Eroding citizenship: gender and labour in contemporary India
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Citation for published version (APA):

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Introduction

October 1994

Walking into Okhla Industrial Area we suddenly came across a large group of young girls and boys sitting in front of the Calcom Electronics factory gate, shouting slogans. Sushma, the leader, explained to us that they were protesting against the management. Their jobs as operators had suddenly been downgraded from semi-skilled and skilled categories to the unskilled category and wages had been cut below the stipulated minimum wage. From October 1994 to December 1995 these young workers who had formed a union, pursued their struggle, starting with a 'dharna' (sit-in) outside the factory gate, moving on to the Labour Commissioner's office, going on a hunger strike in front of the Chief Minister's office, and finally attending endless sessions in the labour court.

November 1994

Women and men workers sit patiently in front of the Weston Electronics factory gate on a wooden platform covered with a canvas. It is 450 days today since the factory shut its gates to more than 200 workers. Every other day Ratni Devi, Gayatri, Sandhya have come and sat on the platform, while the court case continues month after month. They worked for over 20 years in Weston and the hurt and shock at being locked out so suddenly is still visible on their faces and heard in their voices. Management offered 'golden handshakes' and 76 workers have already taken 'hisab' (final settlement). The rest are determined to stay and fight the case and be reinstated as workers. 'We want our jobs back, not money'.

January 1995

Jayshree Dey has piles and piles of files and papers in the corner of her front room. She is fighting 47 legal cases, representing workers from Ahuja Radios. She became a union leader when management refused to upgrade her scale after she had trained to become a junior engineer. Suspended for the last two years, she spends every day trudging through different courtrooms and the Labour Commissioner's office. 'I know I will not get my job back but I cannot give up; all the workers — especially the men — trust me and I have to win their cases.'
February 1995

We meet Bina by chance at the BMS union office as we wait for the General Secretary. She is young, very attractive and has worked for eight years in a small-scale electronics factory, Avanti. A few months earlier the owner had set-up a new company called Accuracy in the same building and asked all the workers in Avanti to resign, with the promise that he would reemploy them in the new company. Bina tells us this is a common practice among small factory owners who have used up the concessions provided for five years. They simply shut down the old unit and reopen with a new name. Most of the Avanti workers agreed and quite a few were reemployed in Accuracy. Bina has refused to resign, suspecting that the employer would try to get rid of her since she has not been very 'cooperative'. She has come on her own to meet the union officer, and is confident and aware of her rights. Married with two children, she is the main earner since her husband only gets intermittent casual jobs in the export garment industry. She is determined to fight alone: 'For eight years I have borne injustice, not anymore'.

March 1995

Sunita is tense and distracted when we go to interview her in the sprawling slum behind the All India Medical Institute. She has just heard that her husband, a smack addict whom she had left, was planning to come and kidnap her son. As we sit, Jaswanti, the union leader from her factory, walks in saying she has heard about the problem and has come to help. A fascinating discussion begins on strategies to handle the husband with Jaswanti giving examples from her own experience of fighting for a divorce. 'Just ask him for maintenance and he will immediately give you a divorce as well as custody of the child. You know that these men have never been able to support themselves, let alone us and the children.'

These vignettes of the world of women workers in the electronics industry in Delhi present a picture which simultaneously reflects both their vulnerability and expressions of individual and social agency within constraining structures. This study offers a look into the work and lives of working women in the 1990s, a period when India was undergoing major transformation with the liberalisation of the economy. A phase of industrial restructuring initiated in the eighties led to structural changes in the electronics industry, which were intensified by the New Economic Policy initiated in 1991. These changes are transforming the lives of women workers in fundamental ways.

The objective of the study is to bring women workers' experiences and voices into the ongoing debates on the effects of economic/industrial restructuring. Economic restructuring throughout the world has led to increasing vulnerability and insecurity for workers, with women constituting a large
proportion of extremely vulnerable workers. Industrial restructuring towards flexible production systems has led to the informalisation of work while structural adjustment programs have led to the withdrawal of the state from social provisioning. This has resulted in increasing poverty and insecurity.

In the context of crumbling social protection systems and increasing job insecurity, the key issue today is the undermining and ensuing fragility of the conditions that ensure the reproduction of labour power. Economic restructuring compounds this process as subsidies are withdrawn from the food, health and education sectors, putting further stress on the conditions for social reproduction. The increasing financial instability inherent in the world economy, the convergence of short-term structural adjustment programs with long-term macro-economic policies, along with new forms of economic governance, are locking governments into a neo-liberal disciplinary framework of accumulation with little room for manoeuvre (Young, 2003; Singh and Zammit, 2000; Gill, 1999). The ‘crisis of reproduction’ highlighted in the DAWN analysis of the nineteen eighties debt crisis has now expanded to include populations of the North and the South (Bakker and Gill, 2003; Sen and Grown, 1989).

