

CHAPTER –IX

Conclusion and Policy Implications

9.1. The Research Problem.

Economic development hinges, among other things, on utilisation of labour and the later is defined by the extent of participation of working age population in the labour market. Biologically speaking, the labour force of a region consists of males and females. Historically and contemporarily, the labour market in the developing countries including India is characterised by low labour force participation and such participation is lower for females compared to males. This holds for a state like Odisha and for the rural areas as well. The economic participation for women continues to be low and far lower than males in rural Odisha on account of economic, social, cultural and demographic reasons. But for faster, sustainable and inclusive economic development women should partner the process and be equal partners too. The issue of women's labour force participation is, therefore important and a matter of concern in academic and policy making circles. It owes its origin to Nobel Laureate Arthur Lewis' "The Theory of Economic Growth" and particular reference may be made to page 422 of his seminar publication which reads "It is open to men to debate whether economic progress is good for men or not, but for women to debate the desirability to economic growth is to debate whether women should have the change to cease to be beasts of burden and to join the human race."(Lewis, 1955)

However, women's labour market participation remains a less researched topic, the progress in this area made by the expanding feminist school of thought notwithstanding. The issues are so vast, varied complex and dynamic that any amount of research effort is bound to be inadequate. Women's activities are, by and large, non SNA activities which are not paid for, difficult to be valued and hence not amenable to exact measurement. The problems are all the more serious when we look at the labour force participation of rural women in typically poor state like Odisha in a developing country of India's dimension. Our review of over 200 research publications indicate that even after having so much of research, we have answered less and opened more questions for further investigation.

9.2 Objectives

1. To investigate into the determinants of women's participation in paid work in the rural areas.
2. To assess the contribution of working women to household income.
3. To analyse the employment and income impact of formation of SHGs on the group members.
4. To assess the status of empowerment among working women.
5. To bring out the problems faced by working women.
6. To draw some policy implications from the findings for increasing work participation of rural women.

9.3 Hypotheses

The following hypotheses have been tested by applying simple statistical tools to primary data.

- 1) Labour market participation of rural women varies inversely with household income, land holdings owned by the household, number of pre-school age children, age of women and own education but positively with dependency ratio number of school age children, caste and marital status of women.
- 2) Women workers' wage earnings constitute a significant proportion of the household income in the rural areas.
- 3) In the rural areas, women working for wages are more empowered than non-working women.

9.4 Rural Women in the Workforce: An Overview

Women's workforce participation rate is far lower than in many developing countries and surprisingly the rate is lower for rural women than for urban women. The female labour force participation is falling since 2004-05 and this has acted as a depressant pull to lower than overall work participation rate in the country. The labour force participation rate of female (FLFPR) in rural Odisha is lower than that for rural India. It is also lower than the LFPR of rural males in the state. An important fact is that for both

males and females and for rural and urban areas the worker- population ratio (WPR) is lower than the LFPR the difference being accounted for by the employment of working age persons. Also, the growth rate of non-workers is higher than the growth rate of workers and the growth rate of marginal workers is much higher than the growth rate of main workers. The marginalization is far greater for females than for males. This denotes a highly unhealthy situation which the planners and policy makers in the state should take note of or else the problem will aggravate further and slip out of control.

9.5 Data and Methods

The study intends to focus on the determinants of women's labour market participation and its effect on the household income and on their own in the rural areas. We have also studied the problems which rural women encounter at work. The study is based on the secondary data collected from Census and NSSO reports and primary data collected from a survey of households at the village level. In line with our objectives and on account of time and resource constraints we conducted a sample survey rather than a Census survey.

We have followed five stage sampling procedure with the district, the blocks, the Grampanchayats, the villages and the household as the units in the respective stage. For selecting the district we have used purposive sampling technique, stratified random sampling procedures has been followed in selecting CD blocks, and simple random sampling have been applied to select the Grampanchayats and villages for the study. The households have been selected the Census method to collect primary data from the households through a policy of elimination. To meet the constraints of time and resources we pick up 260 households corresponding to 260 women workers and 320 households corresponding to 320 women non-workers from 20 villages of 5 Grampanchayats of the two selection blocks in Balasore district of Odisha State. As befits a rural sample, most women workers, 125out of 260 or about 48 per cent are agricultural labourers and none of them own land. Next in order of numbers com the construction workers 72 out of 260 or about 28 per cent in conformity with the vast expanding construction activities in the rural areas. The third category of workers chosen are those who work in four different activities in the household segment such as leaf plate, pooped rice, earthen work and pottery and coir work and they number 63 with a 24 per cent share in the sample. Data have been collected

by canvassing a well structural schedule in person among the respondents of selected households by adopting an interactive, adaptive approach and focuss group discussion technique. Simple statistical tools like classification, tabulation, percentages, ratios, ordinary least squares, logit regression, correlation, graphs and figures have been used to process the data, analyse them, draw conclusions and interpret the results.

