

CENTRE FOR DEVELOPMENT STUDIES



Working Paper No.127

WOMEN IN THE URBAN INDUSTRIAL LABOUR FORCE
IN INDIA

Leela Gulati

68847

Centre for Development Studies
Trivandrum 695 011
India

May 1981

∟ Paper presented at the UNESCO Conference on Research on the Status of Women, Development and Population Trends: Evaluation and Prospects . UNESCO, Paris 25-28 November, 1980

Women in the Urban Industrial

Labour force in India

Leela Gulati

Looking at the macro picture of India's labour force as it has evolved over the present century, it cannot escape notice that female participation rate in the country as a whole has gone down. It can be seen from Table I that even when one allows for all the biases and errors in the recording of female work participation, the trend has been downwards.

Table I Female Work Participation Rates for
Census Years, 1901 to 1971

Year	Percentage of Working Women to total population of Women of all ages	Percentage of Working Women to total population of Women in the age group 15 to 59
1901	31.70	53.60
1911	33.73	56.13
1921	32.67	54.96
1931	27.63	46.23
1951	23.30	41.19
1961	27.96	51.74
1971	11.87	22.91

Note: The concept of working force has varied from Census to Census. Thus comparability of participation rates is limited. In particular while for the 1961 Census, the concept was stretched to one extreme, in the following Census for 1971 was made severely restricted. Thus it has been estimated that if the 1971 Census had not so drastically departed from the 1961 Census, women in the working force would have been 71 million instead of only 31 million.

Source: (1) Census of India, 1901-1971.
(2) Asok Mitra: India's Population - Aspects of Quality and Control, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1975, p.439.

Of the several factors behind the decline in women's work participation rates from Census period to Census period, a major factor seems to have been the decline of many traditional industries and services in which women were involved. As a result, several women were forced either completely out of work or into agriculture. Thus, in the rural sector, while the category of agricultural labourers has accounted for an increasing proportion of the women left in the labour force, the manufacturing and services sectors have been showing a drastic decline. In the urban sector, however, since agriculture offered only limited scope for employment, those thrown out of traditional employments had generally little choice but to stay at home, whatever be the economic compulsions.

Between 1901 and 1971, the percentage of total female population living in urban areas increased as part, no doubt, of the overall trend towards increasing urbanisation. Table II gives the growth in urban population for the period 1901-1971. It is well known that in the rural-urban migration to the cities of India there was a male accent. This probably was the main reason for the falling urban sex ratio. Still, as can be seen from the table the population of women in urban India more than quadrupled in 70 years.

According to the 1971 Census, work participation by urban women for the country as a whole stood at an all time low of 6.6%. The corresponding rate for rural women was 13.1%. This low rate of urban women's work participation, of course, was arrived at according to the very strict definition of a worker used by the 1971 Census, which excluded not only all the unpaid helpers but even those working

Table II Growth in Urban Population, 1901-1971

Year	Total Urban population in millions	Urban Population as percentage to total population	Women as percentage of total population	Urban sex ratio
1901	25.852	10.83	47.64	910
1911	25.942	10.29	46.58	872
1921	28.086	11.18	45.83	846
1931	33.456	12.00	45.59	836
1941	44.153	13.86	45.39	831
1951	62.444	17.30	46.24	860
1961	78.937	17.98	45.80	845
1971	108.787	19.91	46.21	859

Source: Census of India, 1901 to 1971.

women whose main activity was not entered as economically productive work. The result seems to have been that women who were principally housewives but did at the same time, some economically productive work, particularly as helpers got altogether excluded from the 1971 count of workers.^{1/} Earlier according to the 1961 Census, when all such working women, i.e., part-time workers and unpaid helpers are believed to have been classified as workers, the urban women's work participation rate was found to be 11.1%. But the latter work participation rate for urban women was almost one third of that for rural women. Clearly, the urban setting in India cannot be said to have been particularly conducive to women's work participation. To put it somewhat differently, work opportunities are much more restricted

for urban than rural women in India.

How are urban women distributed over the various occupational categories. It can be seen from Table III that in India's urban sector a little over 75% of the working women are currently concentrated in the occupational groups other than those related to agriculture. Still the proportion of urban working women engaged in the primary sector is twice as large as the proportion of urban working men.

