

Work, Gender, and Immiseration in South Africa and India

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Abstract

In this paper, we broaden Marx's immiseration thesis to articulate social reproduction under capitalist growth. Specifically, we compare the female labor market in the context of the wage economy, the family-household, and the state, three institutions that influence the production-reproduction system. Our observations lead us to conclude that the neoliberal growth path has exacerbated inequities in the opportunities for female workers in both countries. Our findings affirm both the differentiation and homogenization of conditions of reproduction under capitalist exploitation.

JEL Classification: B51; B54; O1; O5

Keywords

immiseration, neoliberalism, labor, gender, reproduction, South Africa, India

1. Introduction

In the last decade, South Africa and India have been capitulated into the global arena as “emerging” economies. The relatively recently acquired international gravitas have their roots in the growth paths formalized by both countries in the 1990s, characterized by what Tickell and Peck (2003) have referred to as the “rollback” and “rollout” of the state. The new economic policies implemented in the 1990s in both countries have afforded capital the benefit of mobility, informal and flexible labor markets, and formal capital markets. However, evidence of growing unrest among peasants, and agrarian and industrial workers in the two countries suggests that gains from the economic growth paths may be inequitably distributed, and demands greater attention to the conditions under which the working poor and marginalized satisfy minimum consumption and reproduce themselves. In this paper, we focus our attention on working-class women, and their labor in wage and domestic economies. While the female labor force participation rate (FLFPR) in South Africa has increased since the 1990s, it has witnessed a significant decline in India. We explore the following question in the paper. How is FLFPR shaped by the conditions of the wage economy and the compulsions of household reproduction?

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We adopt the feminist insight that while capitalist production enhances cooperation in the organization of production, it also accumulates differences and divisions within the proletariat through its organization of social reproduction. This point is critical as we realize that economic policies have ostensibly paved the way for women to participate in the wage economy without mitigating the historical burden of social reproduction. As far as the household constitutes the reproduction of labor power, it also bears a disproportionate burden imposed by the exploitation and immiseration of workers, and thus constitutes a crucial sphere of class struggle.

We argue that the observed increase and decrease in female labor force participation in South Africa and India, respectively, point to conditions of immiseration in both countries at a time when economic growth may be high, but does not offer workers secure and minimum standards of living. In making this argument, our intention is not to suggest that the two countries are similar. Nor are we advocating for a deterministic understanding of capitalism. Nevertheless, despite significant differences in the social, economic, and political context, and the expression of immiseration, our investigations suggest a degree of convergence in the conditions of reproduction faced by the working classes, particularly working-class women. The difficulties that working-class women face are not a result of acontextual and apatriarchal institutions. Rather we find that patriarchy works in tandem with factors intrinsic to the economic system. Women's labor thus is shaped as a response to a potential crisis of reproduction and the immiserating tendencies inherent in the specific context of each country's growth path. In comparing the two countries, our objective is to situate the nuances of specific cases in the larger context of global capitalism.

2. Growth, Immiseration and Social Reproduction

Reproduction comprises the tangible costs of providing for socially determined essential commodities, participating in the labor market (i.e., education and training), and the intangible costs of care and maintaining social relations that may not fully be quantified; it also includes the generational and everyday reproduction of the population. In a capitalist economy, wages constitute the primary form of reproducing the household. However, the capitalist wage economy also constitutes the roots of immiseration as capital-intensive production produces an ever-increasing relative surplus population (Cockcroft 1983). This poses a significant dilemma as reproductive costs accrue irrespective of whether the population is employed by the capitalist economy or not.

Marx (1986: 603) believed that reproduction of the laboring and surplus population enters the "*faux frais*" of capitalism but it systemically shifts the burden onto the working classes. Furthermore, "the actual processes of *reproduction* remain outside the value-producing economy" (Dickinson and Russell 1986: 10). A feminist lens foregrounds the question of reproduction of the laboring and surplus population as capital accumulation proceeds unabated and creates potentially immiserating conditions. Under conditions of inadequate absorption of labor, insufficient capital investment in employment generating sectors, or weak bargaining position of workers, the working classes are forced to turn to two other institutions that play an important role in the production-reproduction system—the family-household and the state.

The family-household facilitates the processes of reproduction by converting wages into goods and services, but in lieu of an adequate wage economy, it can also engage in noncapitalist production (Dickinson and Russell 1986), or what Meillassoux (1977, cited in Cockcroft 1983) referred to as "domestic economies," to bolster household consumption and ensure reproduction. Labor expended in domestic economies and other reproductive work contributes significantly to household consumption of essential goods and services, especially though not exclusively, in underdeveloped regions and economies. This labor remains outside (though not divorced from) the commodity relation, is unaccounted in official statistics, and hence becomes "invisible." It is overwhelmingly, but not solely, performed by women, and is driven by the existing sexual division of labor, access to public goods and social welfare, and the conditions of the wage economy.

The family-household is articulated to the state and market economy through this dialect. In turn, women's participation in waged work, as "workers" in the conventional sense, is dependent on the imperatives of survival, that is, everyday reproduction of the household.

