

## WOMEN IN PRECARIOUS WORK

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Men and women often experience differently in terms of social and political status, education, opportunity, work, wage etc. There is an element of gender biasness when it comes to labor participation. It is often seen that lucrative, organized and high paying jobs are considered as organized and non-precarious, and men usually occupies these positions. While those jobs which do not have the above-mentioned characteristics are considered as unorganized and even undervalued, and women in most cases tend to occupy these positions. The over-representation of women in precarious work setting also highlights the discriminatory practices and biasness in organized workplaces, where employers prefer male employees. In any society, it is women who mostly take up family nurturing responsibilities compared to men. As such, apart from unequal opportunities in education, wage, skills and other opportunities, women tend to engage more in part-time jobs or take up precarious work with no union benefits, insurance or protection. In this paper, in order to understand why precarious works are taken up by women and its impact on women and society, two theories are discussed along with some forms of precarious works.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Inequality, Gender, Wage, Work, Labor, Precarious*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Inequality is universal and inherent in all societies. One aspect of inequality which is 'Gender inequality' is one of the crucial developmental problems adversely affecting the well-being of women and human development (Sen: 2001a). This inequality is embedded in all societies but the degree of inequality varies from society to society. Gender division of labor in the labor force is one important problem where women who work in the informal sector due to various reasons are often unrecognized, invisible and undervalued. At workplaces wage differentiation and low labor force among the female continues. Women are often exemplified as weaker than men in relation to jobs, skills, etc. In this regard, men tend to occupy the higher positions of authority and women subordinate to it. Most women who are not well educated or just finished high school do not find jobs that match their skills and as such a lot of women are out from female labor force participation. Development has not brought about much change in the labor force differentiation between men and women. Also, manufacturing and agriculture which provides employment opportunities have not contributed much towards economic growth. Another problem is when women work in the recognized or unrecognized sector there is inequality in wage patterns. Marisa C. Young is of the opinion that gendered differences in terms of wage; work hours, security and union protection suggest that women experience a greater degree of precariousness in various types of employment. In India participation of women in the labor force is low, with total participation being 25.5 per cent (2011 Census).

The figure below from Census 2011 shows the percentage of workforce participation where female participation in both rural and urban is generally lower compared to males.

**Table 1**

Year	Rural		Urban	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
2009-2010	26.1	54.7	13.8	54.3
2011-2012	24.8	54.3	14.7	54.6

Source: Census 2011

### What is Precarious Work?

Precarious works are those works which provide low wages, unstable employment, few benefits and work in dangerous conditions which may have health consequences for the workers. Rodgers and Rodgers (1989) characterized precarious employment on several dimensions including working wages, work intensity, the presence of a union, job stability, and access to personal or family benefits. As a result work without stability and benefits are considered highly precarious.

Basing on the above, two hypothetical questions can be asked:

- Why do women take up precarious work? Is it because it is economically more generative in spite of the instability and dangers?
- What are the impacts of precarious work on women and society?

There is 'gender' to precarious employment in that women are likely to work in low job settings, as evidenced by low hourly wages, less benefits, over-representation in part-time jobs. There are many reasons regarding why women take up precarious jobs. One is the gender wage-gap where for the same amount of time and work, women are often paid lesser and benefits are given more to the male employee. Education is another sector, where women who are more educated will occupy positions which are less precarious as compared to the ones with lesser qualifications. Another is where women compared to men are engaged more in household duties; as such women participation in formal work becomes less. There are several theories which explain why women work more in precarious settings, of which two shall be discussed:

### HUMAN CAPITAL THEORY

According to the Human Capital theory, women invest in less work-related capital and more in family obligations, resulting in less rewarding opportunities. According to this theory, those who invest in their careers through education, experience, skills are subsequently rewarded with high-quality jobs because the employer recognizes the value of the employee. In the labor market, the more valuable a worker, the more the rewards, either through promotions, benefits or raises (Becker, 1994). Other factors such as marital status, the number of children, household responsibilities also affects employment opportunities. According to Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) competing family obligations may compromise on employer's time, effort and commitment towards their work roles, thereby jeopardizing their employment situation. Although working men are married, women commit more time to relationships compared to their partners (Stevens, Kegin, Riley 2001). According to Young, women work in the more precarious setting because they choose to invest more in their family and not in their personal capital.

