

GENDER AND GLOBALISATION: AN ANALYSIS OF THE GARMENT SECTOR IN INDIA

Meghna Dasgupta

Research Scholar, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India

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ABSTRACT

Since the 1970s, industrial production has been outsourced from developed countries to parts of the developing world where labor was found to be significantly cheaper and more 'flexible'. This phenomenon was accompanied by a rise in the female intensiveness of the workforce, in a process called feminization. In this light, the objective of the current paper was to analyze how gender was embedded in the production process under contemporary global capitalism in different localized contexts, using the example of the Indian garment industry. In particular, it strove to understand the location of women workers in the industry and the differences in the way men and women workers are integrated into the sector. Using secondary data sources, the paper found that the manner in which gender was embedded in production was both "contingent and patterned" i.e. a product of both global and local factors. There also seemed to be large variations in the way feminization has taken place across different clusters and spaces of work. Moreover even as women were integrated into the sector, their position within the workforce continued to remain subordinate to that of men, as was evident from the larger share of women workers in subsidiary status and informal employment.

KEYWORDS: *Globalisation, Gender, Labour, Garment Industry, India*

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1970s, with increasing globalization, there have emerged new forms of industrial production and ways in which work is organized. Under the new international division of labor, industrial production especially labor intensive processes have been outsourced from developed countries to parts of the developing world where labor was found to be significantly cheaper and more 'flexible' (Elson & Pearson, 1981; Standing, 1999). As a result, developing countries started manufacturing goods for export to advanced industrial countries which had earlier being produced within developed countries. This helped generate millions of jobs in developing countries. But questions have arisen regarding the quality of employment generated. Increases in employment have been paralleled by structural shifts in production, characterized by increasing informalisation, low wages, and dismal working conditions.

The rise of export-oriented manufacturing like the garment industry was also accompanied by a rise in the female intensiveness of the workforce, in a process called feminization. To be more specific, according to Standing (1999), feminization refers to the rise in female labor force participation and an accompanying relative if not absolute fall in men's employment. But as many early feminist critiques pointed out, the increasing employment opportunities created for women by globalization were based on the "comparative advantage of women's disadvantage" (Arzipe and Aranda, 1981) in the labor market. The subordinate position of women in the labor market meant that they had lower reservation wages than

their male counter-parts, were more willing to accept longer working hours that were often spent in unpleasant and hazardous work environments (Ghosh, 2004; Mies, 1998 and, Elson and Pearson, 1981). Women also had a lower tendency to unionize and organize themselves, indulge in other forms of collective bargaining or demand for permanent contracts as compared to their male counterparts. This allowed their employers to lay them off at will and exercise more control over their labor in general (Hartmann, 1982). Employers also often favored women workers, knowing well that they could be periodically replaced as life cycle changes such as marriage and childbirth could be used as the proximate cause of termination of employment (Ghosh, 2004). Such management strategies helped make labor more informal, 'flexible' and also allowed firms to circumvent issues of labor regulations and worker unionization which were prevalent in the formal sector.

While there are certain universal characteristics that may be associated with gendered transnational production, the way these characteristics manifest often depend on the local environment. Bair (2010), in her literature review on gender and internationalization of production, admits that while a feminized workforce is a common phenomenon of such production, it is also important to acknowledge the diverse and context-specific ways in which gender may be constructed at such sites of production. Thus she emphasizes on the fact that the way gender may be employed in such production is both "*contingent and patterned*", and to understand how gender is embedded in such systems of production it is important to look at it as a set of context-specific meanings and practice intersecting with the structure of global capitalism and its objective of profit maximisation.

OBJECTIVE AND METHOD

The objective of the article is to analyze *how gender is embedded in the production process under contemporary global capitalism in different localized contexts*, using the Indian garment industry as a case study. It strives to understand the location of women workers in the industry across different dimensions such as geography, the status of work, nature of employment and kind of the enterprises. In the process, the article aims to highlight the differences in the conditions under which men and women are integrated into the industry. Thus the current article positions itself within the body of literature which studies the relationship between global capitalism and the importance of social differences in production.