9.6 Socio-economic Profile of the Study Area

For any empirical research, background information about the socio-economic characteristics of the study area and the sample area are essential. An understanding of these characteristics will prove helpful in analysing and explaining the results and drawing conclusions.

The state economy and the economy of the study area are basically agricultural in nature. The district is prone to frequent natural shocks because of its close proximity to the Bay of Bengal. It does not have any large scale industry worth the name and has few MSMEs with low employment potentialities. The service sector is not well developed and the rural infrastructure is in bad shape. The socio-economic scenario of the state, the sample district and the sample area show the characteristics of a developing economy. The demographic features, educational status, occupational characteristics and other relevant variables of the sample households exhibit more or less the similar scenario that is the low participation of rural women in gainful economic activities, which have resulted in their low earning potentialities and the consequential low economic status.

9.7 Determinants of Women's Work Participation

Women's labour market participation is determined, by and large, by push factors. Broadly speaking, the decision to participate in labour market is found to have been determined by three sets of variables. They are economic forces, household, social and demographic characteristics and women's own characteristics. The level of household income and the amount of own agricultural land of the household are taken as the economic factors; dependency ratio, number pre-school-age children, number of school-age children and caste are the selected socio-demographic household characteristics; and educational attainment, age and marital status of the sample women are the chosen own characteristics.

We have used the simple tabular analysis and logit regression technique to examine the relationship between women's work participation and these nine selected explanatory variables. The determinants show the impact of these factors on the probability of women being in the workforce. Economic theory predicts that women's labour market participation in the rural areas should be inversely related to household income and amount of farm land owned by the household. Because a high income and possession of more land generating more production and income permit women not to take up paid work and rather engaged in household and care work. This is evidence of a 'U' shaped relationship between household income and women's labour force participation. The simple tabular analysis and logit estimates confirm this relationship and the results are statistically highly significant. Similarly, married women are more likely to participate in paid work while unmarried are less likely to be in the labour force. This is because the married own more responsibilities. Our results confirm this relationship and the estimates indicate a statistically highly significant relationship.

Having young children (pre-school age < 5 years) reduced women's participation in waged-work because of the need of care role and having school-age children (5-10 years) is likely to increase participation to contribute to their growth and well-being. The estimates show expected results but the relationship is statistically not significant. Women of households with high dependency ratios have a greater likelihood of labour market participation to share the dependency burden with the male earners and this result has been observed to be statistically significant at 5 per cent level. Middle aged women (30-45 years) are more likely to do paid work for reason that they need to supplement family income but the relationship though positive is statistically not significant. Women's own education has been found to be negatively influencing work participation because of their unwillingness to do low wage, low skill work. The estimates show negative and statistically highly significant relationship in this case. Participation or rural women in labour market in found to be influenced by social class i.e., SCs, and STs together participate more than general caste women do because caste is often correlated with income. The results are statistically significant at 10 per cent level.

Our findings i.e., women's work participation bearing an inverse relation with income, land, number of pre-school age children, education and age of the women and positive relationship with dependency number of school-age children, caste and marital status are in conformity with expectations and they prove our hypothesis-1.

9.8 Women's Work Participation, Household Income and Empowerment

Unequal gender relation have persisted historically, socially, culturally and are manifested in men having greater control and access to land and other resources including income. The inequalities are more pronounced in rural areas. But with the advancement of civilisation, spread of knowledge and growing awareness rural women are traversing various fields of work. Their economic contributions are quiet commendable. They are employed for wages and are making a direct contribution to household income by participating in paid work. It is observed that the contribution of women to household income is significant in the sample area. Their wages constitute about a quarter of total household income. It has certainly empowered the rural women. By taking 10 indicators with values on a 0-10 scale, it has been found that the women workers in the household industries are more empowered followed by construction workers and agricultural labourers. It is also observed that working women are far more empowered than non-working women.