The state, on the contrary, affects reproduction at the collective level through legislations and social grants (Dickinson and Russell 1986). It plays an important role in determining women's participation in wage and/or domestic economies, mitigates potential immiseration by regulating the labor market and structural inequities (both within and outside the domestic sphere), subsidizes household consumption (Dickinson and Russell 1986) and improves household welfare, and attempts to arrest the ill-effects of capitalist accumulation.

However, global economic policies have allowed the contradiction of immiseration in the face of economic prosperity to resurface thereby deepening the disconnect between the cycles of social reproduction and capital accumulation, thus increasing social fragmentation and leading to new contradictions (Mingione 1985). This has forced the laboring classes to engage in multiple livelihoods—straddling regular and casual labor markets, and domestic economies—and to increase dependence on the state for their survival even as many states are increasingly abdicating or unwilling to undertake provisioning. This economic reality appears consistent with Marx's (1986: 603) argument that the immiserated relative surplus population, along with pauperism, is a "condition of capitalist production, and of the capitalist development of wealth," which places a higher burden of reproduction on the household, particularly women in the household. It is this gendered nature, the "hidden basis," of the social relations of production and capital accumulation that we seek to show in this paper as having an immiserating tendency, differentiated in different contexts by the specific economic, social, and political conditions pertaining to each context—in our case, India and South Africa.

3. Economic Growth and FLFPR in South Africa and India

Data from Table 1 indicate that India performs better than South Africa in terms of economic growth even during and after the global economic crisis, but while male LFPR is higher in both countries, FLFPR is consistently higher in South Africa. Women's labor force participation in South Africa witnessed a downturn in 2005 and during the global economic crisis and since then appears to be recovering. Indian women's labor force participation, on the contrary, has been in decline except for a brief upturn in 2005. In this section, we discuss FLFPR in each country and argue that it is a function not only of the wage economy but is also shaped by the compulsions of household reproduction. Our investigations find that the wage economy is unable to satisfy the

Table 1. Selected Comparative Statistics.

Year	1991	1995	2001	2005	2010	2014
GDP (%)						
South Africa	-1	3.1	2.7	5.3	3	1.5
India	1.1	7.6	4.8	9.3	10.3	7.4
Female LFPR (15–64 years)						
South Africa	43	47	53	50	47	49
India	37	37	36	39	30	29
Male LFPR (15–64 years)						
South Africa	70	69	67	65	63	64
India	87	86	85	86	83	83

Source: The World Bank (2014).

Note: LFPR = labor force participation rate.

minimum conditions for reproduction, and thus necessitates state intervention and/or the domestic economy to (successfully or unsuccessfully) stave off immiseration.

3.1. South Africa

FLFPR in postapartheid South Africa has been impacted by many interrelated factors. First, apartheid laws that previously restricted movement and access to employment and “increased aspirations” were abolished (Department of Labor n.d.). Furthermore, legislation such as the Employment Equity Act, 1998; the Skills Development Act, 1998; and the Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment Act, 2003 (Clarke et al. 2005: 70–71) have contributed to increasing opportunities for women in the labor market.

Second, higher access to education in postapartheid Africa has increased FLFPR and the quality of jobs (Klasen and Woolard 2000: 12), especially for black African men and women. On average, South African women have achieved a higher level of education compared with men. While 50 percent of employed women had completed secondary or tertiary education, and nearly 21 percent had completed tertiary education in 2009, 50 percent of employed males had completed at least secondary education and only 17 percent had completed tertiary education (van Klaveren et al. 2009). Even though the education gap between the employed and unemployed is not that large, there appears to be some dividend associated with higher education qualifications (Ntuli 2007; van Klaveren et al. 2009).

Third, although the increase in the proportion of women in total employment increased from 39 percent in 1995 to 44 percent in 2014 (Orr and van Meelis 2014), suggesting a closing of the gender gap, a deeper analysis suggests an employment crisis in the country. Increasing FLFPR could be driven by a decline in female access to male income as a result of increased unemployment among male workers (i.e., structural unemployment), the consequences of the HIV epidemic, and an increase in female headship of households due to changes in household structure (Casale 2003, 2004; Kingdon and Knight 2007). The labor force for men and women increased by 16 and 11 percent, respectively, between 2008 and 2014. In the same period, employment increased by 10 percent for both sexes. However, unemployment increased by 14 percent for women and a massive 38 percent for men (Orr and van Meelis 2014). This may have also contributed to the significant decline in male labor force participation rate from 70 percent in 1991 to 64 percent in 2014 (see Table 1). Thus, women may be entering the labor market to meet a deficit in household income causing the FLFPR to increase by 11 percent between 1995 and 2014 (Orr and van Meelis 2014). In other words, postapartheid policies have constituted the “pull” factors, whereas the immiseration of the working classes have constituted the “push” factors that have contributed to higher women’s participation in the labor market. We proceed to examine a few features of the wage economy as well as the conditions of reproduction in South Africa.

