is defined as the percentage of persons unemployed out of total persons in the labour force (employed +unemployed).

The Indian urban labour force

Labour force participation rate is one of the significant key indicators of the labour markets. The rate basically indicates the percentage of people in the working age group who are either working or looking for work. According to PLFS 2020, the labour force participation rate for women in India was 24.5 per cent while for men it was 75.5 percent. In simple words, this implies that around three-fourth of women in the productive age group in India were neither working nor even seeking work. Further, there exists a rural-urban divide and it may seem counterintuitive, but the participation of rural women in the labour force was higher than that of their urban counterparts. The labour force participation rate for rural and urban males was 76.4 per cent and 73.7 per cent respectively, while the participation rates for rural and urban women were 26.4 per cent and 20.4 per cent respectively.

Labour force participation is undeniably a significant labour market indicator and has rightly received the attention of scholars as well as policy makers. However, labour force, being an aggregate parameter, sometimes does not provide a comprehensive picture. Hence, understanding of the workforce and unemployment is in order because on the one hand, high workforce participation rates (WFPR) are desirable while high unemployment rates are not. This section will provide a picture of changes in the labour force, workforce and the unemployment scenario in urban India from 2004-05 to 2018-19. The labour force participation rate (LFPR) for both males and females has declined in the analysis period (Table 1). The male participation has decline by 4 percentage points while female participation has decreased by 1 percentage point. The decline in labour force participation can happen for a myriad of reasons such as demographic change, educational enrolments, availability of jobs etc.

This study focuses on women's participation in the labour market. So, let us zoom in on the female population in urban India. Various studies have pointed out that the high rate of female labour force participation, accompanied by high unemployment rates, is a signal of distress (such as drought, financial crisis etc.), because all the women who are looking for a job to support their family income may or may not get a job. (Srivastava and Srivastava, 2010). In 2002, India faced one of the severest droughts in 130 years and the livelihoods of around 300 million people were severely affected (Samra, 2004). Analysis shows that in the last 15 years, the highest LFPR for urban women in India was

recorded in the year 2004-05 at 21 per cent accompanied by a high unemployment rate of 9 per cent. This high LFPR of females in 2004-05 was the result of distress employment (Himanshu, 2011). The subsequent decline in the female participation rate in 2011-12 can be associated with the restoration of normal conditions where female workers went back to the boundaries of their homes. Unfortunately, these fluctuations point out that even in the 21st century, women's labour force participation in India is still distress-driven. It is still a matter of economic compulsion rather than choice.

The labour force participation rate between the periods of 2011-12 and 2018-19 shows an upward trend (Table 1). Though on the surface, it seems that there is some marginal increase in the participation of women in the labour force in this period, if we scratch the surface a little bit, we will find that it is not a positive trend as the increase is on account of an increased unemployment rate. This simply means that in this period, although the labour force participation rate for females increased by 2 percentage points, the increase in employment rate was only 1 percentage point while the unemployment increased by 4 percentage points. The analysis of WFPR corroborates with the literature and our analysis also points towards stagnation of the work force participation rate among urban women at around 18 per cent.

Mind the Gap: Gender and Labour Force Participation

Under-representation of women in the labour market is a salient feature of the Indian labour market (Himanshu, 2011). A close analysis of the data reiterates this grim reality of the Indian labour market. A wide gender gap in LFPR continued to prevail during 2004 to 2019 at around 60 percentage points (Table 1). However, in 2018-19, the gender gap has marginally narrowed down to 57 percentage points. However, this decline in gender gap is primarily due to the decline of males' participation rates.

The scenario of gender gap changes completely when we look into unemployment rates. In this section, the rate is high for females as compared to males. This high gender gap shows that in the urban labour market, it is difficult for women to find jobs. The gender gap in unemployment rates has decreased from -5 percentage points in 2004-05 to -3 percentage points in 2018-19.

In absolute numbers, the situation appears quite horrid as between 2004-05 and 2011-12, 18 million more men joined the labour force while only 3 million more women entered the labour force. Broadly speaking, in the last 15 years, there was an addition of 22 million men in the urban labour market while only 7 million new female workers entered the labour market in the same period. Further, in 2018-19, there were 92 million men in the labour force and women's share was abysmally low with only 24 million participating in the labour market. In other words, as compared to men, there were 69 million fewer women in the labour market.

The above situation in India is contrary to the global trends where the economic boom has witnessed more females entering the labour market. The low participation of urban women in the labour market is a sign that even in the 21st century, women are excluded from economic growth in India. Another baffling phenomenon about Indian women's participation in the labour market is the fact that despite achieving a high level of education, Indian women are showing a low propensity to join the labour force.

Table 1: Gender wise Labour Force, Workforce and Unemployed in Urban India (usual principal status)

Year	Rate (%)			Number (in Millions)		
	Male	Female	Gender gap	Male	Female	Gender gap
Labour Force						
2004-05	81.6	21.4	60.2	70.8	16.9	53.9
2011-12	79.2	18.8	60.4	88.7	19.7	69.0
2018-19	78.0	20.7	57.3	92.4	23.7	68.7
Work Force						
2004-05	78.0	19.4	58.6	67.7	15.3	52.4
2011-12	76.6	17.5	59.1	85.8	18.4	67.4
2018-19	72.2	18.5	53.8	85.6	21.1	64.5
Unemployment						
2004-05	4.4	9.4	-5.0	3.1	1.6	1.5
2011-12	3.3	6.7	-3.4	2.9	1.3	1.6
2018-19	7.4	10.7	-3.4	6.8	2.5	4.3