9.9 Problems of Working Women

Women's entry into the labour market involves multiple decisions taken simultaneously. The issues are very complicated. The labour market choice is largely conditioned by social norms, family's attitude, level of education and employer's attitude. These boil down to various problems. Discrimination is a major general problem. Women usually get lower wages than they deserve relative to men. There may be access discrimination too. Women lack the ability to access work. There is occupational discrimination, more women are found to be in low paid jobs. The modern technology is not women-friendly. Here women lose. Technological advancement has supplanted women labour rather supplementing them. Work women face the problem of wok-life imbalance,

neglect of children, old and sick. Women works are subjected to harassment, they have to pay commission to contractors and they need to travel long distances daily to do waged-work. This infuses stress and strain on them.

9.10 Women Employment and Self Help Groups in Rural Areas

Women are central to the success of poverty alleviation efforts particularly in the rural areas. The overall employment scenario of the rural economy indicates that most women micro entrepreneurs are self employed through SHGs. SHGs have emerged as a ray of hope in bringing more women in to the mainstream of development. It has now been a major thrust area and women worker are moving away from paid work to SHGs to secure work according to choice and achieve independence and self-sufficiency. Even those who were non-workers in the past are now assuming a new task by joining in SHG formation. The functioning of the members of SHGs in the district and in the study area is satisfactory. It is observed that those women who were previously in low income activities, have joined SHGs and have created a good fortune in their favour in terms of their income, contribution to household expenditures, savings, and increased number of days of employment. SHG women are facing numerous problems in areas of credit, management, marketing, storing and more so in the adoption of modern technology. Therefore, there is a need of greater cooperation and support from the government as well as micro finance institutions to achieve the objective of gender equity and justice for the rural women who are at the lowest rung of the social ladder.

9.11 Major Findings of the Study

Our analysis of socio-economic profile of the blocks and sample women households shows near homogeneity of situation obtaining in them. Examination of issue-specific primary data also reveals more or less the same scenario. The results indicate the same pattern too. For these reasons, in most of the case we have presented the findings and explanations for the sample as a whole rather than describing them separately for the blocks.

The main findings of our study are as follows:

9.11.1 Women's work force participation level are very low. They are lower relative to males and are low in the rural areas this means that the system has failed to exploit the full economic potential of women.

- 9.11.2 Women's participation in the rural labour market are confined to vary low wage and low skills requiring activities such as, agriculture, construction and small household industries.
- 9.11.3 The labour force participation of rural women is influenced by economic reasons, household traits and women's own characteristics. Among the economic reasons low household income and small landholding status are of paramount importance. Result shows that work participation of rural women are largely distress driven determined by economic forces of low household income and small landholding. Among the household factors mentioned may be made of dependency ratio, number of pre-and school-age children and social caste status. Level of education, age and marital status are the own characteristics influencing work participation of rural women. Dependency ratio, education, marital status and caste are the other powerful determinants next to economic factors. Number of children and age are statistically not very significant determinants.
- 9.11.4 By participating in wage-employment activities women contribute to their household income and their contribution are highly significant. They give the whole of their wage earnings to the household.
- 9.11.5 Participation in paid work brings empowerment to women. Women workers are observed to be more empowered than women who do not work for wages. However, distress driven work participation does not guarantee high empowerment.
- 9.11.6 Self Help Groups have become a very important source of self-employment for rural women. Some of the workers in low wage sectors have moved to the SGHs for higher economic gains. Even those who were not in the workforce earlier have joined the SHGs because of its lucrative benefits. SHG members are making a remarkable contribution to their household income, expenditure and savings.
- 9.11.7 Women's work participation in waged-work not only fetches economics and income gains but also entail untold costs as manifested in the problems which women works encounter at the workplace and at home. They include low wages, disproportionately lower waged relative to male wages, unfavourable and long hours of work, work-family imbalance and family-work-imbalance, harassment by male co-workers, superior grade workers and informal labour contractors which

range from scolding to sexual exploitation, payment of commission to contractors and commuting long distances for work.

9.12 Main Findings by Objectives and Hypotheses

The findings given at 9.7 and 9.8 above conform to our objectives and they validate their hypotheses. A summary picture of the same is given in the following table.