For the purpose, the paper adopts a quantitative approach, using data from secondary sources including unit level data from the various rounds of NSS quinquennial surveys on employment and unemployment. Findings from this data have been juxtaposed against the existing literature on the sector to get a clearer understanding of the processes underlying these outcomes.

Locating India in the Global Garment Industry

In the past few decades, India has emerged as a major garment exporter and is currently the sixth largest garment exporter in the world, though it accounted for only about 4% of the total garments exports in the world in 2017 (WTO database). Amongst the many countries India exports garments too, the US constitutes its largest share, accounting for 22.5 % of its total garment exports in 2016. Other major export partners include UAE, UK, Germany, France, and Spain. T-shirts, women's suits and blouses, and men's suits and shirts comprise the bulk of the exports from India to the world (UNCTAD database).

In India, the textile and garments industry as a whole contributes to 7% of total industrial production, 2% to India's GDP and constitutes 15% of the country's export earnings. Being an extremely labor intensive sector, it is also one of the largest providers of employment in the country and employs more than 45 million people directly (GOI, 2015 and Make in India statistics, 2018). The Indian garments industry is extremely diverse, covering a wide spectrum of activities, ranging from handspun and handwoven products to standardized homogeneous goods which are produced across a range of enterprises, ranging from large factories to small household units.

Domestically, the Indian garments industry is one of the largest and oldest industries in the country. The garments industry has been subject to a number of changes in global and domestic regulations in the past few decades. Till 2005, the industry was subject to export quotas under MFA signed under the GATT. But the MFA was phased out with the setting up of the WTO, and India is now free to export any volume of exports in the sector. The garments industry had also initially been subject to a number of restrictions on production by large scale enterprises so as to incentivize and promote the small sector under the domestic laws. But by 1980s, the reservation of production by small scale sector was done away with so as to allow large scale enterprises to grow.

Locating Gender in the India Garment Industry

In spite of having a thriving export sector in the industry, India does not seem to follow the trend of greater feminization observed in the rest of the world. Men accounted for about 59% of employment in the sector while women, only 41% in 2011-12 (See Table I). However, the number of women workers in the sector has been consistently increasing, as has been their share. From 1993-94 to 2011-12, their share in the sector increased from 33% to 41% of the total workforce in the sector. As a result, the share of women garment workers in total manufacturing has also been increasing, accounting for 22% of total manufacturing female employment in 2011-12. This is considerably higher than the men, whose participation in the sector only accounted for about 13% of their manufacturing employment.

Table 1: Sex-Segregated Employment in the Indian Garment Industry

Years	Male (Number In 000s)	Female (Number In 000s)	Total (Number In 000s)	Male (% Share)	Female (% Share)
1993-94	656	316	972	67	33
1999-00	1638	639	2277	72	28
2004-05	3873	2568	6441	60	40
2011-12	5034	3494	8528	59	41

Source: NSS Unit Level Data, Various Rounds

As mentioned above, the rate at which employment is being generated for women workers in the sector has been increasing. This is true for both male and female workers, but per as NSS unit level data, the rate of growth has been slightly higher for women workers in the sector during the period 1993-94 to 2011-12, with employment for women workers growing at 14.2 per cent and at 12 per cent for male workers.

Variations in the Gendered Patterns of Production

Though the Indian garment sector may not be particularly feminized, gender continues to be an important institution that determines the particular position of a worker in the labor market. As Kantor(2002) puts it, women workers are subject to both gender exclusive and gender intensive constraints when it comes to employment opportunities in the informal sector. The former pertains to constraints arising out of norms institutionalized at the macro level that affect

women due to their genders such as lack of mobility and a much higher burden of domestic responsibilities vis-s-vis their male counterparts. Elson et al(1981) also makes a similar point and theorizes labor markets to be gendered institutions, wherein women contribute to a much greater extent to the 'reproductive economy(caring, unpaid work), which affects their functioning in the 'productive economy.' Gender intensive constraints, on the other hand, affects both men and women but due to unequal power relations, tend to affect women workers more such as access to productive resources, technology, information and credit (Kantor,2002).

