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**WOMEN AND WORK MOBILITY :  
SOME DISQUIETING EVIDENCES  
FROM THE INDIAN DATA**

**Mridul Eapen**

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This paper forms part of a larger study on Demystifying the ‘High Status’ of Women in Kerala, being done in collaboration with a colleague, Dr. Praveena Kodoth, originally sponsored by the ISST, New Delhi and funded by the IDRC, Canada. It was presented at a National Seminar on “*Globalisation and Women’s Work*”, organised by the V.V Giri National Labour Institute, Noida, Delhi, on March 25-26, 2004. I am grateful to the two discussants, Dr.Indu Agnihotri, Delhi University and Dr. S.K Sasikumar, VVG NLI, for their very helpful comments and suggestions.

## ABSTRACT

In this paper we have attempted to raise an issue which has always concerned feminist scholars- the sex segregation of jobs and its perpetuation over time to the disadvantage of women workers, in the context of the nineties, the period of globalisation in India. Our data show that horizontal segregation indicated by the index of dissimilarity has declined during the period 1987-88 and 1993-94 in urban areas but has increased slightly in rural areas. Given the aggregate nature of the data, the indices are very low. Women are more mobile between establishments while hardly achieving any upward mobility in terms of status/occupation. More importantly, we emphasise the need to include women's domestic work as a category of work in such an economic analysis, arguing that a growing proportion of women (or 'working' days of women) moving into the activity 'not in the labour force' whether voluntary or involuntary, reduces their mobility. It tends to enhance women's dependence, making them economically vulnerable and hence weakens their 'bargaining position' within the household and outside it. Unlike men, for whom the need to find employment is clearly central, for women full time domesticity is not regarded as 'unnatural'. Our attention was drawn sharply in this direction based on recent female work participation data for Kerala, macro and micro, suggesting a 'voluntary' withdrawal of women from the labour force. The state boasts of the high(est) female literacy rates among all states of India; yet as recent studies have shown it scores poorly in terms of what are termed as non-conventional indicators attempting to capture power and subordination.

**Key words:** occupational segregation; gender division of labour; domesticity; gender roles

**JEL classification:** J16; J21; J22; J24

## **The Problem**

In this paper we have attempted to raise an issue which has always concerned feminist scholars- the sex segregation of jobs and its perpetuation over time to the disadvantage of women workers, in the context of the nineties, the period of globalisation in India. More importantly, we emphasise the need to include women's domestic work as a category of work in such an economic analysis, arguing that a growing proportion of women (or 'working' days of women) moving into the activity 'not in the labour force' whether voluntary or involuntary, reduces their mobility, tends to enhance women's dependence, making them economically vulnerable and hence weakens their 'bargaining position' within the household and outside it.

Our attention was drawn sharply in this direction based on recent female work participation data for Kerala, macro and micro, suggesting a 'voluntary' withdrawal of women from the labour force. The state boasts of the high(est) female literacy rates among all states of India; yet as recent studies have shown it scores poorly in terms of what are termed as 'non-conventional' indicators<sup>1</sup> attempting to capture power and subordination. There is a growing uneasiness with the rising visibility of gender based violence in the state, particularly domestic violence, mental ill-health among women manifested in high rates of attempted

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1 See Sonpar and Kapur 2003.

suicides and the rapid growth and spread of dowry and related crimes (Eapen and Kodoth 2003). A recent micro study, for rural and urban Trivandrum district in the state, highlights the criticality of women's access to and control over economic resources, particularly immovable assets, in prevention of domestic violence (Panda 2003).

In what follows we present evidences at different levels, macro and micro (based on specific studies) to examine (or draw inferences regarding) women's mobility in terms of different categories of work, including domestic work as a category. The paper is organized in three sections. We start in Section 1 by laying out the context; in Section 2 gender differentiated labour mobility in the conventional way, in terms of occupation/status at the all-India level, is examined for the three years 1987-88, 1993-94 and 1999-00<sup>2</sup> and the changes therein which lend support to the continuing inferior position of women in the type of work they do. While horizontal segregation does normally decline over time, this may not be true of vertical segregation which however, is difficult to capture with the data available (ILO 2003). We then go on to focus on Kerala, a highly literate state, in an effort to highlight how limited the role of education has been, given its pattern, in enhancing women's choices and opportunities. Given the nature of secondary data available, we can present only a broad picture of labour mobility by gender across occupations in the nineties. In Section 3 we examine female work participation rates (WPRs) at the all-India level and the decline in the nineties with a higher proportion of women moving into the category 'not in the labour force'. This is followed once again by a

