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ENG 161 (38.2) VS IND 329 124/2 (31.0)

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Growth declines with missing women @ work

An OECD expert has unearthed the surprising finding that women's employment declined in India as education and family income went up. DH found some fa



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Dr Sunita Maheshwari

What if more women step out of their homes and go for work in India? A forthcoming study by economist and University of Manchester professor Pierre-Richard Agénor makes the intriguing contention that it could simply push up the country's growth by about two per cent.

In a recent study ('Economic Participation of Women in India — A New Growth Engine?') Piritta Sorsa, an expert at the Country Studies division of the Paris-based Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), found that female labour force participation is the lowest in India among BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India China and South Africa). This holds good even if one adds Indonesia to the mix and make it BRIICS.

Mining data from National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO), Central Statistics Office (CSO), and the International Labour Organisation (ILO), she found that female labour force participation in India is only at about 32 per cent of working age women, compared with the world average of about 50 per cent. Not only did she find high unemployment among educated women, but also discovered that a third of the women are self-employed, but remain unpaid.

IND lead by 292 runs

In a telephonic interaction with Deccan Herald, she attributed cultural factors in India, among others, for the low participation. “In India, the most important factor is the cultural factor. When women get more education, they go for work. At the same time, many women are willing to work, but there are not enough jobs for them,” she said.

“Most women also work in marginal jobs — over half are self-employed — and more than 90 per cent have no social security. In India, women’s participation in the labour force during active working age is 32 per cent, whereas it is 75 per cent in China and 65 per cent in Brazil. There are only few women in the manufacturing sector, and also women in India can’t work at night. More jobs should be created so that women can work,” she said.

If liberalised, retail sector would create more jobs, especially for young educated women, says Sorsa. Another sector which she cites is healthcare, where she feels more women can be trained to take up jobs. Sorsa’s study also found that the 32 per cent participation paled in comparison to the 47 per cent in South Africa, and 54 per cent in Indonesia — both of which do not have trillion-dollar economies, unlike their peers in the BRIICS grouping.

Women need clear goals

Not only is there high unemployment among educated women, but intriguingly, labour participation declines with education and family income, Sorsa found. Dr Sunita Maheshwari, chief dreamer, Teleradiology Solutions, has some insights to share on this as a female entrepreneur.

Dr Sunita is open to recruiting women employees, and over the last decade she has directed the HR team to be inclusive and gender agnostic. “The good news is we do get talented women, in fact many times more conscientious and efficient than male employees. The bad news is that they are forced to leave the workforce for reasons beyond ours and many times, their control. Take for instance, marriage. Having kids and no childcare support, among other reasons, lead to attrition. Women have familial obligations and needs that men don’t have and also restrictions on their ability to work — they cannot work late shifts due to security issues, and cannot do night shifts due to family needs. This, to some extent, makes them less desirable than men when it comes to the many jobs that need time/hour flexibility,” she says.

Women’s pay packages are generally less globally, compared with men’s pay. Sorsa said, “This scenario exists everywhere. In India, the difference may be even larger. Women have to ask for

better salaries.” Ushasri TS, senior vice president and general manager at Manhattan Associates India, had this to say: “With the focus on ‘Make in India’ by the government, there is going to be more investment in manufacturing as well as related sectors that will provide entrepreneurial opportunities of various scales. This is also likely to encourage women’s participation in jobs. The increasing importance of eCommerce also provides impetus for broader distribution of goods as well as services. All these provide opportunities for women to participate and contribute at various levels.”

Women are now at a stage, where they need to internalise on the challenges and come up with solutions themselves, she adds.

“If you are a 22-year-old at the threshold of a career, make a 15-year or a 20-year plan. Do not stop at 30. If you are in your mid-30s, and looking forward to a family life along with career growth, have clarity about how you are going ahead with it,” says Ushasri.

Ensure equal opportunities

“India has many equal opportunities and equality laws in place, but biases remain either in implementation or in laws. There are challenges in India; for instance, labour laws still forbid night work or access of women to certain occupations, some inheritance laws are biased against women. But a lot more needs to be done, given the still low participation,” says Sorsa. “Our study suggests a few measures to create jobs — reforms in the business environment, labour markets, and macroeconomy. On the other hand, overcoming social and cultural barriers requires radical measures — reinforce existing equality frameworks, modernise labour laws to ensure equal work opportunities for women, and expand secondary and higher education for women,” she added.

Dr Sunita thinks the government has done a lot already for increasing labour force participation by women. “However, if they made it easier for people to get to work, it would help women in the workforce as well. For example, better road and traffic management so that not so much time is spent commuting, forcing women to choose between family and a job. Also, keep our cities safe, so women can work late shifts. In addition, make it simpler for women to have bank accounts and start companies without reams of paperwork,” she says.

Compared with other sectors, are there enough women in the healthcare?

Interestingly, there are many women in the workforce in medicine, compared with other fields. This may be as medicine is seen as a nurturing and ‘noble’ profession, suited to women’s personalities. But, over time, women tend to take lower positions, work part-time, and attempt to balance family and careers, an issue men in medicine don’t seem to face as much.

Dr Sunita Maheshwari

Why are there only few women in corporates? Any specific reason?

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Today, the corporates understand the importance of hiring and retaining women and have introduced many proactive initiatives. However, due to various challenges like societal and familial pressures, lack of role models, lack of mentors, and societal attitude, women tend to give up their career as they grow in an organisation.

Ushasri TS

Why is there a decline in female economic participation in the labour force?

The largest part of the recent decline since 2005 is due to millions of poor women in rural areas dropping out of the labour force from marginal jobs classified as unpaid helpers.

This can be due to the rise in agricultural incomes for the family in rural areas since 2005.

Piritta Sorsa

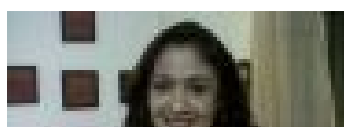


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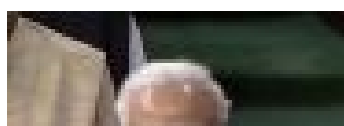
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