3.1.1. Wage economy. Despite higher concentration of women with higher educational attainment in the labor market, the returns to education are greater for males than females (Casale and Posel 2011). Wage convergence for men and women of different racial groups vary. Yet, the average wage gap in 2011 between male and female wages in South Africa is significant. The proportion of women (20.5 percent) earning less than R1,000 per month was twice the proportion of men (9.5 percent) in this income category,¹ and while the mean hourly wages for men was R138.75, for women it was a meager R41.175 (Statistics South Africa 2013). In 2013, women earned 34 percent less than male workers on average—the gap is higher in the private sector at 35.5 percent and lower in the public sector at 27 percent (Ledwith and Munakamwe 2014). Like many other

¹Furthermore, 63.6 percent of female workers compared with 56 percent of male workers earned less than R4,000 (Statistics South Africa 2013).

countries, the gender wage gap is higher at lower wages, possibly demonstrating a sticky floor effect² (e.g., Bhorat and Goga 2013; Casale and Posel 2011; Muller 2009; Ntuli 2007; Shepherd 2008). The economy continues to exhibit features of the apartheid wage structure of inequity and stratification, and this particularly affects unorganized workers in certain sectors (Coleman 2013).

Women workers in South Africa also face occupational segregation. In the informal sector, 58.4 percent of women were employed in only two sectors—trade and community services; and in the formal sector, 75.8 percent of women's employment was derived from three sectors—trade, community and social services, and finance (Statistics South Africa 2013). Most of these sectors are characterized by high flexibilization, low pay, and working conditions (Orr and van Meelis 2014). Employment of male workers, however, is spread across many sectors. Cichello, Leibbrandt, and Woolard's (2014) statistical study suggests that female workers are less mobile across different employment sectors than male workers. Women workers are also likely to be employed in industries and sectors with higher workers' compensation and lower apartheid era wage structures; in 2011, 35.6 percent of women were employed in unskilled occupations, whereas only 23.2 percent of men participated in unskilled jobs (Statistics South Africa 2013).

The share of women in the informal economy has been declining for more than a decade. It decreased from 46 percent in 2008 to 39 percent in 2014 (Orr and van Meelis 2014), though adding employment in private households (mainly domestic work) to informal employment increases the share of women workers to around 51 percent in 2014 (Statistics South Africa 2015c). Much of the growth in employment since the end of apartheid, especially for African women, has been in relatively low-skilled informal sector jobs that allow time flexibility but yield lower earnings (Banerjee et al. 2007; Casale 2004; Casale and Posel 2002; Devey, Skinner, and Valodia 2006; Ledwith and Munakamwe 2014). More recently, however, it appears that women have gained a greater foothold in the formal economy. The share of women workers in total formal sector employment increased from 40 percent in 2008 to 42 percent in 2014 (Orr and van Meelis 2014).

A look into employment generation in the formal and informal sectors reveals the following. Both male and female workers derived 74 and 68 percent, respectively, of total jobs from the formal sector in 2014 (Statistics South Africa 2015b). Women's formal sector employment only grew 14.2 percent between 2008 and 2014, whereas informal sector employment declined by 15.9 percent in the same period based on data from Statistics South Africa (2015b). In the same period, male employment increased by 2.2 and 8.1 percent in the formal and informal sectors, respectively. Women workers overwhelmingly benefited from an increase in formal sector jobs, whereas they lost significantly from a decline in informal sector jobs between 2008 and 2014 (Statistics South Africa 2015b). It also appears that some of the decline in women's employment in the informal sector was compensated by an increase in male employment in this sector. The reversal in women's employment in the informal sector may be attributed to a 50 percent decline in informal businesses run by women between 2001 and 2013, whereas men faced only a 5 percent decline in the same period (Statistics South Africa 2014). These developments indicate a possible defeminization of the informal sector.

Despite the dominance of the formal sector and progressive legislation to mitigate gender inequities, South Africa suffers from a low growth rate and a very high unemployment rate (33.7 percent including discouraged workers in 2013; Di Paola and Pons-Vignon 2013). However, the fallouts of a relatively stagnant economy are unequally experienced. A higher percentage of the female labor force (14 percent) was characterized as discouraged workers compared with 9 percent of the male labor force, and the male and female absorption rates (employed/labor force) were 49 and 38 percent, respectively, in 2015 (Statistics South Africa 2015c). The net result is

²There is evidence to suggest a glass ceiling as well but we are interested in the lower end of the wage and income spectrum.

that the sum of discouraged and unemployed female and male workers, who constitute the floating form of the relative surplus population, was 4.07 and 3.87 million, respectively, in 2015 (Statistics South Africa 2015c), which indicates a high degree of immiseration among the working classes.