Table -9.1: Main Findings by Research Objectives and Proof of Hypotheses

Sl. No.	Research Objectives and Findings		Hypotheses	
	Specification	Main findings	Specification	Proof
1.	To investigate the determinants of women's participation in paid work in rural areas.	Women's work participation is influenced by numerous factors. These are economic, socio-demographic and women's own traits. Among them the numbers of completed years of education by women, income of the households, amount of agricultural land owned by the household, number pre-school age children and age of the women negatively influence the work participation decision of women. Marital status, caste, dependency ratio, and number of school-age children bear a direct relation with work participation decision of rural women.	Rural women's work participation decision is influenced negatively by the numbers of completed years of education by women, income of the households, amount of agricultural land owned by the household, number pre-school age children and age of the women and positively by marital status, caste dependency ratio and number of school age children.	The hypothesis is proved.
2.	To assess the contribution of rural working women to household income when they are engaged in different types of waged work.	Rural women are engaged in different paid occupations. The board categories of occupations are agricultural works, construction works, and works in household industries. The incomes of all workers are not equal. The earning of the construction workers are more followed by household industry workers and agricultural labourers. Taking their mean income into account it is found that the earnings of all workers constitute a significant proportion of household income. The correlation between worker's income and household income is positive and statistically significant.	Women workers' wage income constitute a significant proportion of the total household income.	The hypothesis is validated.
3.	To analyse the status of empowerment of working women compared to non-working women.	Women's participation in income generating activities lead to a position where they become empowered. A working woman can directly access resources, achieve greater control over life choices and improves her bargaining power. By assigning 0-10 score values in a scale to 10 indicators we observed that working women are more empowered than non-working women.	Working women are more empowered than non-working women.	The hypothesis is confirmed.

9.13 Policy Implications and Suggestions

It appears that the economies are operating masculine models under which economic activities are organised according to male norms, values and life styles. But women's economic participation has distinctive impact on family functioning, demand patterns, food habits and food choice, education and health of children and overall well-being of the family. The fact remains that the labour market participation of women is blurred by a number of economic, social, cultural, technological, demographic obstacles. Hence, there economic participation depends, among other things, on how better they can cope with these obstacles and how supportive the system can be towards them. We need to remember that a woman is important because she is the most active agent of change at the most basic level. Hence it is imperative to remove the obstacles and create conditions favourable to her participation in the labour market.

The findings of our research themselves have the policy implications to address the main issues confronting women's work participation especially in the rural areas. The issues may be addressed from both demand-side and supply-side perspectives.

9.13.1 From a demand-side perspective the findings have two important implications.

Firstly the process of growth, the advance in technology and the pattern and composition of output need to be labour-using and women labour –friendly. It is time we be a good bye to jobless growth and embrace labour absorbing growth. Second, it is not just the number of person days of employment created that is important, it the quality of employment generated that counts much. The employment outcome needs to be favourable to women workers. Creating off-farm employment opportunities can be a solution.

9.13.2 From a supply-side perspective the results of our study have five important implications for policy. First, it is imperative to understand that the inherited social disadvantages inherent in a patriarchal structure have adverse effects on women's confidence and they affect women's work participation negatively. The socio-cultural norms and age old traditions tend to foster the subservient status of women. They very socialisation process defines the roles and shapes the capabilities of

women both at home and in the society and the same are simply reinforced through acquiring education at schools, colleges and universities and by their workplace experience. On account of this, women workers face and fail to address work-family imbalance. Transforming the attitude of the people assumes critical importance.

Second, access to work is determined by educational status and level of skill acquired by women. Low education and low skills mean poor employability. Education improves women's capabilities, expands their economic and employment opportunities and enhances their empowerment. Since technology is permeating all domains of activity, a higher level of education and skill formation in women will have positive health and education effect on children, improve their employability, promote employment, increase productivity and enhance well-being. This requires adequate public investment in education and vocational and life skills training, particularly those oriented towards girl children and women. Policy makers should also consider measures that increase the incentives to send girl children to school and minimise drop -out. Making social security benefits to poor families conditional on the regular school attendance of their daughters can be an effective option.

The absence, inadequacy and low quality of basic infrastructure put obvious limits on women's ability to fully participate in wage-employment activities. In the face of these problems women may have to spend long hours on fetching water, collecting fuel, and preparing food and hence have less time for waged-work. Public investment in good infrastructure such as, those directed at provision of fuel-efficient or solar cooking stoves and safe drinking water can reduce the time they spend on home production and increase their options for taking up gainful paid work. Public transport is supposed to have the same effect.

A lack of access to and absence of control over productive resources including land, markets, financial resources and information and communications technology (ICT) may have a dampening on rural women's workforce participation. Promoting access to these can bring rural women from the morass of low paid jobs

which limit their income earning potential to provide effective motivation for taking up lucrative non-farm and commercial agriculture activities.

Literature as also our own research inputs suggest that discriminatory malpractices such as, gender wage differences favouring males and harassment in any form of women works discourage women from participating in the labour market. Strict implementation of workplace ethics can help improve the situation and promote women's waged work participation.