While a little over one quarter of the urban working women are engaged in the secondary sector comprising of mining, manufacturing and construction, about one half are engaged in the Tertiary or Services sector.

In India, manufacturing is subdivided into household industries and industries organized on a larger scale. Though the basic unit of organisation for a household industry is generally the household, it does not mean that non-family members are not employed in such units. While hardly one out of every six urban men engaged in manufacturing works for a household industry, at least two out of every five urban women engaged in manufacturing work for a household industry. So the considerably greater dependence of urban working women on the household industries for employment should be obvious. But to view the distinction between household and non-household industries in terms of only the scale or unit of organisation would be to miss the real significance of this distinction. Household industries are relatively very low paying and involve hard work for long hours/amenities. It is in this context that the fact that while there are less than 12 women to every 100 men in the

Table III Occupational Distribution of Urban Workers, 1971

Occupational group	Men	Women	Number of women workers to every 100 working men
Total workers	100	100	11.6
1. Cultivators	5.2	4.2	9.3
2. Agricultural labourers	4.7	17.5	43.7
3. Livestock, forestry, fishing and plantations	1.7	2.0	13.3
PRIMARY SECTOR (1+2+3)	11.6	23.7	
4. Mining and Quarrying	1.6	1.0	
5. Manufacturing			
(a) Household industry	4.4	10.0	26.4
(b) Other than household industry	23.9	12.9	6.2
6. Construction	3.5	2.9	9.4
SECONDARY SECTOR (4+5+6)	33.4	26.8	
7. Trade and Commerce	21.4	8.2	4.5
8. Transport, Storage and Communications	11.5	3.2	3.5
9. Other services	23.2	38.1	
TERTIARY SECTOR (7+8+9)	56.1	49.5	

Source: Census of India, 1971.

urban working force, in household industries more than 25 women are engaged to every 100 men is significant. Only in agricultural labour is the representation of women in the labour force higher than in household industries. No less significant it is to note that while total employment in the new organised, capital intensive industries increased 17 times between 1911 and 1961 and the lions share (96%) of the increased employment went to men. Several of the old, unorganised, labour intensive industries suffered serious declines, with the brunt of such decline in employment falling on women. Processing of foodgrains, for instance, which employed as many as 810,000 women in 1911, the second largest employer of women after handloom weaving, could only employ 286,000 women in 1961 although in the same period male employment in the same industry registered an increase from 67,000 to 344,000. The result was that while in 1911 there were as many as 1208 women to every 100 men working in this industry, in 1961 only 83 were there to every 100 working men.^{2/} Evidently changes in the technology of food processing worked against the employment of women.

In the services sector the urban working women are concentrated in 'Other services', a category which includes not only administrative services but also sanitary and domestic services. Employment in domestic services where women exceed men, is known to be insecure, while hours of work are long and wage is paltry. Also the involvement of young children, particularly girls, is quite a common thing.^{3/}

While there are less than 12 women to every 100 men engaged in work in the cities, the incidence of unemployment among urban working women is much higher than among urban working men. For every 100 men seeking work there were according to the 1971 Census, 62.5 women seeking work. A more recent survey, has shown that though the employment situation worsened for both urban men and women between 1972-73 and 1977-78, working women have been the worse sufferers.^{4/}

Out of an estimated number of some 72 million urban working women in 1971, as many as 2.9 million are accounted for by such activities, each providing employment opportunities for over 100,000 women. Table IV below ranks such activities in order of the size of female labour force.

It is in the backdrop of the above review of the overall situation of urban women workers that I present the insights I have gathered from micro level case studies of two urban working women, both engaged in the secondary sector, one in manufacturing and the other in construction. These women are from the State of Kerala, a state with per capita income close to the all-India average but with employment in the secondary sector significantly above the country average.* However, a major part of Kerala's employment in the secondary sector is accounted for by its traditional industries such as coir, and cashew processing and brick and tile manufacturing which use old, labour intensive technologies.^{5/}

*While for India as a whole, i.e., including both rural and urban sectors, 20 per cent of the working force is employed in the secondary sector, the corresponding percentage for Kerala is 17.50. Both the figures are for 1971, based on the Census of that year.