3.1.2. State intervention and domestic economies. The inadequacy of the labor market to ensure decent living has compelled the state to aid in household reproduction. Spending on social grants accounts for 3 percent of GDP and is projected to rise from R118 billion in 2013–2014 to R145 billion by 2016. Child support, old age, and disability grants constitute 71, 18, and 7 percent, respectively, of total grant spending. Over the past decade, the number of social grant beneficiaries has doubled from 7.9 million in 2003 to 15.8 million in 2015, an increase formally attributed to an expansion of the child support grant (SAnews.gov.za 2014). More than half of South African households benefit from social assistance, and for 22 percent, grants are the main source of income (National Treasury 2013). Proponents claim that targeted social grants have stabilized income levels of the poor in the postapartheid era and contributed to declining levels of poverty and inequality in South Africa (Bhorat and Cassim 2014). Some argue that social grants may undermine labor force participation by reducing the opportunity cost of not working, but evidence suggests otherwise. Individuals from households in South Africa receiving social grants have increased both their labor force participation and employment rates compared with those who do not receive social grants (Posel, Fairburn, and Lund 2004; Samson et al. 2004). Furthermore, women's share of total beneficiaries of government job creation programs increased to 63.1 percent in 2014 (Statistics South Africa 2015a).

Thus, the South African state has not only passed legislations making it easier for women to participate in the wage economy but has also instituted a social assistance system to aid in the reproduction of the working and relative surplus population. Yet, the emphasis of the South African State remains on privatized welfare.³ In lieu of provision of services such as old age homes, state crèches, and facilities for mentally and physically disabled people, the labor associated with their provision are privatized and the burden has to be borne by household (Webster and Faiker 2010). Social grants contribute up to 60 percent of income of eligible households, but the effects of privatization of care and the high costs of public services effectively neutralize the benefits of these grants (Webster and Faiker 2010).

Unsurprisingly, South African households rely on domestic economies, in addition to social grants. Nearly, six million people of both sexes were involved in at least one subsistence activity such as subsistence farming; fetching water, wood, or dung; producing goods for household use; construction and repair of houses; and hunting or fishing for household consumption; this represents an increase of 11.4 percent between 2014 and 2015 (Statistics South Africa 2015c). Of these, 28 percent combined subsistence activities with paid employment, 14.4 percent were unemployed, and 57 percent were economically inactive (Statistics South Africa 2015c). In addition, employed women of all races spent at least twice as much time than men engaging in subsistence activities, unpaid housework, and care labor, with unemployed women spending even more time than their male counterparts (Orr and van Meelis 2014). Despite higher participation in the labor force, women continue to hold the primary responsibility for reproduction, thus imposing on them a “double shift burden” (Makgetla 2004). Labor expended on reproduction, however, continues to be unaccounted, unremunerated, and exploitative.

Combined with the health crisis associated with the spread of HIV/AIDS, which deepens immiserating tendencies, neoliberal capitalist growth places a terrible burden on the reproductive

³Between 2005 and 2010, the welfare budget dedicated 93 percent of its resources to the payment of grants, and less than 1 percent was devoted to providing services (Department of Social Development 2007: 332, cited in Webster and Faiker 2010).

sphere in South Africa. Despite the progressive role of the state in mitigating discriminatory practices, high rates of unemployment prevent wage labor from playing a significant role in household reproduction. This means that social grants and invisible reproductive labor, mainly performed by women, prop up household consumption and hence reproduction. South African women's waged and unwaged work, including high FLFPR, thus occurs under immiserating conditions faced by working-class households.

3.2. India

Unlike South Africa, the Indian state has not implemented any significant legislation to encourage female participation in the labor force or mitigate gender inequities in the workplace. The decline in Indian FLFPR since 1987 to 1988 (except for a moderate upturn in 2004–2005) thus has policy implications and has generated significant debate. The dominant explanation is that decreasing FLFPR is a result of higher household incomes, that is, an “income effect” (e.g., Abraham 2009; Himanshu 2011). Furthermore, an increase in women's participation in domestic and allied activities corresponding to the decline in FLFPR is interpreted as women's desire to engage in “status production” consonant to rising household income activities (Abraham 2009; Himanshu 2011; Srivastava and Srivastava 2010). These explanations draw from the optimistic U-shape hypothesis, which states that countries at low and high levels of development experience high FLFPR, whereas countries at middle levels of economic development experience a very low FLFPR. It is assumed that as a middle development country, India's declining FLFPR will automatically rise with higher economic growth in the future.

However, Lahoti and Swaminathan (2013), in an India-specific study that utilizes state-level panel data from 1983 to 2010, found no significant relationship between economic development of states and their labor force participation rates.⁴ Instead, they suggested that the participation rate is affected by the composition of growth. Based on the data gathered by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), Kannan and Raveendran (2012) estimated that 28.16 million Indian women did not participate in the labor market despite poor living conditions. NSSO data also suggest that FLFPR had declined for all levels of education in 2009 to 2010 compared with 1983 (Abraham 2013), unlike in South Africa where education has led to higher employment opportunities. Thus, a less optimistic view attributes low FLFPR to declining or low employment opportunities for female workers in India (Ghosh 2009; Patnaik 2003). We therefore investigate features of the wage economy and the role of domestic economies and the state in household reproduction.

