

* Fallen through the cracks

- 2020 → 50th anniversary of report 'Towards Equality' submitted by Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) to UN
 - 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action
 - ↓
- a benchmark for analysing condition of women & State-led Empowerment
- India's female employment trends does not resonates with —
 - high eco. growth
 - low fertility
 - rise in female schooling.
- Status of women in workforce evident from
 - ↳ Labor Participation Ratio continuously ↓ since 1950
 - ↳ similar status in PLFS 2018-19.
 - ↳ WEF's Global Gender Gap Report
 - ↓
 - India @ 149/153 in terms of women's eco. participation & opportunity
 - ↳ 2019 Oxfam Report ⇒ Gender Wage Gap highest in Asia.

- ↳ Despite Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, Indian women paid 34% less than men (for same qualification & work)
- ↳ Not much presence in formal economy
- ↳ Concentrated in low paid jobs.

- Women workforce (2019)

- ↳ Agri → 60% ⇒ (bulk of them landless laborers)
- ↳ Manufacturing → 14%
- ↳ Services → 26%
 - ↳ Of these, majority involved in care-work, like domestic workers, ASHA workers etc

- Pandemic fallout

- 39% women lost their jobs (Apr-May 2020) compared to 29% men (CMIE data)
- India's unequal gender division of household worsened
 - ↳ Women spend 3X times (as per NSS) or 6X (as per OECD) more time than men ⇒ totally unpaid work.

- 70% of world's healthcare & social workers are women (WHO)
 - ↳ Eg: ASHA workers → Though indispensable and overworked, yet underpaid.

- India passed 3 labour codes recently to transform labour relations

- Concerns in these codes -

- Does not acknowledge gender wage gap or payment of bonus
 - Ignores informal (mostly women) workers in terms of social security, insurance, PF, maternity benefits, or gratuity
 - Little focus on accountability & responsibility of employers
 - Protection from sexual harassment at workplace missing, though 'allowing' women to work night shifts
 - No maternity benefits in case of adoption of infants > 3 months
- Policy makers cannot just unacknowledge ~50% of the population.

* NHRC notes drop in women workers

- PLFS reports

↳ released by NSO

↳ women's participation fell to its lowest points since independence.

↳ Major declines b/w 2004 & 2017-18

↓
29.4%

↓
17.5%

Lectures Bureau

Lectures Bureau

↳ Marginal ↑ in 2018-19 ⇒ 18.6%

- NHRC held meeting with Ministries & other stakeholders.

- Suggestions →

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(1) Investment in care economy

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(2) Urban Employment Guarantee scheme, like MGNREGA, with reservation for women.

(3) Better working conditions, gender sensitivity at workplace & equal sharing of household work.

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(4) Encouraging women to take up unconventional jobs, like drivers & electricians.

(5) Digital literacy, esp. with WFH norms.

* A 'duet' for India's urban women

- Need for better social protection in urban areas
- Options -
 - (1) Universalising PDS in urban slums, under NFSA
 - ↳ but rations do not take people very far.
 - (2) Employment based support-
 - ↳ 2 advantages - [Self targeting
↓ Valuable asset generation
- Proposal for an Urban Employment Guarantee Act by Jean Dreze
 - Called Decentralized Urban Employment & Training (DUET)
 - ↳ job stamps to be issued by Govt
 - ↳ for 1 day of work at Minimum Wage
 - ↳ These stamps to be distributed to approved public institutions like, universities, hostels, hospitals, jails etc.
 - ↳ These institutions would use these stamps to hire labour for small projects

- ↳ Wages paid by Govt would go directly to workers' accounts against the stamps
- ↳ Independent placement agency for assigning workers.
- ↳ Needs skilled workers too (electricians, carpenters, masons etc)
 - ⇓
 - ≡ widens range of jobs
 - ≡ workers could learn skills "on the job" by working alongside skilled workers

• Advantages -

- ↳ activates many potential employers
 - ↳ Avoid need for special staff
 - ↳ Facilitate productive work
 - ↳ Workers secure entitlement to minimum wages, etc
 - ↳ First line of defence for maintenance of public premises
- #### • One variant of DUEI → prioritises women
- ↳ Absolute priority
 - ↳ As long as women workers are available, they get all the work.

↳ work in part time basis \Rightarrow attractive to many poor women in urban areas

↳ As Full time employment tends to be difficult.

↳ Give women economic independence.