**Objective of the Study**

In India, as in most developing countries, the near absence of citizenship-based entitlements to social protection has meant an extreme dependence on selling one’s labour power as the only means for survival and security. Three basic principles of entitlement: need (relief, public assistance), employment (earnings related social insurance) and citizenship (membership of society) have been deployed by welfare states to provide security (Fraser, 1996:50). The dominant mode has been entitlement based on employment reinforcing ‘industrial citizenship’. The basis of entitlements takes a specific form in India. The Indian Constitution professes a commitment to a welfare state, and there are constitutional provisions to meet the obligations to provide for the right to work and education, as well as support for old age, sickness, disability and social assistance for disadvantaged groups. Apart from limited preventive measures, overall there has been a focus on ‘promotive’ forms of social security through anti-poverty and targeted development schemes, employment guarantee programs and food security through a public distribution system rather than strengthening protective measures. (Harriss-White and Subramanian, 1999; Ahmad et. al., 1999; Drezé and Sen, 1999) These limited measures have been patchily implemented, and employment in the organised sector remains the main basis for entitlements (Gore, Figueiredo and Rodgers, 1997; Appasamy et al., 1996). It is estimated that in the early 1990s only 10 per cent of workers (out of a labour force of 375 million) were covered by social security schemes in the organised sector (Harriss-White and Gooptu, 2000; Ginneken, 1998). The Second National Commission on Labour notes that only about 7 to 8 percent of the workforce in the organised sector is protected (GOI, 2003:26). Women
constitute a mere 15.42 per cent of total employees in the organised sector with the bulk of women’s employment (94 percent) concentrated in the unorganised sector (Srivastava, 1999:182). Changes in the conditions for these employment-based entitlements, even if they are restricted to a small section of workers, have immediate consequences for the survival of workers, households and communities. These consequences occur on a gendered terrain with vulnerability and insecurity leading to gender-differentiated effects at the workplace and within the household.

Using data from a micro-level investigation of women workers in the electronics industry in Delhi, this study analyses the continuities and changes in the relationship between state intervention, economic/industrial restructuring, and women’s employment and vulnerability in India during the decade of the 1990s. The ‘locales’ are the workplace and the household. These are the sites where the construction, production, confrontation and conflicting interpretations of gendered identities occur and labour processes alter in the context of restructuring. In this study, I highlight the gendered nature of both labour regimes and domestic regimes, and also the linkages between households, labour markets, factories and the state, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between gender and economic/industrial restructuring. I examine how women workers experience and deal with gendered structures of control in different labour regimes and domestic regimes, and the changes resulting from industrial/economic restructuring. I demonstrate that vulnerability and insecurity take different forms, depending on the place women occupy in the employment structure and the assets they can access, at work and within the household.

My interaction with these women workers highlights the need for a ‘bridging link’ in contemporary discussions on gender and economic restructuring. Even as changing state and managerial practices unleash an almost irreversible process undermining the stability of the conditions that can ensure the reproduction of labour and life, workers in the electronics industry in Delhi have organised in different ways to confront these changes. Resistance, struggle and organisation to get employment-based legal entitlements have been continuing features in the electronics industry from the time of the Weston workers and Jayshree Dey, who represent an older unionised workforce forged in the 1980s, to the newly recruited Calcom girls mentioned above.

Contrary to the image of a submissive and docile workforce whose youth and innocence – the basis of their recruitment – imply easy manipulation and control at the workplace and within the family, these women workers are engaged in struggles about their work, wages and service conditions and in their personal lives. These assertions of ‘citizenship in practice’ highlight the significance of agency and public action in ensuring legal entitlements as well as a consciousness of rights among workers in the electronics industry. The gendered structures of labour regimes and domestic regimes are not static, and the structures can be both constraining and enabling since they are always
mediated by human agency (Giddens, 1986). I illustrate how different processes of the informalisation of the labour market and concomitant increasing vulnerability of households are undermining the enabling conditions on the basis of which women workers were able to assert their rights in the workplace/factory and within the household.

I examine how a pre-existing industrial structure within the electronics industry and changing state practices ‘inter-connect with local institutions and groups of social actors (firms/factories/labour markets/households/workers) to mediate the patterns of articulation with the global economy’ (Feldman, 1992a). Taking a ‘view from below’, I highlight the intervening factors and institutions in the articulation between the micro and the macro, make connections between the global and the local, between structures and human agency, between the past and the present, and between economic and social policy. The study necessarily traverses disciplinary boundaries. Economics, political science, anthropology, and sociology are informed by an interdisciplinary perspective from women/gender and development studies. Consequently, the study is situated at the intersection of several strands of literature. These concern: (1) patterns of industrialisation and women’s incorporation into the labour force; (2) the effects of structural adjustment on households and responses to this; (3) social development focusing on social insecurity, poverty, social exclusion and vulnerability; and (4) social policy debates on the shifting basis of entitlements, capabilities and citizenship.

Globalisation/Economic restructuring/Industrial restructuring

In contemporary discussion, the terms economic restructuring and industrial restructuring are often used synonymously, or are subsumed under globalisation as a generic label. Globalisation is itself a contested term with different meanings attributed to it in different social science disciplines. There is continuing controversy over the significance of globalisation – for instance, whether it is a recent or a longer-term historical process; the changing role of the nation-state and transnationality; and whether capitalism is still the dominant force in the global economy. Further debates continue regarding the relative weight of economic, cultural and political dimensions to characterise the contemporary period² (Lieten, 2003; Harvey, 1989, 1999; Hirst & Thompson, 1999; Jameson, 1998; Appadurai, 1996). Given that the focus of this study is the implications for women workers of changes in employment-based entitlements in an individual industry, as well as changes in state provisioning in the area of food security, health and education, I prefer to use the terms economic restructuring and industrial restructuring rather than globalisation. The term globalisation can obscure the specificity of a national context, variations and diversity in resource bases, prior historical conditions and the nature of integration into the global economy, all of which may shape the processes of restructuring (Bakker, 1994:1; Feldman, 1992a:6). The local is simultaneously
embedded as well as subject to change in interaction with the ‘global’, leading to processes of homogenisation as well as hybridisation (Munck, 2003). ‘Glocalisation’, a concept that aims to highlight the interaction between local and global factors, is too broad a term and in a way begs the question I investigate in this study.