3.2.1. Wage economy. The overall gender wage gap has declined since the 1980s. Nevertheless, the gap remains significant with regular female workers getting 40 percent less in rural areas and 25 percent less in urban areas compared with their male counterparts in 2004 to 2005 (Karan and Selvaraj 2008). In addition, wages of rural workers were only one-fourth of the wages of urban workers, and casual workers in rural and urban areas received a little over one-third of wages of regular workers in 2004 to 2005 (Karan and Selvaraj 2008), which is significant for our analysis because women are overwhelmingly employed in rural areas, and as casual workers in rural areas. Menon and Rodgers (2009), in their study on the gender wage gap in manufacturing, found that trade liberalization in the context of inadequate enforcement of labor standards and sex-based discrimination has worsened the ability of women workers to bargain for higher wages, thus contributing to a substantial wage gap. This illustrates the benefits that accrue to global capitalism from existing gender inequities to the detriment of workers. Studies estimate that 50 to 72

⁴Other studies also question the robustness of this hypothesis across countries (e.g., Gaddis and Klasen 2014; Kabeer and Natali 2013).

percent of the gender wage gap in informal employment (e.g., Das 2006; Deininger, Jin, and Nagarajan 2013) and at least 80 percent in formal employment result from gender discrimination rather than differences in endowments or productivity (Khanna 2012). Moreover, discrimination is much higher for low-wage earners in regular jobs rather than high-wage earners in regular work, thus suggesting a sticky floor effect like in South Africa, possibly due to low reservation wage, low bargaining power, or occupation segregation (Khanna 2012).

The negative impact of occupational segregation on rural women's labor force participation has increased over the years and is between two to three times larger in 2010 than in 1994 (Kapsos, Silberman, and Bourmpoula 2014). Similar to South Africa, women workers in India are concentrated in few sectors. Seventy-five percent of the rural female workforce, which is 3.7 times larger than the urban female workforce, is employed in agriculture, whereas 64 percent of the urban female workforce is concentrated in manufacturing, and community and social services (NSSO 2014a). These sectors suffered significant job loss in the period 2004–2005 to 2009–2010, during which female workers lost 21.5 million jobs in the agricultural sector and 3.1 million jobs in the manufacturing sector, whereas only 4.46 million total jobs created in the economy benefited women workers (Mazumdar and Agnihotri 2011). In 2011 to 2012, 17.7 million women listed domestic and allied activities as their primary occupation (Thomas 2014). However, juxtaposed with dismal job creation and an increase in the potential female labor force by 21.5 million between 2004–2005 and 2011–2012 (Thomas 2014), these data undermine the “income effect” explanation for declining FLFPR.

Not only does the high growth Indian economy suffer from inadequate job creation, the quality of employment created has been quite low. About 90 percent of the Indian workforce is employed in informal work, which is characterized by low wages, lack of job security or social security, low bargaining power, and higher incidence of sexual harassment for female workers (National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector 2009). For instance, Chen and Ravindran (2011) estimated that the combined share of domestic workers, home-based workers, street vendors, and waste pickers in total urban employment increased from 19 to 33 percent in the period 1999–2000 to 2009–2010, and their share in urban informal employment increased from 22 to 41 percent. This indicates a rise in the proportion of workers in the lowest occupation categories in the informal work hierarchy (see Chen 2006).

Furthermore, in the period 1999–2000 to 2009–2010, the share of male workers in these four occupational categories increased, whereas that of female workers decreased significantly; much of the change was driven by home-based work. The proportion of employment in home-based work as a proportion of female urban employment decreased from 22 to 9 percent, while the share as a proportion of male urban employment increased from 8 to 20 percent, which suggests a displacement of female workers by male workers (Chen and Ravindran 2011). While it is desirable that fewer women work in low-quality jobs, it is of concern that their prospects in better quality regular jobs have not significantly improved, and that the quality of overall employment in the Indian economy for both male and female workers is very poor.

In addition to the direct impact of a dearth of sufficient well-paying and high-quality jobs, an indirect effect is that the excessive reliance on informal labor forces male workers to compete for occupations with lower returns that were previously occupied by women workers. The net impact on male labor force participation has not been as significant as the impact on women's labor force participation (see Table 1). The immiserating conditions that plague both male and female workers may be particularly intensified by gender inequities in the labor market. This has created conditions for a “discouraged worker” effect (Das 2006; Thomas 2014), and may have contributed to the significant withdrawal of women workers from the Indian labor force, 60 percent of whom belong to low-income households (Kannan and Raveendran 2012). In lieu of an adequate wage economy, however, working-class households may be forced to depend on state intervention and domestic economies to satisfy reproductive needs.