## GENDER STRATIFICATION THEORY

Everywhere society is stratified and unequal. This theory argues that women experience personal discrimination in work-related domains. Women are often at a lower ladder compared to their male counterpart with regard to positions, wages, rewards, benefits etc. Gender Stratification theory emphasizes on inequality between men and women but this does not mean they deny that workplace rewards are a product of investments in human resources such as skills, education, etc. This theory states that greater presence of women in precarious work setting results not from personal choice, but from employers' discriminatory practices to segregate women in these positions. In general, men and women do not have equal opportunities to invest in their careers (Bergmann, 1974; England, 1992). The difference between men and women in precarious employment also relates to the hours of work and work settings. Men are likely to work more hours in larger firms, which may lead to greater rewards in terms of union protection and benefits (Cranford, C.L. Vosko, N. Zukewich 2003).

Compared to women, men with equal education and work experience receive more wages and are less likely to work in part-time jobs. However, women who spend equal time on household chores are more likely to receive less pay and therefore more likely to work in part-time jobs. When we talk of precarious work, there are several kinds of work which women participate in. Here in this article three instances of precarious works are highlighted:

## OPIUM CULTIVATION

Opium is a naturally occurring narcotic, which is the source of opium gum which contains several indispensable alkaloids such as morphine, codeine and the baine. Morphine is the best analgesic in the world, when taken orally it relieves pain and tension. Codeine is used in cough syrups. There was a chronic imbalance of trade between China and Britain- there was tremendous demand for Chinese silks, tea, and porcelain, but there was little demand in China for Europe's manufactured goods. Colonial powers wanted to balance their trade with China, India was identified as a fertile ground for the cultivation of poppy and manufacturing of opium and as a result, exported opium grown in India and sold it to China. In the nineteenth and the early twentieth century, the British imperialists established the monopoly over opium cultivation. Today India is one of the few countries that legally cultivate opium and only country which produces opium gum.

Opium cultivation in India has had several negative impacts on society over the years. India is wedged between the Golden Crescent and the Golden Temple, the two largest areas of illicit opium production in the world. After independence restrictions have been brought where under section 8 of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act 1985 (NDPS) cultivation of opium poppy is prohibited except for medical or scientific purposes and in the manner and extent provided by the provisions of the Act. Licit opium poppy is cultivated in three states in India Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh, the rest where opium is cultivated is regarded as illicit. However, despite this, smuggling, abuse and illicit cultivation of opium are on the rise. Not only that, more people taking up the cultivation as a means of livelihood.

There are several reasons why opium cultivation is practiced such as unemployment, low paying jobs, the poor economic development where opium cultivation seems to be profitable and more rewarding. When asked why women engage in the cultivation of opium, the contention is that it provides additional income and proves to be more profitable than other jobs.

As far as North- East is concerned, it is argued that illicit cultivation became commercial when the population came into contact with the timber merchants from the plains. Since there is little economic activity and agricultural practices are more subsistence-based, opium is often the marketable commodity produced. According to a UNODC sponsored study in 2001, production of opium was reported in the Upper Siang, Lohit, Changlang districts and Khonsa circle of tirap districts of Arunachal Pradesh, districts of Uttaranchal and Himachal Pradesh, and certain quantities in Jammu and Kashmir. In Arunachal, a study covered 86 out of 506 villages in the three districts of Upper Siang, Tirap and Changlang. It was reported that out of 86 villages, 52 were observed to be growing opium. According to a study by Anirudh Deshpande in Arunachal Pradesh, the poppy was cultivated in pre-colonial times for medicinal and ceremonial purposes. But now it is grown as a cash crop with several negative implications on the state. Since the state is not listed under licit cultivation, therefore it falls under illicit cultivation. Several operations for destruction have been made over the years in the illicit areas.

But the flipside of this economic bloom is that, there is an increasing addiction to the drugs, which is affecting the family system especially the young ones who frequently die due to overdose; not only that talents and skills are wasted away. Drug addictions have also led to an increase in dropouts, robbery, and stability of the family has also been affected. Cases of domestic violence have been reported. All these in the long run will affect the society and might lead to decay, in the worst case scenario if not addressed. For instance, during the colonial times, the British brainwashed and encouraged the konyaks of Nagaland to take up opium cultivation for economic sustenance. The result was that the Konyaks became addicted and according to an article published in a newspaper daily, 'the konyaks became enslaved in every sphere of their lives....they could not catch up with their counterparts in any field.... and reduced them to be the most backward people' (Nagaland Post). Since most of our society is patriarchal when a considerable number of addicts are males, women are often forced to manage both domestic and also to generate income. On Arunachal Pradesh, Bhattacharjee (2009) writes "Significantly, all the addicts are male. With education and development, women have benefitted the most. Earlier, they had to work like slaves in fields and at homes, when the men consumed themselves in opium fumes. Now, many of them are educated and are professionals. There are quite a few entrepreneurs also among them. In fact, they are so successful that people from outside the valley are seeking their hands in marriage". Perhaps because of these benefits that despite the menace of drug trafficking, drug abuse and opium production; there is opposition from women about the blanket ban of the illegal cultivation of opium.

