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The real picture

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An independent study, India Human Development Survey, conducted by six researchers and published by the Oxford University Press, reveals that even in an era of rapid economic growth, the processes that have shaped inequalities in the country along the lines of gender, caste and religion continue to persist.

The survey says women are less likely to participate in the work force than men. When women work, they are largely concentrated in agriculture and care of livestock. Even when they engage in wage work, they work fewer days per year and at a considerably lower pay than men.

The average rural man works 206 days per year, while the average rural working woman works for 106 days in a year.

Even education fails to bridge the gender gap in labour force participation. Educated women seem to be less likely to be employed than less educated women. The progressive decline of in-labour force participation with higher levels of education stops only at graduation. However, graduates form a very small segment of the female population.

While most men work, women's labour force participation rates are considerably lower, reaching their peak at around age 30-34 years at about 70% for rural women and 25% for urban women. For women, work participation varies as per social background and place of residence, with urban women being the least likely to participate in workforce. Only 15% women in metro cities are employed, compared with 62% in villages.

For each rupee earned by men, rural women earn only 54 paise and urban women earn 68 paise. The employed rural women earn an average of Rs 42 per day, which is Rs 4,491 earnings per year. Rural men work more days and at a higher average rate (Rs 79) and, thus, earn 3.6 times as much as rural women in a year. Employed urban women work about as many days as rural men but at a much higher average rate (Rs 118). As many as 70% said they had a say in buying an expensive item for household use. Only 11% women respondents were found to be primarily responsible for household decisions.

—Source: *Human Development in India—Challenges for a Society in Transition*, OUP