

P-ISSN: 2706-7483  
E-ISSN: 2706-7491  
IJGGE 2022; 4(1): 168-173  
Received: 14-03-2022  
Accepted: 05-04-2022

**Kulwinder Singh**  
Assistant Professor,  
Department of Geography Pt.  
Chiranjilal Sharma  
Government College, Karnal,  
Haryana, India

**Corresponding Author:**  
**Kulwinder Singh**  
Assistant Professor,  
Department of Geography Pt.  
Chiranjilal Sharma  
Government College, Karnal,  
Haryana, India

## Gendered patterns of rural work participation rate in India

**Kulwinder Singh**

### Abstract

It is a fact that women's participation in economic sphere is much lower than men in India. However, due to education and economic reforms, new employment opportunities have come up for women. Therefore, the scholars argue that the feminization of agriculture is going on. Therefore, this paper attempts to analyse the data from National Sample Surveys to arrive understand the trends and patterns of women's work participation rate. Ultimately, the paper analyse the relationship of women's work participation rate with various socio-economic and geographical factors. It is concluded that feminization of workforce is a myth in India except few states. The participation of women have only increased in informal and low paid jobs. The multinomial regression analysis reveals that the socio-economic and geographic factors such as family size, size of landholdings, geographical area etc. significantly control the women's work participation rate.

**Keywords:** Rural work, economic reforms, socio-economic, geographical factors

### Introduction

India is a conservative country where the participation of women in the social, economic and political spheres is subordinate to men. It has been observed for the economic status of a community controls the social and political influence of that community. Therefore, women have been excluded from non-domestic economic activities, so that they continue to perform either domestic work or inferior economic activities with low wages. It has been observed that women have been left in low paid agricultural work whereas the men have moved to non-agricultural sectors. It has led to feminization of female work participation rate.

A review of literature has been done to understand the two set of theories regarding feminization of agriculture. First, feminization of agriculture is assumed to take place due to male out-migration and lack of women's mobility. This theory includes social and anthropological factors to explain the existence of feminization of agriculture. Second, it is contended that due to impact of new economic policies of 1991, the production system in new regimes demands casual/less paid labour and women's employment tend to increase when low paid jobs spread. Specifically, women's participation in non-farm sector will tend to increase due to their demand in this sector. Also, there is high probability of feminization of non-farm employment.

An attempt has been made to review the factors influencing the spatial patterns of women's work participation in agriculture. There is a gap in the literature with respect to change in the trend of feminization of agriculture in India or its spatial manifestations. A few international papers dealing with feminization of agriculture contend that feminization of agriculture has not happened as expected. These papers analyses the participation of women in different economic sectors by age categories and find that the younger age groups are leaving agriculture and participating in non-farm sector at a greater pace than their predecessors. These papers come out with the proposition that the patterns of trends of feminization can be better explained by age, proportion of non-farm employment and education.

Hence, it is necessary to analyse and understand the dynamics of women's work participation rate (WPR) in rural India for making policies to improve their participation to fullest of their potential.

### Objective

1. This research piece attempts to analyse the gendered patterns and trends of rural work in India. It specifically looks at the farm and the non-farm sectors, the latter being a more favoured sector in terms of wage-rates.

2. An attempt has been made to lay out the spatial contours of work force participation and the composition of rural work.
3. Finally, the study attempts to analyse the factors that promotes work participation for males and females to understand whether these are different on the one hand, and compares the factors responsible for driving the farm and the non-farm sectors, on the other.

**Data Source**

National Sample Survey (NSS) unit level data of 55<sup>th</sup>, 61<sup>th</sup> and 66<sup>th</sup> round has been used to fulfil the objectives of this paper.

**Table 1:** Work Participation Rate (PS+SS) in 2009-10 (15-59 age group)

Sex	Sector	WPR	Non-workers	Unemployment Rate
Male	Rural	83.35	16.65	1.48
	Urban	78.48	21.52	2.37
	Total	81.90	18.10	1.75
Female	Rural	39.18	60.82	0.68
	Urban	19.79	80.21	1.26
	Total	33.65	66.35	0.84
Total	Rural	61.53	38.47	1.08
	Urban	50.45	49.55	1.84
	Total	58.29	41.71	1.31

Source: Calculated from NSS 66<sup>th</sup> round unit level data.