Source: Author's computation from EUS and PLFS unit level data, various round

Interplay of Marital Status and Gender in Urban Labour Market

Marriage has a contrasting effect on the economic life of men and women. Globally, various studies have indicated that not only are the odds of married men participating in the labour force high; they are favoured by employers and even earn more salary than their never married counterparts. While in the case of women, exactly the opposite is true whereby the likelihood of an unmarried woman participating in the labour market are higher in comparison to the married women (Matsoso, 2015; ILO, 2020; Thakur, 2019). According to UN Women's 2019 statistics, globally, only 52 per cent of married women were in the labour force as compared to 96 per cent of the married men. Therefore, it seems that in every nook and corner of the world, marriage acts as a premium for men but as a penalty for women. The reason behind this is twofold: *Firstly*, the institution of marriage is deeply entrenched in traditional gender roles as a result of which after marriage, women are pushed to take up the role of care-giver in the family. *Secondly*, the notion of social status is attached with the employment of married women, especially in developing countries, where the job of women is considered as a sign of poor fortune of the family.

In Indian society, the life of a woman revolves around the household. In fact, the institution of marriage is a watershed event in their lives. Besides, in recent times, the demographic group of married women has become highly conspicuous within the productive age (15-64 ages) female population in India. Currently, 80 per cent of females in this working group bracket in India are married (Census, 2011). Furthermore, Sample Registration System's 2018 report revealed that around 66 per cent of the Indian population is between 15-59 age brackets ("Nearly 2/3rds of Indians", 2020). Thus, married women who are in the productive age group are a very significant human resource that India is still unable to tap.

Predominantly, males in India are more economically active than females. However, this difference accentuates after marriage. The gender difference between never married males and females is also quite high. But this difference become even more intense within the married population. To

illustrate, in 2018-19, the gender gap in the never-married population was 35 per cent while for married people it was a whoppingly high 74 per cent (Table 2). Thus, the data clearly indicates the existence of marriage premium for males and penalty for women in the Indian labour market. It is therefore hardly a surprise that among all the marital categories, married men have the highest labour force participation while married women's participation is the lowest. In the analysis period of 15 years, the labour force participation of married men hovered around more than 90 per cent, but for married women, it has not touched even 20 per cent.

Across all the marital categories, never married and currently married women are showing low propensities to participate in the labour market, but the category of others show a comparatively high participation rate. The reason for low participation among never married women could be due to enrolment in education while for married women, household responsibilities seems to be the main reason for their withdrawal. In Indian society, women are celebrated as the homemakers and caregivers whose prime domain of work is the household. Thus, there is a prevalence of a negative attitude towards women working outside the home. These social perceptions and expectations are internalised by women since childhood and contribute to withdrawal from paid employment after marriage in order to attend to domestic duties as they seem a natural extension of their feminine selves.

With an unbroken streak of low labour force participation, the future of female economic empowerment looks bleak. However, everything's not lost yet, a careful analysis shows that during the period 2004-05 to 2018-19, 1.3 million more never married women, 4.5 million married and 1 million other category women have joined the labour force.

Table 2: Labour force participation rate by sex and marital status in Urban India (usual principal status)

Year	Rate (%)						Number (in millions)					
	MALE			FEMALE			MALE			FEMALE		
	Never Married	Currently Married	Others	Never Married	Currently Married	Others	Never Married	Currently Married	Others	Never Married	Currently Married	Others
Labour force												
2004-05	60.2	94.4	74.7	21.5	19.2	39.0	19.1	50.7	0.9	3.7	10.6	2.6
2011-12	52.0	94.7	76.0	19.4	16.5	38.0	20.6	66.8	1.3	4.5	12.1	3.1
2018-19	53.6	93.0	65.7	19.1	19.2	37.1	23.5	67.5	1.3	5.0	15.1	3.5
Work force												
2004-05	52.2	93.3	73.6	16.5	18.0	38.4	16.6	50.2	0.9	2.8	9.9	2.6
2011-12	45.5	94.2	75.0	15.6	16.0	37.4	18.1	66.5	1.2	3.6	11.7	3.1
2018-19	41.1	91.2	63.9	13.2	18.1	36.3	18.0	66.2	1.3	3.5	14.2	3.4
Unemployment												
2004-05	13.3	1.1	1.5	23.6	6.4	1.4	2.5	0.6	0.0	0.9	0.7	0.0
2011-12	12.4	0.5	1.3	19.3	3.4	1.4	2.6	0.3	0.0	0.9	0.4	0.0
2018-19	23.3	1.9	2.8	30.8	6.1	2.3	5.5	1.3	0.0	1.5	0.9	0.1