Economic restructuring refers to three processes of change: long-term changes with shifts in the sectoral composition of output and employment, including changes in physical infrastructure and social indicators; medium-term changes in the role of the ‘state versus the market, controls versus prices, public sector versus private sector, and centralisation versus de-centralisation’ and short-term changes such as stabilisation and adjustment in response to external shocks or debt crises (Nayyar, 1995:19). The OECD offers an account which draws a distinction between two aspects of structural change: compositional structural change which is limited to individual industries, and institutional structural change which is concerned with wider markets. In the last two decades global restructuring has combined these different aspects at a macro level through state policies of demand side restrain and supply side flexibility propelled by structural adjustment programs (Standing, 2002b, 1999a and b; Bakker, 1994).

Within the scope of this study, I use economic restructuring to refer to the general process of liberalisation, and specifically to changes in relation to the social sector: food distribution, health and education. Industrial restructuring refers to changes in industrial policy and explicit/implicit changes in labour regulations, focusing on changes in the electronics industry. In India, processes of industrial restructuring were initiated in many industrial sectors during the 1980s, preceding the New Economic Policy announced in 1991. Recent changes should therefore not be attributed only to the package of economic reforms. Methodologically as well, a proper assessment of the effects of structural adjustment would require comparative data on situations ‘before and after’ or a ‘counterfactual’ comparative case to avoid problems of false causation (Elson, 1991a). The data used for this study was gathered from 1994 to 1996, with follow-up surveys made of some aspects of the study in 2000. It is therefore more appropriate to speak of the effects and changes for women workers in relation to the prior process of industrial restructuring that then continues through the period of economic restructuring.

Gender and economic restructuring

Isabella Bakker has noted the ‘conceptual silence’ that pervaded discussions on economic restructuring in the eighties (Bakker, 1994:1). In the last decade, however, numerous studies have highlighted the significance of gender and the role of women in bearing the brunt of, and cushioning the effects of, economic/industrial restructuring. Women workers have figured in these discussions in two ways. They have been directly affected in the shift towards flexible
production systems that create conditions for increased employment of women; and they have been indirectly affected through increasing poverty as household incomes decline. Poverty is thought to result in the ‘distress entry’ of women into waged work and the intensification of women’s reproductive labour as households try to survive with limited and diminishing resources. In the following section I review the main issues emerging from the literature on gender and economic restructuring and note the insights and gaps in these studies.

Gender and Industrial Restructuring: The View from the Workplace

Studies on women’s employment globally have put forward three main theses: marginalisation, incorporation and feminisation (Beneria, 2003; Pearson, 1998; Standing, 1989, 1999a). In particular the employment of women in the electronics industry, as also in the garment industry, has been associated in numerous studies with export-oriented manufacturing. In the 1980s, more than a decade of feminist scholarship on Third World female factory workers had led to the emergence of the ‘nimble fingered and docile’ woman worker as ‘the paradigmatic subject’, the stereotypical image that dominated the literature. This literature was framed within the broader debate on the ‘new international division of labour’. From the nineteen sixties on, it had been argued that capital was faced with a crisis of profitability and had to ‘automate, emigrate or evaporate’. The need to lower labour costs and the possibilities created by developments in new technology (in communication, transportation and the labour process) led to the internationalisation of Fordist production methods. In certain industries this took the form of relocation of labour-intensive assembly to countries of the South, while research and design remained in the North.

The emergence of the New International Division of Labour transformed the traditional international division of labour structured by colonialism, where advanced industrialised countries specialised in manufacturing and export, and developing countries produced and exported raw materials and primary products to the industrialised countries for processing (Frobel, Heinrichs & Kreye, 1980). The relocation of labour-intensive production processes and establishment of export-oriented manufacturing sectors in developing countries led to the demand for a specific labour force – female, single, and young, hired to do what was termed ‘unskilled’ manual work. These women workers were considered the ideal ‘flexible’ work force, with advantages of high labour turnover, docility, low wages and reduced social costs of reproduction. The focus on women’s employment and export-oriented industrialisation led to the view that ‘industrialisation in the post war period has been as much female-led as export-led’ (Joekes, 1987:81). This view reversed the prevailing consensus that industrialisation led to the marginalisation of women, held by

In the nineties, academics espoused another position on the relationship between industrialisation and women’s employment. In spite of disagreements about globalisation there is a general agreement that late twentieth century capitalism exhibits certain new features, particularly in terms of scale and speed. A key feature is flexibility, which ushers in new ‘regimes of flexible accumulation’ in production systems, financial and banking systems and marketing strategies (Harvey, 1989). It is argued that recent configurations of state/capital relations and the reorganised geography of global manufacturing have led to a trend towards a global feminisation of the labour force, linked to the need for flexibility facilitated by deregulation of the labour market (Standing 1989, 1999a).