↳ as dependence of women on men is one of the prime roots of gender inequality & female oppression in India

• Advantages of this women led variant

↳ Self targeting \Rightarrow as women from relatively well-off houses are unlikely to go for casual labor at minimum wage

↳ Promotes women's general participation in labour force.

\equiv India \rightarrow one of the lowest female workforce participation rates in the world

\equiv NSS data 2019 \rightarrow only 20% urban women in 15-59 years spend time in "employment & related activities".

\equiv loss for society as a whole

↳ May help prevent corruption, as women may be more reluctant to participate in a scam.

→ "Service Voucher" scheme in some European countries

↳ much like job stamps

↳ but are used by households instead of public institutions, for domestic services

↳ service vouchers are highly subsidized, so incentive for households

→ Best way to check efficacy of the DVET is to give the scheme a chance

↳ in form of a pilot scheme in select districts

↳ There is nothing to lose.

* Task force on marriage age submits Report

- Chairperson - Jaya Jaitley
- Minimum Age of marriage (esp. for women)
 - a contentious issue
 - Current law prescribes minimum age of marriage - 21 years for men & 18 yrs for women
 - Minimum Age of marriage \neq Age of majority
 - Age of majority is gender neutral
 - Individual attains Age of majority @ 18 as per the Indian Majority Act 1875
- Committee set by MoW&CD
 - to examine matters related to age of motherhood
 - ↳ purpose is to lower Maternal Mortality Ratio
 - ↳ & improvement of nutritional status
 - examine correlation of age of marriage & motherhood with health, medical wellbeing, nutritional status etc
 - examine possibility of \uparrow age of marriage for women from present 18 to 21 years

Provisions for minimum age of marriage

- Personal laws of various religions
- Hindus

↳ The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 sets 18 years for bride & 21 for groom.

↳ child marriages not illegal even though they can be declared void at the request of minor in the marriage.

- Islam

↳ marriage of a minor who has attained puberty is considered valid.

- Special Marriage Act, 1954 & Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006

↳ also prescribes 18 & 21 years.

- Sexual intercourse with a minor is rape & 'consent' of minor is invalid since she is deemed incapable of giving consent at that age.

Evolution of law

- IPC, 1860 → criminalised sexual intercourse with girl < 10 years.

- The Age of Consent Bill, 1927

- ↳ marriage with girl < 12 would be invalid
- ↳ law faced opposition from conservative leaders of Indian National Movement as they saw it as a British intervention and an attack on Hindu customs.

- The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929

- ↳ set 16 years & 18 years as minimum age of marriage for girls & boys resp.
- ↳ also known as Sarda Act
- ↳ amended in 1978 to change years to 18 & 21 years.

- Contention over different legal standards

- No reasoning in the law for having different legal standards of age for men & women
- Law Commission Consultation paper
 - ↳ argued that having different legal standards contributes to the stereotype that wives must be younger than their husbands.

- Women activists

↳ argue that law perpetuates the stereotype that women are more mature than men of same age

↳ & hence can be allowed to marry sooner

- Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

↳ calls for abolition of laws that assume women have different physical or intellectual rate of growth than men

- Why a relook on the law?

- Child marriages still prevalent.

- Reduce risks of early pregnancy

- Early pregnancy associated with ↑ child mortality & affects mother's health

- Petition in SC also

- challenged law on grounds of discrimination

- as Art 14 & 21 were violated by having different legal ages for men & women to marry

- SC (2014): Nalsa V Union of India
 - ↳ recognised transgenders as the 3rd gender
 - ↳ humans have equal value & should be treated as equal by laws.
- SC (2019): Joseph Shine V UoI
 - ↳ adultery decriminalized
 - ↳ a law that treats women differently based on gender stereotypes is an affront to women's dignity.

@lectures - bpu

* Don't ignore the women farmers

- Agri Census

- 73.2% of rural women engaged in farming
- just 12.8% own landholdings
- Women denied landholdings
 - ↳ due to cultural, social & religious forces
 - ↳ perception that farming is man's profession

- Indian Human Development Survey

- ↳ 83% of agri land inherited by male members of family
- ↳ women mostly left out.
- ↳ literally excluded from definition of farmers

- Most women workers in fields are labelled as

- ↳ cultivators or agri labourers
- ↳ but not farmers
- ↳ so excluded from benefits of Govt schemes
- ↳ Also, 81% of women agri labourers belong to SC, ST, OBC.