It is pertinent to remind that our future growth prospects depend more on how better we can activate women and how best we realise their potential than on far we embrace the conventional wisdom of treating women as plain care providers.

9.14 Contribution to Knowledge

This research contributes to the literature in several ways. First, we have investigated rural women's participation in the labour market and have identified women's own endowments, such as, the level of education, age and marital status as also economic, social and demographic characteristics of the households like income, agricultural land, dependency burden on male worker, age composition of children, and caste as the crucial covariates in influencing the work participation. While pursuing our objectives we have studied both married and unmarried women and workers and non-workers for establishing the relationships. Previous studies focused mainly on married women and examined the determinants by looking at a fewer number of factors.

Second, we decompose the aggregate participation into participation in particular waged-work activities across sub-groups of workers which is new in the country and certainly in the state.

Third, our study generates two findings which are not obvious. On the one hand, in our study, age, marital status, education and caste appear statistically insignificant in explaining the work participation of rural women. We have found that ages of children are a second order determinant. However, in line with the results of most of the previous studies, the role of economic forces, such as, level of income of the household and the

amount of agricultural land owned by it as also the demographic factor i.e., dependency ratio have proved to be very powerful factors in influencing work participation of rural women.

Fourth, we are probably the first in highlighting the income contribution of women workers, women's work participation as an instrument of their empowerment and the obstacles which women workers do face both at work and at home relating to their work participation. We believe that these obstacles have hindered women from working for wages and if we can address these, their work participation would certainly increase. Finally, as no in-depth previous study has been made in the Odisha context, this study is the first on the subject. The results of this study are expected to throw valuable light on the determinants, contribution and obstacles to rural women's work participation and hence will guide the policy makers to shape and redesign women's work participation and empowerment related policies to ease the problems, expedite economic participation of women and push the rural economy forward.

9.15 Limitations of the Study

Since this study is the first attempt to examine rural women's labour market participation in the state, an exploratory approach has been used in the investigation and hence there will obviously be limitations. Further, it is normal and quite expected that empirical studies have limitations. Ours is no exception. This has limitations in terms of the sample, procedure of data collection, accuracy of data, selection and measurement of variables, use of statistical tools and generalisability of conclusions.

One of the key limitations of this study is its relatively small scale confined to only 580 samples in 20 villages of five gram panchayats of two blocks in Balasore district in Odisha. Another limitation is the constitution of the sample. The sample was also relatively homogenous both across areas and cross section of women. Therefore, no strong claim can be made regarding the representativeness of the sample selected for the study. But this is due to the fact that it is impossible to have a more wider scale on account of time and resource constraints.

Quantitative and qualitative data have been used in this study. As is true of any empirical and primary data based research work, the perceptions and biases of the investigator(s) are likely to have influenced the accuracy level of such data. No doubt we have taken all precautions to overcome such bias and inaccuracy but it is very difficult to guarantee accuracy. However we believe that reasonable accuracy has been maintained.

A major limitation of the study relates to the number of determinants selected to examine their influence on rural women's work participation. Other factors might have been at work which has been ignored by us as it is difficult to manage analysing ' n ' number of factors. Further there are both paid and unpaid works performed by women as contributing to the household economy and the broad national economy whereas our study is limited to paid work only. The bypassing of unpaid work is an obvious limitation.

Further more we have taken only working and non-working women in our study but have ignored other groups, such as students which should have been included but we could not because of time and resource constraints.

Finally, we have used logit regression to analyse data and establish relationships. Probit and other tools could have been applied to examine the varying results and drawing more valid conclusions. The most vital aspect of the limitations of this research is that being a case study much claim cannot be made regarding the generalisability of its conclusions.

In sum, it can be submitted that these limitations are obvious in the case study method and barring that the present research may claim to have made some seminal contributions to existing knowledge on the subject.

9.16 Scope for Further Research

No research can be the final word. Every research work provides some answers to the subject under investigation and at the same time opens the door for additional research questions. Based on our findings we can outline the following new areas where research can be made to overcome the limitations of our study and strengthen and broaden the knowledge base. Rural women's workforce participation are a reflection of economic, social and demographic situation obtaining at the household and societal level as also of

individual preferences. The following areas can be suggested as research along these lines may prove to be innovative and more rewarding.