3.2.2. *State intervention and domestic economies.* State provisioning in India has been severely inadequate. Nevertheless, under significant pressure from ground activists, the state passed the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) in 2005. This legislation mandates the provision of 100 days of manual work at minimum wages for rural households that demand work. It has increased wages and the bargaining position of rural workers (Dutta et al. 2012; Government of India [GoI] 2014). It has also led to high participation of women in areas with effective program implementation due to its association with lower incidence of sexual harassment, child care provisions, and geographical proximity of work to place of residence (Khera and Nayak 2009; Pankaj and Tankha 2009). In many cases, women have participated in waged work for the first time, thus indicating latent demand. Interestingly, the program has benefited women in those states in which men have had access to better employment. In 2013 to 2014, Rs. 330 billion was allocated to this program and it provided 2.19 billion person-days of employment, of which the share of female employment was 53 percent (GoI 2014).

Notwithstanding the progressive legislation, NREGA's implementation has been patchy. Many state governments have attempted to implement the program through labor contractors in contravention of the provisions of NREGA, thus undermining its effectiveness. In some regions, the program has also suffered from tardy distribution of funds and wages (Comptroller and Auditor General 2013). The expansion and implementation of the program has been disappointingly limited so that it has been unsuccessful in stemming the decline in FLFPR (Kannan and Raveendran 2012). The combined expenditure on labor and employment by the federal and state governments was 0.51 percent of total development and nondevelopment expenditures in 1990 to 1991 prior to NREGA implementation, but has been less than 0.4 percent of total development and nondevelopment expenditure since 2000 to 2001 after the implementation of NREGA (Reserve Bank of India [RBI] 2005, 2015).

Share of expenditure on plan and nonplan social security and welfare in total development and nondevelopment expenditure for the federal and state governments increased from 2.7 percent in 1990–1991 to 4.3 percent in 2011–2012 (RBI 2005, 2015). For the same period, share of food subsidy expenditure in total development and nondevelopment expenditure increased from 1.7 percent in 1990–1991 to 3.3 percent in 2011–2012 (RBI 2005, 2015). These data both highlight and underestimate the need for such programs. It is clear both from the low spending on key line items and the high incidence of poverty and declining consumption (e.g., Patnaik 2013) that the Indian state has been unable or unwilling to play a significant role in the reproduction of working-class households. This explains the high reliance of working-class households on domestic economies.

NSSO data on women's participation domestic and allied activities (which includes women's participation in free collection of vegetables, roots, firewood, cattle feed, and so on; sewing, tailoring, and weaving; processing food for household consumption, etc.) indicate an overall increase from 12.2 percent in 1987–1988 to 23.7 percent in 2011–2012 (NSSO 2014b). Advocates of the income effect hypothesis claim that this increase is indicative of women's preference for producing "social status" and explains Indian women's labor market withdrawal. However, these labor-intensive activities are most likely to be associated with women from lower income households. Kannan and Raveendran (2012), for instance, estimated that 61 percent of the missing female labor force in 2010 were from the poorest households. It is plausible that instead of engaging in "status production," women from working-class households compensate for the lack of decent jobs and insufficient state intervention by increasing their participation in reproductive activities as captured by NSSO data on work in domestic and allied activities (see also Sen and Sen 1985). Around 60 percent of women in 2011 to 2012 reported that their principal occupation in domestic and allied activities was due to unavailability of other family members to carry out these tasks; around 40 percent of the women whose principal occupation was domestic and allied activities were willing to take up market work, and most of them wanted regular work (NSSO

2014b). These national data highlight the importance of domestic and allied activities, that is, domestic economies, to working-class households, and impose a constraint on women's participation in the labor market. While the role of sexual division of labor in women's participation in these activities cannot be denied, it is also pertinent to question the economic conditions that force women into labor-intensive invisible work to produce goods and services that have market substitutes, which suggests these households' low relative income and social status.

Contrary to the suggestions of some researchers, "income effect" does not explain women's withdrawal from the labor force at all levels of income. Instead, there is significant evidence of low supply of well-paying jobs (Das 2006; Patnaik 2003; Thomas 2014). The continued concentration of the majority of jobs in agriculture, despite its declining share in GDP, also underlines the failure of any meaningful structural transformation of the Indian economy. Furthermore, it is clear that nonfarm jobs created in India in the past two decades have been of poor quality and there is a significant gender wage gap that can be attributed to discrimination. In the absence of suitable employment opportunities either by private or public sectors and inadequate state policies, high- and low-income households may decide that it is preferable for women to opt out of labor market participation and engage in domestic economies. It is clear that the compulsions of ensuring a minimum level of household consumption are increasingly borne outside the wage economy, and without adequate social provisioning, this responsibility is shouldered by the household sphere.

4. Discussion

Postapartheid South Africa committed itself to urban reconstruction and development for integrated and coherent social economic progress that would eradicate the legacies of apartheid. The ostensible goal was "to build a democratic, nonracial, and nonsexist future," and the programs claimed to represent a vision for the fundamental transformation of South Africa. The New Growth Plan (NGP), launched in November 2010, intended "a restructuring of the South African economy to improve its performance in terms of labor absorption as well as the composition and rate of growth" (Economic Development Department 2011: 2), that is, achieve both economic growth and income redistribution (Bell 2010). Yet overwhelming reliance on the private sector to actualize its centerpiece—creation of employment—renders it vulnerable to market vagaries. Furthermore, its recognition of the importance of (re)industrialization suffers from being potentially gender blind (Tregenna 2011).