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2 We could not access data on the percentage distribution of persons 'usually working' by occupation for the year 1999-00 which is not published; in lieu of this we have used the change that is given by status and occupation between 1993-94 and 1999-00.

focus on Kerala where female work participation rates have not declined as at the all-India level; but remained stable. However, some disaggregated data on its distribution by activity status between 'employed', 'unemployed' and 'not in the labour force' to measure the extent of underemployment, is disquieting and yields interesting insights into the shaping of women's job preferences within an overall patriarchal context which tends to restrict mobility, drawing women into full-time domesticity. Some micro studies have also been used to discuss mobility between work, seeking work and non-work, within the extant social context.

## **Section 1**

### **The Context**

The gender division of labour which gives primacy to women's domestic role in terms of housework and child care (and identifies men as the bread winners), is closely linked with other forms of discrimination against women in the non-domestic sphere, critical within which is education and employment. Familial patriarchal interests profoundly affect women's access to education and its level/type. While the structure of female education has changed over time, family strategies and practices in shaping educational achievements towards their "collective well being", remain (Mukhopadhyay and Seymour 1994<sup>3</sup>). The inferior educational achievements of women is rationalised in terms of their future domestic careers as wives and mothers. This is exacerbated by the discrimination women face in the labour market constructed in terms of

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3 The authors discuss this issue in terms of 'patrifocal' family structures which they distinguish from 'patriarchal', the latter implying a monolithic system in which males always predominate in all settings, in all socio-economic contexts and at all stages of the life cycle. The 'patrifocal' concept, they argue, is more 'flexible'

what is “appropriate” work for them reflected in the persistence of sex segregation of occupations and little mobility over time, in particular vertical mobility. The gendered differences in hiring, career advancement and wage structure, is similarly couched in terms of the generalised social commitment to women’s domesticity, arguing additionally that women are secondary earners with husbands to support them and their children.

What is interesting is that such socio-economic facts and beliefs themselves shape women’s job preferences, especially of literate/educated women, reflecting patriarchal interests as they are in accordance with what is considered socially desirable work for women— restricted mobility and ‘high’ status work. The higher number of years women spend in the educational stream, largely in ‘general’ education, is perceived as being in the interests of the family as it could foster more effective child care, health and education even though it may not result in gainful employment. Unlike men, for whom the need to find employment is clearly central, for women full time domesticity is not regarded as “unnatural”. In a situation where ‘desirable’ job opportunities for women are not keeping pace with the numbers seeking work, a withdrawal of women from the labour market thus acts as a further constraint on their mobility. Of course not all women are in a position to refrain from working and low economic status brings pressures on women to seek work for pay breaking ‘tradition’ reflected in greater mobility, and higher (than male) responsibility for provisioning the household. However, poor working women have to contend with larger structures of patriarchy in discriminatory wages and occupational segregation. Even at the level of Government policy which assumes the male breadwinner-woman housewife model, lower wages and occupational segregation continues to be legitimised (Lindberg 2001).

Globalisation, as we experience it today, is essentially the closer integration of countries into the world's production system (through trade and aid) which its proponents argue, developing countries must accept if they are to grow and fight poverty effectively. However, driven largely by the West, in particular powerful international corporations and governed by international institutions such as World Bank, IMF and WTO, the benefits of this process have accrued very unequally across the globe. It is widely accepted now that globalisation is not making life better for those most in need of its promised economic benefits. (Stiglitz 2002). In India, there is a broad indication of some decline in poverty in the nineties (though poverty data are highly contested); however, there is a definite increase in inequalities in income across people, rural and urban areas and states in the country (Deaton and Dreze 2002).

It has also been argued that the pronounced shift towards the market in the process of globalisation and a restructuring of the economy with an expansion of the export oriented sectors, has altered the nature of employment towards greater 'flexibility' which benefits women workers in terms of (a) larger absorption of women into paid work; and (b) shifts in the gender differentiated structure of occupations (Standing 1996). Such a position has been contested by other scholars who argue that while levels of female employment may rise (though not necessarily), the labour market may continue to remain highly segregated (Elson 1996). Obviously what is needed now is a number of micro studies examining the restructuring of labour contracts and the altering of job boundaries in the name of 'flexibility'.

