

# **INDIAN ASSOCIATION FOR WOMEN'S STUDIES**

## **XV National Conference on Women's Studies**

Sub-theme-1

### **Women's Work and Employment**

A crisis in female employment is evident in the last two rounds of NSSO employment and unemployment survey data. India is among countries in the developing south that have low levels of female employment hence it is of concern that the crisis has not generated the public interest or debate that it deserves among feminist scholars and activists. There has been a slackening of the emphasis that women's employment received in the early years of women's studies in India. Whereas in the 1980s and 1990s, many studies examined women workers and their employment in specific sectors and industry segments linking it to labour processes, the turn to globalization brought a disproportionate focus on the debate on global feminization despite contrary evidence at the macro level in India. There was also a renewed attention on women's disproportionate presence in the informal economy. In this disparate focus, the links between economic policy, performance and the low and stagnant work participation of women have been poorly understood as also the underlying processes on the demand and supply sides of the labour market.

In this backdrop, we invite papers that reflect on the crises of women's employment. The papers may explore the crises of women's employment, and critically reflect upon the related debates, issues and concerns. The impact of policy shifts and related changes in the economy and its interaction with social and cultural settings and related processes are key in understanding and situating the prevailing conflicts, opportunities and challenges that confronts women's work and employment question. The complex engagement of women in the contemporary period, as workers and as unpaid care providers, with social, cultural and economic challenges and state policies thus call for attention.

Papers may probe questions in three broad areas.

- Linkages between economic policy, performance and women's employment in the context of changes in overall labour and employment. Macro perspectives on women's employment may be concerned with the national or regional/state economies and/or address linkages in specific sectors like industry, trade or agriculture as well as employment in different technology categories within sectors. The papers may address the following set of questions: Why have increased rates of growth not translated into increased rates of employment among women? What are the economic and socio-cultural determinants of women's employment? What are the effects on women's labour market choices of demographic characteristics and caste/social group composition? Are women being confined to a narrow range of occupations thus lacking occupational diversification and mobility? Is low female employment embedded in India's failure to expand manufacturing employment unlike its South Asian neighbours, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka where female employment is significantly higher? What is the influence of services and the crisis in agricultural employment and related differentials in social outcomes to the current regressive reconfiguration of women's work too demands attention.
- Experiences of women across subsectors and occupation, both with reference to overall changes in product and labour market as well as policy. Papers may examine how micro processes including organization of production (including factory production, sub-contracting and home based work), ongoing shifts in this regard and intermediation of labour and processes of collectivization affect female employment and how women negotiate volatilities in the labour and product markets. Economic pressures and social and cultural constraints on women, their motivations for engaging in specific types of work or occupations may be probed. How are women negotiating with new and changing sourcing and recruitment practices and forms of intermediaries? How have policy changes and labour law reform agenda impacted experiences of women and their inter-generational experiences in different sectors? These are other questions that need further enquiry.

- The challenges of social reproduction, how it structures women's participation in paid and unpaid work and is addressed by women workers across classes and social groups. The feminization of paid care work, women's growing mobility across the domestic and national borders and redistribution of care in the sending regions are important analytical issues. The question of valuation of women's work in the economy, their contribution to social reproduction, associated policy and political economy perspectives and regimes are important in this context. The distinctions and continuity between paid and unpaid work; and its interplay with market forces and how it affects women's labour and employment decisions are key issues that attention. We would also like to draw attention to political economy or the dominance of the interests of specific classes, castes and gender as an important concern in suppressing women's employment and in marginalizing women workers. There is also a need to closely interrogate the specificities of unpaid economic activities in the current period of declining female work participation rates.

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