In India, while the 1980s laid out a new path toward liberalization, the changes in the macroeconomic regime were formally implemented in the new economic policies of the 1990s. The growth pattern shifted from being state-led to market-driven through a systematic process of deregulation and liberalization of domestic and external markets and disinvestment in the public sector. According to data from the Annual Survey of Industries, total value of output in the period 1990–1991 to 2004–2005 increased by 518 percent, profits increased by 1,170 percent, but the total wage bill including social security only increased by 246 percent (Jha 2009). While the first decade of liberalization constituted government withdrawal from the accumulation process, primarily through reductions in public-sector capital formation, the next decade constituted active participation of the state in creating conditions conducive for private-sector accumulation (De and Vakulabharanam 2013).

The dissimilarities in the economic and sociopolitical conditions when the two countries embarked on their neoliberal growth paths have understandably created differential working and living conditions in the two countries. This is reflected in the differing trends in female participation in the labor force. Yet, the "rollout" and "rollback" of the state (Tickell and Peck 2003) have plagued both economies with inadequate decent employment generation, albeit at different magnitudes. While it may be tempting to perceive inadequate employment conditions and the related

immiseration of female workers merely in the context of patriarchy or reserve army of labor, neither provides us with adequate explanations for the differences observed in the two countries. The interjection of political, economic, and social institutions, besides gender inequality, help explain why and how immiseration shapes women's participation in the wage economy of each country. We thus consider an analysis of women's labor market in conjunction with the interrelated issues of access to wage work, the value of labor power, and situating the family under contemporary and contextual capitalist practices (Fine 1992).

First, from the description of labor market conditions in the two countries, it is clear that female workers in India have lower overall access to jobs. They have lower and insecure access to secure work environments and socialized means of reproductive care, that is, child care, which would prevent their labor market restriction. In South Africa, on the contrary, a higher commitment to gender equality in the workforce by the postapartheid regime as well as a whittling away of the heteronormative family as the primary institution to facilitate individual and household consumption has had a significant role in increasing the ability of women to demand paid work. The paucity of employment opportunities in these different contexts has led to dissimilar expressions—high female unemployment in South Africa and a significant degree of withdrawal of female labor in India. Furthermore, a gender wage gap and sex-based occupation segregation create and maintain unequal access in the labor market for women workers due to lack of progressive legislation in India and despite progressive legislation in South Africa. Differential valorization of labor and the maintenance of a labor hierarchy based on gender benefit capitalist employers by impeding class consciousness and class solidarity.

Second, we consider the value of labor power in terms of its ability to meet socially accepted levels of consumption to reproduce the labor force and the dependent population, and associated sexual division of labor (see Fine 1992). Differences in behavior of women workers in South Africa and India, revealed in terms of their different labor force participation rates, obscure the underlying immiserated conditions of the women who constitute the relative surplus population and the proletariat. It has been observed that in occupations with a large female labor force, as industries have upgraded, matured, and needed a higher skilled labor force, there has been widespread “de-feminization” (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UNDESA] 1999, cited in Razavi 2009). Ghosh (2009) argued that with a concentration of female workers, the traditional advantage of gender discrimination declines as female workers work to improve their bargaining position and regulations are put in place, thus reducing the desirability of lower paid and easily controlled female workers. Data on home-based work in India and self-employment in South Africa reveal that in the context of insufficient job creation in the formal economy, male workers are forced to compete for jobs and occupations with lower returns that have been the refuge of female workers. While South Africa is only experiencing defeminization in the informal sector, India appears to be “de-feminizing” both its formal and informal labor force. Existing gender inequities facilitate such an outcome but the need for such an outcome arises in the context of specific economic conditions of immiseration under contemporary capitalism in which both male and female workers do not have access to better jobs and wages. The dispossession from means of production, and the lack of sufficient employment and wages under contemporary capitalism, produces conditions in which the wage economy does not allow for the reproduction of workers and their kin.

The insufficiency of the wage economy to sustain reproduction of workers and their kin has elicited different responses in the two countries. On one hand, inadequate male income, along with factors such as the spread of HIV/AIDS, has led to a breakdown of the traditional household structure, an increase in female-headed households in South Africa, and pushed more women into the formal labor market. On the other hand, in India, insufficient income, purchasing power, and employment appear to have forced women into expending a higher proportion of work time in domestic and allied activities to maintain a minimum level of household consumption. In

South Africa, immiseration has aided in an erosion of the heteronormative household, whereas in India immiseration has solidified the sexual division of labor and increased the opportunity cost of participating in the wage economy, particularly as the cost of food and other commodified goods has increased in the past decade.