The previous section discussed the broad trends of feminization in the garment industry in India as a whole where women were found to contribute to 30 per cent of total employment in the sector. But given the factors stated above the degree of feminization in the sector may vary across different dimensions-by sector, by location, by nature of employment, by the size of enterprise, etc. This section seeks to bring out the nuances in gendered patterns of production.

By Location

The organisation of production and labor processes in the sector vary greatly across various regions in India, shaped by local trajectories and historical legacies specific to a place. From NSS unit level data (2011-12), it can be seen that while the Indian garment industry is not very feminized, some of the southern states in India may be employing a higher proportion of women in the sector. In Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, women workers accounted for 79%, 70% and 58%of the total garment workers respectively. The share of regular factory based workers is also higher in these states (Roy, 2009). In contrast, the North Indian States having rigid patriarchal structures is significantly less feminized. For example, in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Delhi, women constituted only about 27%, 45% and 6% of the total garment workers respectively.

Interesting results also emerge when one looks at the major garment clusters in India. Garment production in India is often based out of clusters as the latter tend to be product specific and are usually arranged around particular forms of labor processes shaped by social structures (Harris-White, 2004). Garment clusters include Delhi, Noida, and Gurgaon (together called the National Capital Region or NCR for short), Ludhiana and Kanpur in northern India, Kolkata in eastern India, Mumbai, and Gujarat in western India, and Chennai, Bangalore, and Tiruppur in southern India (LIPS Sedane, CLEC, & SLD, 2015). Out of these the NCR, Chennai, Bangalore, and Tiruppur are the more export-oriented clusters. Taking advantage of their long history of craft-based production, the northern clusters produce more value-added embellished products. On the other hand, the southern cluster have capitalized on their proximity to cotton producing centers and specialize mostly in volume based production of basic garments (Mezzadri et al, 2015)

NCR which specializes in the production of women and children's woven garment is a composite and complex industrial cluster, formed by a combination of formal and informal organizations including factories, workshops and home-based units(Mezzadri, 2014). The cluster employs mostly male migrants from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and a much smaller share of women workers; the latter are mostly located in larger factories and in home-based production to some extent. In comparison, the southern clusters such as Chennai (specializes in the production of men's wear), Bangalore (specializes in men and women's readymade garments) and Tiruppur(specializes in T-shirts, hosiery and knitwear) are relatively more 'feminized'. In Bangalore and Chennai, women workers could constitute up to 80-90 per cent of the workforce and mainly come from nearby areas and villages (Fair Wear Foundation, 2016). Production in Bangalore is relatively better organized as compared to other garment centers, being centered mostly on factory-based production (Roy Chowdhury, 2005). On the

other hand, Tiruppur relies on a highly flexible production system constituted of a multitude of small individual units which are able to handle production orders of varying sizes (Verite, 2010). Tiruppur, or T-shirt city as it is often called, initially had a stronghold in production of knitwear based on local same caste based solidarities, but later started specializing in readymade garments. This made way for the rapid entry of female workers from surrounding areas as well as distant districts in Tamil Nadu and nearby states (Mezzadri 2014).

By Nature of Employment

The Indian garment industry, like other manufacturing industries in India, is highly informalized and fragmented. As production processes have become more decentralized and segmented the push for greater flexibility and lower labor costs have transformed the Indian garment sector. As a result, the sector has experienced both, an expanding unorganized sector as production shifts to workshops and home-based units as well as an increase in informal employment in the organized sector through contractualization and casualization of labor (Mezzadri, 2015; Kauret al, 2004).

