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Women's Domestic Work and Economic Activity:  
Results from the National Sample Survey

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## Introduction

There are two major competing explanations for the relationship between the household and the participation of women in the labour force. One explanation states that female labour force participation is conditioned by childbearing and rearing and by women's responsibility for domestic work. Thus the rise in labour force participation rates in most Western industrialized countries during this century is traced to the decline in fertility and dramatic changes in the technology of housework. Labour force participation, in this theory, is residual to women's responsibility for child-care and other domestic work.

While not denying women's primary responsibility for domestic work, the alternative theory places greater emphasis on the economic pressures that necessitate women's earning cash incomes through work outside the home.<sup>1/</sup> In a situation where a household does not have access to sufficient economic resources for its on-going reproduction, women may have to participate in wage labour regardless of childcare or domestic work. The latter work is then "marginalized" in a variety of ways including the extension of the woman's working day. In this case, therefore, it is domestic work that becomes, in some sense, residual to participation in the labour force. The priority given to earning a cash income arises from the fact that modern day domestic work to a considerable extent involves the transformation of purchased commodities into consumable form as well as maintenance activity; the first requirement is therefore to have access to the commodities themselves either through own production or through cash.

The actual experience of any country or region will obviously depend on how widespread is the phenomenon of economic pressure. In a country like India where a significant proportion of the population is below the official poverty line, and as many as 37%<sup>2/</sup> of rural households obtain their principal

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A wage labour, we would expect quite a large proportion of rural women to be under pressure to participate in the labour force. Child-care and domestic work are not entirely without explanatory power however as we shall see.

We examine two main hypotheses about India in this paper. First, dividing women's work into three types - (i) participation in the traditionally defined labour force, (ii) domestic work plus activities such as fuel collection, animal care etc, (iii) domestic work alone<sup>3/</sup> - we expect to find that labour force participation will increase with poverty; and among women who do domestic work, the share of those who do only domestic work will itself be negatively correlated with poverty. Second, the importance of childcare and domestic work will determine which women (by age and marital status) within the household will do which type of work, but will not affect overall labour force participation. Family structure variables such as overall household size, the dependency ratio or the presence of nuclear versus joint families are not, we believe, the dominant variables determining female labour force participation in India, although we try to control for family size later in the paper. These variables are more likely to affect the division of work among women (as in the second hypothesis above) but it is difficult to test this with the data at our disposal. We turn now to examine more systematically the precise meanings of the different types of work mentioned above that are discussed in this paper.

National level enquiry into the duration and composition of domestic work has rarely been undertaken anywhere in the world to date. The National Sample Survey in its 32nd Round on Employment and Unemployment made a modest beginning in this direction. Although these data are somewhat limited in the scope of questions asked and in the category of persons covered, they,

result of one of the first large-scale attempts to investigate and quantify domestic labour; as such, they merit serious attention from analysts of women's work.

It should be borne in mind in this context that the content of domestic work varies significantly across societies, between rural versus urban dwellers, and across socioeconomic classes within a society. In particular, in partly "commoditized" rural societies, the dividing line between domestic work and what data-gathering agencies call "economic activity" is quite fuzzy.<sup>4/</sup> This ambiguity is an aspect of the work itself as well as of the time-disposition of those who do the work. For example, should work in household poultry or animal care for family consumption be considered part of domestic work or economic activity? The fact that the product is for home consumption does not define the work as non-economic, since agricultural work for home consumption is usually treated as economic activity. Furthermore, a woman may look after the animals in between cooking meals, washing clothes etc., making a strict timebased division between different types of activity quite difficult. It is possible to visualize a range of tasks (typically though not exclusively performed by women) such as fuel gathering, kitchen gardening, poultry/animal care, water collection among others, which are fraught with such ambiguity in terms of their content, location and time disposition, but which are of considerable importance in rural Indian life.

The National Sample Survey in its 32nd Round distinguished between a person who "attended domestic duties only" (code 92) and one who "attended domestic duties and was also engaged in free collection of goods (fish, small game, wild fruits, firewood, cowdung, cattlefeed etc) for household consumption, maintenance of kitchen garden, orchards etc., work in household poultry, diary etc, sewing, tailoring, weaving etc. for household use, tutoring children or bringing water from other villages" (code 93). Codes 92 and 93 together include all women whose usual work is domestic. The detailed data we shall

examine in this paper refer to code 93 above, and therefore do not strictly deal with "domestic duties" as defined by the National Sample Survey. They do, however, provide some detail on precisely the type of ambiguous tasks discussed earlier. The next section of the paper discusses the data and their limitations. This is followed by three sections, the first on labour force participation versus domestic work, the second on the impact of the household's economic resources on women's work, and the third on the division of work among women on the basis of age and marital status. A brief discussion of the coverage, definitions and procedures used in the NSS 32nd Round is contained in an Annexure.

#### Data and Limitations<sup>5/</sup>

The data used here were collected as part of the all India quinquennial survey on Employment conducted by the National Sample Survey in 1977-78.<sup>6/</sup> The published data are broken down both by urban versus rural households and across states. In this paper we concentrate on rural women alone. For the purpose of analysing the significance of the work included under code 93, there are three main limitations to this information. First, the survey only provides information on those women who are not considered workers by "usual status". (See Annexure). This means that we do not have data on the "double burden" of women who are defined as part of the labour force. For example, we do not know how many women combine work such as fuel-gathering or animal care with working for a money income and the more narrowly defined domestic activities. Not only can we not assess the content of women's dual work-burden, but we have also to be cautious in analyzing the distribution across different classes of households of work such as fuel-gathering, since the distribution of "economically active" women varies across households. The same problem would crop up for an analysis across states; we shall discuss it in more depth later.

The second problem is that the data contain no time-disposition, even of the sort available for other parts of the 32nd Round Survey. To elaborate, for those considered to be part of the labour force by "current status" (See Annexure), the survey obtains their main activity for each half-day of the reference week. Thus a summary time-disposition over fourteen half-days is available for each person, and is available for codes 92 or 93. Thus, while we now know how many women are involved in the different activities listed under code 93 (subject to the first limitation discussed in the previous paragraph), we do not know how much time they spend on such work, or how their time is divided between the different activities. Hence, judgements made about the relative importance of different types of activities included under code 93 are based on the number of workers rather than amount of time, and have therefore to be treated with caution.