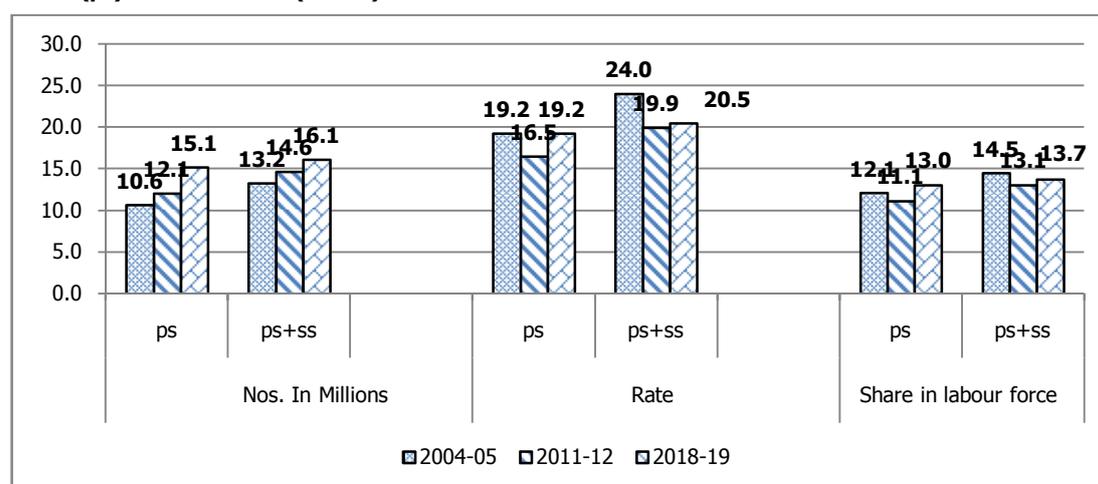
Source: Author's computation from EUS and PLFS unit level data, various round

Note: 0.0 value appears due to only considering one decimal place while converting to Millions

Trends in Married Women's Participation

The present-day world is moving rapidly towards urbanisation where more and more people are migrating to cities every day. Today, more than half of the world's population resides in urban areas (UN Habitat, 2020). Cities drive human progress by generating wealth and employment. India too has not remained untouched by this global phenomenon and has witnessed an upsurge in the proportion of people living in cities. The urban population of the country has increased from 17 per cent in 1951 to 31 per cent in 2011. But the labour force participation of married women has remained stuck at 19 per cent. (Fig.1). However, if we consider the subsidiary activities, it has actually dropped from 24 per cent in 2004-05 to 21 per cent in 2018-19. The surge in the LFPR after considering subsidiary activities highlights that apart from excessive unpaid care work, a significant section of married women works on a part-time basis as a strategy to balance their reproductive work with the economic necessity to earn money for the household. Nevertheless, in the period 2004-05 to 2018-19, the number of married women working in a subsidiary capacity has reduced from 3 million to 1 million. This decline in subsidiary employment can be attributed to rise in income levels in the country (income effect) due to which women's labour force participation, especially in a subsidiary capacity, has declined (Verick, 2014).

Figure 1: Trends in labour force participation of married women (%) in Urban India, Usual principal status (ps) & Usual Status (Ps+Ss)



Source: Author's computation from EUS and PLFS unit level data, various rounds

Further analysis of the share of married women in the total labour force reveals a gloomy picture. As mentioned earlier, 80 per cent of all women in the productive age group are married, but their share in the labour force was as low as 15 per cent (ps+ss) in 2004-05 which has further shrunk to 14 per cent in 2018-19 (Fig.1). In simple terms, in 2018-19, for every 7 men in the labour force, there was only 1 woman.

Age and Married Women's Labour Force Participation

Age is one of the many reasons for the drop in FLFP in India. Andres (2017) study highlighted that from 2004-05 to 2011-12, approximately 53 per cent of fall occurred among 15 to 24-year olds, 32 per cent among 25-34 year olds and 15.6 per cent among those 35 and above.

Women of different ages interact with the labour market in different manners. While the young women may be out of the labour force for educational reasons, for the middle-aged women, the demand for care work often keeps them away from the labour market. Over time, the LFPR for 15-25 age group declines, which can partially be attributed to increased participation in educational activities (Himanshu, 2011). Further, the median age at first birth in India is 21 years (IIPS, 2017) which means half of the married women in the country have had their first child by this age. Thus, a majority of the married women in India are preoccupied with child rearing in their twenties. Data also reveals that the LFPR of married women starts increasing after 30 years of age and reaches a peak after 35 and again declines after 40 (Table 3). Among all the age groups, the highest participation rates are recorded for the women who are in the age group 35-39. This pattern can be observed in the three periods. The period of 2004-5 to 2011-12 saw a decline in labour force participation across all the age groups. However, between 2011-12 and 2018-19, the participation rate started improving, except for the women in 20-29 age brackets.