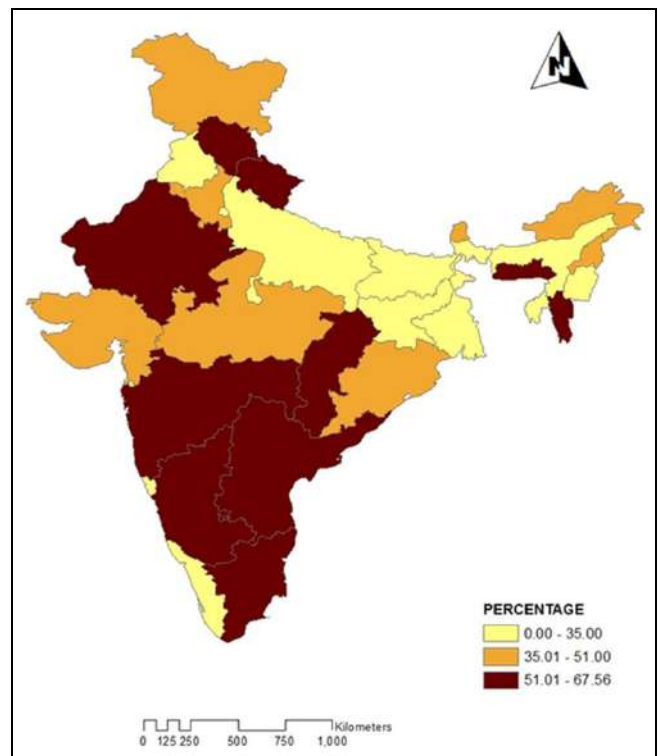
**Patterns of Work Participation Rate in India**

This section deals with the contextualization of gender issues in work in rural India with a special reference to farm sector because farm sector is largest employment provider to women in rural India. This section is divided in two major section i.e. extent of work and quality of work. The section on quality of work includes sub-sections on unpaid work and comparison of male-female wages. In fact, this section takes monetary remunerations as quality of work which might be a narrow point of view but it provides us with some objective and important realities.

Extent of work means the amount of visibility of women in working spheres. This gives us a raw idea about the situation of women in labour market or labour market of different sectors. This section provides us information about WPR and sectoral composition of work and this information is a pre-requisite for further analysis of condition of women in working spheres. After analysis of NSS unit level data (Table 1) we come to following conclusions.

- Men’s WPR is disproportionately higher than women’s WPR both in rural and urban areas. The difference between WPR of rural and urban male is not very significant but the same difference is very wide among female labour.
- The spatial patterns of women’s WPR authenticate that there is a north-south dichotomy in India. The southern India shows greater female WPR than the north Indian states. The female WPR across states of Indo-Gangetic plains is consistently low. The mountain states are regions with high female WPR (Map 1).
- The correlation between female WPR and male-female disparity is -0.95 (significant at 1% level) which means that regions with higher female WPR has lesser disparity between men and women WPR than the regions with lower WPR.

- Disaggregating by the economic sectors, it is observed that there is a negative correlation (-0.512 at 1% significance level) between women’s rural WPR and proportion of rural women’s non-farm employment to women’s rural employment. This implies that regions with higher rural WPR are the ones with lesser proportion of women in non-farm sector and vice-versa. The Haryana, Punjab, Kerala, Goa and Manipur have high proportion of women in non-farm activities.
- The correlation between the female rural WPR and male-female disparity in their proportion of non-farm employment in rural India stands at 0.43 (significant at 5% level). This denotes that high WPR regions have greater disparity between men and women in terms of their proportion of non-farm employment to their respective total employment.



**Map 1:** Female work participation rate (PS+SS) in 15-59- years age group in rural India 2009-10

**Quality of Work**

The quality of work provides us additional information regarding economic empowerment of women. Some parts of this section seek to audit the effectiveness of women’s extent of work on their economic empowerment. The variables which have been chosen to represent economic effectiveness are proportion of unpaid work in total work, work burden on women involved in domestic duties with performance of other works (coded 93) and wage rate. This section includes following observations (See Table 2).

- The proportion of women involved in unpaid work is very high in rural area and it is higher than urban women. The male paid work is much higher than women but the gap is much wider in rural area than the urban area.
- Including domestic duties with other works (coded 93), the proportion of women unpaid workers skyrockets. The differences in male-female unpaid work widen. The women’s proportion of unpaid work exceeds men