Macro-level statistics show that since the 1980s, women’s labour force participation growth has been higher than labour force participation growth for men in every region of the world except Africa. Data from more than half the developing countries listed showed female labour force participation rates (LFPR) rising and male participation rates falling. In developed countries, the increase has been in women’s greater involvement in part-time work relative to men. In developing countries, the highest female labour force participation rates have been noted in those countries pursuing export-oriented industrialisation, a shift which has intensified with structural adjustment programs pushing for a transfer from non-tradables to tradables (ILO, 1998).

The Indian debate on flexibility/feminisation

Mirroring international debates, the discussion in India on recent trends in women’s employment has one position arguing convergence with global trends and another arguing Indian exceptionalism. Arguments about a general trend towards feminisation or de-feminisation have also been based on nation-wide (large-scale) survey data such as the Census and National Sample Survey (NSS). The convergence argument has been presented most clearly by labour economists such as Sudha and Lalit Deshpande (Deshpande and Deshpande, 1994; Deshpande, 1993; Deshpande and Deshpande, 1992). Drawing on Guy Standing’s projections of the link between globalisation, flexibility and feminisation, they see a similar process occurring in India. They anticipate an increase in the pace of ‘feminisation in the near future’, on the assumption that the processes of urbanisation would be accelerated by liberalisation of the economy (Deshpande & Deshpande, 1999:231). Other economists such as A. Kundu (1999) and J. Ghosh (1999) also interpreted national-level data published in the early nineties as indicating a process of feminisation, though they focus more on the broader process of casualisation.

The argument for Indian exceptionalism is made most forcefully by N. Banerjee in her article, ‘How real is the bogey of feminisation?’ (Banerjee,
According to her, the broader trends in women’s employment in India have not responded to global restructuring, and recent indicators also reveal that women’s industrial employment in India is a continuation of the long history of their *marginalisation* in the modern economy (Banerjee, 1999b). The convergence argument focuses primarily on the demand side: new industries being established as a result of liberalisation and an available pool of girls with secondary school education are seen as unproblematically providing a new (feminised) supply of labour.

The argument for Indian exceptionalism, on the other hand, finds structural barriers on the supply side, which prevent a move towards feminisation of the labour force in India. These barriers are located in the labour surplus structure of the economy as well as in the structure of the patriarchal household (Banerjee, 1999a and b). The argument is that a woman within the Indian household is treated ‘basically as a flexible family resource rather than a person with independent rights and priorities’ (Banerjee, 1999b:313). Furthermore, she argues that Indian women’s primary orientation is towards marriage rather than the labour market, and other cultural/ideological factors place a major constraint on their employment possibilities.

Data from the NSS 55th Round shows a decline in work participation rates for all four categories of workers. There is a sharp decline for all rural workers with a fall in self-employment and increase in casual labour for both categories. In the urban sector, a decline for urban women is noted from 15.2 per cent in 1987-88 to 13.9 per cent in 1999-2000. The NSS data also records a change in employment status distribution, with an increase in regular employment for urban women. The overall trend noted is towards casualisation, particularly in rural areas. (GOI, 2003:944)

Table 1.1  Employment in India, 1983-2000

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<tr>
<td>Rural males</td>
<td>54.7</td>
<td>53.9</td>
<td>55.3</td>
<td>53.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural females</td>
<td>34.0</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>29.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urban males</td>
<td>51.2</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>52.0</td>
<td>51.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urban females</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>13.9</td>
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Source: NSS Report No. 455, 'Employment and Unemployment in India' in GOI, 2003

These newly released macro statistics suggest that the ‘process of feminisation’ noted in the early 1990s had not been substantial enough to counteract the forces which have led to a decline in women’s work participation rates (Ghosh, 2000:4). A comparative study of labour force participation rates in South Asian countries observes that the international pattern of rising female
participation and falling male participation rates was seen only in Pakistan and Sri Lanka. (Unni, 2001:2364) Does this imply that in India, even after almost two decades of economic reforms, women continue to be marginalised, as they have throughout the process of industrialisation? The latest NSS data can be interpreted in different ways and there are clearly limits to analysis based on such a broad sweep of statistical data. Data collection methods continue to be gender-biased, ignoring large areas of the informal economy that predominate in the use of women’s labour. While such a level of analysis is useful to map broad trends in relation to the overall changes in employment, it is necessary to complement and supplement these observations with more fine-grained analysis through micro-level studies at industry, factory and household levels.

Evidence from other recent micro studies as well as my own is far more contradictory than presented in the two positions elaborated above. On the one hand, there is confirmation of the continued marginalisation of women and masculinisation of the labour force as firms restructure to meet the demands of competition unleashed by liberalisation. For example, the TNC-dominated pharmaceutical industry in Bombay was once an industry where women’s employment was expanding (Gothoskar, 1995, 1997a). However, in the 1990s many of these companies resorted to flexibility in the organisational structure of the firm, relocating and subcontracting to the hinterland, with the new units employing a predominantly male workforce. Newly-established export industries, even those typecast as ‘women’s industries’, do not necessarily employ women. Indeed, a recent study of jewellery production in the New Okhla Industrial Development Area (NOIDA) export processing zone documents a predominance of male migrant labour from Bengal employed in the factories rather than women (Soni-Sinha, 1998).