The third limitation of the data relates to the possible inferences one can draw about the relationship between female un/under-employment and involvement in domestic work. It has been suggested in the literature that domestic work is a "residual" activity (especially for women from agricultural labour households) which women report themselves to be doing when they cannot find waged employment, and that there appears to be a seasonal increase in the number of women engaged in domestic activities during the lean season in agricultural employment. <sup>U</sup> With this kind of hypothesis in mind, the NSS enquired into the reasons underlying women's attachment to domestic duties as a "usual status" occupation. However the three alternatives given - "pressing need", "non-availability of work" and "other" - are probably insufficient to test a hypothesis regarding the potential link between unemployment and domestic work. The notion of "pressing need" for domestic work is not adequately defined, and it is probable that many women engaged in domestic work would feel that their work fulfills an important household need, whether

or not their performance of it has been catalyzed by nonavailability of waged employment. This potential confusion could possibly have been avoided by asking a question about availability of waged work prior to the question about need for domestic work, and by defining the notion of need more sharply in terms of the availability of alternative domestic workers if the woman were employed in waged or other remunerative activity.

It is, of course, possible that the very high proportion (over 92% for the country as a whole) of women reporting "pressing need" as the reason for their involvement in domestic duties is an accurate reflection of the priorities of those women who are in codes 92 or 93 as their usual status. The hypothesis about seasonal unemployment may, in fact, be properly testable only for those women who report domestic work as their current status which would be more sensitive to seasonal variations. (See Annexure). Unfortunately, such detailed information on the reasons for current status domestic work is not available.<sup>8/</sup> Bearing these caveats in mind, we now proceed to examine the data. We shall rely on usual status data unless otherwise specified.

#### Labour Force Participation - Inter State Variations

In neoclassical economic literature, the participation of women in work outside the home is understood to be conditioned by household choices between income and leisure, with the former including both purchased goods and goods produced at home. Accordingly, women's low labour force participation rates relative to men are seen as the direct result of their comparative advantage in work within the home, a reflex of the relative wage structure which is tilted in favour of men. Feminists have criticized this approach for its treatment of the household as a homogenous decision making unit free of power relations, authority and hierarchy. The approach has also been questioned because it treats the household as an essentially isolated unit, independent

of social pressures, norms or values. Certainly, in the Indian context, few households are either homogenous or independent. In particular, it has been extensively observed by anthropologists and other field researchers that, in rural India, an improvement in the household's economic position in terms of access to land or income, often leads to a "withdrawal" of women from waged agricultural labour or other income-generating work outside the home. The norms of the traditional caste hierarchy whereby upper caste women's mobility is restricted as a mechanism of sexual control are enmeshed herein with the removal of women from direct class dominance by larger landowners who hire agricultural labour. Caste, class and gender hierarchies are all interwoven in these "decisions" which affect women's participation in the labour force.

Even feminist writers have not, however, systematically examined what those women who are not part of the traditionally defined "labour force" do. What types of activities are they engaged in? Do they substitute leisure for work as is often assumed? In the Indian context, the sharp variations across states in the rural female labour force participation rate (LEFR) make such questions all the more interesting. Previous attempts to explain these variations in terms of cropping patterns or caste divisions have not been very successful.<sup>9/</sup> An attempt to correlate these variations to differences in the extent and type of work done by women in and around the home may, however, be more fruitful. Indeed, using the data from the National Sample Survey, we found a strong negative correlation across states between female labour force participation and the proportion of the rural female population<sup>10/</sup> usually engaged in domestic duties.<sup>11/</sup> (See Table I). It is arguable, of course, that this correlation is to be expected, since most women who are not part of the traditionally defined labour force are likely to be engaged in some domestic activity. (Unfortunately, these data cannot tell us if labour force participation is being substituted by leisure, since we do not



have time dispositions available.) What is striking, nevertheless, is that the negative correlation between the labour force participation rate and the proportion of women engaged in domestic and other activities such as fuel collection or care of livestock (i.e. code 93) is highly significant; indeed it is more significant than the inverse correlation between LFPR and the proportion of women in domestic duties alone <sup>12/</sup> (i.e. code 92). This suggests that in states such as Punjab where women's participation in the traditionally defined labour force is low, women's participation in the type of activities covered under code 93 is high.

One could argue therefore that if the activities that come under code 93 were to be acknowledged to indeed be "economic", then the overall rate of female labour force participation would rise; furthermore, the inter-state variations in LFPR would decline. Thus for the country as a whole, the LFPR (for rural women above 5 years of age) increases from 30.51% to 52.30% which is much closer to the male rate of 63.66%; and the coefficient of variation in the female LFPR across states declines from 0.452 to 0.124. It would appear therefore that, to a considerable extent, the observed variation in female labour force participation rates across states is an artifact created by the unjustified exclusion of a considerable range of women's tasks from so-called "economic activity".

Even if the LFPR were adjusted to include the activities under code 93, it would still be important to know what determines whether a woman will be part of the traditionally defined labour force or of code 93, i.e., performing a range of activities in and around the home. Given the prevalent social structure which permits, indeed encourages, the control of women's mobility, there exists a hierarchy of female labour which accords the lowest status to agricultural wage labour, and a higher status to women who work in

Table I

Labour Force Participation and Domestic Work

	1	2	3	4	5	6
	%	%	%	%	%	%
all-India	30.51	40.23	21.79	18.44	14.34	12.68
Andhra Pradesh	47.90	27.47	11.60	15.87	7.31	5.73
Assam	7.97	54.85	35.71	19.15	18.65	25.67
Bihar	19.93	49.87	27.56	22.25	20.55	15.84
Gujarat	33.97	33.90	17.77	15.13	14.64	10.02
Haryana	16.06	52.97	32.18	20.78	17.26	24.59
Karnataka	39.22	32.92	16.51	16.41	11.81	8.46
Kerala	29.74	36.26	23.28	12.98	9.28	20.56
Madhya Pradesh	43.70	22.85	14.28	13.90	10.59	6.93
Maharashtra	47.90	23.53	9.88	13.66	7.45	4.04
Orissa	27.05	44.09	24.62	19.47	7.06	17.27
Punjab	11.77	59.57	41.87	17.70	14.61	26.28
Rajasthan	39.47	36.60	28.24	8.36	20.00	18.00
Tamilnadu	42.09	31.93	15.93	16.00	11.76	7.74
Uttar Pradesh	19.39	51.48	21.87	29.61	15.99	8.56
West Bengal	14.33	52.20	33.72	18.48	20.39	22.80

Source: Sarveshana, Jan-April 1981, op.cit., pp 20, 51, S46 - S87 (N.B. There appears to be some discrepancy between columns 3 and 4 above which were calculated from the detailed tables on pp S46 - S87 and the data presented in pp 17-18 of Sarveshana. We have used the detailed tables as our source throughout).