This brings us to the third point about contextualizing the family, which is the site of individual consumption necessary for reproduction, vis-à-vis contemporary capitalism. Under neoliberal capitalism, with its “footloose” and low-paid labor (Breman 1996), there arises a contradiction between wage work and domestic labor. While many aspects of social reproduction are increasingly commodified, it does not free working women from the drudgery of domestic labor. In fact, increasing costs of reproduction are reflected in the rising costs of outsourcing care work, and high or rising subsistence production. Despite the implementation of formal legislation to encourage women’s participation in the wage economy in South Africa, inadequate provision of socialized reproduction means that women in both countries shoulder the burden of domestic production and care work whether they are employed in the labor market or not.

Women’s participation in domestic economies often means that capitalist employers can expect the reproduction of labor without paying a living wage and even lobby to undermine social grants and welfare programs that support the working and relative surplus populations. In other words, the household undertakes a larger proportion of the burden of ensuring minimum levels of consumption required for daily and generational reproduction. Invisible work or work for the nonmarket economy, often the bastion of female workers, is likely to be subject to self-exploitation. Depending on the economic conditions of the household, access to means of production for domestic economies, and gender relations, household provision of goods and services may continue until the marginal product of labor equals zero. In the long run, it may also undermine the well-being of the female worker physically and psychologically (e.g., Floro 1995). This further perpetuates the vicious cycle of immiseration of the worker and the household.

To the extent that the Indian and South African states have been able to undertake welfare roles to provide “substitute wages” and subsidize consumption of essential goods, they have aided domestic economies in keeping immiseration at bay and reduced the burden of women responsible for reproduction of the household. However, the degree of intervention has been woefully insufficient in both economies. This further suggests the states’ inability to fundamentally transform the economy and create jobs, thus resorting in the last instance to social protection measures to counter contradictions inherent in capitalist growth.

5. Conclusion

In our comparison of South Africa and India, we are fully aware that the historical development of capitalism in either context is subject to different social, economic, and political trajectories. However, there appears to be some degree of convergence in the immiseration that working classes and working-class women face. This does not suggest that capitalism is all-encompassing, nor are we arguing for a deterministic understanding of capitalist growth. Instead, we contend that a comparison cautions and informs of the impacts of the “emergence and domination” of a specific form of capitalism that requires both differentiation and homogenization of the conditions of capitalist exploitation (Bernstein 2009).

Due to gaps and deficiencies in data pertaining to work involving women especially those working in nonmonetized and informal markets, it is difficult to fully assess the gendered impacts of liberalization (Ghosh 2009; Kannan and Raveendran 2012; Razavi 2009). Thus, productive as well as reproductive work is subject to underestimation. Nevertheless, the exercise of accounting for work and the conditions surrounding the availability of work are important because as Ghosh (2009: 166) noted, “[w]ork defines the condition of human existence in many ways.” The neoliberal milieu has subjected commodified work, that is, waged labor, to increasing levels of informalization and

precarity at the same time that capital has progressively become more formal and mobile (Bremar 2013). The divergent responses of female workers in South Africa and India underscore the different sociopolitical institutions and processes of neoliberalization that operate in different countries.

South African economic policies in the 1990s were crafted after the fall of the apartheid regime when negative sentiments against prevailing gender and racial inequities in society were quite high. This is reflected in the significant degree of support offered to prop up minimum level of household consumption as well as legislations promulgated to encourage women's participation in the labor market. However, policymakers' commitment to equity was insufficient to prevent the percolation of neoliberal ideas in economic policies. The result is a positive trend of women's participation in the labor market but insufficient job creation in the market. Policymakers in early 1990s in India were unencumbered with progressive ideas of equity like their South African counterparts. Hence, there has been systematic undermining of conditions conducive to decent work, both in terms of quantity and quality of employment. Combined with the dismal lack of sufficient social provisioning and state intervention, neoliberalization in India has resulted in an exacerbation of gender inequities manifested in the decline of women's participation in the labor force and an increase in domestic and allied work. Instead of benefiting from growth that results from capitalist accumulation, a significant proportion of women in both countries have been relegated to either the floating or stagnant forms of the relative surplus population and are still primarily responsible for social reproduction.

Lacking serious engagement with the economic growth path predicated on cheap and flexible labor, low labor force participation in the case of India and high unemployment in South Africa are written off as frictional unemployment (Di Paola and Pons-Vignon 2013), or a result of labor market rigidities (see Panagriya 2014), or resulting from an "income effect." Such analyses not only minimize (or ignore) effects of the neoliberal growth path on work conditions, and the quality and quantity of work, but also the ability of households to reproduce. However, merely increasing the number of available jobs does not solve the problems associated with the delinking of the "cycles of reproduction and capital accumulation" (Mingione 1985). Without addressing household reproduction, it is likely that we will continue to observe the contradiction of immiseration of the working classes at a time when some economic indicators signal economic prosperity. As Ghosh (2009: 167; emphasis in the original) argued, "concern has to be focused upon the *quality*, the *recognition* and the *remuneration* of women's work. . . , as well as the *conditions* facilitating it, such as alternative arrangements for household work and child care." These are affected by the economy, the direct impact of which is felt through wages and employment creation, in addition to government interventions at various levels (Ghosh 2009) and gender arrangements within the household.

Authors' Note

The authors assume responsibility for all remaining errors.

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