- by large margin in rural area but the same difference is small in urban areas.
- The unpaid among women is prevalent at a greater scale in northern India than southern India. Proportion of men and women involved in paid work is higher in southern India. Eastern India is one of the least paid regions for women. Generally, the higher proportion of paid work among women co-exists with higher proportion of paid work among men and vice-versa (0.385 at 5% significance level).
- The farm sector has very distinct characteristics regarding existence of unpaid work in it. It has been found that proportion of female unpaid worker to total female workers rises with increase in the size of landholding. This connotes that larger landlords practice greater control over the labour of their women. The spatial patterns are similar to the patterns of unpaid work in labour force in general except Punjab having least proportion of female unpaid work.
- A special study of women doing “domestic duties with free collection of goods and other works” has been done to analyze the burden of work on them. It has been found that women falling under this category do “double day duty” and is burdened a lot. A rural woman

- in this category performs 2.7 average numbers of works additional to domestic duties while an urban woman perform only 0.98 work additional to domestic duties. This means a rural woman is much more burdened than urban women.
- Either tribal regions or the mountainous and hilly regions fall under high work burden category. Women perform a lot of additional works in such regions due to lack of supply of labour and nature of resources available in such environs. Tribal or mountain women are involved in collection of goods from forest for household use. These women are also involved in many agricultural activities during the year i.e. husking, grinding, harvesting etc.
- The wage rate is higher in non-farm sector than farm sector in rural India. Urban farm sector has highest wage rate and lowest male-female wage disparity. The wage disparity is greater in rural farm sector than non-farm sector but this is not true across all states. The farm wage rate is higher in north-western Indian states than other regions except mountain and hilly states. The non-farm wage rate in rural and urban India does not have spatial patterns except it being higher in mountain and hilly regions.

**Table 2:** Proportion of Paid and Unpaid (PS+SS) (15-59 age group) 2009-10

S. No.		Male			Female		
		Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
1	Paid Worker <sup>1</sup> #	160.91	69.90	230.	52.36	14.58	66.94
2	Unpaid Family Worker#	26.28	5.27	31.55	33.55	2.73	36.29
3	Domestic Duties and Other works#	0.33	118935	0.45	45.43	9.47	54.90
4	Others <sup>2</sup> #	197.27	90.06	287.33	74.83	29.21	104.04
5	Total Working age Population* #	384.81	165.36	550.17	206.18	56.00	262.19
6	% of Paid work in Work	85.96	92.98	87.97	60.94	84.20	64.85
7	% of Paid work in Population	41.82	42.28	41.95	25.39	26.04	25.53
8	% of Unpaid Work in total working age population	6.83	3.19	5.74	16.27	4.89	13.84
9	% of unpaid work (“domestic duties with other works” included) in sum of S. No 1,2,3	14.19	7.16	12.18	60.14	45.57	57.67
10	% of unpaid work (“domestic duties with other works” included) in total working age population	6.92	3.26	5.82	38.31	21.80	34.78

\*Excludes people, doing “domestic duties only”

#in Millions

Source: Calculated from NSS 66<sup>th</sup> round unit level data.

### Analysis of Farm Employment

The section focuses on the biggest employment provider in rural India i.e. farm sector. Farm sector is important to be studied separately because farm employment is governed by many socio-economic relations and these socio-economic relations are interwoven with labour market in farm sector. Farm sector represents, largely, the circumstances of rural labour market, too. The findings of this section are as below.

- At national level, the proportion of male and female farm workers across land owned categories declines with increase in land size except 0.4-4 hectares of land size category. This is a very crude picture of distribution of farm workers across land categories.
- At state level, one can observe that the proportion of female farm workers declines across land owned categories in those states, like Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, where land is fertile and mean size of landholding is smaller than less fertile states, like Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat,

Maharashtra, Orissa. The mean size of landholding in these states is larger due to lesser value of land. This seems to be happening because the strength of social relations of between landlord and the wage labour is stronger in the regions with higher land fertility than the less fertile regions.

- The section on distribution of farm workers across landholding categories by social groups reveals that study of inequality of land distribution can be well done by analyzing the distribution of land across different social groups. The legacy of our social exclusion is manifested, noticeably by ownership of landholdings. The scheduled castes are most excluded from land ownership and the non-SCs/STs own either large size of landholdings or own landholdings across all land categories which is true in caste of male as well as females.
- Around 67% of female SC farm workers are involved in casual wage labour, followed by OBCs (44%), STs (42%) and others (27%). The SC

<sup>1</sup> Paid Workers includes NSS usual status categories 11, 12, 31, 41 and 51.

<sup>2</sup> “Others” includes NSS usual status categories coded 81, 91, 94, 95 and 97.



women have the lowest proportion in unpaid work category. Very few women fall in “own account worker” or “employer” category while high proportion of non-SC men fall under these categories.

### Feminization of Work Participation Rate

This section contains the trends of distribution of workers in different economic sectors and trends of work participation rate by age, sex, and MPCE categories. Following observations have been made regarding trends of women’s WPR and their sectoral composition of work in rural India.