Table IV. First ten non-agricultural activities ranked according to the size of the urban female work force, 1971

Industry	Number (in thousands)
1. Educational services rendered by non-technical colleges, schools, universities and other institutions	837
2. Domestic services and other personal services	600
3. Medical and health services	292
4. Bidi manufacture	265
5. Weaving and finishing of cotton textiles on handloom (other than khadi)	248
6. Retail trade in vegetables, fruit, meat, fish, poultry and grocery stores	214
7. Sanitary services	139
8. Handcart pullers, rickshaw pullers, porters and coolies	122
9. Construction activities	121
10. Laundry services, cleaning and dyeing plants	105
Total	<u>2,942</u>

Source:- See K.C. Seal, Women in the Labour Force in India: A Macro-Level Statistical Profile. Chapter 2. Women in the Indian Labour Force, Asian Employment Programme, 1981, p.61.

CASE STUDY : I

A Women in Brick Making

Brick making falls into the category of manufacturing other than household industry. Still it is an industry where the state of the art is very old in practically all its operations from kneading the clay, moulding it into bricks, carrying and stacking them in the kilns to firing the kilns. Only in the transportation of baked/burnt bricks is there any evidence of the use of modern technology in the form of diesel-powered trucks.

According to one estimate, there are some 120,000 persons engaged in brick making in Kerala State alone.^{6/} There are other official estimates which place the figures at 50,000 for both tile as well as brick making.^{7/} Going by the latter figure, the number of persons engaged in brick making alone would be not more than 30,000. A traditional brick making unit in Kerala usually employs less than twenty workers at a time and does not use any electricity.*

The majority of kilns is located on the outskirts of towns because that is where baked bricks are largely in demand for use in construction. While a typical kiln is located on a roadside so that it is easily approachable by trucks, the kneading of clay and moulding of bricks take place in a surrounding paddy field.

*It therefore does not fall under the category of a factory and escapes all the requirements imposed under the Factory Act with respect to working conditions.

The brick industry uses female labour quite intensively. On an average, there are three women workers to every male worker employed by a kiln. But women workers are assigned the most unskilled of all jobs, that is, of head-load transporting of either kneaded clay or bricks. The skilled and semi-skilled jobs in the industry are the preserve of men only.

Jayamma, a woman working for a brick kiln on the outskirts of Trivandrum, the capital of Kerala State, is almost fifty years old. She lives in a squatter settlement within walking distance of the kiln she works for. Her husband, a retired boatman, and two unmarried children, one son and one daughter, live with her.

Jayamma has been working for brick kilns from the tender age of eight years. Wages in the brick industry are paid according to the number of bricks or the loads of clay that are transported. Very often, therefore, mothers take these young daughters along with them to give them a hand with transporting. Jayamma was an orphan child brought up by her mother's sister who too was a brick worker. She started going to work with her aunt and has taken all her children, both sons and daughters, 'as soon as they were old enough to transport bricks on their heads.

Jayamma has been working for almost forty years now, altogether for the brick kilns. She goes to work early in the morning. The work site keeps changing but not the brick kiln unless one is fired from the job. Jayamma's work site is where the clay is kneaded and the bricks

are moulded and dried. Jayamma and other women working with her for the kiln have to transport sun-dried bricks to the kiln.

As part of her equipment a women brick worker carries her own wooden plank, two feet by eight inches. The plank is used as a base on which the bricks can be placed. She uses a piece of old cloth, properly twisted into a sort of round coil, to serve as a cushion on the head of for the plank. An adult woman carries 20 bricks at a time. Each brick weighs approximately one kilogram. Every woman has to stack the bricks on her head by herself and then carry them to the kiln which may be between ten and 20 minutes walk. The main brunt of the weight falls on her neck. One can sprain one's neck or injure one's feet if one loses balance. And still these women virtually run holding the bricks with one hand and using the other hand for balancing themselves. When they reach the kiln, every women must unload the bricks by herself two at a time, one with each hand. Usually, there is a man waiting at the kiln to receive and stack bricks.