On the other hand, studies of women workers in different industries conducted during the nineteen eighties had pointed out that women workers in export industries such as garments, electronics and food processing were mainly young, unmarried and relatively better-educated than the profile of the average woman worker. A review by Nirmala Banerjee concluded that these new entrants into the labour market were reflective of newly emerging trends (Banerjee, 1991b and c). A recent study of a synthetic gem-cutting industry in rural Tamil Nadu shows how a traditional single-caste, semi-bonded labour force was replaced in the nineties by a young, unmarried female labour force from lower middle-class households in urban areas – an unusual case of urban to rural migration (Kapadia, 1999). Other studies, for instance, on the footwear industry, have documented a growth in home-based female employment as a result of shifts in export and domestic markets (Knorringer, 1999). In the fast growing information technology sector, home-based teleworkers, predominantly women are increasing in cities such as Mumbai (Mitter, 2000; Gothoskar, 2000).

In my case study of the electronics industry, which has employed women in significant numbers, both women and men workers recruited in the 1970s were losing their jobs at the same time as changes in technology and new labour
processes were creating a demand for new categories of younger women and men workers. While the overall tendency is towards *casualisation* rather than masculinisation or feminisation, there are also new job categories where employers invest in providing training, and those with higher qualifications and accredited skills receive better wages and benefits/incentives. Some women are entering these new jobs in the electronics industry. Simultaneously, the demand for ‘unskilled’ young women continues for low-waged assembly jobs.

How does one address simultaneously the processes that continue to marginalise women and the growing demand for women workers in certain industries? The ‘global feminisation’ thesis dominant in policy circles (for instance in the ILO in the 1990s) has itself also been challenged and qualified by other feminist economists. It has been pointed out that the process of feminisation is limited to certain export-oriented, labour-intensive sectors that employed a predominantly female labour force. In these cases there is no evidence of substitution of men by women (Elson, 1996; Joekes, 1995; Pearson, 1998; Razavi, 2000). Even in these sectors, the process of feminisation has not necessarily been sustainable in the long run or irreversible. The ILO report on global employment trends notes that the increase in unemployment globally (from 20 million in 2001 to 180 million in 2002) was most severe among women who were in sectors most vulnerable to economic shocks (ILO, 2003:13). The vagaries of global markets continue to affect the export sector – in Bangladesh around 1,200 garment factories shut down in 2001 and an estimated 350,000 workers lost their jobs. (ADB, 2002) The erosion in the gender wage gap, skill upgrading, technological change and product diversification have led to a decline in women’s employment and in some cases even a substitution by men (Razavi, 2000:11). As Pearson has pointed out, the answer to the question above requires abandoning the idea of a unilinear trend towards feminisation. Instead, one must analyse the ways in which all three tendencies: marginalisation, centrality and the recent thesis that industrialisation depends on the feminisation of work, can co-exist in different countries as well as within countries, varying according to sector or region (Pearson, 1998: 176).

The electronics industry in India is a particularly apt choice to investigate the issues outlined above since it typifies recent changes towards globalisation and liberalisation. This is due not only to the nature of the industry itself, which is at the heart of the developments in new technology, telecommunications and the transformation of socio-economic life itself, but also because India's experiment with liberalisation began with the electronics sector. Women have formed 30-40 per cent of additional manufacturing employment in the Indian electronics industry so far.

It is estimated that the electronics industry will continue to demand a women-specific workforce in future. As a ‘modern' industry, unlike the textile sector, this industry is projected to grow very fast in the next few years and therefore provides a good case for an assessment of new trends in relation to women's employment. The government has also accorded priority to
employment creation in this sector: It was estimated that the factory employment of women in the electronics industry would grow by 25 per cent in the near future\textsuperscript{10} (Sen & Gulati, 1987; Banerjee, 1995).

The fact that women have been employed in large numbers in the Indian electronics industry since the 1980s, and are now being employed in even larger numbers in the new factories set up by multinationals raises two key issues. First, however resilient Indian patriarchy may be, it has not blocked the entry of women into this sector of modern industry. Second, the employment of women/young girls by domestic capital in the electronics industry does not conform to the equating of multinational capital and the employment of young migrant girls – a connection that emerges from studies on both South East Asia and Latin America (Salinger, 2003; Tina, 1994; Wolf, 1992; Ong, 1987; Mather, 1985).

Rather than assuming a monolithic, unchanging traditional patriarchy which blocks women’s entry into the labour market, or an equally monolithic global capital which creates, through external intervention, a female proletariat, it is necessary to examine the dynamic relationship between global/local, economic/cultural, and demand/supply factors which influence women’s employment (Freeman, 2000:39-40). The large-scale employment of women in this industry cannot also be simply attributed to ‘distress entry’ as a result of economic restructuring. It is then a matter of investigating the conditions by which and under which these women join the expanding electronics industry and continue to be employed through time. My study includes co-existent factories producing the same electronic products, primarily televisions, but using different stages of technology. This makes it possible to explore connections between the sexual division of labour and the changing labour process. The inquiry includes older married women with long service records as well as new entrants with one to two years of service. Thus, I could investigate the continuities and changes in the composition of the workforce and concomitant managerial strategies which resort to ‘old’ and ‘new’ forms of gendered labour control.