- Notes: (1) - LFPR (over 5 year)  
 (2) - Women usually engaged in domestic duties (92 plus 93) as a proportion of all women over 5 years.  
 (3) - 93 as a proportion of all women over 5 years  
 (4) - 92 " " " " " "  
 (5) - Women in fuel collection as a proportion of all women over 5 years  
 (6) - Women in dairy, poultry, kitchen garden etc., as a proportion of all women over 5 years.

F.3: All the data used in this paper refer to the "usual status" category as defined in the Annexure. While the NSS does report the proportion of the female population engaged in 92 and/or 93 by "current status", these data are not comparable to the "usual status" data for the following reason. While the "usual status" data on codes 92 and 93 refer to women who are outside the labour force, the "current status" data on these codes refers to the time disposition of women who are within the labour force; the two are therefore conceptually not comparable.

and around the home. The counter pressure exercised by economic need would imply that both across states and across households within a state, the proportion of the female population engaged in code 93 activities would vary directly with the resource position of the household. Using the household's land-holding as a reasonable proxy for the resource position of households, we find that there is indeed a systematic rise in the number of women per household engaged in code 93 activities as household land-holding increase (See Table II). Across states, the proportion of women engaged in code 93 (as also code 92 alone activities is negatively correlated with the proportion of landless<sup>13/</sup> households among rural households.<sup>14/</sup> (An interesting point worth noting here is that these correlations break down completely when we add households with 0.01 - 0.49 acres of land which constitute around one-third of rural households) to the landless households. This seems to imply that the possession of even a small piece of land (up to half an acre) acts as a significant counter to the need to send women to work outside the home).

The above point about the importance of the household's resource position can be made differently by examining some of the activities included in code 93 in greater detail. Of these activities two in particular - free collection of firewood etc., and work in household poultry, dairy, kitchen garden etc. each has around 60% of the women who are included in code 93 active in them.<sup>15/</sup> These two sets of activities are different in that the second set assumes access to some resources such as livestock, or a garden, while the first set involves foraging for fuel - an activity more typical of the resource-poor. Now there is a strong negative correlation between the proportion of the female population engaged in the second set of activities and the traditionally defined LFPR; the correlation with the first set of activities, i.e. fuel gathering, is much weaker.<sup>16/</sup>

Table IILand Holding and Domestic Work - all India

Size class of land possessed (acres)	Households %	92 + 93 %	93 %	92 %	Number of women in domestic duties per household
0.00 without own homestead	1.76	0.66	0.46	0.91	0.33
0.00 with own homestead	1.77	1.03	0.91	1.16	0.51
0.01 - 0.49	33.65	26.53	26.70	26.32	0.70
0.50 - 0.99	6.58	6.70	6.92	5.13	0.82
1.00 - 2.49	17.40	17.35	18.14	16.42	0.88
2.50 - 4.99	16.87	19.27	19.30	19.24	1.01
5.00 - 7.49	8.78	10.93	10.62	11.29	1.10
7.50 - 9.99	3.76	4.93	4.80	5.09	1.16
10.00 -14.99	4.43	5.81	5.40	6.28	1.16
15.00 -19.99	2.03	2.83	2.70	2.99	1.23
20.00 & above	2.95	4.56	4.04	5.17	1.36
	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	0.88

Source: Sarvekshana, Jan - April 1981, op.cit., pp 9, S 124.

Thus participation in the traditionally defined labour force is mainly substituted by resource-based activity around the home such as livestock care etc., when such resources are available.

Furthermore, if we look at occupations, while there is a strong negative correlation across states between the proportion of the female population in code 93 and the proportion who are agricultural wage labourers, there is no such correlation for code 92.<sup>17/</sup> That is, the lower the proportion of women in a state who are agricultural wage labourers, the higher the proportion engaged in code 93 activities; women do not however "withdraw" into domestic duties alone in such cases.

We turn next to examine the households of women usually engaged in domestic duties (including both codes 92 and 93), as also the age and marital status of the women themselves.

#### Household Economic Position and Domestic Work

As already mentioned in the previous section, the number of women engaged in domestic duties per household increases systematically with the size class of land possessed by households; this is true both for the country as a whole, and for each state considered separately. (See Table II). On average, there is less than one woman per household whose usual status is in domestic duties; the size class 2.50 - 4.99 acres is the cut-off beyond which there is more than one such woman per household. Put differently, there is less than one such woman per household in the 61% of rural households that operate less than two and a half acres of land. The need for a cash income and the paucity of owned resources sends a significant proportion of the women from such households out to work. Furthermore, as can be seen from Table II, land size classes above two and a half acres account for

only 39% of all rural households, but over 48% of all women usually engaged in domestic duties.

The above evidence based on household landholding is weakened by the fact that household size itself increases systematically with landholding, i.e. households with more land are generally larger. Thus, it might be argued that, as households become larger, both the need for and the availability of women to be involved in domestic duties increases, leading to the observed positive correlation of women doing domestic duties with landholding size. Since our data on landholding cannot directly refute this conjecture, we turn to data based on the household's per capita expenditure which would, by definition, avoid the problem posed by the landholding data.<sup>18/</sup> From Table III it can be seen that these data define relationships between female work and poverty very similar to those given by the previous landholding figures. As monthly per capita expenditure increases, the traditionally defined LEPR declines; on the other hand, the proportions of women in both codes 92 and 93 increase. Also, if code 93 is added on to the traditionally defined LEPR, the variation across per capita expenditure classes declines considerably.

Thus, the combination of the evidence based on landholding and per capita expenditure lends strong support to the hypothesis that an improvement in the household's economic position leads to a substitution by women of "economic activities" in and around the home in place of work done outside the home. The occupation-wise data also point in this direction. Rural households that obtain the bulk of their income from wage labour constitute 37% of all rural households but account for only 27% of all women usually engaged in domestic duties. Selfemployed households, on the other hand, which tend to be economically better off, comprise 57% of all households but account for 67% of the women in domestic duties.<sup>19/</sup>

Table III

Per Capita Expenditure and Domestic Work - all India

Monthly per capita expenditure (Rupees)	LFPR %	<u>92+93</u>	<u>93</u>	<u>92</u>	<u>LFPR+ 93</u>
		All women %	All women %	All women %	All women %
0.00 - 9.99	35.35	25.93	15.76	10.17	51.11
10.00 - 19.99	40.83	23.90	16.52	7.38	57.35
20.00 - 29.99	37.93	29.55	18.16	11.39	56.09
30.00 - 39.99	35.34	33.30	19.09	14.21	54.43
40.00 - 49.99	32.44	37.42	20.30	17.12	52.74
50.00 - 69.99	28.90	42.04	22.66	19.38	51.56
70.00 - 99.99	26.84	45.55	23.78	21.77	50.62
100.00 - 149.99	25.40	48.53	24.26	24.27	49.66
150.00 - 199.99	23.60	50.78	27.23	23.55	50.83
200.00 & above	23.05	54.34	28.63	25.71	51.68
Total	30.51	40.23	21.79	18.44	52.30

Source: Sarvekshana, Jan - April 1981, op cit., pp 28, S98 - S119.