## **Section 2**

### **Distribution of Workers by Occupation/Status**

Needless to state, social, cultural, historical and economic factors all play a role in determining the pattern of occupational segregation. In

a recent study covering over 40 countries, sex dominated occupations have been defined as those where workers of one sex constitute more than 80 percent of the work force (Anker 1998). It was also found that women workers are employed in a narrower range of occupations while men are differentiated into a wider range of occupations, which lowers the scope for upward mobility of women. Horizontal segregation (that is by different occupational groups) fell in a majority of countries; while vertical segregation (that is by type of work within the same occupation group) tended to increase. The main difficulty in measuring changes in the degree of occupational segregation is to distinguish between changes in horizontal and vertical segregation (ILO 2003).

Our data show that horizontal segregation indicated by the index of dissimilarity<sup>4</sup> has declined during the period 1987-88 and 1993-94 in urban areas but has increased slightly in rural areas. Given the aggregate nature of the data, the indices are very low (Table 1).<sup>5</sup> Over time women have been increasing their share in professional, technical, administrative and managerial occupations, particularly in urban areas, but the nature of their career paths, vis-à-vis men, could be very different (as we see a little later). The rural-urban differential is reflected also in the data on status of employment. While only 3-4 percent of women workers are in regular/salaried employment in rural areas and continue to be so, in urban areas there has been a pronounced increase of women workers in regular employment from about 29 percent in 1993-94 to 33 percent by the late 90s (Table 2) which appears to be compatible with the slight

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4 A simple measure of occupational gender segregation which can be written as  $D = (1/2) \sum |(F_j/F) - (M_j/M)|$  where  $F_j$  and  $M_j$  denote the number of female and male employees in the  $j$ th occupation and  $F$  and  $M$  are total female and male employment, respectively (Watts 1998).

5 Some disaggregation of occupations is given; however, the data are not available for both years and in some cases do not add upto a significant proportion of the total, particularly in the case of men. See Appendix 1.

decrease in the index of dissimilarity in urban areas. However, there is reason to question this whole notion of 'regular' employment in a context in which the formal sector is becoming 'informalised' (Unni 2001, Eapen 2001).

But it is evident that agriculture related activities continue to be women's dominant occupation in rural areas while in urban areas (and in rural areas), it is surprising to note, given the redefining of women's role in the process of economic reforms, that the proportion of women in 'production related workers' (Div 7-9) does not show any increase, while it has risen sharply for men. Perhaps the latest year, 1999-00 would have brought out an increase in the proportion of women working as 'production related workers', which however, we have been unable to access. What we could obtain in 1999-00 was the data on number of usually employed persons (15 years and above) by gender who had changed establishment, status, industry and occupation in the last two years (Table 3) and the results are quite revealing: the change in occupation, status and industry for women in both rural and urban areas is much lower relative to men. This is a bit puzzling in the context of the observed increase in women employed on a 'regular' basis by status in urban areas and the decline in the index of dissimilarity in urban areas. It could be that with an overall decline in proportion of women working, this increase is exaggerated.

However, in terms of establishment the gender disparity is negligible in urban areas but much higher in rural areas. Hence women are more mobile between establishments while hardly achieving any upward mobility. This is also seen from the response to questions regarding reasons for change in nature of work/establishment (data not shown here). A much higher proportion of educated men (that is secondary and above) could change jobs due to 'better remuneration'

particularly in rural areas. Interestingly among the not literate, the proportion of women changing jobs for ‘better remuneration’ was higher in rural and urban areas. While for both men and women the proportion of persons giving ‘promotion/transfer’ as the reason for change was small, it was nil for women in rural areas and half that for men in urban areas (NSSO 55<sup>th</sup> Round).

What is interesting is that even when new types of work are created, which appear to be gender neutral and provide an opportunity for women to improve their occupational status, new categories of ‘women’s work’ get established pushing women once again to the lower rungs of the work hierarchy. Studies on the IT industry have brought this out rather strikingly. In a recent study Bhaskar et al (2001) show that in the gender wise distribution of jobs in the Indian software industry, 60 percent of women are engaged in ‘call services’ while only 6 percent are ‘project managers’ and a quarter of the women workers are ‘consultants’.

### **The Case of Kerala**

Within an overall context of low work participation rates, higher levels of literacy in Kerala have certainly enabled women to procure a higher share of regular employment due to its much higher share in rural areas compared to all-India (Table 2). This is also reflected in organised sector employment in Kerala compared to other states in India. The worker sex ratio (female employees per 1000 male employees) in the organised sector was 542 for Kerala (highest among the 15 major states) vis-à-vis 188 for all India. However, worker sex ratio was very high in the private organised sector, 848 compared to 344 in the public sector (Srivastava 1999). The figures over time reveal that the growth in the proportion of women in organised sector employment in Kerala like in rest of India has been in the private sector. Private sector employment is generally less secure and does not always carry non-wage benefits.