It is necessary to draw trends of women’s share in employment in rural India to determine the occurrence of feminization of work force. It is also necessary to analyse the work participation rates to understand the trajectory of women’s development.

- Feminization of work force has not occurred when one takes a long term view. The proportion of women in work force has declined over last one decade.
- The decline in WPR has taken place across all age groups except one (>44) and fall in female WPR, between 1999-00 and 2009-10, is much higher than male in rural India. The decline in male WPR has also taken place only among younger age groups.
- There has been a drastic decline in rural female WPR across all states except Haryana, Sikkim and Tripura.
- It is observed that change in the patterns of male WPR across MPCE categories, between 1999-00 and 2009-10, differs from female in rural and urban areas. Among rural and urban males, the general fall is higher among higher MPCE categories while the situation reverses in case of rural along with urban women, in same period. In other words, diminution in female WPR is higher among lower MPCE quintiles. The boost in the urban male-female WPR in lowest MPCE quintile is an exception. The results support the findings of Himanshu (2011) <sup>[14]</sup> that distress economic conditions lead to increase in the WPR of disadvantaged groups i.e. women of lower MPCE quintiles in this case.

To confirm the long term trends of labour force participation rate and feminization of agriculture, data from other research paper (Himanshu, 2011, pp. 46, table 2a & 6a) <sup>[14]</sup> has been used. It has been found that the proportion of rural female worker in agriculture has been falling gently since 1977-78 and this fall corresponds to decline in female rural WPR since 1977-78. This authenticates the argument that feminization of agriculture or work force is a myth in Indian labour research. There might be many ups in female WPR but feminization should be studied in a longer period of time rather over a 5 or 10 years of time because such short periods can be abnormal due to economic fluctuations.

- In last one decade, the proportion of women in total farm employment has declined which suggests that the feminization of agriculture has not been taking place.
- There have been increment in proportion of women in total farm employment between 1999-2000 and 2004-05 but this was temporary and triggered by economic distress, which normalized after that.
- Proportion of young males and females has gone down in total farm employment which has led to “ageing of farm employment”. These trends also mean that

younger age groups don’t prefer farm employment. There has been negative growth in farm employment among younger age groups but on the other hand, older age groups have registered a positive growth.

- The male and female child labour in farm sector has come down drastically.
- All the states, except Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Tamil Nadu and Sikkim, experienced feminization of agriculture in last one decade.
- During the distress period (1999-2000 to 2004-05), all the states experienced an increment in proportion of female in farm employment except Mizoram. This means feminization of agriculture is a distinct feature of economic distress in India.
- Contrary to theory, the proportion of women declined in non-farm employment too, but the proportion of non-farm employment in total female employment has increased over last one decade.
- Looking at non-farm employment by age groups, one come to know that proportion of non-farm employment in total employment has increased among all age groups except children, but this increase is larger among younger age groups than older age groups of both sexes but this does not mean that work participation decline of younger age groups in farm sector co-exists with increase in the work participation of younger age groups in non-farm sector.
- The proportion of younger age groups in non-farm employment has gone down and proportion of old age group (>44) is going up. This points towards “ageing of non-farm employment” too. This has happened among both sexes.
- Hence, there has not been “feminization of farm and non-farm employment” but decline in female WPR.

### Factors Affecting Female WPR

In this section, the attempt to audit the causes of disappearing female workforce has been made. This section also includes a “binary logistic regression model” to determine the probability of a male and female being a worker. Another model tries to determine the factors affecting the choice of women for joining either farm or non-farm employment.

- It has been found in previous sections that decline in female WPR has not taken place due to income effect but, there have been a corresponding increase in proportion of women “attending educational institutes”, “attending domestic duties only” and “attending domestic duties with other household works”.
- In the analysis, it is found that the increase in the proportion of females attending educational institutes, domestic duties only, domestic duties with free collection of goods and other works, corresponds well with the decline in female WPR. The linear regression model shows that changes in these three activities explain 74% of the decline in the female work force.

Analysis of factors determining the likelihood of a woman being a worker, using multinomial regression modes leads us reach following conclusions.

- Likelihood of a woman to work is controlled by geographic landscape of the region. The likelihood of a

woman to work increases with increase in harshness of environment because of lack of male labour. Hence, geography matters.