Table 3: Age-specific labour force participation of married women in urban India

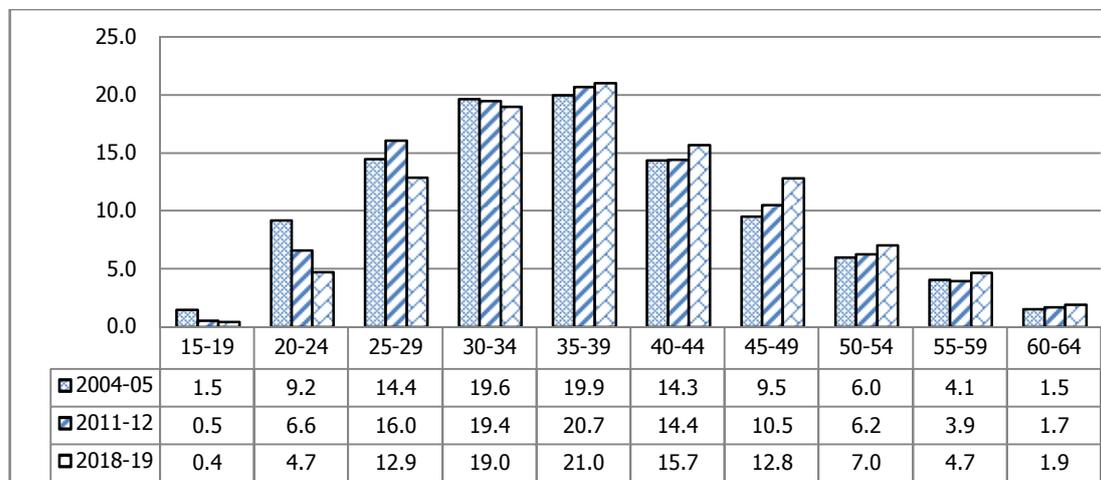
Age Group	Rate (%)						Change (%)	
	2004-05		2011-12		2018-19		2004 to 2019	
	ps	ps+ss	ps	ps+ss	ps	ps+ss	ps	ps+ss
15-19	12.4	17.9	5.7	8.5	9.2	9.3	-3.2	-8.6
20-24	13.3	17.6	10.3	12.6	10.4	11.7	-2.9	-5.9
25-29	16.8	21.1	16.3	19.6	16.7	17.7	-0.1	-3.4
30-34	22.7	28.1	19.2	22.9	23.3	24.5	0.6	-3.6
35-39	24.1	30.6	20.6	25.4	25.6	27.6	1.5	-3
40-44	22.4	27.8	19.9	23.7	23	24.4	0.6	-3.4
45-49	18.9	23.1	16.3	19.8	21.8	23.3	2.9	0.2
50-54	18.1	21.6	15.1	17.7	16.4	17.3	-1.7	-4.3
55-59	17.8	20.7	12.1	14.7	14.1	14.5	-3.7	-6.2
60-64	10.2	12	6.2	8.7	6.4	7.4	-3.8	-4.6

Source: Author's computation from EUS and PLFS unit level data, various rounds

Analyses of the drop in the labour force participation across different age groups during the period 2004-05 to 2018-19 reveal that all the age brackets have experienced decline in labour force participation.

The labour force participation of married women in urban areas across different age groups follows an inverted U-shape, as anticipated, with a peak at 35-39 (Fig. 2). The share of different age groups in the labour markets has changed over a period of time.

Figure 2: Distribution of share of married women (in millions) in total labour force by age group in Urban India



Source: Author's computation from EUS and PLFS unit level data, various rounds

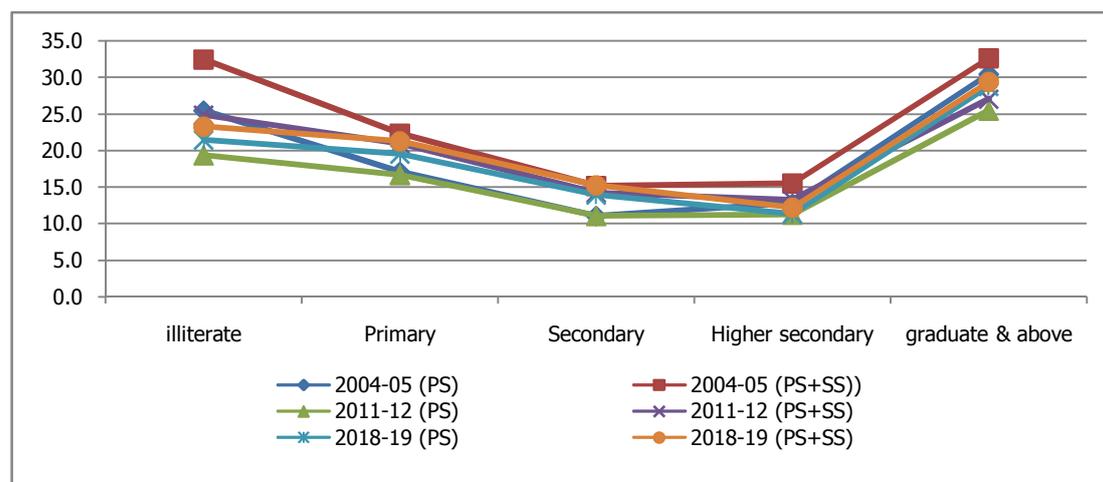
Education and Married Women's Labour Force Participation

Women's entry into the labour force can be facilitated by investing in human capital. Education provides the skill and training which equip women to take up different occupations and jobs (Lincove, 2008). However, in the case of the effect of education on the participation of women, arriving at a priori is quite difficult. Literature suggests that female labour force participation rates (FLFPR) respond differently to education across different countries due to two prime reasons: a wage effect (substitution effect) and a bargaining power effect.

In India, the data shows, there exists a U-shaped relationship between education and labour force participation of married women. In other words, either the women who have less than secondary education are participating in the labour force or women who have education above graduation level. Various researches pointed out that in the case of India, the participation of married women is deterred by income effects owing to the fact that women with high education tend to marry men with high education who in turn have high income (Chatterjee, 2018).

Women with moderate education (10th & 12th) do not prefer to work in low skilled jobs and the competition in medium skilled jobs such as sales, clerical, marketing is high due to which their participation gets further restricted due to the crowding effect (Himanshu,2011). Data also reveals that (Fig. 3) in the Indian urban market, a married woman with secondary and higher secondary education is less likely to be working than the illiterate women.