Among women who usually do domestic work, the distinction between those who perform domestic work alone (code 92) and those who do the work included in code 93 also appears to be systematically related to both household landholding and monthly per capital expenditure. For India as a whole, the ratio of women in domestic duties alone (code 92) to all women in domestic duties (code 92 plus 93) bears a U-shaped relationship to size-class of land possessed. (See Table IV). The lowest point of the ratio is in the size-class 0.50 - 0.99 acres. Beyond this point, for the country as a whole (as well as for most states), there is a clear upward trend in the ratio of 92 to 92 Plus 93. Thus, beyond a point an improvement in the household's resource position leads to a relative increase in the number of women engaged only in domestic work. The high ratios in the lowest three size-classes are more difficult to explain, and we can only speculate here about the possible reasons. First, the two landless classes together account for only 1.7% of all women engaged in domestic duties; hence there may be some small sample problems here. However this cannot be true for the next size-class (upto 0.5 acres) which accounts for fully 27% of the women in domestic duties. Second, the resource position in these size-classes may be too poor to allow very much of the activities included in code 93. Third, these size-classes probably account for a considerable proportion of all agricultural labourers and of women who work outside the home; since the economic pressure for women to work outside is severe, it is possible that those women who do not work outside are also incapable of foraging for fuel etc, and may be confined to domestic work alone.

As in the division between LEPR and domestic duties, data based on landholding are vitiated by the problem of household size. The higher proportion of women in domestic duties alone may be direct result of the above,



Table IV

$\frac{92}{92 + 93}$  by size class of land possessed

(acres)

	Total	0.00 without owned home- stead	0.00 with owned home- stead	.01- .49	.50- .99	1.00 2.49	2.50 4.99	5.00 7.49	7.50 9.99	10.00 9.99	15.00 19.99	20.00 above
India	.45	.64	.51	.46	.39	.43	.46	.47	.47	.50	.49	.52
A.P.	.58	.69	.45	.61	.58	.55	.56	.53	.56	.56	.48	.65
Assam	.35	0	.32	.39	.34	.41	.34	.33	.26	.28	.24	.42
Bihar	.45	.44	.42	.37	.32	.41	.46	.55	.55	.67	.60	.73
Gujarat	.28	.69	.57	.57	.52	.45	.43	.42	.39	.38	.51	.47
Haryana	.39	1.00	.33	.38	.38	.34	.39	.37	.39	.43	.35	.47
Karnataka	.50	.45	.28	.58	.33	.47	.42	.44	.42	.51	.54	.64
Kerala	.36	.74	.50	.42	.33	.30	.30	.28	.36	.16	.44	.19
M.P.	.49	.54	.65	.40	.31	.45	.49	.49	.53	.48	.43	.61
Maharashtra	.58	.78	.67	.59	.45	.45	.51	.59	.64	.65	.61	.71
Orissa	.44	.37	.30	.45	.41	.33	.42	.46	.53	.45	.52	.57
Punjab	.30	.28	.15	.31	.32	.26	.25	.30	.28	.30	.31	.34
Rajasthan	.23	.43	.46	.33	.13	.10	.19	.23	.18	.25	.20	.22
Tamilnadu	.50	.60	.36	.54	.50	.41	.48	.46	.73	.57	.54	.74
U.P.	.58	.50	.64	.55	.47	.55	.60	.59	.56	.68	.69	.82
W.B.	.35	.50	.39	.32	.31	.25	.37	.39	.52	.37	.40	.45

Source: Sarvekshna, Jan-April 1981, op cit., pp S124 - S145

rather than of an improved resource position per se. To correct for this problem, we look at the ratio of 92 to 92 plus 93 across per capita expenditure classes as before. (See Table V).

Here too, the pattern is similar to that based on land-holding, in that beyond a monthly per capita expenditure of Rs.30, there is a steady increase in the proportion of women engaged in domestic duties alone. The U - shape in this case is much less pronounced, and the same reasons can be advanced for it as in the case of land-holding.

A final point may be made about the tasks included in code 93. As is obvious from Table VI, the proportion of all women in domestic duties who are engaged in fuel collection has an inverted U - shape vis a vis land-holding, tending to drop off sharply after the 0.50 - 0.99 acres size-class. On the other hand, the proportion engaged in animal care etc. rises sharply up to the same size-class, but remains fairly stable thereafter. It would appear, therefore, that the size-class 0.50 - 0.99 acres is some sort of turning point for the distribution between 92 versus 93, as well as for the relative importance of fuel collection versus animal care etc. The pattern for different states, while broadly similar, are however by no means identical.

Table V

$\frac{92}{92+93}$  by household monthly per capita expenditure

	0.00- 9.99	10.00- 19.99	20.00- 29.99	30.00- 39.99	40.00- 49.99	50.00- 69.99	70.00- 99.99	100.00- 149.99	150.00- 199.99	200.00 and above
India	.45	.39	.31	.39	.43	.46	.46	.48	.50	.41
A.P.	.58	.68	.56	.52	.51	.58	.56	.58	.63	.64
Assam	.35	1.00	.35	.39	.35	.32	.36	.37	.29	.43
Bihar	.45	.26	.06	.28	.34	.43	.47	.54	.55	.49
Gujarat	.28	-	.22	.50	.55	.49	.46	.42	.53	.49
Haryana	.39	-	.30	.37	.41	.37	.37	.39	.40	.42
Karnataka	.50	.66	.57	.50	.55	.48	.51	.49	.46	.50
Kerala	.36	.40	.28	.40	.38	.38	.40	.33	.30	.27
M.P.	.49	0	.23	.32	.36	.47	.51	.58	.62	.65
Maharashtra	.58	0	.57	.50	.52	.57	.57	.57	.71	.64
Orissa	.44	0	.33	.37	.39	.40	.45	.55	.57	.64
Punjab	.30	1.00	0	.21	.36	.32	.30	.29	.30	.24
Rajasthan	.23	0	.54	.20	.23	.16	.23	.24	.27	.24
T.N.	.50	0	.32	.44	.49	.48	.46	.55	.58	.55
U.P.	.58	0	.36	.52	.56	.58	.58	.58	.60	.55
W.B.	.35	.67	.25	.24	.29	.36	.36	.39	.48	.41

Source: Sarvekshana, Jan - April 1981, op.cit., pp S98 - S119 .