Jayamma transports between 500 and 700 sun-dried bricks in a day, the actual number depending upon the distance to be covered. The wages she gets is determined on the basis of the number of bricks and the distance over which she transports them. During 1978, she made between five and six rupees ($\text{₹}=\text{Rs.}8$ approximately) every day that she worked.

In brick making there is a very rigid compartmentalisation of work on the basis of sex. Women, as noted already, are used exclusively for the unskilled job of carrying headloads. If they are not carrying bricks they are carrying clay. They do not have access to any of the

other jobs in this industry such as kneading, moulding, stacking and firing.

The minimum daily wage that a man made in brick making was nine rupees in 1978. This was the wage for kneading the clay. All other jobs carried a higher wage. Jayamma's two married sons have graduated to the level of skilled workers, making ten rupees a day which is almost twice as much as Jayamma and her three daughters, who too work for the brick kilns make.

Jayamma has been doing the same job for the last forty years. The day she was strong enough to carry twenty bricks on her head, she had reached the ceiling in her career.

Not only is the daily wage made by the woman brick worker significantly lower than the wage a male brick worker makes, but also it is lower than what a women agricultural labourer makes, namely eight rupees. Agricultural labourers in Kerala State are unionised and this has enabled them to keep reasonably abreast of the inflation. Also, though women agricultural labourers get a wage lower than men, the differential men enjoy is of just 25%. Of course, those working for brick kilns have one distinct advantage over agricultural labourers in that brick workers get work much more regularly than agricultural labourers.

Though Jayamma and her family have lived in the immediate neighbourhood of the city of Trivandrum, they have made virtually no use of the educational facilities available in the city. Jayamma herself never went to any school nor have any of her six children, three boys and three girls.



She was illiterate and so are her three daughters and three sons. Only one of her sons has managed to read and write a little but even he is nearly illiterate. Because of low wages and irregular income of her boatman husband, Jayamma felt compelled to take her children to the brick kiln to cart bricks so that they could thus supplement her earnings. So there was no question ever of sending her children to school. But Jayamma's grand daughter did go to school for three years before she started going with her mother to the kiln. Perhaps, Jayamma's other grand children will also do some schooling, but it is also likely that they too will drop out after three or four years to join their mothers in work.

Jayamma's daughters are availing themselves better of the access to medical facilities. Unlike Jayamma, her daughters and daughters-in-law have been going to hospitals for their deliveries and two out of three women have even taken to family planning. Even the two who have not yet taken to family planning do not wish to have large families although they are aware that the children would start supplementing the family income pretty early in their lives. The explanation is simple: we do not want our children to lead the same type of life. Therefore, the less their number, the better it is.

Judging by Jayamma's life, all these past forty years there can be little argument that the woman brick worker's life is a hard, hard grind. Work she does is not only arduous but also hazardous. Still, the wage she can earn has remained pitifully low, so that she has always the temptation to enlist her children from an early age ^{of} seven or eight in helping her with work.

Will the introduction of modern technology in brick making make things brighter for Jayamma and the likes of her? There are already quite a few small sized mechanized units in Kerala which manufacture wire-cut bricks. These bricks have several advantages such as levelled surface and greater load bearing strength. Much more modern units using imported machinery can produce at a very much larger scale. The problem, however, is that they cut down employment. An average sized traditional brick kiln producing 750,000 bricks a year employs 16 persons, 12 women and four men for 280 days in a year. A small-sized mechanized unit which can produce twice as many bricks employs at the most 20 persons, of whom only six are women. Thus by replacing traditional with mechanized units of small size overall employment is reduced by 37.5 per cent and women's employment by 75 per cent. Still, the State's Draft Five Year Plan, 1978-83, envisaged the establishment of 80 small-sized mechanized units and a few large-scale units for the manufacture of wire-cut bricks. The latter are to be set up with imported machinery and foreign collaboration.