Figure 3: Labour force participation among married women (%) by education levels in urban India



Source: Author's computation from EUS and PLFS unit level data, various rounds

In the span of 15 years (2004-2019), the share of illiterate women in the jobs has gone down by 2 per cent in usual principal status while in usual status, the decline is 9 per cent, which is expected as government of India has launched Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in 2001, after which the level of illiteracy has plummeted in the country. Women, particularly, have made strides in this area as the percentage increase in literacy rate from 2001-2011 for females is 8 per cent while for males it was only 2 per cent (Census, 2011). However, there is a decline in participation rate among graduates too. Between 2005-2019, the participation among graduate women has declined by 2 per cent in usual principal status and by 3 per cent in usual status. Part-time jobs are highly significant for married women as these types of jobs are flexible and provide them the space to cater to their household responsibilities also. The high rate of decline in usual status is an indicator that in the Indian urban job market, the availability of part-time work is declining. The declined share of illiterate women in the labour market has been picked up mainly by women with primary and secondary education.

Work Status and Share of Married Women

Increase in labour force participation of women is highly significant to the increase in their status but at the same time, the status of employment is also paramount as all types of economic engagements are not as empowering. For instance, the dominance of self-employment and casual work in any economy usually points to an informal economy where workers are in a vulnerable situation. Traditionally, the participation of women in the regular salaried employment was quite low because of a variety of reasons. One of the major reasons behind this lesser participation in regular wage jobs is the omnipotent ideology of sexual division of labour. This ideology divides society into two exclusive spheres of production and reproduction and especially after marriage, the most desirable and respected role for women is to be the homemakers. As a consequence, more women choose to focus more time and energy to raise a family than go for regular jobs.

In 2004-05 urban India, (Table 4) a majority of married women were reported to be self-employed; however, in 2018-19, the status of employment seems to be improving, as more than half of

the women were salaried workers. From 2004-05 to 2018-19, the labour force participation rate (ps+ss) of the salaried has witnessed a sharp increase by 19 percentage points, while casual and self-employed categories had registered a decrease of 7 and 12 percentage points respectively. Nevertheless, the proportion of married women in the self-employed category was still as high as 39 per cent.

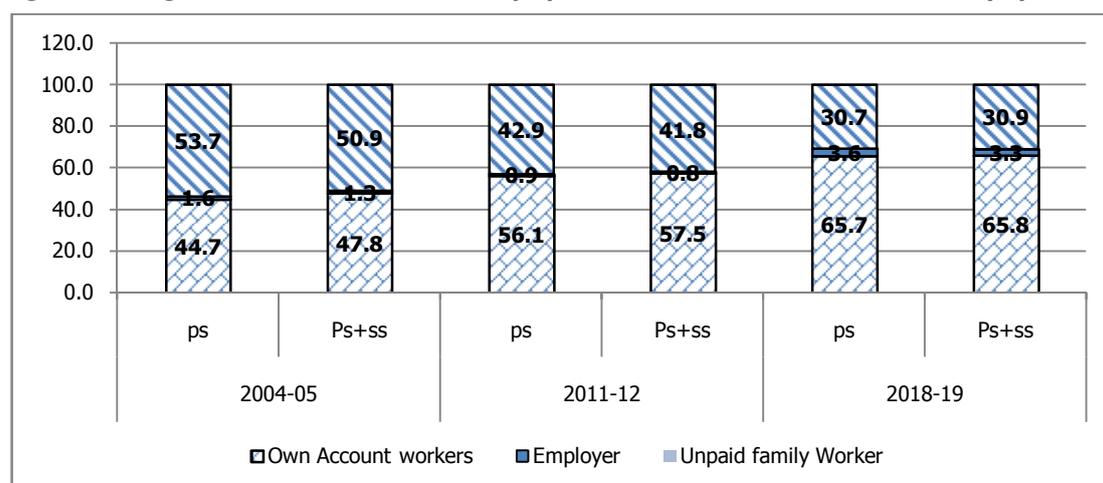
Table 4: Percentage distribution of married women by employment status in urban India

Employment Status	Share %						Share in Millions					
	2004-05		2011-12		2018-19		2004-05		2011-12		2018-19	
	ps	Ps+ss	ps	Ps+ss	ps	Ps+ss	ps	Ps+ss	ps	Ps+ss	ps	Ps+ss
Self employed	43.3	51.0	41.0	48.0	35.7	38.6	4.3	6.4	4.8	6.8	5.1	5.9
Salaried	39.0	31.9	44.8	37.9	54.1	51.2	3.9	4.0	5.2	5.4	7.7	7.8
Casual labour	17.8	17.2	14.2	14.1	10.2	10.1	1.8	2.2	1.7	2.0	1.4	1.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	9.9	12.6	11.7	14.2	14.2	15.2

Source: Author's computation from EUS and PLFS unit level data, various rounds

Self-employment can be differently categorised as – own account workers, employer and unpaid family workers. As per conventional wisdom, the participation of rural women in unpaid activities is higher because of the dominance of farm related economic activities. However, it is irksome to see that even in the 21st century, the high share of economic participation of women in urban India is still unpaid. The share of women who are unpaid family workers was whoppingly high in 2004-05 at 54 per cent which has now come down to 31 per cent (Fig.4). But still, it is a matter of concern that 31 per cent married women who are recognized as contributing to the economic prosperity of the country are not receiving any remuneration in return. According to ILO (2018), if the share of unpaid family workers is high in an economy, then it is an indication of poor development, little job growth and widespread poverty.