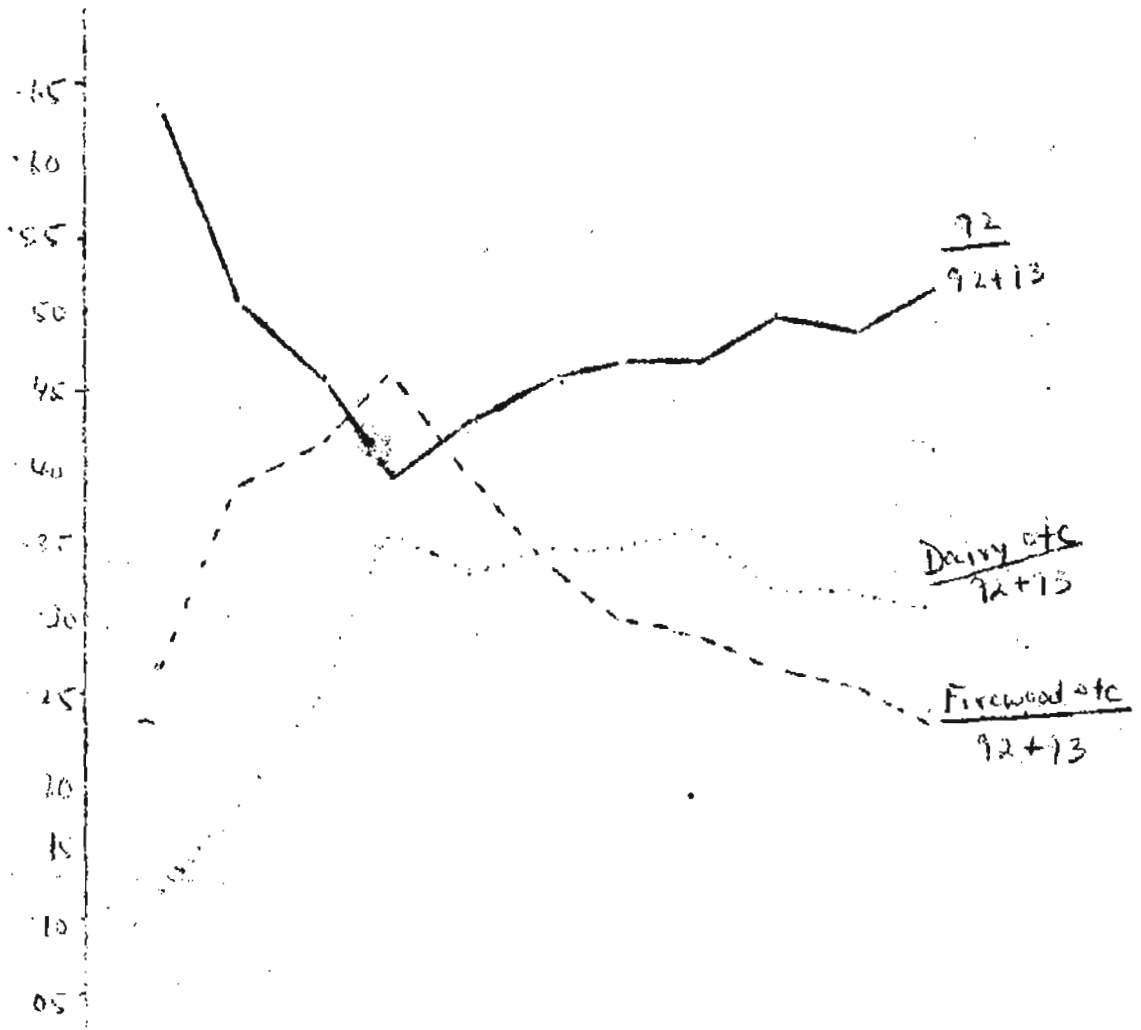
Table VI

Women engaged in "free collection of firewood, cowdung etc" and  
 "work in Kitchen garden, poultry, diary etc" as % of  
 engaged in domestic duties - all India

Size class of land possessed (acres)	Firewood etc	Dairy etc
0.00 without owned homestead	.27	.12
0.00 with owned homestead	.39	.18
0.01 - 0.49	.41	.25
0.50 - 0.99	.46	.36
1.00 - 2.49	.39	.34
2.50 - 4.99	.34	.35
5.00 - 7.49	.30	.35
7.50 - 9.99	.29	.36
10.00-14.99	.27	.33
15.00-19.99	.26	.33
20 & above	.24	.32
Total	.36	.32

Source: Sarvekshana, Jan - April 1981, op cit., p.S124.

Graph I - all India



0:00	0:00	0:00	0:50	1:00	2:50	5:00	7:30	10:00	17:00	20:00	Land Pos by hour (%)
without horse shed	with horse shed	to to (0:00)	to to (0:50)	to to (1:00)	to to (2:50)	to to (5:00)	to to (7:30)	to to (10:00)	to to (17:00)	to to (20:00)	

### Age and Marriage Based Division of Female Work

In this section we examine the age and marital - status based division of female work. We wish thereby to obtain a clearer picture of which women within the household participate in which types of work, and how different types of work is distributed among the women of the household. Accordingly we examine the following categories of work - participation in the traditionally defined labour force, domestic duties alone (code 92), domestic plus other activities (code 93), fuel collection, and care of livestock. It is true that there is considerable overlap between age and marriage categories, but the two are not identical. For example, while the age-group 15 - 59 accounts (not surprisingly) for over 90% of those "currently married", there are significant differences in terms of work between the age-groups 15-29, 30-44, and 45-59. Thus a separate consideration of the age divisions is well worth our while.

Table VII and VIII presents both the age-wise participation in different types of work, and the distribution of work across different age-groups. It appears that with almost all women in the age-groups 15-59 participate in some type of work (LEPR, 93 or 92), only 25% of those aged 5-14 and 48% of those above 60 do any sort of work. This is naturally explained through the importance of school-going, youth, age, illness or pension support in these age groups.