Consequent on the phenomenal upsurge in building activity in Kerala, the demand for burnt bricks has been increasing very fast. Since the technology of traditional brick kilns is simple and involves virtually no expense on plant and equipment, expansion of capacity to meet increased demand for bricks should pose little problem. On the other hand, since the increased demand for bricks is said to have a decided preference for wire cut bricks, a case is increasingly being made, and to good effect, for the manufacture of only such bricks. This would mean setting up new mechanised units for the purpose. But any major movement towards

a change in the technology of brick making could seriously jeopardise not only the prospects of generating additional employment but also much of the existing employment which brick making industry currently provides. As has happened practically all along in the past, whenever any particular industry has undergone technological change, the consequential changes in employment have affected women most adversely. Brick making is unlikely to be any different.

CASE STUDY : II

A Woman construction worker

Devaki, a forty five year old woman construction worker squats on the slopes of a steep hill on a five cent (100 cents =1 acre piece) of land on the outskirts of Trivandrum city. She is living in a palm leaf thatched hut with her three children, a son and two daughters. She separated from her husband, who also was a construction worker, some ten years back. So she is the principal bread winner of the house. Her eighteen year old son and fourteen year old daughter have been both withdrawn from school. The teenage daughter is virtually the housekeeper while the son tries to do his bit for the family whenever he gets work. Devaki is happy that she has a grown up son who can assume the leadership of her household.

~~Devaki comes from a family of handloom weavers.~~ Her parents were reasonably well off owning as they did some land, ~~a loom, and also a small~~ shop to sell handwoven material. She grew up in a sub district which had a concentration of weavers. Several weaver families from the neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu were encouraged, at one time in the past, by the local government to migrate to this sub district to help improve the quality of weaving. Devaki's parents, like several other families, had to give up weaving as the handloom industry languished, unable to compete with cheap mill-made cloth. Only in the late 1950s did the Government's measures to limit the growth of the mill sector and subsidise the handloom sector, have some favourable impact. Till then, skilled labour from the handloom sector had been moving away into unskilled jobs in search of livelihood. The exodus was probably at its peak during the years between the World Wars but it persisted for some years after the World War II. Devaki's brother was the first to start working as a labourer at various construction sites. After some time, Devaki was married off to a construction worker her brother came to know in the course of his work. Within years she too started going out to work to the construction site. Her first job was at a dam site, where her job was principally to transport on her head granite stones of various sizes over short distances.

Over the last twenty-five years or so that Devaki has been working for the construction industry she has worked for a wide variety of constructions. The industry generally covers a wide spectrum of construction, from residential buildings to roads, railway bridges, dams and irrigation canals. Since construction sites keep changing from time to time,

workers also have to be on the move. That is how Devaki moved to Trivandrum, a city around which a good deal of construction activity has been taking place.

Work, on any construction site, can be divided into skilled work and unskilled work. While skilled work requires some previous training, either in a formal school or on job, for unskilled work one needs strength and physical stamina. At any one time, the proportion of the skilled and unskilled workers differs from site to site depending largely upon the stage of construction. During the initial stages when construction work just starts, all sites call for a great deal of earth work, then unskilled hands are employed in large numbers. At later stages, the ratio of skilled to unskilled workers stabilises at one skilled worker to three unskilled workers. Quite a few of the unskilled workers tend to be women.

The National Commission on Labour (1969) had noted clearly that unlike other industries where women were employed in semi-skilled and sometimes even in skilled jobs, women workers in construction industry had no access to skilled jobs. The tasks assigned to women are of carrying earth, stones, mortar or bricks, and drawing and fetching water.

Job Entry

Though work for women in the construction industry is particularly strenuous and not particularly well paid, entry into the job on any site is not simple. Information about work opportunities is always obtained through personal networks. Most Mistries have a few workers attached to them. They may be either relatives or people from the same caste

or village. A Mistry sends word around wherever he requires additional hands. Personal relationships with the Mistry count here a great deal. Sometimes however, people are hired on the work site itself if there is need for a number larger than can be collected through various personal networks. Also, there are certain known street corners where men and women in search of work congregate in the morning.

There is always a chance that a Mistry or a Contractor's agent will come by looking for additional hands. Once the need for their services are over or the tempo of activity drops, the workers in excess get fired. While a building contractor may try to keep a core group of skilled workers going, he does not feel any such obligation towards unskilled workers. Between male and female hands, the axe usually falls first on the latter. Of course, one's personal contact with the Mistry is always a great help in how long one can hold on to one's job but the sex factor generally operates against most women.