However, the occupational structure suggests that the larger proportion of women in the formal sector, would in all probability, be located at the lower end of the worker hierarchy, aided by the generalised orientation of women's education to specific areas, facilitating occupational segregation. As we have argued elsewhere, what gets obscured by the very high aggregate literacy levels in the state is the gender differentiated pattern of higher education as it has evolved over time. Currently women far exceed men in graduate and post graduate education in the arts and science courses<sup>6</sup>; however, they lag far behind men in professional/technical education except in professions such as teaching, where the ratio is in favour of women. Other data show that women dominate in the nursing profession too where there are very few men. In the lower technical educational institutions which are job oriented, the intake of girls is below 10 percent in technical schools, between 13-23 per cent in ITIs and ITCs (two year course) and between 30 and 40 percent in polytechnics during the 90s. In a striking contrast in the ITI's and ITC's (one year course) data on trade wise intake reveals a preponderance of women in stenography, dress-making, cutting and tailoring, secretarial practice and data preparation. Clearly women have limited entry into the more masculine specialisations while dominating those that are already identified with women (Eapen and Kodoth 2003).

A look at the occupational distribution of women in 1987-88 (Table 1) bears this out. In urban Kerala, the share of women in professional categories is 21 percent, which is higher than for all India at 13 percent. However, a further disaggregation shows that most of the women are engaged in the lower rungs of the professional hierarchy -

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6 About two thirds of the students enrolled in graduate courses were girls and almost three fourths in post graduate courses (Women in Kerala 2001).

teaching but largely in schools, specially nursery schools (Eapen and Kodoth 2003). In the medical profession the larger number appears to be in nursing/other health technicians (Appendix 1). In the administrative and managerial occupations the proportion of women workers is lower in urban Kerala than for all-India. Other occupations are clerical, like steno/typist, computing machine operators, corresponding closely to the training they opt for (discussed earlier) with much fewer chances of career advancement; within service workers a very high proportion of women in urban areas are employed as housekeeper, maid, cook, launderer, beauticians etc. The larger proportion of women in Kerala too, continue as agricultural labourers, plantation workers in rural areas and as production process workers in urban areas of which manufacturing (largely in the informal sector) is an important component.

Information on gendered occupational mobility available from the latest NSSO Round providing estimates of the number of usual principal status employed persons who changed their establishment of work, status/ industry of work and occupation of work (2 digit level) during last 2 years, (mentioned above) appears to be very unfavourable to women in Kerala too: in terms of status not a single woman worker per 1000 employed women in urban areas changed her status in this period; in terms of occupation the proportions were barely one fifth those for men in both rural and urban areas. Again, the proportion of men and women changing establishments was not very dissimilar (NSSO 1996, 2001).

However, striking a more positive note, there is a way in which the literate women of Kerala could benefit due to globalisation which opens up windows of opportunity in different parts of the world and at home requiring new educational skills. Although movement of people has

been much more restricted than of goods and services under globalisation, studies point out to the favourable impact of globalisation on those women (and men) who are better endowed with resources and access to education and skills, to markets, or have better links internationally, and can take advantage of these opportunities. The implication of course is increasing inequality in opportunities among women (Jhabvala and Sinha 2002). As brought out in a recent paper (Vijayraghavan 2003), the emerging pattern of skill shortages in the world and the necessary skill acquisition required for them reveals that large segments of educated women can benefit, particularly in a state like Kerala, where female literacy is high. Some data (in the nature of projections) were estimated on the number of US jobs moving offshore in which Sales, Office Support, Legal are some potential areas which are also women intensive. However, one must not get too much carried away by this potential since (a) movement of people across borders has been restrained under globalisation; and (b) much rests upon the quality of education imparted and its price. Kerala has already earned a bad name in the field of quality education (KRPLLD, George 1996). Further, the trend towards privatisation of higher education and user fees charged in Governmental institutions restricts its spread; and (c) it is essential that the state offers some form of security to lone migrant women especially if the nature of work as in Sales or Office Support increases their proneness to harassment in the workplace.