For all age groups except 30-44, domestic duties (92 plus 93) account for more women than LEPR. In the group aged 30-44, participation in the traditionally defined labour force is as important as domestic work. Within domestic work itself, participation in code 93 activities is about the same for adult able bodied women in the groups 15-29, 30-44 and 45-59. This is also reflected in their participation in fuel gathering and animal care. However,

Table VII

## Women's work participation by age - all India

Age-group (years)	LFPR %	92+93	93	92	LFPR + 93	Firewood etc	Dairy etc
		All women %	All women %	All women %	All women %	All women %	All women %
5-14	9.13	16.17	8.77	8.61	17.90	6.92	4.20
15-29	39.71	56.83	29.75	27.08	69.46	18.44	17.21
30-44	49.16	49.88	29.22	20.66	78.38	18.96	17.92
45-59	41.61	51.47	28.37	23.10	69.98	18.93	17.64
60 & above	15.99	32.27	14.67	17.60	30.66	9.58	8.53
Total	30.51	40.23	21.79	18.44	52.30	14.34	12.69

Table VIII

## Work distribution by age - all India

Age-group (years)	All women %	LFP %	92+93 %	93 %	92 %	Firewood Etc %	Dairy etc %
5-14	31.25	8.07	12.56	12.58	12.55	15.08	10.35
15-29	28.77	37.44	40.64	39.29	42.25	36.98	39.01
30-44	20.03	32.28	24.84	26.87	22.45	26.48	28.02
45-59	12.46	16.99	15.94	16.23	15.61	16.45	17.32
60 & above	7.49	3.93	6.01	5.04	7.15	5.00	5.03
	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Sarvekshana, Jan - April 1981, op cit., pp 10, 21, S46

Participation in domestic duties alone (code 92) is much greater for those aged 15-29 than for those in the succeeding age-group.

It would appear from the above that the relative importance of traditional labour force participation versus domestic work alone is exactly reversed for the two adult age-groups 15-29 and 30-44. This view is strengthened if we examine the distribution (as distinct from participation) of different types of work across the age groups. The disproportionality Index<sup>20/</sup> for labour force participation is highest for the age-group 30-44; on the other hand, the index for code 92 is highest for the age-group 15-29. There are no significant differences in the disproportionality index for code 93 across the three adult age-groups in the range 15-59. We can conclude from this discussion that women aged 15-29 are particularly responsible for domestic duties alone. Marriage and hence child-bearing is probably a major factor. This can be seen from the fact that for the 19% of women in this age-group who have never been married, the disproportionality index for code 92 is only 1.1, compared to 1.6 for the currently married. Age per se appears to be less important than marital status in this case. The older age-group above 60 years participates less than proportionately in all work except domestic duties alone (code 92) for which their disproportionality index is almost one.

The evidence by marital status does not appear to add significantly to what has already been discussed. (See Tables IX and X). In particular, we do not unfortunately have LEPR data classified by marital status. This makes it impossible to know how many of those women who have never been married or are widowed, separated etc. participate in the traditional labour force vis-a-vis domestic work. In conclusion, it seems that while across states and across households, code 93 activities are the main substitute for



traditional labour force participation, it is code 92 (domestic work alone) that becomes the principal substitute across age and marital status. This is reflective of the relative importance of access to resources in the former case, and of work division within the household in the latter.

Table IX

Women's work participation by marital status - all India

Marital Status	92+93	93	92	Firewood etc	Dairy etc
	All women %	All women %	All women %	All women %	All women %
Never married	19.64	10.77	8.87	7.51	5.66
Currently married	56.15	30.48	25.67	19.66	18.14
Others	30.49	15.80	14.69	10.94	9.30
Total	40.22	21.79	18.43	14.34	12.69

Table X

Work distribution by marital status - all India

Marital Status	All women %	92+93 %	93 %	92 %	Firewood etc %	Dairy etc %
Never married	35.57	17.37	17.58	17.12	18.63	15.96
Currently married	52.97	73.95	74.11	73.75	72.63	75.74
Others	11.46	8.69	8.31	9.13	8.74	8.40
	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	

Source: Sarvekshana, Jan - April 1981, op cit., p S46.

### Conclusion

The evidence presented in this paper does seem to support the view that, in India, women participate in the traditionally defined labour force in response to economic need. However, when women "withdraw" from such work, they tend to substitute it with a range of "economic" activities in and around the home, and not domestic work alone. Pure involvement in domestic work appears to be the preserve of mainly well-to-do rural women; only in households with land over 10 acres or monthly per capita expenditure over Rs. 150 does the number of such women become greater than the number involved in some "economic activity". Nevertheless, even in poorer households, married women in the principal childbearing age group are disproportionately engaged in domestic duties alone. Thus, both economic need and responsibility for child-care affect women's work but in somewhat different ways.

In what way work affects women's status in society or within the home, or women's own self-perceptions is a matter for on-going debate.<sup>21/</sup> Since women's labour force participation is mainly conditioned by economic need, this paper reinforces the view that by itself labour force participation cannot significantly improve women's status in society at large. The class position of the large numbers of poor and desperate women seeking jobs is likely to be a more basic determinant of their social status.

Vis-a-vis the home, however, it is no doubt true that women who work outside have greater mobility and flexibility, though still bounded within socially defined limits that are much stricter than those that operate for their male counterparts.<sup>22/</sup> Whether their status within the home improves in meaningful ways such as a greater voice in household decisions, a larger share in household resources, or control over income does not appear certain. There seems to be a growing consensus in India that

labour force participation in itself does not significantly improve women's status in the home. As long as women's claims to the household's resources continue to be exercised through men (husbands or sons), their contribution to the household's income disappears without a trace, as it were, into the household. Independent access to resources through changes in inheritance systems as well as systematic female employment creation by the state are both therefore vitally necessary. The emerging view that women's subordination is multi-faceted and requires simultaneous effort on many fronts would mean that no single aspect can be isolated as either the cause or the solution.

Footnotes

- (1) It may, of course, be possible for women to earn cash through putting-out work done at home; however traditional employment of this type appears to have been declining in India.
- (2) Sarvekshana, vol. IV, nos. 3 & 4, Jan-April 1981, p.8.
- (3) More precise definitions of these types are given later.
- (4) See L.Beneria, "Accounting for Women's Work", in Women and Development - The Sexual Division of Labour in Rural Societies, (ed) L. Beneria, Praeger Publ., 1982.
- (5) It is possible to skip this section and still follow the substance of the paper for those so inclined.
- (6) The available data on "Women's Activities in Rural India" have been published in Sarvekshana, op.cit. Further results are contained in Sarvekshana, vol V, nos. 1 & 2, July-Oct. 1981. These are extensively used in this paper.
- (7) See P. Bardhan, "Some Employment and Unemployment Characteristics of Rural Women: An Analysis of NSS Data for West Bengal, 1972-73" Economic And Political Weekly, Review of Agriculture, March 1978.
- (8) Across states there is a rank correlation of - 0.714 (significant at 1% level) between the proportion of the female population over 5 years of age who are in code 92 or 93 and the proportion unemployed by current daily status. There was no correlation by usual status.
- (9) See L. Gulati, "Female work participation - a study of inter-state differences", Economic and Political Weekly, Jan 11, 1975, pp 35-42.
- (10) Unless stated to the contrary, all data in this paper refer to rural women above 5 years of age.
- (11) The rank correlation for 15 states is -0.955 (significant at 0.1% level).
- (12) The rank correlation for code 93 is - 0.898 (significant at 0.1%), and for code 92 is - 0.727 (significant at 1%).
- (13) The National Sample Survey includes among the landless those who own their homesteads.
- (14) The rank correlation for code 93 is - 0.602, and for code 92 is -0.579 (significant at 5% level)
- (15) These sub-categories are not mutually exclusive.