To start with, the essence of any study on the work participation of rural women lies in rigour of the study on the factors determining such participation. In addition to the nine explanatory variables we have used in our study there can be a lot more other factors which deserve special treatment and investigation. The *first* one relates to the responsiveness of women's work participation to change in wages. Wages are important because they play a motivating role and have a strong economic rationale i.e., an increase in wage can lead to increasing labour market participation of rural women. The *second* is the impact of previous labour market experience in the early years of their prime age. Women having such experience are likely to participate in the labour market in their later life after marriage. This relationship needs empirical validation. The *third* is the likely impact of partner's wage earnings and the attitude of parents-in-laws, husband and other family members towards women's waged-work participation. The imperative of cross-cultural studies cannot be gainsaid in this context. The impact of a woman's education on her work participation needs to be investigated with concern and commitment and the same in respect of her own health condition. Poor health can be seen as constraining work participation but participation in waged-work can also impact on health outcomes. These are therefore matters of empirical investigation and future research need to focus on these issues.

Future studies may also include three more variables. *One* is the education of the husband and educational status of the household. An educated husband is likely to get better employment and wages and dispense with the need of his wife participating in paid work but at the same time he is expected to exhibit greater open mindedness thus impacting the wife's labour market participation positively. The issue is debatable and need to be resolved empirically. The *second* is to find correlation, co-variation and association between who the household head is (male only, female only, male-female partnering) and the female(s) seeking outside home paid jobs. Additionally, male family heads, by applying their dominance, may restrain women from going for waged-work. The relation is highly complex and needs probing. The *third* one is gender discrimination at work and harassment towards women at the workplace. Unsurprisingly, discriminatory treatment unfavourable to

women workers can be a discouraging factor and lack of / poor workplace ethics make women feel insecured and unsafe to take up paid work outside home.

In addition to these there is the need of a special study on unemployment of females, the reasons for their not joining paid work and other relevant issues. Another important area of concern is economics of unpaid women's work in the rural areas. In this research we have considered only paid work. But women perform a large variety of unpaid productive works at home as in home-based production processes including cattle rearing, working in the family farm, discharging care responsibility etc. A study based on this broader definition of labour may be undertaken to throw new insights and shed interesting results. This research has studied the importance of wage-employment motivations for women's labour force participation. Though we were constrained to make a detailed and deeper analysis of both these aspects we have made an honest attempt and touched the issue. Women engaged in both these sectors (wage-employment and SHG-self-employment) need to be studied mutually and a comprehensive analysis should be made and conclusions drawn from the study. Research on these lines can throw new light on the role, functions and empowerment of women.

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RURAL WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE- DETERMINANTS, PROBLEMS AND POLICY ISSUES : A CASE STUDY IN BALASORE DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Rural women in the Workforce –

Determinants and Policy Issues: A Case Study in Balasore District

1. The Research Problem.

Economic development hinges, among other things, on utilisation of labour and the latter is defined by the extent of participation of working age population in the labour market. Biologically speaking, the labour force of a region consists of males and females. Historically and contemporarily, the labour market in the developing countries including India is characterised by low labour force participation and such participation is lower for females compared to males. This holds for a state like Odisha and for the rural areas as well. The economic participation of women continues to be low and remains far lower than males in rural Odisha on account of economic, social, cultural and demographic reasons. But for faster, sustainable and inclusive economic development women should partner the process and be equal partners too. The issue of women's labour force participation is, therefore important and a matter of concern in academic and policy making circles.

However, women's labour market participation remains a less researched topic, the progress in this area made by the expanding feminist school of thought notwithstanding. The issues are so vast, varied, complex and dynamic that any amount of research effort is bound to be inadequate. Women's activities are, by and large, non SNA activities which are not paid for, difficult to be valued and hence not amenable to exact measurement. The problems are all the more serious when we look at the labour force participation of rural women in a typically poor state like Odisha in a developing country of India's dimension. Our review of over 200 research publications indicate that even after having so much of research, we have answered less and opened more questions for further investigation. This research study titled "*Rural women in the Workforce –Determinants and Policy Issues: A Case Study in Balasore District*" is an attempt to analyse the factors which determine the decision of the rural women to participate in

the labour market at the micro-level. An effort is also made to explore the linkages between employment and empowerment of rural women.

2. Objectives

The objectives of the study are as follows.

1. To investigate into the determinants of women's participation in paid work in the rural areas.
2. To assess the contribution of working women to household income.
3. To analyse the employment and income impact of formation of SHGs on the group members.
4. To explore the linkages between employment and empowerment of rural women.
5. To bring out the problems faced by working women.
6. To draw some policy implications from the findings for increasing work participation of rural women.

3. Hypotheses

The following hypotheses have been tested by applying simple statistical tools to primary data.

