

GLU 2017 abstract for theme 3: Changing Technology and the World of Work

Breaking occupational segregations or merely readjusting traditional patterns? An empirical study of urban women workers in India under neo-liberalism

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The trade, capital flows and technological advances that characterize economic globalization entail new economic policies and production systems with important implications for national economies including in changing labour market structures. In the current global environment of open economies, global accumulation has relied heavily on the work of women in developing countries, both waged and unwaged, in formal sectors and informal sectors at home, in manufacturing, and in public and private services. However, this kind of 'feminisation of labour' has not been able to improve the working conditions of this large pool of female labour reserves of these regions in terms of wages, training, and occupational segregation. Globally, women workers are disproportionately involved in forms of employment that are increasingly used to maximize profits, such as temporary, part-time, casual, and home-based work. This has resulted in a large number of economically active women in the developing world who continue to work in low paid, low skilled occupations, both traditional and non-traditional, thus continuing with a sex segregation of occupations.

Given the above backdrop, this paper looks at the emerging and the pre-existing non-agricultural occupational patterns for urban women workers in India since the early nineties. Economic reforms in India, began from the early nineties. As is evident in much of the developing countries, a large part of the literature has shown that the reforms affected the labour market structures in terms of continuing or intensifying the several forms of segmentation. The paper suggest that while sex segregation of occupation do show signs of moving away from traditional patterns, yet a large number of urban women workers still remain involved in self-employed activities which can be characterised as temporary, part-time, low paid and home-based work. The non-agricultural occupations of women revolve around such forms of employment mainly, though there have been some changes in the recent period.

It is to be noted in the context of India that women's work participation rates have been declining for almost two decades. However, even within this, the rate of growth of urban women's employment shows marginal improvement over the period. Thus the dynamism of economic growth in India experienced due to economic reforms, although criticized majorly for a pattern of overall 'jobless growth', a different impact was partially felt upon urban women's work. It is evident that while for the bulk of the women workers, the occupational patterns have remained rigid in terms of the slow movement out of agricultural occupations, in the urban areas, certain tendencies have been visible that indicate emerging newer forms of non-agricultural occupations along with the existence of traditional ones.

The paper documents tendencies of moving beyond traditional forms of female non-agricultural occupations. The analysis reveals clear forms of dualism operating in the labour market. On the one hand occupational diversities are observed in the highly technical occupations which require the highest level of educational and technical qualifications and on the other diversification has been in petty

service activities in the form of beauticians and hairdressers, small business SHGs making *pickles* and *papads*, custom tailoring, real estate brokerage activities and so on and in construction activities, which barely requires more than primary level of education. The process of diversification has been missed out in occupations which require mid-level technical knowledge such as being able to operate machines, driving motor vehicles, accounting, mechanics and repairmen, and so on. In terms of breaking gender based occupational segregation, the paper also reveals that certain occupations such as nursing, manufacturing of *bidi*, certain specific textile and garment related occupations, which were traditionally dominated by women, are experiencing a trend in entry of men.

The paper argues that much of the diversification in women's occupational patterns in terms of losing manufacturing jobs and gaining entry into construction and related real estate activities, increased financial market service activities are linked intrinsically with the overall pattern of growth of the Indian economy. The fact that agriculture ceases to remain a viable occupation and manufacturing growth stagnated, the driving force of economic growth has been attributed for a large part to the boom in infrastructure, real estate and financial market activities in the last few years. This has had a direct bearing upon the pattern of occupational diversification of urban workers including women. The trends in convergence of occupational patterns by sex and a resulting diversity of women's occupational patterns is thus not related to increased employment opportunities for women workers but is in fact due to a dearth of overall employment in the economy that drives men to occupy traditional female dominated occupations.

The paper has used empirical evidence based on a secondary data provided by the Employment and Unemployment Surveys (EUS) conducted by the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO), Government of India (GOI) for the 50th and the 68th quinquennial rounds pertaining to the years 1993-94 and 2011-12 respectively. The period of analysis of data is 1993-94 to 2011-12. While unit level data from the surveys have been used for most parts, supplementary data provided by published reports from the other intermediary rounds of EUS conducted by the NSSO in the intermediate period of the analysis have also been used. The information on occupational distribution of women workers in urban areas up to the last available digit of the classification (3 digit) provided by the EUS has been used to arrive at conclusions. However, a concordance table for the two sets of occupational classifications pertaining to the two survey years was prepared for the sake of comparison across the years. The important indicators that have been used to locate the changes in the occupational patterns, specifically for women workers are simple percentage increases and average annual rate of growth of employment in specific occupations over the period, share of male and female workers across occupations (F_i/F and M_i/M) and ratio of women workers to men workers within occupations (F_i/M_i) over the two periods.