### **Section 3**

#### **Female Work Participation Rates and Non-work**

The decline in female WPRs (as also male) in both rural and urban areas of India has been well documented (Sundaram 2001a, 2001 b, Hirway 2002, Chaddha 2002). In rural areas the decline is from around one third of women being recorded as economically active to about 30

percent while in urban areas the decline has been less sharp, from 16 percent to 14 percent. This suggests an increase in the proportion of women not in the labour force, which has been sharper for rural women: almost 70 percent of women in rural areas are not recorded as workers while it is a little over 85 percent in the urban regions (Table 4).

Perhaps the most popular explanation for the decline in worker participation rates has been in terms of (a) a beneficial increase in the student population ratios of girls and boys in the younger ages as also in the 15-19 and 20-24 age groups, indicating a rising participation in secondary plus levels (Sundaram 2001 a, Chaddha 2002); and (b) decline in the 25 years plus age groups being primarily on account of subsidiary workers at least for rural women. The “increasing levels of education” argument appears too stretched given the overall levels of female literacy in India, its distribution between upto secondary level and less and the region/age groups in which female higher education would have had to grow very rapidly to explain the larger declines in female participation (Hirway 2002). Hence, while this argument is unconvincing, the latter, that is a decline in the proportion of subsidiary rural women workers, is a matter of concern in a situation where intermittent work or short duration employment is tending to become a means of livelihood diversification.

Another explanation, put forward from a gender perspective sounds more plausible (Hirway 2002). It goes back to the continuing controversy on defining women’s work. Given the definition of work in official sources which relates to ‘paid’ or market linked activity, part of the female work force is not captured. This is confirmed rather strikingly by the recent pilot time use surveys (TUS) done by the CSO in six Indian states for the first time in 1998-99, Haryana, MP, Gujarat, Orissa, Tamil Nadu and Meghalaya. Data was collected on how men and women spent

the last 24 hours of a normal working day and of the weekly variant day during the last week and how many men and women spent time on each of the activities. Time of men and women was allocated between system of national accounts (SNA) activities including all economic activities officially included in the SNA production boundary; extended SNA, covering activities outside the SNA production boundary but within the general production boundary and non SNA activities which are those people perform for themselves, like sleeping, recreation etc. The combined estimates for the states show that for rural Indian women the TUS worker participation rates are almost double at 50 percent compared to 25 percent by the NSSO<sup>7</sup> and even more than double for a state like Haryana: it increases from about 18 percent to 38 percent. The question ofcourse is that since time use survey was done only for one year, it is difficult to state whether the uncaptured part of the female work force has increased over time resulting in the recorded withdrawal from the labour force. In this context, Hirway puts forward the possibility that with the low growth of formal or organised employment some people, in particular women, are encouraged to withdraw from the labour market and take up activities at home which do not fall under the system of national accounts (SNA boundary) but which contribute to family well-being like for example producing certain goods for home consumption or taking care of old/sick with growing costs of health services (Hirway 2002) and would also include tutoring children.

However, we have other information which lends credence to this possibility. It may be recalled that the NSSO employment/unemployment surveys (since the second quinquennial Rounds) had been providing

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7 The comparison is between the weekly employment rates estimated by the NSSO and hence differ from the WPRs, based on usual principal and subsidiary status, shown in Table 1

information on the 'economic' work of women who are principally engaged in household duties, besides the normal household chores. Earlier studies had also attempted to estimate the uncaptured part of women's work through these data (Sen and Sen 1984). Since this information has continued to be provided (with slight changes) it is revealing to turn to the activities women who report themselves as housewives are engaged in, under the caption of domestic duties, data on which are available for both the Rounds in the 90s (Table 5). The specific tasks have been classified into three broad categories:

- Activities relating to agricultural production like maintenance of kitchen garden, poultry etc including free collection of agricultural products for household consumption; (items 1-4 in the Table)
- Processing of primary products produced by the households for household consumption; (items 5,6,7 in the Table)
- Other activities for own consumption but resulting in economic benefits to the households.(items 8-15 in the Table).

It is stated that while the first two categories are 'economic' in nature the last is not 'economic' when pursued for own consumption but certainly provides benefits to the household.

From the Table we find that while overall, at the all-India level, the numbers of women engaged in specified additional domestic duties have declined during the nineties, there is an interesting increase in proportion of women in activities which fall in the third category, like husking of acquired paddy, grinding of acquired foodgrains, making baskets with acquired raw material, tailoring and tutoring children, defined as non-economic but which enhance the well-being of the household. All these activities would fall under the extended SNA

category of the Time Utilisation Survey. So what the data suggests is that the domestic work load of women is on the increase and there does appear to be a shift between SNA and extended SNA activities as posited by Hirway.