Devaki gets information about work possibilities through her own network of neighbours and friends. Very often the Mistry she has lately been working for sends word asking her to go to a particular work site. The caste group to which Devaki belongs is of help as many other construction workers including most Mistries are from this very caste.

Devaki has become used to going without work for short intervals while moving from site to site. Also, construction, being very largely an open air activity, does not offer the same number of days of work all round the year. During monsoons, the work activity gets frequently interrupted. Then there are occasions when because of the

~~shortage of cement or other building material work gets interrupted and~~
 one is asked to discontinue working. The best period for work, also
 hardest in a sense, is between December to May, when building activity
 is at its peak, though the weather, particularly the heat, can be quite
 oppressive. Thanks to the spurt in construction activity over the
 past four to five years consequent on the sizeable inflow of remittances
 to Kerala State from recent migrants to the Gulf countries, it is possi-
 ble for women to get work in construction for 260 days in a year.
 Earlier, it was difficult to get work for more than 180 days in a year.

Working for the construction industry is regarded a source of low
 status to women. This is not because of the hard work involved nor
 because it offers no scope of improving one's position vertically.
 What seems to give working for construction a bad name is the relation-
 ship between men and women. Women depend on men in the industry for
 job entry, for steady employment and even for job support. So there
 is always room for the development of extra-marital intimacies. At
 least, there is always room for gossip on this score. Also a certain
 amount of crude male behaviour towards women working alongside men
 seems to have become the accepted thing on construction sites. This
 is the reason why husbands are not expected to be around where wives
 are working. The husbands tend to pick up quarrel on matters or issues
 which women themselves would rather ignore.*

*In some other parts of India, however, it is common for husband and
 wife to work in construction as a team. In fact, a study of construc-
 tion workers in Delhi showed that often the wife is prepared to accept
 a lower wage to be able to work alongside her husband. Evidently,
 the husband's presence assures better male behaviour in and around
 Delhi.

Headload carrying is the principal female job in construction. But depending upon the stage of construction, different things have to be carried from time to time. Carrying of granite stones is necessary when foundation is being laid or when retaining walls are being built. This is possibly the most hazardous of tasks because the danger of getting hurt, and that too quite seriously, is quite great.

Devaki herself has been involved in major accidents twice in recent years. One of these took place when she was carrying a stone. The other took place when she fainted on site out of sheer exhaustion after a day of oppressive heat when she had been carrying burnt bricks for a whole day over an uneven terrain. The type of terrain makes quite a difference in the proneness of jobs to accidents.

Whatever the quarrels and divisions between workers, accidents bring them together. All workers, regardless of skill and sex, flock together to help. Devaki does not recall in her memory, even one construction site where first aid kit was readily available. On both the above mentioned occasions her co-workers immediately moved her to a nearby hospital.

All workers get paid at the end of the day. Women workers have to clean and wash all the working equipment like the steel basins, spades, trowels and other gadgets used by the masons and other workers and put them away in a safe place. Very often, the finished part of the building is also swept by women before they go home. Generally, women stand aside in a group, separate from men to collect their wages. Practically, all workers have to give the Mistri a small cut from their wage.

The daily wage rate during 1978 was eight rupees for women and ten rupees for men in ~~unskilled~~ jobs. It had gone up to twelve rupees for women and fifteen rupees for the men by the end of 1980. When Devaki started working for construction some twenty five years back, the money wage was two rupees for women and three for men. Since then the prices have increased several-fold. Between 1955 and 1980 the consumer price index has registered a rise of 400 per cent. Thus in real terms the wage rate have risen very marginally. The differentiation in wage rates, based on sex, was always there, but the relative differential can be said to be somewhat lower now than it was twenty-five years back.

With improvements in the quantum of work available in the industry (from less than 180 days to 260 days in a year) and reduction in wage differential, the earnings of the women workers can be said to have changed for the better, though very marginally. However the same cannot be said yet with respect to their scope for vertical improvement. Unless a women worker has the same chance as men to improve her position there is little prospect of her improving her work status.