Initially the focus of my research was an examination of the flexibility/feminisation thesis in the context of industrial/economic restructuring. However, after walking around the industrial areas meeting employers, workers, trade unionists and visiting the various electronic factories, which were highly differentiated and spanned the organised and the unorganised sectors, I modified the research focus. The issue of women’s employment and flexibility had to be cast in a much broader framework.

First, a historical and comparative perspective within the industry was required to highlight the differences and subsequent development of factories established in different periods as a result of changes in policy regimes in the electronics industry. It is in fact difficult to speak of ‘the electronics industry or the electronics worker in the industry’ given the wide range of size of enterprises and the different labour markets tapped. Industrial restructuring affected these different labour regimes in very diverse ways.
The electronics industry in Delhi is linked to global commodity chains through a variety of indirect and direct subcontracting relations and systems of governance. However, it is primarily oriented towards the local market. This industry therefore does not fit the simple dichotomy between export and local market orientation as significant in determining women’s employment. The aspects of state intervention, changing labour processes and structures of control in gendered labour regimes, plus nature of linkage with domestic or multinational capital, are more significant determinants. Case studies of the organisational structure, production processes and composition of the workforce in factories of different sizes, and subject to different degrees of legal regulation and state intervention, allow distinctions to be made between processes and strategies towards informalisation and flexibility – processes which have often been conflated in contemporary discussions.

Second, the issue of flexibility had to be seen as part of a much larger process of gendered labour control and the construction of a ‘flexible labour force’. Flexibility has always existed as one strategy within the industry and its intensification in the nineties has to be understood as a struggle between managerial needs for both stability and flexibility, together with the effect of worker’s responses. The Indian labour market has in general always been flexible in the sense that labour market regulations/protective legislation have rarely been extended to or implemented for the vast majority of workers. Estimates using the 1981 Census data suggested that employment security provisions did not cover more than 12 percent of ‘main workers’ (Mathur, 1992). The numbers covered in fact declined in the 1990s to 10 per cent as noted earlier.

The ratio between formal and informal sector workers has tended to remain the same through past decades, with almost ‘four fifths of all non-agrarian employment’ found working under informal labour conditions (Breman, 1996:7). The situation for women workers is much worse: only 4 per cent of women workers are in organised industry and services, while 96 per cent are in the unorganised sector, which has always been ‘flexible’ in this sense.

As Pollert points out, ‘flexibility as a concept has gained hegemony along with the contemporary preoccupation with the market’. The revival of the neoclassical paradigm and its concern with ‘rigidities’ has coloured the debate about contemporary restructuring with a singular focus on ‘flexibility’ tending to replace broader discussions (Pollert, 1991: xvii). Crucial areas related to the globalisation of productive and financial capital, and variations in managerial strategies for cost controls, work intensification, and job enlargement are conflated into a single overarching flexibility strategy. Flexibility means different things to the actors involved: workers see it as a device for increasing both managerial control and workers’ insecurity, while employers and policy makers see it as a way to increase productivity (Standing, Sender and Weeks, 1996:7; Standing, 1999b).
Introduction

The significance of labour control rather than 'flexibility' per se is now being recognised, with Standing himself arguing for a return to 'old ideas about control' and the identification of different modes of control and resistance (Standing, 2000b:3). This implies not only a return to the rich tradition of labour process theory but also the adoption of a normative perspective which underlies the International Labour Organisation's policy shift towards 'Decent Work' (Standing, 2000b, 2002b; ILO, 2001). In this study, I recast the discussion on 'flexibility' within the broader discussion on restructuring, gendered forms of labour control, and the entitlement to 'decent work'.

Third, labour markets, patriarchal household structures and gender ideologies are not homogenous, stagnant or inert. Assumptions about appropriate gender roles vary across class/caste/ethnic/religious axes. In fact, Indian feminists have put forward the notion of 'multiple and overlapping patriarchies' that are both legally as well as sociologically diverse, which undermine the assumption of a singular monolithic 'Indian patriarchy' (Sangari, 1995). There are significant differences between North Indian and South Indian kinship systems and a wide variety of legal systems – formal and customary – governing family relationships. The existence of a patriarchal household is not in itself a barrier to women's employment. A notable characteristic of the formation of a neophyte female labour force in contemporary industrialisation in other Asian countries has in fact been the conjunction of capitalism and patriarchy, often the active intervention of traditional patriarchies, sometimes even in direct collusion with religious leaders.

The complex interplay and coincidence of interests between global capital and traditional patriarchies, and the deployment of traditional as well as modern gender ideologies to enforce capitalist discipline have been well documented in a number of case studies (Ong, 1987; Wolf, 1992; Mather, 1985). These studies also depict women workers' modes of agency in the workplace and within the household as (being) forms of resistance to capitalist discipline and/or patriarchal control (Kabeer, 2000a; Freeman, 2000; Wolf, 1992). Wolf's study of Javanese daughters and Kabeer's study of women workers in the export garment industry in Bangladesh describes the numerous ways these women renegotiate (around) traditional gender roles by abandoning prescribed passive ways and chipping away at male authority within the household through overt and covert methods. As studies on the household in the context of economic restructuring show, there are significant variations in responses and changes in intra-household relations. One cannot assume the 'household' to have an immutable and monolithic influence in determining women's employment or even their position within the household.
Gender and Economic Restructuring: The View from the Household