### **The Case of Kerala**

Nonetheless, it may be noted that the explanation given above (Hirway 2002) is couched more in terms of an ‘involuntary’ withdrawal of women from the labour force. We take up the case of Kerala to highlight also the possibility of such a choice being ‘voluntary’.

Female WPRs in Kerala had been among the lowest in India (Eapen and Kodoth 2003). Currently while over a quarter of the female population is recorded as economically active at the all India level, the proportion is about 23 percent in the state. The difference is primarily due to lower rural female WPRs in Kerala and in relation to all India the urban situation in Kerala seems favourable. About one fifth of women in urban Kerala are employed compared to less than 14 percent at the all India level. And, unlike at the all India level, which has witnessed a decline in female WPRs in both rural and urban areas in the 90s, there has been greater stability in Kerala (Table 4). However, there is a catch. Table 6 presents data worked out from the usual status WPRs of women and how it is currently distributed between the different activity statuses—employed, unemployed and not in the labour force, a measure of underemployment. These data show that of those who are employed, the number of days of work is much higher for women in rural and even urban India and it increased during 1993-94 and 1999-00. Alongside this the number of days of unemployment declined in India as also the days not in the labour force<sup>8</sup>. In Kerala the number of days of work has

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8 These are a different category of women and should not be confused with women not in the labour force by principal occupation.

declined in rural areas and showed no change in urban areas. However, the days of unemployment increased in rural Kerala while in urban areas there was an increase in the number of days women reported 'not seeking/not available for work', that is, were not in the labour force. This suggests a revealed preference of urban women for withdrawal from paid work and a higher incidence of short duration employment for women in Kerala.

We need to bear in mind here that women in Kerala enjoy higher wage rates (casual) in both rural and urban areas than in other parts of the country and hence their annual earnings may still be higher. Also male WPRs in respect of Kerala have increased during the 90s unlike at the all-India level (data not shown here). Hence in a situation of higher household earnings it is entirely likely that women are withdrawing into full-time domesticity for significant parts of the year. This could reflect an 'informed' choice, an option reflecting greater leisure or time to attend to household/family concerns. Yet we cannot ignore the strong element of uncertainty implicit in a decline/constancy in the number of days worked in the 90s. Such a choice entails considerable risk of vulnerability by reducing women's direct access to earned incomes and increasing their dependence on their husbands or others.

Some micro studies set in the context of male outmigration demonstrate the powerful influence that increased economic resources has on women's work patterns (cited in Kodoth, 2004 forthcoming). Let us take one of these studies. Sivanandan's survey in 1999 of a south Travancore village studied in the Census of 1961, reveals that at that time women were greatly involved in coir manufacturing work. Over time, access to other incomes, particularly through remittances from the Gulf has had a strong impact on women's work patterns. Female work participation declined sharply from 43 percent in 1961 to 27 percent in

1999 as against which women in 'household duties' rose from 16 percent of women non-workers in 1961 to 32 percent in 1999. It is also noted that women in such upwardly mobile or affluent households retreat from poorly paid manual and/or informal sector work but are not averse to more employment considered to have 'status', particularly regular jobs in the government sector.

That 'choice' gets shaped by levels of education is also demonstrated in the Kerala context. In a recent study of women's education, employment and job preferences, nearly three fourths of the unemployed women reported that they were unemployed (and by inference largely full time housewives) because they had not been able to find jobs of their preference (Lakshmi Devi, 2002). Of the factors constituting preference, social status and proximity to the home were the most important. Given high levels of educated unemployment it is entirely likely that these women are unable to procure jobs commensurate with their educational skills and preferences, choosing to remain unemployed. Nagaraj (1999) has argued that high unemployment rates for women (and men) in states such as Kerala vis-a-vis relatively backward states- UP, MP and Rajasthan- are largely due to constraints in 'skill utilisation': work seekers may not be willing to accept employment at the wages being offered. Over time this can result in discouraging women from entering the labour force preferring to remain primarily housewives.

Let me conclude by stating that there is strong ground for us to consider the social context in which 'appropriate' work for women, their own job preferences and opportunities are shaped. We emphasise once again that occupational mobility in terms of 'domestication' of women, moving from 'economic' work to 'non-economic' work, giving primacy to their unpaid role as housewives and mothers should be a matter of concern as it enhances women's economic vulnerability. Gender

subordination is embedded in this gender division of labour and only gets strengthened by such a process.