## **PROSTITUTION**

A prostitute is a person who allows her body to be used in return for payment. It implies the sale of sexual services, either oral or intercourse or both for money. Prostitution is not something unique to India but it is prevalent all over the world. Prostitution can be seen as one of the oldest profession, for instance, there was a law in the ancient city of Heliopolis in Syria where every maiden should prostitute herself to strangers at the temple of Astarte. In ancient India too there was the practice of Devadasi where young pre- pubertal girls known as Jogini are married-off or dedicated to the service of a deity or temple for the rest of her life. This practice requires the girls to become prostitutes for upper caste communities. But this law has been banned since 1934. But the devadasi system still continues according to a report by the National Human Rights Commission.

According to government statistics, there are 2 million sex workers in the country. Some of the famous red-light areas in India are kamathipura in Bombay, built for the British troops and later taken over by Indian sex workers; G.B Road Delhi; Sonagachi in Kolkata; Reshampura in Gwalior etc.

The important law dealing with sex workers in India are the Suppression of Immoral Traffic Prevention Act, 1956 (ITBA); Prevention of Immoral Traffic Act 1956 and Immoral Traffic Prevention Act, 1956. These laws does not criminalise prostitution or prostitutes per se but under these acts a person shall be punished for keeping a brothel, for living on the earnings of prostitution, procuring or taking a person for prostitution, seducing for purpose of prostitution, prostitution in or in vicinity of public places etc. in 2009, Supreme Court suggested that prostitution be made legal.

Apart from prostitution in brothels, there are different types of prostitution such as escorts, call girls, street prostitutes, religious prostitutes, bar dancers etc. In the present day, women take up prostitution for many various with no security or health benefits. When we talk of prostitution some are forced into it like trafficking and some are voluntary. Studies about girls in colleges engaging in various forms of prostitution revealed that it is often to have a better lifestyle and get the latest material possession which otherwise they cannot afford. Most women take up the work due to economic reasons such as poverty as this business proves to be easy and more rewarding financially; some due to lack of education and awareness. Others due to the history of rape cases or incest where the women starts treating her body as worthless or due to rejection by family members, some due to early marriage and desertion later. There are several effects of prostitution on the women as well as society. In India, the epidemic of HIV/AIDS was first identified among sex workers and her clients. Also, there have been cases where promiscuity have resulted in unhappy marriages, or strained relationships among married couples.

According to Lalitha Kumaramangalam, head of National Commission for Women, authorities would be in a better position to stop trafficking, especially child trafficking if prostitution is properly regulated. Also, it will help in improving the conditions in which the workers and clients operate and also control and reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS. On an encounter and conversation with a sex worker, the sex worker maintained that 'the society should be grateful that they exist and function, if not for them, rape cases will increase and nowhere in society will women feel safe'. The legalisation of prostitution will decrease cases of rape, fraud or other criminal acts. Most of the time the criminals do their acts boldly and sex workers do not report because if a prostitute complaints to the police, her work will be revealed and therefore will be harassed even more. The legalisation of this industry will safeguard women's health and they will also gain rights. The sex workers on the other hand also want to be accorded legal status, as they are weary of going to doctors, or scared of being harassed by police and fear of being evicted from their homes once the landlord or family becomes aware of their work.

## **DOMESTIC HELPS**

Apart from the argument that women are often considered as homemakers, there is another category of precarious work in the form of domestic helps. Domestic helps are those who are paid to do menial works at home. In the modern context given the situation that both partners work outside or rich people preferring to keep help, there is demand for people to work full or part-time in the form of domestic helps. Their job is often to look after the children and perform house-keeping duties. These jobs are mostly taken by people who are suffering from poverty, financially poor, socio-economically not stable or lack education. Most of the domestic workers in Nagaland are from the backward region,

especially the eastern region. Here, most of them prefer to study in return for their service as a domestic help. The reason may be due to poor financial status, or better schools in the town area. However, apart from school going helps, there are many full-time who are paid. The concern here however, is that domestic helps are often deprived of benefits such as medical insurance, pensions, maternity or mandatory leave. These domestic helps take up this work due to poverty, low economic status or low or no education. Some take up in order to provide for their family, the person being the sole breadwinner and compelled by circumstances. For instance, there are many widows who take up the job in order to provide for their children or pay their educational fees.