The most significant contributions to contemporary discussions on economic restructuring have come from feminist analysis and empirical studies of the household in the context of economic reforms. In the mid-eighties, studies began to report on the adverse effects of structural adjustment and free-market policies on the poor, and specifically on women and children. In particular, the UNICEF report on Adjustment with a Human Face acted as a catalyst in shifting the focus to the social dimensions of adjustment (Cornia, Jolly and Stewart, 1987; Commonwealth Secretariat, 1989). Subsequent micro-level studies on household responses to the debt crisis and the effects of stabilisation and structural adjustment policies, informed by a feminist perspective, have highlighted both the similarities and the variations in the way women within households have experienced these changes. The picture that emerged from this literature was that, notwithstanding all the variations between countries, economies, and political systems, poor women were bearing the brunt of the ensuing hardships of adjustment (Afshar & Dennis, 1992; Sparr, 1994; Beneria & Feldman, 1992).

This body of literature challenged the methodology, the conceptual framework and the conclusions drawn from research based on large-scale data sets of national-level household surveys (Elson, 1991a:211). The claims to representativeness, and the statistical and comparative significance of large-scale data sets was queried, given gender bias in selection of key informants (only interviewing male household heads), lack of attention to gender disaggregated variables, and administration of formal questionnaires which do not capture the perceptions and processes of change. A conventional large-scale household survey remains a male-biased research tool (Elson, 1991a:212). Many of the early micro studies mentioned above also suffered from methodological limitations, particularly in disentangling the effects of adjustment from other factors and the lack of a systematic longitudinal perspective with gender-disaggregated data. However, the use of small samples and diverse data-gathering techniques provided in-depth information, particularly on intra-household interactions (Elson, 1991a).

Comparative research produced in the nineties with a more rigorous methodology has confirmed many of the earlier observations of a convergence in the ways poor women were experiencing and responding to economic crises and restructuring. The evidence from these studies clearly illustrates that economic restructuring has direct implications on the distribution and intensity of women's work. It leads to changes in the allocation of labour time between market and non-market activities, and intensifies aspects of unpaid reproductive work (i.e. non-marketed goods and services provided within the household or by the community). This work, which falls disproportionately on women, is vital for social reproduction and human development (Floro, 1995). The lengthening and intensification of women's unpaid labour time, i.e. the increase in the
reproductive tax' paid by women, directly affects their well-being and the development of the next generation (Palmer, 1991).

The gender bias of macro-economic models is evident in the disregard of three crucial areas: the implications of the gender division of labour; unpaid reproductive work; and intra-household relations based on the assumption of the household as a unity and a site of common interests. The conceptual silence on the contribution made by the care economy (for example, cooking, cleaning, child care, looking after the elderly and other family members), is also a strategic silence. Acknowledgement would imply recognition that economic restructuring has hidden costs and usually implies the transfer of costs to the unpaid care economy based on the implicit assumption of the 'infinite elasticity of women's labour time' (Elson, 2002b, 2000, 1998; Bakker, 1994). Irene Stavereen has also argued that the financial risk-taking characteristic of contemporary restructuring is premised on women absorbing the costs. This 'buffer function of the care economy shouldered largely by women, has a perverse effect on financial risk taking and hence, future financial crises' (Staveren, 2002:29). Feminist research has highlighted the significance of another area of invisible work — paid care work, i.e. work in the sex sector, prostitution, entertainment and domestic work which has made large contributions to the GDP of some South East Asian economies in particular (Young, 2002; Truong, 1998). Re-visioning the economy to include the unpaid care sector and the paid reproductive sector would imply a radical reformulation of macro-economic models and the necessary integration of economic and social policy.16

Studies on economic restructuring and the household provide a major shift in the way both poverty and the household are conceptualised. Moving away from conventional poverty assessments based on income/consumption, the new approach to poverty is multidimensional, and broader notions of vulnerability and well-being are addressed. This multidimensional approach draws on the capability approach of Amartya Sen (1981, 1983, 1984); the rural livelihoods systems approach and research on food security, particularly the work of Robert Chambers (1983, 1989, 1988); and the social exclusion approach (Rodgers, Gore and Figueiredo, 1995). The focus is on assets and entitlements, and the processes and changes as 'people move in and out of poverty' (Lipton & Maxwell, 1992:10). The other end of the vulnerability scale therefore is not increased income but security, which is also multidimensional.17

The new approach to poverty (implying conceptual and methodological shifts) has the potential to address gender relations.18 The 'asset vulnerability framework' fashioned by Caroline Moser has a place for both tangible and intangible resources within the household — labour, productive assets (housing), human capital (education, skills), household relations and social capital (social networks). These assets are crucial in mediating vulnerability. Integral to this framework is the assumption that the poor are not just 'victims' but are 'managers of complex asset portfolios' (Moser, 1998:1). As Chant points out,
the focus on the command and control over assets links with Sen’s concept of the household as a site of ‘cooperative conflict’ and feminist theorisation of the household as a site for competing claims, rights, power, interests and distribution of resources between household members (Chant, 1999; Sen, 1990b; Moore, 1994).

The asset vulnerability framework is particularly useful for this study. It synthesises and adapts the general poverty/food security discussion to an urban context, allows for the linkage between labour market insecurity/security and household vulnerability, and addresses intra-household relations which have a bearing on the gendered dimensions of responses to economic restructuring. However, there are some aspects of this framework which can be problematic. The way in which certain questions are posed and the ambiguities in certain concepts and conclusions drawn, point to the need for cautious use of such a framework.