The National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector (NCEUS) Report, 2007 defines the unorganized sector in India as: "The unorganized sector consists of all unincorporated private enterprises owned by individuals or households engaged in the sale and production of goods and services operated on a proprietary or partnership basis and with less than ten total workers".

Using the NCEUS definition of unorganized sector, NSS unit level data shows that an overwhelming number of workers in the garments industry are employed in the informal sector, accounting for at least 85% of the sector in 2011-12. As expected the share of women workers in the informal sector is considerably at 88% is significantly larger than that of male workers at 81 per cent (See Table II). Between 2004-05 and 2011-12, employment in the sector has also been expanding for both male and female workers as evident from positive CAGR at 4.1% for both the unorganised sector has expanded as the supply chain has become more fragmented, subcontracting increased, and work outsourced from factories to jobbers and smaller establishments (Mezzadri et al, 2015).

However, there does seem to be some indication of scaling up, as CAGR for the organized sector was slightly higher at 4.4% than that for the unorganized sector. This seems to be especially true for women workers in the organized sector for which the CAGR was 9.3%, though the growth of employment for men in the organized sector was significantly lower. This is also reflected in the share of organized employment in total employment for women as it improved marginally from 8% to 11%. This does not take away from the fact that women workers continue to be concentrated overwhelmingly in the unorganized sector, especially in home-based work.

Table 2: Sex-Segregated Employment by Sector

	Organised	Unorganised	Unknown	Total
Male				
2004-05(000s)	64 (17%)	3126 (81%)	106 (3%)	3873
2011-12(000s)	762 (15%)	4145 (82%)	127 (3%)	5034
CAGR (%)	2.5	4.1	2.7	3.8
Female				
2004-05(000s)	210 (8%)	2332 (91%)	27 (1%)	2568
2011-12(000s)	390 (11%)	3079 (88%)	24 (1%)	3494
CAGR (%)	9.3	4.1	-1.6	4.5
Total				
2004-05(000s)	850 (13%)	5458 (85%)	133 (2%)	6441
2011-12(000s)	1152 (14%)	7225 (85%)	151 (1%)	8528
CAGR (%)	4.4	4.1	1.9	4.1

Source: NSS Unit Level Data, Various Rounds

* Figures in Parentheses Represent Shares of Workers in Total Employment

By Status of Work

The experiences of men and women workers may be differentiated on the basis of their status of work. Men tend to be mostly employed in principal status¹. On the other hand, women having to often balance work with their domestic and reproductive obligations, have no choice but to often assume work in a subsidiary status. In 2011-12, the share of men in principal status of employment as a share of the usual status of employment (i.e. containing both principal and subsidiary status workers) in the sector was 26 %. Compare this with men, for whom subsidiary status workers constituted only 1.6% of the total usual status workers. But this marks an improvement from 2004-05 for which the correspond shares for women was 34% and for men was 1 %.

Another indicator of the quality of jobs existing in the sector is given by the status of the worker i.e. whether s/he is self-employed, regular salaried employee or works as casual labor. Generally, a shift away from self-employment to regular salaried work is considered beneficial for the worker as the latter is associated with better wages and better working condition. Self-employed workers may include home-based workers, own account workers, and unpaid family workers. From Table III, one can see that self-employed workers tend to dominate the sector for both males and females albeit the share of female self-employed workers in total female employment is much higher. The share of self-employed workers has been declined over the past couple of years (from the period 2004-05 to 2011-12) for women workers while that of regular workers has slightly improved.

Table 3: Distribution of Garment Workers by the Status of Work

Year	Male			Female			Total		
	SE	Regular	Casual	SE	Regular	Casual	SE	Regular	Casual
Number (000s)									

¹The usual status measure includes both principal and subsidiary status activities. The activity status on which a person has spent relatively longer time (183 days or more) during the period is considered the usual principal activity status of the person. In addition to the principal status activity, there is subsidiary economic activity status wherein the workers must have worked for at least 30 days or more in a year in the sector.