- Issues of women farmers -

- (1) Non-recognition as farmers

- (2) Unequal access to rights over land, water & forests
- (3) Existence of gendered access to support systems, like storage, transportation, agri credit etc
- (4) Gendered access to inputs & markets
- Women farmers reduced to
 - ↳ marginal section
 - ↳ vulnerable
 - New Farm laws can even ↑ exploitation
 - No mention of MSP
 - ↳ women farmers won't be able to negotiate better prices
 - Not adequate redressal mechanism

* A step back in gender equality

- Kamal Hassan's political party
 - ↳ electoral promise of paying women for domestic work & care work.
- Unpaid domestic work and care work
 - mainly by women
 - 81% of females & 26% of males participate in domestic work.
 - Females bear more than 83% of the burden of domestic & care work.
- Insight by feminist economist D. Elson (2017)
 - ↳ public policy should aim at closing the huge gender gap in unpaid domestic and care work
 - ↳ through recognition, reduction & redistribution (Tripple R)
- Paying the wage is just 'recognition'
- But the proposal fails as -
 - Paying monetary benefits
 - ↳ means endorsing the social norm

that domestic & care work are women's work
 ↳ thus, risk of furthering gender disparity.

↳ and hence fails on the second R i.e. reduction.

- Also fails in 'redistribution' aspect
 ↳ as men might then claim that women are bound to do these activities

- Need is

↳ for a policy proposal that ↑ men's participation & time spend in unpaid work at home

- The electoral promise lacks potential of achieving gender equality in sharing unpaid work.

Corrective voice from top court against stereotyping women

A judgment by the Supreme Court forbidding judges from making gender-stereotypical comments came as a corrective voice from within the highest level of judiciary in India.

- The judgment stopped courts from trying to mandate marriage or compromise between a sex offender and his victim.
- It is one among a series of interventions with which the top court has clamped down on abuse and sex stereotyping of women.

Some notable judgments which have lashed out at sex stereotyping include:

- The framing of the Vishaka Guidelines on sexual harassment of women at workplaces.
- Justice D.Y. Chandrachud's historic judgment giving women Army officers equal access to Permanent Commission while debunking the establishment's claim that women were physiologically weaker than men.

* Providing horizontal quota: The Bihar Way

- Reservation

• Vertical

↳ like SC, ST, OBC, EWS etc

↳ Eg: if EWS reservation is 10%, then out of 100 total seats, 10 seats will be for EWS category.

• Horizontal

↳ given within each vertical category

↳ Eg: 40% horizontal reservation for women would mean 40% of the seats in each SC, ST, OBC, EWS etc to be reserved for women of that category.

↳ Generally given for women, veterans, transgenders, PwDs etc.

- Bihar's way of promoting gender equality -

• 1992 → 2 days menstrual leave for women Govt employees.

• 2006 → Bihar was first to reserve 50% seats for women in Panchayats.

→ later imitated by MP, Andhra, Maharashtra, Gujarat & Chattisgarh.

- 2013 → 50% horizontal reservation for women in cooperative societies & 35% in police force.
- 2016 → 35% horizontal reservation for women in all state govt jobs.
- 2021 → 33% horizontal reservation for women in State Engineering & Medical Colleges.

- Positive effects of Bihar model:

- 25% police force are women officers
↳ while national avg. is 10%.
- Enrolments of girl students ↑

- Lagging areas

- low female literacy rate
- low Female Labour Force Participation (FLFP)

- Reasons for the lag:

- Social barriers
↳ block employment opportunities for women
- Patriarchal control of women

- Gender discrimination
- Unpaid work is not accounted for.
- Lack of employment opportunities.

- Way forward for Bihar & other states:

- Creating jobs

↳ filling pending vacancies in Govt.

- Govts need to ensure that women don't fall out of the labour market as they become more educationally qualified.
- Horizontal reservation for women should be extended in prt. colleges too.
- Transgenders should also be provided with separate horizontal reservation.
- Reducing school drop outs & ensuring quality education at primary & secondary levels.

* Arms and the women

— SC Judgement on Ensuring Gender Parity in the Indian Army in 2020:

- Grant permanent commission to women in the Short Service Commission and
- Give them command postings in all services other than combat.

— Petition in SC to allow women take NDA exam

- Govt's Stand: it was a policy decision not to allow women to take the NDA exam
- SC noted that closing a route of entry for women to join the Army was discriminatory and violative of Art 14, 15, 16 and 19 of the Constitution
- SC passed an interim order allowing women to appear for the NDA entrance exam.
- Ensures that women get an equal opportunity.

Onus of contraception still on women, NFHS-5 figures show

The latest NFHS-5 (2019-21) notes the inequity in terms of family planning method adoption between men and women in India.