- Cropping intensity, size of landholding owned and household burden does not have any clear relationship of probability of a woman to work.
- The income of the household affects the probability of a woman to work, negatively. It means more income and less likelihood of work.
- Household size and child-woman ratio has a negative impact on the likelihood of a woman to work.
- The impact of social group, religion, marital status on women's likelihood to work is very clear and significant. The women of lower social status are more likely to work and vice-versa. Muslim women are least likely to work but Christian women are most likely to work, it happens due to religious barriers on the mobility of women. The divorced and widowed women are most likely to work in the absence of any male working member and any social security.
- Increase in educational level seems to be negatively impacting the probability of a woman to work. This would imply that higher education does not necessarily promote a higher level of WPR.

### Conclusion

It can be concluded from the summary of findings that the women are subject to socio-economic discrimination in India and this discrimination has adversely influenced the extent and quality of women's work. Women have lower work participation in farm as well as non-farm sector than the men and women tend to concentrate in farm sector due to various socio-economic adversities. In a spatial sense, the women workers of southern India are better off than the ones of northern Women in southern India participate more in work and the male-female disparity in work participation is also lower in southern India. The women in northern India participate more in non-farm sector than southern India. Therefore, women of both regions lose in terms of total economic welfare in different ways. But it is also necessary to study the wage rate and kind of non-farm employment which is taken by women in states with low WPR India. Hence, further research is needed to justify the greater participation in non-farm employment by women in regions with lower WPR.

The quality of work is linked to economic welfare of the worker. Women have to participate in unpaid work at a higher rate than the men and rural women in particular, have higher proportion of unpaid work. The greater proportion of women in north India falls under the category of unpaid work than the south India. The women in southern India are better paid too. Hence, the women in south India are economically more empowered and independent than the north India, where their labour is controlled by the patriarch, is used largely either as domestic worker or unpaid family labour.

The women who perform domestic duties with free collection of goods and other works are one of the most burdened sections of women. The women in rural India bear greater intensity of work burden, than the urban women, performed in addition to domestic duties. Over the space, the section of women which are burdened most is located in tribal or mountain states. This kind of burden is taken up by women in function of resource endowment in such environs.

These women have to collect lot of goods from the nature for household use and also have to participate in husking, grinding, sowing etc. This is the most vulnerable, burdened and unrecognized group of women in rural economy.

Socio-economic inequality plays its part very well in determining the work status of a woman in farm sector. The inequality in the distribution of land and social status represented by castes exert great influence on women's work status and one can find that the women of lower socio-economic status women in the society participate in work at a greater rate than women of higher socio-economic status in farm sector. The big landlords and households of higher social status practice greater control over their women's labour, so, the proportion of unpaid work among women of higher socio-economic status is high.

Dealing with the clamour of "feminization of labour force" in India, it is found that feminization is neither occurring in farm or non-farm sector. This implies that there has not been a transfer of workers from farm to non-farm sector. It is found that the proportion of women is declining in farm as well in non-farm sector which indicates that there is a decline in women's working population. Data calculated from (Himanshu, 2011) <sup>[14]</sup>, shows that there has been a gentle decline in female WPR and their proportion in agricultural workforce since 1977-78 which confirms that the feminization of agriculture has been a myth. The short period increase in their proportion in farm workforce like between 1999-2000 and 2004-05 occurred due to temporary economic distress and these short period distress driven increments in female's proportion in work force should not be taken as feminization of work force.

An analysis of factor affecting female WPR shows that geography of the region plays one of the most important roles in determining female's work participation. The participation of women in work increases with increase in the harshness of the environment. It is so, because the harshness of the environment determines the carrying capacity and harsher climates have lower carrying capacity and hence lower population. Therefore, it becomes compulsory for men to include their women in work but this inclusion is not due to social norms of people of these regions but due to the compulsion which is climate impose on men. In short, men are not enough in regions of higher female WPR.

The social factors like caste, religion, marital status are also significant in determining the female work participation. These social categories affect female work in perfectly stereotyped ways. These three of factor are related to mobility of women or economic compulsion to work or both. The women of lower social status is more likely to be poor too which means that she is obliged to work to support household livelihood circumstantiated by the inability of the patriarch to impose his authority in the lack of economic power. Religion does not matter much in determining female work status except Muslim women. Muslim women are segregated from rest of society through religions norms, so, they are less likely to work. The married women are freer to move than the unmarried women because of lesser control over her sexuality and divorced or widowed women are freer than married women because of economic compulsions, in lack of an adult working male member.

The educational level of a person reduces the probability of a woman to work because the educated people might be either looking for better jobs which might be scarce or they

might be pursuing higher studies.

It can be concluded from the above observations that geography combined with many socio-economic inequalities and women specific factors, determines the female work participation and their choice of sector to work in.

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