- (16) Rank correlation of LFPR with dairy, poultry, kitchen garden etc. is -0.877 (0.1% significance level), but only -0.580 (5% significance level) with fuel collection.
- (17) The rank correlation for code 93 is -0.854 (0.1% significance level), but -0.379 (not significant) for code 92.
- (18) Household per capita expenditure has been extensively used as a proxy for poverty in Indian poverty studies. While this measure appears to avoid the problems posed by household size, it has recently come under attack as being a misleading indicator of poverty. See N. Krishnaji, "Family size, levels of living, and differential mortality in rural India: some paradoxes", Economic and Political Weekly, Feb. 11 1984, pp 248-258.
- (19) See Sarvekshana, Jan-April 1981, op.cit., pp. 8 and S5.
- (20) The disproportionality index is explained most clearly by an example. If women in the age-group 30-44 constitute 20.03% of the total female population and 32.28% of the total no. of women in the labour force, then the disproportionality index is 32.28 divided by 20.03, i.e. 1.61. It is a way of normalizing the share of a particular group by its share in the labour force that is more than proportional to its share in the population, the index makes it possible to compare and rank such group according to the extent of disproportionality. Similar indices can be constructed for any variable.
- (21) For example, the sessions on "Work and Employment" at the Second National Conference on Women's Studies (Trivandrum, India, April 9-12, 1984) discussed these questions at great length.
- (22) See G. Sen, "Subordination and sexual control comparative view of the control of women", forthcoming, Review of Radical Political Economics 1984.

## ANNEX---I\*

SALIENT FEATURES OF THE CONCEPTUAL FRAME  
AND THE DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

AI.1 In the second quinquennial survey on employment and Unemployment carried out by the NSSO in its 32nd round (July 1977 - June 1978) survey operation, comprehensive data on the employment and unemployment situation in the country were collected. The first quinquennial survey was carried out in the 27th round (September 1972-October 1973). In formulating the Survey Questionnaire and also in standardising the procedure of data collection both in the first and the second survey, almost all the recommendations of the Expert Committee on Unemployment Estimates were taken into consideration. The basic conceptual frame remained essentially the same for both these surveys, some important changes, however, were introduced in the second survey. The salient features of this are discussed briefly in the following paragraphs, bringing out the changes introduced in the second survey.

AI.2 The main objective of these surveys was to measure, in quantitative terms, the pattern and characteristics of all activities (also inactivities) including employment and unemployment of the total population and of the different sub-populations homogenous with respect to various social and economic characteristics pertaining to households and individuals. In achieving this objective, the main operation of the survey was to classify the population into different activity categories, independently, by using three different approaches, namely, (i) the usual status approach, (ii) the current weekly status approach, and (iii) the current day status approach. The various activity categories, adopted for the purpose, were as under:

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\* SOURCE: SARVEKSHANA, JANUARY - APRIL - 1981, pp 65 - 68.

description of the activity category (1)	category code (2)
Working with an employer under obligation but work not specifically compensated by any wage/salary	.. 01 - 04
Worked (self-employed) in household enterprises	.. 11
Worked as helper in household enterprises	.. 21
Worked as regular salaried/wage employee	.. 31
Worked as casual wage labour in public works	.. 41
Worked as casual wage labour in other types of work	.. 51
Did not work though there was work in household enterprise	.. 61
Did not work but had regular salaried/wage employment	.. <u>71</u>
Sought work	.. 81
Did not seek but was available for work	.. <u>82</u>
Attended educational institutions	.. 91
Attended domestic duties only	.. 92
Attended domestic duties and was also engaged in free collection of goods (vegetables, roots, fire-wood, cattle feed, etc), sewing, tailoring, weaving, etc., for household use	.. 93
Too young to work/to attend school/to seek employment	.. 94
Old and disabled	.. 95
Rentiers, pensioners, remittance recipients, etc.	.. 96
Beggars, prostitutes, etc.	.. 97
Others	.. 98
Did not work due to temporary sickness (for casual workers only)	.. 99

The activities listed under the category codes 01 to 71 were considered gainful activities and persons assigned any one of these activities were treated as 'working' (or employed). Persons assigned activity category codes 81 or 82 were treated as 'seeking and/or available for work' (or unemployed). The remaining persons i.e. the persons assigned any of the activity category codes 91 to 99 were treated as 'not available for work' (or not in labour force). The data on activity particulars of the persons were, however, tabulated only for population of age 5 years and above by certain social and economic characteristics of households and individuals, such as, village irrigation and crop pattern, household groups, household land possessed, per-capita monthly household expenditure, household industry and occupations, etc., and also by sex, age, education, industry and occupation, etc, of individual members of the households with a view to making the data amenable for further analysis in disaggregated groups of homogenous sub-populations.

AI.3 Classification according to usual status approach: In the 32nd round survey, for classification of population into various activity categories according to usual status, persons were first classified into three major activity status, namely, 'working', 'seeking and/or available for work' and 'not available for work' on the basis of the major-time-spent criterion with reference to the period of 365 days preceding the date of survey. Accordingly, one was categorised as 'working' if one was reported to be engaged for relatively long time during the reference period in one or more of the gainful activities (category codes 01-51), 'seeking and/or available for work' if one was reported to be either 'seeking or available for work' (category code 81 or 82) for relatively long time during the same reference period and 'not available for work' if one was reported to be not available



for work during the major time of the reference period. Within each of these three broad groups of categories, the detailed activity status categories were then determined by the same major-time-spent criterion. This procedure of classification of persons by activity status categories marked a clear departure from the procedure adopted in the 27th round survey. In that survey, the status category corresponding to the activity a person pursued for a considerably long period in the immediate past (say, one year or so) and which the person was likely to continue also in future was considered his/her usual activity status. But in a situation where a person pursued more than one activity in the immediate past, the status corresponding to his/her current activity which was likely to continue in the future also was considered his/her usual activity even when the activity which was discontinued was the dominant activity during the past one year or so.