2004-05	2417	1136	319	2250	220	98	4667	1356	418
2011-12	3075	1632	327	2888	431	175	5963	2063	502
Share (%)									
Table 3: Contd.,									
2004-05	62.4	29.3	8.3	87.6	8.6	3.8	72.5	21	6.5
2011-12	61.1	32.4	6.5	82.7	12.3	5	69.9	24.2	5.9
CAGR (%)									
2004-05/ 2011-12	3	5	0	4	10	9	4	6	3

Source: NSS Unit Level, Several Rounds

The usual status measure includes both principal and subsidiary status activities. The activity status on which a person has spent relatively longer time (183 days or more) during the period is considered the usual principal activity status of the person. In addition to the principal status activity, there is subsidiary economic activity status wherein the workers must have worked for at least 30 days or more in a year in the sector.

By Size of Enterprises and Spaces of Work

The size of the unit determines the nature of the enterprise i.e. its production structure and the labor processes that are undertaken in that unit. Both male and female workers are concentrated overwhelmingly in smaller units consisting of less than 6 workers. However, this concentration is more pronounced in case of female workers as 84 per cent of women workers were concentrated in these units compared to the 67 per cent of the male workers in 2011-12 (See Figure I(a) and II(b)). Though between 2004-05 to 2011-12, this sector has considerably shrunk for both male and female workers. The next most important segment for the male worker is that of units consisting of 6-10 workers, contributing to 14% of male employment. For women workers, on the other hand, it is the larger enterprise, consisting of more than 20 workers, that absorbs the next bigger share of workers at 9%. Thus the majority of women workers are concentrated in micro-enterprises, and to a lesser degree in enterprises consisting of less than 20 workers.

Closely related to the previous section, spaces of work may also be an important site where gender constraints play out to determine where women workers may be located. "Spaces of work" may be understood as particular forms of production organizations, defined by the institutional settings that the workers work out of. Broadly, three such different production organizations may be categorized-factories, workshops and home-based work. The first pertains to the formal sector, while the latter two pertaining to the informal sector.

The rationale behind which kind of workers occupy which kind of positions in the informal sector can be understood better in the context of social embeddedness of capital, which reiterates how existing social structures such as caste, class, religion, gender, and migrant status are used to organize labor processes (Gooptu et al, 2009; Barbara Harriss-White, 2004; Unni and Scaria, 2009; Granovetter,1985). Factories employ both male and female workers, the degree of feminization, however, depends on the location. Factories in Bangalore employ up to 80 per cent women workers whereas in Delhi, this would be less than 30 per cent. Within the informal sector, male workers tend to be concentrated in workshops and micro-enterprises and female workers, in home-based work.