Compared to other countries, in India domestic helps do not enjoy much privileges, apart from being lowly paid or some exploited with no payment of their rightful wages, there are cases of abuse, rape and violence against them. There are many incidences against domestic helps which often do not make headlines but rather dissolve away because of the many loopholes in the system. One case which caught worldwide attention was the case of Devyani Khorbragade, the then Deputy Consul General of the Consulate General of India in New York who was charged by U.S authorities with committing visa fraud and providing false statements in order to gain entry for Sangeeta Richard who was employed as a domestic worker for Khobragade and was charged additionally for failing to pay minimum wage to the domestic worker.

Today various sections and parties of the nation have started raising awareness and started campaigning for domestic helps. The Congress also announced a nationwide campaign demanding a strong law for safeguarding the financial and social rights of domestic helps (The Hindu). Arbind Singh, President of All India Unorganised Workers Congress, argued that there is at least one crore domestic helps across the nations who have brought smiles in the houses they work in, but unable to see any positive changes in their own houses. Therefore, it is imperative that domestic helps and placement agencies be registered, given fixed pay, weekly and annual fees and be given benefits like insurance. The Labour ministry has been working on a national policy for domestic workers where they will enjoy the same rights enshrined for other category of workers, get access to benefits such as health insurance, pensions etc.

## CONCLUSIONS

In spite of changes in employment patterns in present day world, there is still the disproportionate balance of work and household duties when it comes to men and women. From the above, what we see is that women often out of necessity engage in part-time works because they have to compromise their paid work with their full-time unpaid commitments (family, household). Of which some is below their skill level or often compromising with their career advancement.

If women and men work in the same sector for the same amount and time of work, they are unequally paid, for instance, the sports industry. Last year in 2017 FIFA announced that the 2018 Russia World Cup Champions will win \$38 million (US) in prize money, but in 2015 Women's World Cup the Champions only won \$2 million (US). The argument placed for this is that male players generate more revenues. According to Jerome Valcke, FIFA Secretary General, the Women's World Cup should wait until it was in its 20<sup>th</sup> year before it could expect the same money. Tennis, particularly the US Open was the first to pay equally back in 1973. According to a study published by BBC, the gap in prize money among genders in sports is narrowing although there are disparities in sports such as cricket and football. Since time immemorial the idea that men are strong and women are weak has been long entrenched and embedded into our minds. When it comes to women and men in sports, women are often viewed as second class, no matter how talented they are. Not only that, there is also sexism in sports in the sense that women have to wear skimpy outfits or

show some flesh to do some selling and to ensure male spectators pay attention. For example, there is a case where Spain's Basque Handball Association submitted an official complaint to the European Commission against regulations which imposed on females to wear bikini tops and bottoms no wider than four inches.

The complaint was made after the Association threatened penalties because 21 out of 22 females covered their bodies with normal clothing. What is needed is to do away with these stigmas attached to women.

The disadvantage of precarious or part-time work is that it is lowly remunerated compared to full-time with no union protection, no or few health benefits and no career up-gradation. These female-headed- household and inequalities according to writers contribute to 'feminization of poverty'. Mostly it is women who are from the low socio-economic background or from racial or ethnic minority or those with little or no education who often take part in precarious work settings. According to research, women often experience depression twice the rate of men and perhaps it is because of their socio-economic standing, and also because job insecurity increases anxiety. Apart from depression or anxiety, there are various health implications for women's health. Because of its overwhelming detrimental effects, precarious work is now considered a social determinant of poor health. Nelson Mandela quotes that "education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world". Hence, more women need to get educated and climb the social ladder and break the stigma that men alone are stronger and more qualified for higher positions or jobs. Women need to be made aware of their rights. Laws and policies should be revised and changes needs to be brought. We cannot keep on adhering to an outdated law and expect to keep up with the changing times. What is needed is not to do away with natural inequalities which is almost impossible but what needs to be achieved is to do away with the man-made social inequalities. And opportunities should be given for playing in an open level field.

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