

Chapter 21

Gender and Water: The Indian Context

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the welfare implication of wage revisions for two Indian unorganized sector female workers with opposite preference patterns for income and leisure in drought-prone zone. The female workers here face a gender-based wage gap and the inconveniences caused by water shortage adversely affect their effective incomes since females are the major users of water in the family. This chapter also makes a couple of recommendations for policymakers and legislators. It experiments with alternative utility functions in neoclassical microeconomic behavioural model framework.

INTRODUCTION

It is very difficult to understand why in this country so much difference is made between men and women.
- Swami Vivekananda

Gary Becker in his Nobel Prize lecture in 1993 narrated the importance of modelling, not only the economic behaviour of an individual, but her behaviour in all spheres of life, i.e. family, society and polity. This spirit is also observed in many a great economist of Indian origin like Kaushik Basu, Amartya Sen and their students and followers. The topic of this chapter is precisely one of those, which imbibed the above spirit in last four decades. In traditional microeconomics an individual plays twin roles of consumer and supplier of a factor of production. For both of the roles her behaviour in terms of her responses to prices and other determinants is what determines demand for goods on the one hand and supply of a factor of production. This behaviour is essentially micro level behaviour.

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In explaining the labour supply function in labour-surplus economies on the one hand there are analytical studies like Tendulkar (2010) while on the other hand there are structuralist studies like Basu (1987). The former indicated that the response of the labour supply function toward incentives or disincentives are determined by social, political, demographical and technological factors specific to a particular nation (Tendulkar, 2010, p. 126). The former follows an approach which is macroeconomic approach by nature (Tendulkar, 2010, pp. 117-118) while the latter follows an approach, which is microeconomic by nature (Basu, 1987, pp. 4-5). The latter examined the (dis)equilibrium in the labour market in a subsistence economy, where labour supply is infinitely elastic at an exogenously fixed rate of wage (Basu, 1987, p. 6-7), with reference to the efficient wage doctrine. Thus micro-level individual choice and structural constraint receive focus from the theories on gender inequalities.

Bardhan (1996) is among few which ignited academic interest in the efficiency wage doctrine in the rural India context. This interest may be traced back to Bardhan (1979). Mazumdar (1989) is an example of continuation of such example from 1980s onward¹.

Theorization of the role of water availability in determination of female welfare given the say of women in workplace as well as household took place in terms of unitary models and collective models. The unitary models revolve around the axiom of concentration of decision making power (i.e. say) in the hand of one while the collective models presume distribution of such power. In the context of rural India, the efficiency wage theory also gained attention. Labour markets in the developing economies are characterised by oversupply but at the same time downward rigidity of wage. The disequilibrium wage rate is determined by a host of economic and social factors, like involuntary unemployment, resistance to wage cut in slack season and deficit in rainfall.

Since full time work is the primary source of income of labourers in the unorganized sector, the remainder of this chapter is divided into a number of sections like background, objectives, existing literature, framework, modelling, policy implications, further research directions and conclusion.

In substantiating the economic arguments this chapter uses mathematics up to the high school level, which is intelligible to readers without technical knowledge. The rigor of exposition warrants mathematical applications to understand the optimization behaviour of households which play the role of supplier in the labour market. Since this book deals with *inter alia* economic progress, this chapter likes to examine the varying behaviour of household in the labour market at different levels of real income, which may be taken as a proxy of economics progress.

CHAPTER OBJECTIVE

To analyze the impact of change in wage rate on economic welfare of the unorganized sector female worker, in terms of the Slutsky equation in the circumstances of gender-based the socio economic condition characterized by wage gap and water shortage in a comparative mode between two states:

1. Rajasthan, relatively water scarce area (ndtv, 2012), and
2. West Bengal, the second largest potato producing state in India (APEDA, 2013)².

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