#### AI.4 Classification according to current weekly status approach:

In both the 32nd and the 27th round surveys classification of population according to current weekly status was done in two stages considering their activities during the reference period of seven days preceding the date of survey. In the first stage, a person was categorised as 'working', 'seeking and/or available for work' or 'not available for work' by adopting a priority rule. Under the rule, the status of 'working' got priority over the status of 'seeking and/or available for work' and the latter in turn, got priority over the status of 'not available for work'. At the second stage, the detailed activity status category was assigned to the person within two of the three major status groups, namely, 'working' and 'not in labour force' by adopting major-time-spent criterion. Engagement of a person in an activity for at least one hour on any one day of the reference

week was considered sufficient to treat him/her as engaged in that activity. Thus a person was considered 'working' if he/she was reported to be engaged in one or more of the gainful activities (category codes 01-71) for at least one hour on any one day of the reference week and the detailed activity status category corresponded to the one of those different gainful activities (category codes 01-71) in which he/she spent relatively long time during the week. Each person was thus assigned a unique activity status for the week. Aggregates of persons under the different activity statuses provided the distribution of person by activity, on an average, every week of the survey period of one year.

AI.5 Classification according to current day status approach: The activity pattern of the population particularly in the unorganised sector is such that a person might be pursuing more than one activity during a week and sometimes even during a day. Some people especially women might undertake nominal work in their household enterprises along with other non-gainful activities, thus pursuing both gainful and non-gainful activities on the same day. In adopting the current day status approach, therefore, attempt was made to account for two major activities pursued by a person on each day of the seven days reference week allocating 'half day' to each activity. The unit of classification, according to this approach, was thus half day though the data were collected for all the seven days of the reference week. In assigning the activity status on a day, a person was considered 'working' (or employed) for the entire day if he/she had worked 4 hours or more on the day, and assigned the one or two (as the case may be) work activities (01-71) to which he/she devoted the working time. But if the work was done for one hour or more but less than 4 hours, he/she was considered 'working' (or employed) for half day and 'seeking -available for work' (or unemployed) or 'not available for work' (or not in labour force) for the other half of the day depending on whether he/she was seeking/available for work or not on the day. On the other hand,

if a person was not engaged in any gainful work even for one hour on the day but was seeking or available for work for four hours or more, he/she was considered 'unemployed' for the entire day. But if the reported availability for work was for less than four hours only, he/she was considered 'unemployed' for half day and 'not in labour force' for the other half of the day. A person who neither was having any gainful work to do nor was available for work even for half of the day was considered 'not available for work' (or not in labour force) for the entire day and assigned the one or two of the non-gainful activity statuses which he/she had during the day. The aggregate of person-days so classified under the different activity categories for all the seven days of the week divided by seven gave the distribution of persons (strictly speaking, person-days) per day, by activity category on an average every day of the survey period of one year.

A.I.6 Probing Questions: The data on the activity situation of the population generated through the adoption of the three different approaches do bring out the different facets of the characteristics of the various activities pursued by persons including the characteristics of employment and unemployment. But, as for classification of the population by the activity (or inactivity) categories, use of such criteria as major time disposition, priority treatment etc. becomes unavoidable, certain facts of the activity situation capable of throwing up information to prove or disprove certain hypotheses often made in analysing the activity situation get suppressed in the process. For instance, information on (i) the nature and extent of multiple activities pursued, the extent of underutilisation, the nature and extent of the expressed willingness to do additional work etc. for the persons classified as employed and (ii) the types of work desired, efforts made to get work, the extent of mobility in securing work etc. for those



classified as unemployed or students or engaged in household duties etc. according to usual status get concealed in this process of analysis. It is with the objectives of also obtaining information on these aspects of the employment situation that provision was made, first in the 27th round, to introduce some additional probing questions in the survey schedule intended be put to persons categorised under the various usual activity status categories, Similar probes were undertaken in the 32nd round survey also with some structural modifications. The set of probing questions formulated for the 32nd round survey consisted of the following:--

- (i) Whether seeking or available for work, (for unemployed and not in labour force categories)/additional work (for employed categories)
- (ii) whether seeking or available for work for the first time (for unemployed category only)
- (iii) efforts made to get work/additional work
- (iv) for how long seeking or available for work/additional work
- (v) type of work/additional work sought or available for
- (vi) status of work/additional work sought or available for
- (vii) If wage/salaried employment sought within the village/town of stay, then acceptable:
  - (a) daily wage
  - (b) monthly salary
- (viii) whether willing to accept wage/salaried employment outside the village/town of stay
- (ix) if willing, acceptable:
  - (a) daily wage
  - (b) monthly salary

These probing questions apart, a second set of probing questions were also canvassed in the 32nd round survey exclusively for those classified according to usual status as engaged in domestic duties with a view to eliciting

information on the reasons for their usual engagement in household chores, whether they would report as available for work if work was provided at their residences etc. This second set of probes consisted of the following:-

- (i) whether it was necessary to spend most of their days on domestic duties almost throughout the year.
- (ii) the reason for usual attachment to domestic duties
- (iii) alongwith domestic duties whether carried out also regularly
  - (a) free collection fish, small games, wild fruits etc. for household consumption
  - (b) free collection of fire-wood, cowdung, cattle feed etc. for household consumption
  - (c) maintenance of kitchen garden, orchards etc.
  - (d) work in household poultry, dairy etc
  - (e) sewing, tailoring etc. for household use
  - (f) tutoring of children
  - (g) bringing water from outside the villages (for rural areas only)
- (iv) inspite of the pre-occupation in domestic duties, whether willing to accept work if work is made available at their houses.
- (v) if willing, the nature of work acceptable
- (vi) type of work acceptable
- (vii) whether they have skill or experience to undertake the work
- (viii) what assistance they need to undertake the work

#I.7 Activity category 93: It is well known that normally a part of the total working time of the women usually engaged in household duties is spent on certain activities to meet household needs. These activities are considered gainful if the goods or services produced as a result of such work are essentially for sale. It was generally felt that information on this aspect of participation in household activities of persons, mostly women, classified according to usual status as 'engaged in domestic duties' could not be obtained

from the 27th round survey. In the 32nd round survey, therefore, attempt was made to sub-divide persons who usually remain predominantly engaged in domestic duties into two sub-categories, namely, (i) engaged exclusively in domestic duties and (ii) engaged in domestic duties as well as in the activities like free collection of fish, small games etc. listed above. The adoption of this new approach was intended to ascertain to what extent these activities for household use got combined with purely domestic duties like cooking, rearing of children, etc.

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