- 1) Labour market participation of rural women varies inversely with household income, land holdings owned by the household, number of pre-school age children, age of women and own education but positively with dependency ratio, number of school age children, caste and marital status of women.
- 2) Women workers' wage earnings constitute a significant proportion of the household income in the rural areas.
- 3) In the rural areas, women working for wages are more empowered than non-working women.

4. Plan of the Study

The study is organized in nine chapters. As usual Chapter-I is introductory which defines the research problem, reviews the relevant literature, identified research gaps, spells out the objectives, hypotheses and plan of the study. In chapter II an analysis of the National Sample Survey Organization and Census data on composition and the trend of the rural workforce has

been presented which point to low labour market participation of rural women in India and Odisha. The details of the data base, techniques adopted for selection of the study area and the sample women and households along with the methodology used to examine and analyse the primary data are discussed in Chapter III. Purposive and random sampling procedure, regression and other simple statistical tools have been used in the study. The study is confined to 260 workers and 320 non-workers in 20 villages of five gram panchayats in two blocks of a district.

Chapter IV provides a broad macro setting for this study and presents various related aspects of the state, district, sample block and the sample population which in our case consist of rural workers and non-workers. The overall analysis indicates that mainly strong economic reasons puts pressure on the rural women to join the paid workforce. Those paid workforce comprise agricultural labourers, construction workers and household industry workers.

In Chapter V we analyse rural women's labour market participation at the individual and household level. The broad research question addressed in this chapter is: what factors determine the participation of rural women in the labour market? An analysis of contribution of women workers to household income and the linkages of working status and the empowerment of rural women has been provided in Chapter VI. Some significant factors which attract the wage earning rural women to take up self-employment activities through SHG model are highlighted. Various problems faced by working women (both at work place and in household), are discussed in Chapter VII. As SHGs have emerged as one of the vibrant forces for the self-employment of the rural women this aspect in our sample area has been explained with the help of the data collected from the field in Chapter VIII. The last chapter -Chapter IX- summarizes the overall research effort and concludes with some policy implications, main contributions to knowledge, limitations and scope for future research.

5. Major Findings of the Study

Our analysis of socio-economic profile of the blocks and sample women households shows near homogeneity of situation obtaining in them. Examination of issue-specific primary data also reveals more or less the same scenario. The results indicate the same pattern too. For these reasons, in most of the case we have presented the findings and explanations for the sample as a whole rather than describing them separately for the blocks.

The main findings of our study are as follows:

- 5.1 Women's work force participation level are very low. They are lower relative to males and are low in the rural areas this means that the system has failed to exploit the full economic potential of women.
- 5.2 Women's participation in the rural labour market are confined to vary low wage and low skills requiring activities such as, agriculture, construction and small household industries.
- 5.3 The labour force participation of rural women is influenced by economic reasons, household traits and women's own characteristics. Among the economic reasons low household income and small landholding status are of paramount importance. Result shows that work participation of rural women are largely distress driven determined by economic forces of low household income and small landholding. Among the household factors mentioned may be made of dependency ratio, number of pre-and school-age children and social caste status. Level of education, age and marital status are the own characteristics influencing work participation of rural women. Dependency ratio, education, marital status and caste are the other powerful determinants next to economic factors. Number of children and age are statistically not very significant determinants.
- 5.4 By participating in wage-employment activities women contribute to their household income and their contribution are highly significant. They give the whole of their wage earnings to the household.
- 5.5 Participation in paid work brings empowerment to women. Women workers are observed to be more empowered than women who do not work for wages. However, distress driven work participation does not guarantee high empowerment.
- 5.6 Self Help Groups have become a very important source of self-employment for rural women. Some of the workers in low wage sectors have moved to the SGHs for higher economic gains. Even those who were not in the workforce earlier have joined the SHGs because of its lucrative benefits. SHG members are making a remarkable contribution to their household income, expenditure and savings.

5.7 Women's work participation in waged-work not only fetches economics and income gains but also entail untold costs as manifested in the problems which women works encounter at the workplace and at home. They include low wages, disproportionately lower waged relative to male wages, unfavourable and long hours of work, work-family imbalance and family-work-imbalance, harassment by male co-workers, superior grade workers and informal labour contractors which range from scolding to sexual exploitation, payment of commission to contractors and commuting long distances for work.

6. Main Findings by Objectives and Hypotheses

The findings given above conform to our objectives and they validate their hypotheses. A summary picture of the same is given in the following table.