- While male sterilisation continues to remain comparatively lower, female sterilisation continues to be on the rise.

- Female sterilisation has gone up for the entire country from 36% in NFHS-4 (2015-16) to 37.9% in NFHS-5.

- Male sterilisation's share in family planning methods has always been extremely low, despite the fact that it's safer, quicker and easier.

- This is indicative of the mentality that family planning is the sole responsibility of women.

*Socio-Economic Impact of Pandemic on Women

— Widening gender employment gap

- Even prior to 2020, the gender employment gap was large.
- Only 18% of working-age women were employed as compared to 75% of men.
- Reasons include a lack of good jobs, restrictive social norms, and the burden of household work.
- The nationwide lockdown hit women much harder than men.
- Data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy Pvt. Ltd. show that 6% of male workers were unaffected during the lockdown while only 19% of women experienced this kind of security.
- Men who did lose work were able to regain it, even if it was at the cost of increased precarity or lower earnings, because they had the option of moving into fallback employment arrangements.
- Even as new entrants to the workforce, women workers had poorer options compared to men.
- Women were more likely to enter as daily wage workers while men found avenues for self-employment.
- So, not only did women enter into more precarious work, it was also likely to be at very low earnings compared to men.

— Growing domestic work

- With schools closed and almost everyone limited to the confines of their homes, household responsibilities increased for women.

- The India Working Survey 2020 found that among employed men, the number of hours spent on paid work remained more or less unchanged after the pandemic.
- But for women, the number of hours spent in domestic work increased manifold.
- This increase in hours came without any accompanying relief in the hours spent on paid work.

— Way forward

The following measures are needed now:

- The National Employment Policy, currently in the works, should systematically address the constraints around the participation of the women's workforce.
- Expansion of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and the introduction of an urban employment guarantee targeted to women as soon as the most severe forms of mobility restrictions are lifted.
- There is a need for coordinated efforts by States to facilitate the employment of women while also addressing immediate needs through the setting up of community kitchens, the opening of schools and anganwadi centres, and engagement with self-help groups for the production of personal protective equipment kits.
- Further, a COVID-19 hardship allowance of at least ₹5,000 per month for six months should be announced for 25 million accredited social health activists and Anganwadi workers, most of whom are women.
- The pandemic has shown the necessity of adequate public investment in social infrastructure.
- The time is right to imagine a bold universal basic services programme that not only fills existing vacancies in the social sector but also expands public investments in health, education, child and elderly care, and so on, to be prepared for future shocks.

* The gender technology gap has to end.

- Pandemic has caused existing inequalities to come to light
 - ↳ One such aspect is Access to technology.
- Status of Digital Inequalities
 - 390 mn women in low & middle income countries do not have Internet access
 - ↳ S. Asia has more than half of them.
 - In India
 - ↳ only ~15% women used internet
- Reasons for gender digital divide
 - Cultural beliefs
 - ↳ Access to tech. will motivate women to challenge patriarchal societies.
 - ↳ Women needs to be protected & online content can be dangerous.
 - Financially not independent
 - Many of the apps cater to young men, as they are their target audience.
 - Eg: Sports, gaming

- Consequences of digital divide

- As men have more access to internet
 - ↳ so 17% more men than women have been vaccinated.
- Women & LGBTQ+ also have less information w.r.t the pandemic & related survival strategies.
- Affects online education.

- Way Forward

• Feminist technology (Femtech) Approach

↳ Inclusive, informed & responsive approach to tech & innovation.

↳ Equality through innovation

↳ In this, UN Women's Generation Equality Forum's goal is to double no. of women working in tech. & innovation.

↳ Aim ⇒ By 2026, reduce gender digital divide & ensure universal digital literacy

↳ Support women's leadership as innovators

• UN Women & Intl. Telecom Union's

↳ digital empowerment programmes like EQUALS

↳ promoting STEM (Sc, Tech, Engg & Maths)

- ↳ enter digital technology careers & become the next leaders.
- Companies should go for gender-equal technology and sometimes specifically for women
 - ↳ like for telemedicine consultation
 - ↳ connecting women to informal job opportunities
 - ↳ Emergency buttons in mobiles to connect to law enforcement if they face unwanted street harassment.

- Conclusion -

- Closing gender gap in mobile Internet usage
 - ↳ would ↑ GDP by US \$ 700 bn in 5 years in low & middle income countries.
- Women are largest consumer group left out of tech
 - ↳ could be major profit drivers
- Thus, ending gender digital divide will make our future more equal, diverse & sustainable.