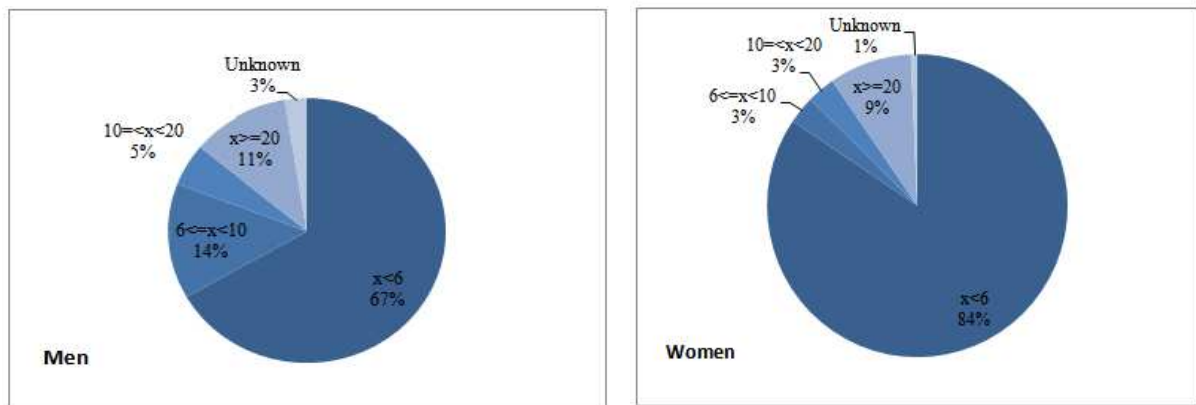


Figure 1: Distribution of Men and Women Workers by the Size of the Enterprise

There are several reasons for why women workers in the unorganized sector are concentrated overwhelmingly amongst home based workers. Home-based work allows women to support their families while fulfilling their domestic responsibilities and finding work within private spaces, a feature often preferred by the male members of the family (Carr et al, 1999; Ghosh, 2004 and WIEGO, 2013). WIEGO (2013) defines home-based workers as a “category of workers who carry out remunerative work in their own homes or adjacent grounds or premises”. From the NSS unit level data, it was found that 70% (79% if additional options like structures to the dwellings considered) of the women workers in the sector are based out of their homes. In contrast, home-based male workers constituted only 22 % of the total workers in the sector; rather men mostly work out of workshops and micro-enterprises within the informal sector.

From the point of view of employers, there is a rationale for exploiting the existing gender constraints and organizing labor in these specific organizational and spatial configurations. Home-based work or the modern putting out system is commonly used by employers, as it cuts on the time and money invested by them on supervision of workers while simultaneously reducing the number of other input costs such as electricity, maintenance, health and safety at work, pensions, etc) (Carr et al, 1999; Ghosh, 2004 and WIEGO, 2013). Similarly, male workers working and often living out of workshops, are amenable to the execution of urgent orders during peak periods and production of high-quality products (Kaur and Sapra, 2004; Unni and Scaria, 2009).

A worker’s position, in turn, affects the kind of products that are outsourced to him/her, the earnings received and mode of payment and even their ability to move upwards in the value chain (Unni and Scaria, 2009; Unni et al, 1999). For example, while looking at the garment embellishment chains in Bareilly, Unni and Scaria (2009) found that home-based workers tended to have lower daily earnings than helpers in micro-enterprises, as the products that were outsourced to home-based workers were less expensive and required less skill. Similarly, women home-based workers tended to be more dependent on the middlemen for work orders and factory outlets due to constraints on their physical mobility. However, there may be distinctions amongst male and female workers even within these “spaces of work”. For example, men operating in home-based work may be operating mostly as independent self-employed workers as compared to women in the sector who have a largely dependent relationship with their contractors.

CONCLUSIONS

Much of the literature on globalization and gender seems to suggest that increasing globalization of labor-intensive industries is usually accompanied by the feminization of labor in the developing countries. The rationale for this

phenomenon is based on the assumption that women's labor is cheaper, more flexible and easier to control. But in spite of being a major exporter, the Indian garment sector has largely balked the trend of feminization and women constitute only around 40% of the workforce in the sector. In addition, there seem to be differences in the way men and women are integrated into the sector. Export clusters in north producing more embellished value-added products are found to employ more migrant men, whereas the southern clusters producing more volume based basic garments are more feminized. Women workers in the sector are also more likely to be found in subsidiary employment or in the unorganised sector (especially in home-based work) as compared to their male counterparts. Thus, in conclusion, it may be said that the manner in which gender is embedded in production is both "contingent and patterned" i.e. the outcomes in the sector seem to be a product of both global and local factors. There seem to be large variations in way feminization has taken place across different clusters and spaces of work. Moreover even as women are integrated into the sector, their position within the workforce continues to remain subordinate to that of men, as is evident from the larger share of women workers in subsidiary status and informal employment.

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