

**FEMALE EMPLOYMENT IN INDIAN MANUFACTURING:  
A STUDY OF THE GARMENT INDUSTRY IN BANGALORE  
AND THE NCR REGION**

by

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## Abstract

The thesis examines some aspects of female labour in manufacturing in India, with a focus on the garment sector. The size of manufacturing employment in India in general, and female manufacturing employment in particular, has been relatively small. Despite being a country with large reserves of surplus labour, India's inability to emerge as a major growth pole in labour-intensive industries such as garments has been puzzling for scholars and policymakers. The low rate of absorption of female workers into manufacturing jobs in India assumes importance in the context of a low and declining rate of female labour force participation in the country in recent years.

The thesis is partly based on an extensive analysis of secondary data from India's official statistical agencies including Employment and Unemployment surveys of the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO), Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), Annual Survey of Industries (ASI), and the Survey on Unincorporated Non-agricultural Enterprises (2015-16). At the core of the thesis is the primary data on women workers and firms that I collected from two garment clusters in India: Bangalore and Delhi–National Capital Region (NCR).

There are three separate but interlinked themes that motivate my enquiry. The first one is the low female participation and its implications for women's well-being and agency. The second one is the slow growth of employment, and particularly female employment, in India's manufacturing sector. The third is about the global nature of the garment industry value chain and the implications of the same for workers and supplier firms based in developing countries.

Given the context above, I specifically addressed five questions in the thesis. They are, the first, to explore the size and nature of employment, especially female employment, in Indian manufacturing. The second question addressed in the thesis was to understand how the industry structure and firms' strategies determine the nature of female participation in Indian manufacturing, especially in the garment industry in India. The third question was to examine the socio-economic characteristics of the women workers in the garment industry. It also tries to understand how these characteristics influence the decisions relating to labour supply and demand. The fourth question tries to understand the nature of the relation between women workers and the factories in which they work. In particular, we look at the

roles in which women contribute to the production process, the process of recruiting the workers, and finally, the wages and working conditions. And fifth question was to understand what women's work means to their families, their own lives and women workers' capabilities for collective action.

The thesis begins with an analysis of the size of employment in the organised and the unorganised manufacturing sectors in India (Chapter 2). The chapter finds that the size of employment in the unorganised manufacturing sector may have declined substantially during the period from 2011-12 to 2017-18 -- from 61.1 million to 58.5 million. This decrease in overall manufacturing employment was mainly due to the fall in female employment by 4 million. During the same period, factory-sector employment increased from 13.4 million to 15.6 million. The thesis finds that the acceleration in the factory sector employment, which began in the second half of the 2000s, has continued while manufacturing employment growth in the informal sector has slowed down. Textiles, garments and leather industries have been an important source of manufacturing employment (organized and unorganized combined) in India and a majority of the workers are engaged in enterprises that fall outside the factory sector. These industries are also characterized by relatively low value-added per employee. The size of the female workforce is small in manufacturing, both in absolute and relative terms. The chapter also finds that the quality of employment was very low in manufacturing, especially for female workers. The region-wise analysis shows that the lead of the western and the southern States over other regions is particularly marked in the factory sector. But the north and east are characterised by high levels of overall manufacturing employment implying their significant presence in the unorganised sector. When it comes to female industrial employment, especially in the factory sector, regional concentration is much sharper.

The thesis then discusses the context of the study and methodology (Chapter 3). India's share in global exports of garments increased only marginally although it was predicted to increase significantly post the Multi-Fibre Agreement (MFA). The chapter finds distinct variations in factory employment across various States in terms of size of the firms, directly employed female workers, contract workers and emoluments to workers. The methodology, especially the field research, is motivated by the analytical literature on production networks that take into account the role of labour and institutional factors. The third chapter also forms the rationale for choosing the two clusters – Bangalore in South

India and NCR in North India, for understanding the female employment patterns in the garment industry.

The second question addressed in the thesis was to understand how the industry structure and firms' strategies determine the nature of female participation in Indian manufacturing, especially in the garment industry in India. Bangalore is characterized by relatively large firms and a very high share of women in the workforce. On the other hand, firms in NCR are small and female participation is low. We find that the above-referred characteristics – factory size and female share of employment -- are strategies adopted by firms in the respective clusters, given the specific market opportunities and constraints they face. We argue that the decisions to employ more female workers in Bangalore and more male workers in Delhi-NCR are driven not entirely by economic considerations. Equally important have been the historical legacies in the respective industries, institutional factors, and most importantly, the perceptions held by the employers and the industry in general about gender and work.

The third and fourth questions were to examine the socio-economic characteristics of the women workers in the garment industry and the nature of the relation between women workers and the factories in which they work. In particular, the chapter addresses the roles in which women contribute to the production process, the process of recruiting the workers, and the wages and working conditions in the industry (Chapter 5). Women workers in Bangalore are short-term migrants from rural areas of Karnataka. Women workers employed in factories in NCR were not migrant workers while the factories in NCR are dominated by male migrant workers. The nature of the jobs that women do is also different, women mainly work as tailors in the factories while women in NCR do work that is categorised as helpers. Wage theft is practised in the garment industry in Bangalore by making workers do overtime without benefits and by underpaying the workers in NCR-Delhi. Even though the jobs are of regular nature, women workers in NCR do not receive any of the social security benefits that workers in Bangalore receive.

The fifth question the thesis addressed was to understand what women's work means to their families, their own lives and the women workers' capabilities for collective action (Chapter 6). In this way, we aim to find out how women's work in the garment industry contributes to their well-being and agency. We understand that women's entry into paid work has not redefined the gender roles where women are responsible for most of the

unpaid domestic work. Work has been more about upward mobility for the workers in Bangalore and paid for the education of their children. In NCR, work was about ensuring basic facilities such as food for their families. Garment manufacturing provides a steady source of income for many women workers, especially in NCR where many of the male members in the family are unemployed. Work in the garment factories has positively transformed the lives of many women workers in Bangalore and NCR, even when it has been exploitative. Transportation is also an important barrier for women in accessing labour markets, especially in NCR. We also discuss the possible agents of change for more equitable distribution in the industry.

The thesis concludes that the size of the factories and the female share of employment are part of the strategies adopted by firms, given their specific market opportunities and the constraints they face. While the price of the garments has fallen over the years squeezing the suppliers and the workers in the process, government support is appearing to be crucial for the future growth and survival of the industry.