Figure 4: Changes in characteristics of self-employment of married women in urban India (%)



Source: Author's computation from EUS and PLFS unit level data, various rounds

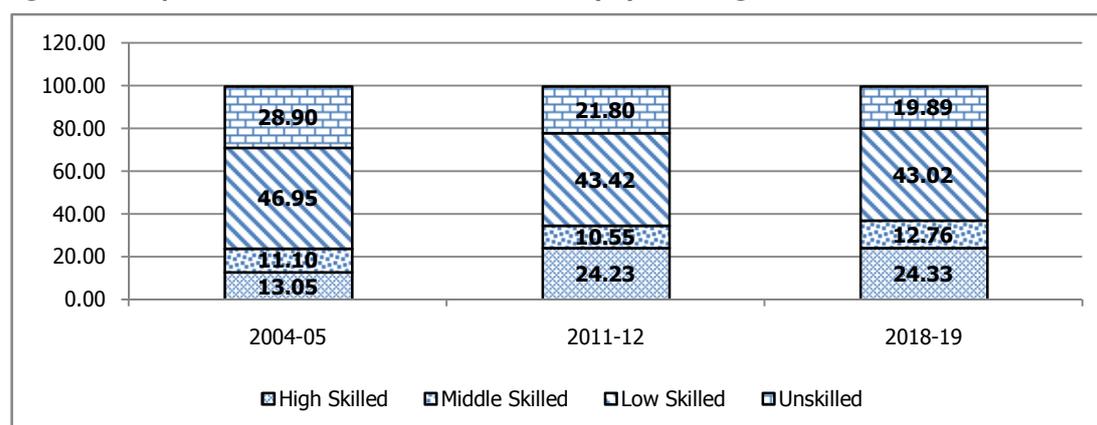
Own-account workers are those workers whose employment status is "self-employed without employees". The major decline from unpaid family workers has picked up by the own-account category. In 2004-05, 48 per cent married working women were own-account workers which has increased to 66 per cent in 2018-19. Notably, married women are significantly under-represented in the employer category. The share of married women as employers has improved but still is negligible at just 3 per cent.

Occupational Structure and Share of Married Women

The question of labour force participation of women in general and married women in particular cannot be confined to the rate of labour force participation as the quality of that participation is also significant. To achieve gender parity in a society, it is not enough that women are participating in the labour market; rather, society should strive to facilitate the representation of women in all occupational categories. This section throws light on the position married women hold in the occupational hierarchy in urban India. Literature suggests that labour markets are segregated on the lines of gender where men and women are predisposed to work in certain kinds of occupations. Some jobs are deemed as masculine and thus fit for men and some jobs are considered feminine so women are better suited for them. Women are overrepresented in jobs such as teaching, clerical jobs, front office etc. (Banerjee Madhusree, 2019). The occupational aspirations of women are largely confined by the gendered social norms in India. A UNDP (2015) study in four major cities in India (Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad) highlights this fact. The study found that the top priority jobs for women in the country include Beauty & Wellness, IT & ITES, Textile & Clothing, Travel & Tourism, Hospitality & Trade and Education & Skill Development.

The trends in occupation distribution among married women show little upward mobility. Slowly, women are climbing the ladder and entering into high skill occupations. In 2004-05, only 13 per cent of the women were in the high skill professions which has increased to 24 per cent in 2011-12 and remains at 24 per cent in 2018-19 (fig.5). Unfortunately, around two-thirds of married women are still trapped in the lower rungs to jobs. Across all the rounds, more than 40 per cent of married women are employed in low skilled occupations. Around 29 per cent in 2004-05 and 20 per cent in 2018-19 were doing unskilled jobs. The consideration about occupational mobility is not limited to having more women in the boardrooms and parliament only; rather, it's a matter of women's economic wellbeing. The high skilled jobs generally are better paid and have high social status and thus when more women have access to these jobs, that means more economic independence and social status.

Figure 5: Occupational distribution of married women (%) according to skill levels in urban India



Source: Author's computation from EUS and PLFS unit level data, various rounds

The level of skill required to perform a job is directly related to the level of education. Various studies have pointed out that women are employed in low paying jobs that are low in the job hierarchy (Unni & Raveendran, 2007). As expected, people with high education occupy the majority share in the high skill jobs and the illiterate are the majority in unskilled jobs. Conversely, a substantial number of highly educated married women in urban India are still stuck with the low skill jobs (Table 5). Analysis reveals that in 2004-05, around one-fourth of the married women were employed in low skill jobs despite having a graduate and above degree. However, it appears that there is some upward mobility of highly educated women to jobs commensurate with their education levels. The proportion of women with high education in low skill jobs has come down to 20 per cent in 2011-12 and further down to 18 per cent in 2018-19. This can be an indication that increase in education provides an opportunity of upward mobility in the labour market.

Table 5: Occupational distribution of married women (%) by education levels in urban India

Education	High Skilled	Mid Skilled	Low Skilled	Unskilled	Total
2004-05					
Illiterate	3.6	0.1	47.8	48.5	100.0
Primary	6.6	1.4	57.2	34.9	100.0
Secondary	9.1	9.9	63.4	17.7	100.0
H. Secondary	19.1	34.1	43.3	3.5	100.0
Graduate +	38.3	36.7	24.4	0.6	100.0
2011-12					
Illiterate	8.3	0.5	49.6	41.6	100.0
Primary	10.9	0.5	55.0	33.6	100.0
Secondary	19.6	6.0	56.2	18.1	100.0
H. Secondary	32.8	24.1	39.5	3.5	100.0
Graduate +	51.3	27.9	19.6	1.2	100.0
2018-19					
Illiterate	8.6	0.0	47.1	44.2	100.0
Primary	12.3	0.7	57.3	29.7	100.0
Secondary	16.5	4.4	59.4	19.6	100.0
H. Secondary	17.1	23.8	51.8	7.3	100.0
Graduate +	48.9	32.3	18.3	0.5	100.0

Source: Author's computation from EUS and PLFS unit level data, various rounds

If not in the labour force, where are urban married women?