*Mridul Eapen is Associate Fellow at the Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum. Her research interests include Gender, Labour and Rural Transformation.*

*Her e-mail contact:mridul@cds.ac.in*

**Table 1. Occupational Distribution of the Workforce**

Division	All India								Kerala			
	1987-88				1993-94				1987-88			
	Rural		Urban		Rural		Urban		Rural		Urban	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Division 0-1 Prof.tech.workers	2.1	1.1	6.9	12.9	2.7	1.6	7.7	14.9	2.2	6.5	7.1	21.2
Division 2 Admn/exec/manag	0.8	0.4	5.5	2.6	1	0.8	6.4	3.2	1.7	1	4	1.3
Division 3 Clerical workers	1.8	0.2	11.2	6	1.8	0.4	10.2	7.3	3.3	2.4	10.6	18.8
Division 4 Sales workers	4.7	2.2	18.6	8.9	5.1	2.1	18.7	8.6	15.5	3	17.4	6.3
Division 5 Services	2.4	7.7	8.2	17.7	2	2.1	7.7	16.1	4.2	7.7	6.6	14.1
Division 6 Farmers/ Fishermen etc.	73.4	78.2	8.5	21.2	73.5	84.7	8.8	19.5	50.8	50.7	14.9	20.6
Division 7-9 Production and related workers	14.3	9.3	28.3	30.5	14.1	8.4	40.5	30.3	24.2	23.3	38.8	22.1
<b>Index of Dissimilarity</b>		<b>0.10</b>		<b>0.30</b>		<b>0.11</b>		<b>0.26</b>		<b>0.11</b>		<b>0.33</b>

**Source:** 1. *Sarvekshana*, September 1990:Results of the Fourth Quinquennial Survey on Employment and Unemployment (all-India), NSS 43<sup>rd</sup> Round, July 1987-June 1998. For Kerala, *Sarvekshana*, Special Issue, January, 1992

2. *Sarvekshana*, July-Sep 1996, Employment and Unemployment in India, 1993-94 (50<sup>th</sup> Round), National Sample Survey Organisation

**Note:** Index of Dissimilarity:  $D = (1/2) \sum |(F_j/F) - (M_j/M)|$

**Table 2: Employment by Status**

	Self Employment			Regular Employment			Casual Employment		
	1987-88	1993-94	1999-00	1987-88	1993-94	1999-00	1987-88	1993-94	1999-00
All-India									
RM	58.6	57.7	55	10	8.5	8.8	31.4	33.8	36.2
RF	60.8	58.6	57.3	3.7	2.7	3.1	35.5	38.7	39.6
UM	41.7	41.7	41.5	43.7	42.2	41.7	14.6	16.1	16.8
UF	47.1	44.8	45.3	27.5	29.2	33.3	25.4	26	21.4
Kerala									
RM	44.6	40.8	8.1	12.2	12.3	13	43.2	46.9	48.9
RF	57.7	55	53	9.4	9.7	15	32.9	35.3	32
UM	41	37.5	37.4	32.6	26.8	28	26.4	35.7	34.6
UF	51.5	45.8	50.9	30.9	26.6	31.9	17.6	27.6	17.2

**Source:** Same as Table 1 and for 1999-00, Employment and Unemployment Situation in India, 1999-00, Report No. 458(55/10/2)

**Table 3: Number of usual principal status employed persons per 1000 persons of age 15 years and above who changed their establishment of work, status of work, industry (division) of work and occupation of work (2 digit level) during last 2 years**

	Male				Female			
	Establishment	Status	Industry	Occupation	Establishment	Status	Industry	Occupation
<b>All India</b>								
Rural	58	6	9	9	81	2	4	6
Urban	45	9	14	13	46	3	7	6
<b>Kerala</b>								
Rural	98	18	30	31	70	1	6	6
Urban	81	13	26	29	50	0	9	6

**Source:** NSSO, Employment and Unemployment Situation in India, 1999-00, 55<sup>th</sup> Round, Report No. 458(55/10/2)

**Table 4: Worker Participation Rates, Labour Force Participation Rates and Not in the Labour Force (UPSS)**

	All-India		Kerala	
	1993-94	1999-2000	1993-94	1999-2000
Rural Females				
WPR	32.8	29.9	23.8	23.8
LFPR	33.0	30.2	26.4	27.3
NLF	67.0	69.8	73.6	72.7
Urban Females				
WPR	15.5	13.9	20.3	20.8
LFPR	16.5	14.7	25.0	25.4
NLF	83.5	85.3	75.0	74.6

**Source:** Same as Table 2

**Notes:** UPSS - Usual Principal and Subsidiary Status

WPR - Worker Participation Rate

LFPR - Labour Force Participation Rate

NLF - Not in Labour Force.