Main Findings by Research Objectives and Proof of Hypotheses

Sl. No.	Research Objectives and Findings		Hypotheses	
	Specification	Main findings	Specification	Proof
1.	To investigate the determinants of women's participation in paid work in rural areas.	Women's work participation is influenced by numerous factors. These are economic, socio-demographic and women's own traits. Among them the numbers of completed years of education by women, income of the households, amount of agricultural land owned by the household, number pre-school age children and age of the women negatively influence the work participation decision of women. Marital status, caste, dependency ratio, and number of school-age children bear a direct relation with work participation decision of rural women.	Rural women's work participation decision is influenced negatively by the numbers of completed years of education by women, income of the households, amount of agricultural land owned by the household, number pre-school age children and age of the women and positively by marital status, caste dependency ratio and number of school age children.	The hypothesis is proved.

2.	To assess the contribution of rural working women to household income when they are engaged in different types of waged work.	Rural women are engaged in different paid occupations. The board categories of occupations are agricultural works, construction works, and works in household industries. The incomes of all workers are not equal. The earning of the construction workers are more followed by household industry workers and agricultural labourers. Taking their mean income into account it is found that the earnings of all workers constitute a significant proportion of household income. The correlation between worker's income and household income is positive and statistically significant.	Women workers' wage income constitute a significant proportion of the total household income.	The hypothesis is validated.
3.	To analyse the status of empowerment of working women compared to non-working women.	Women's participation in income generating activities lead to a position where they become empowered. A working woman can directly access resources, achieve greater control over life choices and improves her bargaining power. By assigning 0-10 score values in a scale to 10 indicators we observed that working women are more empowered than non-working women.	Working women are more empowered than non-working women.	The hypothesis is confirmed.

7. Policy Implications and Suggestions

The findings of our research themselves have the policy implications to address the main issues confronting women's work participation especially in the rural areas. The issues may be addressed from both demand-side and supply-side perspectives.

- 7.1 From a demand-side perspective the findings have two important implications. Firstly the process of growth, the advance in technology and the pattern and composition of output need to be labour-using and women labour –friendly. It is time we be a good bye to jobless growth and embrace labour absorbing growth. Second, it is not just the number of person days of employment created that is important, it the quality of employment generated that counts much. The employment outcome needs to be favourable to women workers. Creating off-farm employment opportunities can be a solution.
- 7.2 From a supply-side perspective the results of our study have five important implications for policy. First, it is imperative to understand that the inherited social disadvantages inherent in a patriarchal structure have adverse effects on women's confidence and they affect women's work participation negatively. The socio-cultural norms and age old traditions tend to foster the subservient status of women. They very socialisation process defines the roles and shapes the capabilities of women both at home and in the society and the same are simply reinforced through acquiring education at schools, colleges and universities and by their workplace experience. On account of this, women workers face and fail to address work-family imbalance. Transforming the attitude of the people assumes critical importance.

Second, access to work is determined by educational status and level of skill acquired by women. Low education and low skills mean poor employability. Education improves women's capabilities, expands their economic and employment opportunities and enhances their empowerment. Since technology is permeating all domains of activity, a higher level of education and skill formation in women will have positive health and education effect on children, improve their employability, promote employment, increase productivity and enhance well-being. This requires adequate public investment in education and vocational and life skills training, particularly those oriented towards girl children and women. Policy makers should also consider measures that increase the incentives to send girl children to school and minimise drop –out. Making social security benefits to poor families conditional on the regular school attendance of their daughters can be an effective option.

The absence, inadequacy and low quality of basic infrastructure put obvious limits on women's ability to fully participate in wage-employment activities. In the face of these problems women may have to spend long hours on fetching water, collecting fuel, and preparing food and hence have less time for waged-work. Public investment in good infrastructure such as, those directed at provision of fuel-efficient or solar cooking stoves and safe drinking water can reduce the time they spend on home production and increase their options for taking up gainful paid work. Public transport is supposed to have the same effect.

A lack of access to and absence of control over productive resources including land, markets, financial resources and information and communications technology (ICT) may have a dampening on rural women's workforce participation. Promoting access to these can bring rural women from the morass of low paid jobs which limit their income earning potential to provide effective motivation for taking up lucrative non-farm and commercial agriculture activities.

Literature as also our own research inputs suggest that discriminatory malpractices such as, gender wage differences favouring males and harassment in any form of women works discourage women from participating in the labour market. Strict implementation of workplace ethics can help improve the situation and promote women's waged work participation.

It is pertinent to remind that our future growth prospects depend more on how better we can activate women and how best we realise their potential than on far we embrace the conventional wisdom of treating women as plain care providers.