Various studies point out that all over the world, domestic and care work is impeding women's entry into the labour force (Barrientos & Kabeer, 2004). Thus, it is significant to understand the competing demand for time women face due to domestic duties. As mentioned earlier, in 2018-19, only 24 per cent of all productive age group women were in the labour force against 92 per cent of men. The most pertinent question to ask at this juncture is, "Where are urban married women if not in the labour force"? To find the answer, we need to peep into the 'out of labour force' category.

It's not a surprise that in the context of India, the household has a quite pivotal role even in the economic life of women. Thus, the answer to the riddle of stagnant labour force participation of women in urban India can be found in the household. The inquiry about the labour force participation of women, especially married, cannot be comprehensive without the account of out of labour force women.

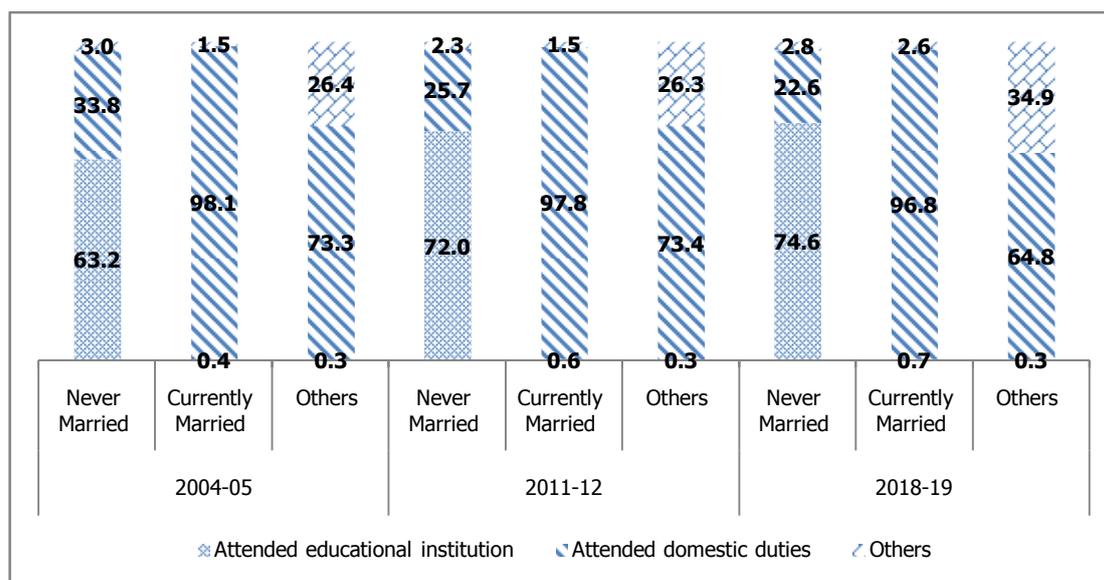
In the patriarchal matrix, the household chores are the sole responsibility of the women, which has significant bearing on their participation in market work and thus it is necessary to understand the unpaid household duties. Therefore, understanding the out of labour force women and the persistent gender inequality at the household level is the missing link to unravel the gender gaps in the labour force participation (Ferrant G *et al*, 2014).

Time is a finite resource and as a result of overwhelming and exhausting unpaid care work, women are left with very little or no time to invest in paid activities. According to recent time use survey (NSS 2019), in India, women spent 299 minutes per day on unpaid care work while men spent only 97 minutes per day for domestic chores. This huge gender gap in care work has put Indian women at a great disadvantage because every extra minute a woman spends on unpaid work eats into her time which could potentially be spent on paid work-related activities or may be devoted to her education or leisure. Due to this gender inequality in unpaid care work, women on the one hand are time poor and on the other hand income poor. In this section, we explore what type of activities women who are categorised as "non-workers" actually engaged in. Also, if there any difference between the activities of educated and uneducated women.

Marital status seems to impact the activities non-working women are spending their time on. The analysis reveals that the majority of out of labour force never married women are attending educational institutes while most of the married and other category women are attending to domestic duties. In 2004-05, 98 per cent of women were engaged in domestic duties² as primary activity which has marginally decreased to 97 per cent in 2018-19 (Fig. 6). The high involvement of women in domestic duties highlights the fact that even today, domestic chores keep the women, especially married women, tied down to the home. It appears that despite achieving high accolades in education, women in India are predestined to be full-time homemakers. Due to the cult of domestic tasks like cooking, cleaning, and child care being highly gendered, women are socialised to excel in these areas.

² NSS collects data on domestic duties under two sub-categories – domestic duties and domestic duties with free collection of goods for the household i.e. domestic duty performed along with at least one unpaid own account production activity (as defined by UNSNA)

Figure 6: Distribution of out of labour force women by marital status in urban India



Source: Author's computation from EUS and PLFS unit level data, various rounds

Table 6 presents various activities and engagements of married women belonging to different education levels. It is evident that out of the labour force married women with different levels of education are practically similar. The involvement of married women in the education sphere is almost negligible. It appears that marriage is not only associated with withdrawal of women from the labour force, but also leads to education cessation among urban women in India. Data reveals a glaring reality of Indian society that irrespective of their educational achievements, married women in India are the primary caregiver in the household. They are crumbling under the inordinate burden of household work which even in 21st century urban India seems to be the domain of women.