**Table 5: Number of Women of age 15 years and above usually engaged in household duties and without any subsidiary activity participating in specified activities per 1000 women (of age 15 years and above) usually engaged in household duties**

Specified Additional Activities	All India				Kerala			
	RF		UF		RF		UF	
	1993-4	1999-0	1993-4	1999-0	1993-4	1999-0	1993-4	1999-0
1. Maintenance of Kitchen garden	162	128	47	31	174	202	169	128
2. Work in household poultry	301	276	92	37	283	253	146	116
3. Free collection of Fish	169	147	17	11	31	18	19	10
4. Free collection of firewood	343	370	58	50	264	196	94	90
5. Husking of paddy (own)	98	101	15	4	11	6	5	14
6. Grinding of foodgrains(own)	84	85	13	12	53	33	49	44
7. Making of baskets (own)	15	34	1	3	0	1	1	0
8. Husking of paddy (acq)	53	86	23	66	59	62	123	59
9. Preservation of meat (acq)	26	73	14	63	20	80	96	117
10. Grinding of grain (acq)	79	112	69	113	283	285	238	312
11. Making of basket (acq)	27	69	14	58	40	51	106	62
12. Preparation of cowdung cakes	509	453	76	52	18	13	5	1
13. Sewing, Tailoring	223	260	266	265	53	92	66	111
14. Tutoring own children*	45	57	126	128	92	128	86	143
15. Bringing water from outside	541	488	296	225	239	209	186	126
Any of the activities	869	855	609	580	718	698	605	625

**Source :** NSSO : 1993-94 - Participation of Indian Women in Household Work and other Specified Activities, 50th Round, Report No.416  
1999-00 - Participation of Indian Women in Household Work and Specified Activities, 1999-00 Report No. 465.

**Notes :** \* Category changed to free tutoring of own/others' children in the 55<sup>th</sup> Round

RF - Rural Females; UF - Urban Females; acq- acquired

**Table 6: Distribution of Person-days of Persons Usually employed (Principal and subsidiary status) by their broad current daily status**

	Rural Females		Urban Females	
	1993-94	1999-2000	1993-94	1999-2000
<b>All-India</b>				
Employed	242	247	280	289
Unemployed	15	14	8	8
Not in labour force	112	104	77	68
<b>Kerala</b>				
Employed	216	211	248	248
Unemployed	16	26	19	14
Not in labour force	133	128	99	103

**Source:** Derived from relevant NSSO, Employment and Unemployment Surveys, from the Tables on per 1000 Distribution of Person-days of Usually employed (principal and subsidiary status) by their broad current daily status

### Appendix 1: Percentage Distribution of 'Usually Working' by Select 2-digit Occupation Groups in Urban Areas

		All India (Urban)				Kerala (Urban)	
		1987-88		1993-94		1987-88	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
08	Nursing, Health Technicians	04	2.0	0.3	2.0	0.3	3.9
15	Teachers	2.1	9.4	2.3	10.5	1.7	14.2
30-35	Clerical, other supervisors, village officials, Stenographers, typists etc.	10.0	5.6	9.1	6.9	9.1	13.3
40	Merchants, shop keepers, wholesale and Retail trade	11.9	5.9	11.4	5.7	10.5	4.3
51-56	House keepers, maids, launderers, sweepers, beauticians, barbers etc.	4.4	15.8	4.1	14.7	3.3	12.9
610&611	Cultivators	n.g	n.g	3.9	5.4	n.g	n.g
63	Agricultural workers	n.g	n.g	2.9	10.2	n.g	n.g
71	Miners, quarrymen, drillers	0.8	0.3	0.5	0.3	0.1	0.8
72	Metal processors	0.8	0.1	0.6	0.1	0.4	0.0
75	Spinners, weavers, knitters	3.9	5.5	3.7	5.7	2.1	3.8
77	Food, bev.processors	1.5	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.2	1.4
79	Tailors, dress makers etc.	2.6	3.9	2.8	4.5	2.8	5.7
80 & 81							
& 82-89	Shoe makers, leather, carpenters etc	12.1	2.2	9.7	1.4	12.5	0.6
95	Bricklayers, other construction workers	3.0	3.0	3.6	3.0	3.9	2.1

**Source:** Same as Table 1.

**Note:** n.g - not given

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