Some General Observations

Pulling together the main strands of thought in the paper, it would appear that work opportunities in India seem to have considerably narrowed down for women over the last seventy years. Urbanisation itself seems to have been an important cause of the trend. So the few women who continue to be in the urban labour force are there very largely because they must

work to eke out a minimum of livelihood. These women are concentrated in the secondary and tertiary sectors doing mostly unskilled and low paid jobs in the unorganised sectors of the economy. Two out of every three urban working women are occupied in the sector.

From our micro level observations of women workers, it would appear that women take to work because of the irregular nature of work that their men are involved in and the low incomes they make. By taking to work, these women feel they can both minimize the number of days either of them is without work and also supplement the family's income. Both our women brick and construction workers took to work as young children supplementing the incomes of their parents who also were in casual wage labour. Our construction worker came from a family of artisans forced into unskilled wage labour with the decline of the handloom industry. Our brick worker was an orphan child who started going out to work at the age of seven or eight to pay her keep.

As regards the kind of work opportunities open to urban women working in the unorganised sector, very often the choice is made for them in the sense that they go for the type of work their parents or relatives are involved in. Job entry is possibly the least difficult in such work. Whatever the occupation they manage to enter, their work is generally unskilled, low paying and physically exhausting. Not that the picture is necessarily very different for men, particularly for men in unskilled jobs, as for example in construction but the difference arises because while women are altogether restricted to unskilled work for all their working lives, men have some prospect of vertical mobility.

In brick making, however, while women alone do the unskilled job of head load transportation of sun dried bricks, semi-skilled and skilled jobs are reserved for men only.

Wage discrimination between men and women arises not only from the manner of sex typing of jobs referred to above, but also from open differentiation. For example, in construction, women have continued to be paid at rates lower than men in unskilled jobs, though the differential wage payments now is about 20% as against 33 per cent some 20-25 years ago.

With work which is physically exhausting and which still offers low wages and little scope for improvement throughout her life, is it any wonder that the working women's own norm should be not to work? This norm, if she cannot really achieve in her own life, she tries to see if at least her daughters achieve it. Women try to improve the lot of their daughters by arranging their marriage to men with steady, better paid jobs. Then these girls may not need to work. Not for nothing has the practice of dowry crept into even the humblest of households. Educating girls, i.e., putting them through some years of schooling does not seem to offer an alternative viable route to the sort of improvement the working mothers at least of the type I have studied, are looking for. Given the norm they have evolved of not working, this should be understandable. At the same time, it should not be difficult to see how the norm becomes more and more remote in the process. My brick worker's daughters never went to school and are now working as brick workers. Though my construction worker's teenage daughter had a few years of schooling,

she has for some years now been fully occupied in household chores. If, as is most likely, she ends up marrying an unskilled worker, she too, like her own mother, may one day be forced to take up unskilled work. The norm of not working will then remain distant and elusive.

References

- 1/ Leela Gulati, Occupational Distribution of Working Women, Economic and Political Weekly, V. X. No.43, 1976, pp.1692-1703.
- 2/ T.P. Ambannavar, Changes in Economic Activities of Males and Females in India, 1911-1961, Demography India, No.2 of 1975, p.354.
- 3/ Government of India, Report of the Committee on the Status of Women, Towards Equality, 1974, pp.178-79.
- 4/ K. C. Seal, Women in the Labour Force in India, A Macro-Level Statistical Profile, in ILO, Asian Employment Programme (ARTEP), Women in the Indian Labour Force, 1981.
- 5/ United Nations, Poverty, Unemployment and Development Policy, A Case Study of selected issues with reference to Kerala, Document No. ST/ESA/23, 1975, pp.78-9.
- 6/ The Report of the Minimum Wages Committee for Fixation of Minimum Rates of Wages for Employment in Bricks Manufactures, Trivandrum, 1971, p.8.
- 7/ C.K.Joshi and S.M. Pandey, Employment Relationship in the Building Industry, 1972, pp.23 and 50.
- 8/ Draft Five Year Plan, 1978-83, State Planning Board, Trivandrum, 1978, V.I.p.208.