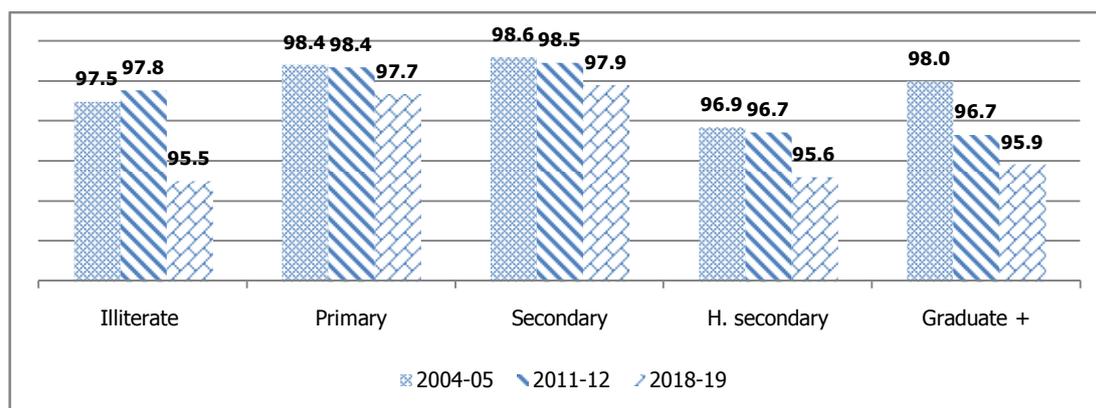
Table 6 Education-specific distribution of out of labour force married women (%) in urban India

Education Level	Attended educational institution	Attended domestic duties	Others
2004-05			
Illiterate	7.8	25.8	26.2
Primary	5.4	21.4	21.3
Secondary	20.3	32.5	32.2
H. secondary	42.4	8.0	8.0
Graduate +	24.1	12.3	12.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
2011-12			
Illiterate	0.0	21.1	30.5
Primary	0.1	18.7	19.8
Secondary	14.6	33.3	26.8
H. secondary	40.8	11.5	7.7
Graduate +	44.5	15.5	15.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
2018-19			
Illiterate	3.0	17.6	30.8
Primary	2.2	15.9	13.8
Secondary	14.8	35.2	24.8
H. secondary	41.4	11.8	9.6
Graduate +	38.6	19.4	21.1
Total	100	100	100

Source: Author's computation from EUS and PLFS unit level data, various rounds

According to the recently released AISHE (All India Survey on Higher Education) 2019-20 report, women holds 49 per cent of total enrolment in higher education in India. However, there is a need to take cognizance of a lack of transmission of higher participation of women in education to high participation in the labour force. But this is not seeming to be happening anytime soon as across all the education groups, around 70% of women were performing domestic duties. Over a period of time, there is a miniscule decline in the proportion of women with domestic duty as their primary activity. The decline is comparatively high among illiterate and graduate plus category of women (Fig 7). This, commensurate with the earlier finding in this paper, shows that there is high participation among married women among illiterate and graduate plus educational groups. This again emphasises the argument that unless there is equitable distribution of household chores among both the genders, the increase in women's participation in the labour force is a distant dream.

Figure 7: Percentage of married women involved in domestic duties as primary activity in urban India



Source: Author's computation from EUS and PLFS unit level data, various rounds

Conclusion

The empirical findings of this paper show that even in the 21st century, the Indian urban labour markets are suffering from a huge gender gap. In absolute numbers, this gap translates into a gender gap of 14 million missing women. Further, the participation of married men is the highest among all the marital statuses, while married women's participation in paid activities is abysmally low. This shows that marriage is a premium for men while a penalty for women.

Educational levels in India have increased faster for women than for men, but these high educational achievements of women have not translated into economic achievements. Despite achieving high accolades in education, more than 90 per cent of married women are engaged in domestic work which in simple terms means dropping out from the labour market. Besides, educational achievements less than graduation level also do not seem to have much impact on this dwindling participation of Indian women in the labour market.

The most prominent pattern of age specific labour force participation across all the three periods under analysis is that the participation rate starts increasing at the age 25-29, reaches its peak at 30-44 and then starts declining. However, due to exit from the labour market in the peak productive years, women are lagging behind in the economic sphere.

As far as the quality of the employment of married women is concerned, there is some improvement on this front. Earlier, the majority of women were self-employed and now around 50 per cent employed women are in salaried employment. This is a significant change as self-employed women are exposed to insecurities and salaried employment ensures some regular income. However, still women are mostly employed in low skill jobs and have very low share in the high skill occupations.

The analysis highlights that the key to this perplexing decline of women's participation in the era of high economic growth and high educational achievements can be found hidden in the households. Every human being has 24 hours and if the majority of your time is spent on one activity, you will automatically have less time for others. This is the case with Indian married women where the majority of their time is spent on household chores due to which they are left with no time for the labour market while on the other hand men, by avoiding this unpaid work, gain in the paid market. In a nutshell, India is aiming to become a superpower but if half of its population is still not emancipated,

that can be a distant dream. Double digit growth has no meaning until all the citizens receive their fair share in the growth. The issue of women's participation is highly significant for women's empowerment in the country.

In order to increase participation of married women in the labour force, India needs to adopt a two-pronged strategy. On the one hand, there is a need to break away with the traditional gender norms where the household and care work falls squarely on the shoulders of wives. Men in society should also be sensitised and trained to do household chores. On the other hand, government should strive to increase the opportunity for women by introducing gender-based employment policies.

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