First, the notion of ‘household strategy’, which continues to be used in most studies on economic restructuring and the household, as well as in studies on food security, is problematic. The following quotation, drawn from the food security literature that distinguishes between different kinds of strategies and highlights the importance of ‘strategy sequencing’, endorses a view that ‘the household’ makes decisions, and does so through a process of strategic rationality.

This shows that households select from a range of nutritional, economic and social responses available to them (Corbett, 1988) with sequencing the product of a number of complex (though largely intuitive) calculations concerning the feasibility, relative costs and expected return of each option, both immediately and for the future. (Moser, 1998:5)

Wolf has presented a trenchant critique of such a notion of ‘household strategies’, pointing to the faulty assumptions and methodological problems that arise with the use of this concept. Similar to the assumption of the neo-classical model of the household, this notion assumes that the household has one overarching collective goal reflecting common interests (the single utility function); the individual and the household are merged (the ‘I am Thou’ syndrome); the power relations which determine who makes decisions are obscured; conflict, dissent and coercion within the household are ignored; and relations within the household are seen as ruled by ‘pure altruism’.

There are many methodological problems with the concept which is both tautological and teleological. The problems are: household strategies are often read retrospectively from completed actions so only those strategies which have been successful are given mention; inaction and intangible behaviour which cannot be measured but may be significant are ignored; and strategies are usually imputed on the basis of behaviour and outcomes, rather than through a discussion and exploration of the process of decision-making among the actors involved. The terminology itself evokes an image of calculation, of a long-term
plan and of choices; the latter are likely to be limited, severely so for the poor (Wolf, 1992:15-19).

In this study I will use the term ‘household responses’, rather than household strategies, to convey an absence of imputation or presupposition of a strategic rationality. Household responses refer to actions and effects in relation to different members of the household, thus enabling the processes of decision-making to be explored.

A second area that needs clarification is the use of the concept of social capital. The concept is a ‘fuzzy’ one that can be used for different and opposed agendas. Molyneux has highlighted a number of problems with its application in the policy field. She argues that the recent focus on social capital is part of a new development agenda on decentralisation; a shift to civil society institutions as more efficient than the state; and emphasis on self-help and voluntary work deployed for the ‘collective good’. Gender appears in the discourse on social capital mainly in the form of ‘naturalising’ women’s key role in social networks as women’s work. Social capital is recommended as a panacea for poverty and the concept idealises the ‘community’, ignoring power dynamics within communities and households (Molyneux, 2002). Thus an unspecified notion of social capital can end up as part of World Bank policy to shift costs of provisioning onto households and communities since the poor manage to handle their asset portfolios so well!

A more explicit feminist conceptualisation of intra-household relations and a less romanticised notion of social capital and community needs to be incorporated into this framework, for example by interweaving the questions posed by Caroline Moser with the questions posed by Diane Elson.

What risks do poor households take in order to withstand long term economic crises, without irreversible damage to their net asset position? Under conditions of prolonged uncertainty, how do households diversify their assets, minimise vulnerability and prevent asset erosion? Finally, are some assets more finite than others? At what stage are assets so depleted that even an upturn in the economy cannot reverse the damage – in other words, what are the implications for households when all ‘capital is cashed in?’ (Moser, 1998:5)

Who absorbs the stress, and copes, when the economic environment deteriorates? Who disintegrates, or resorts to violence, or walks away? Who is able to quickly take up new opportunities to earn higher incomes when the environment improves? Who shares the fruits of such opportunities most widely with other family and community members? In the pressures, positive as well as negative, of structural adjustment, do gender relations stay the same or change? (Elson, 1991a:214)

A blending of these questions opens up ‘the black box’ of the neo-classical model of the household (Folbre, 1986, 1987; Agarwal, 1997), which has been subjected to a substantial theoretical and empirical critique. Starting with a deconstruction of Becker’s New Household Economics – with its assumption of
a joint utility function, income pooling, resource allocations by an ‘altruistic benevolent dictator’ who represents the household’s tastes and preferences and seeks to maximise household welfare – discussions have now moved on to alternatives to this unitary model in economics (Sen, 1990b; Folbre, 1994; Kabeer, 1994; Agarwal, 1997). The conflation of units of residence, reproduction and production has been challenged in anthropological analysis, as has the generic use and assumptions regarding the meaning and composition of the household (Pittin, 2002). The notion of altruism has been countered by pointing to the contractual nature of many household relations.\(^{22}\) Whitehead’s research concentrated on the way in which familial ideologies embedded in implicit ‘conjugal contracts’ affected the translation of wages into actual control over income (Whitehead, 1981).

Preceding contemporary discussions of intra-household bargaining, Kandiyoti had applied the notion of ‘bargaining with patriarchy’, arriving at two ideal type models of kinship with different conjugal contracts, residence and inheritance rules. The differences in women’s access to resources and in the residential and customary norms and rules between Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia implied different conditions for ‘bargaining’ and affected their strategies of collusion or resistance (Kandiyoti, 1988). As a corrective to the focus on the ‘economic’ aspect of bargaining models, feminist analyses from a sociological and anthropological perspective have stressed the normative aspects of gender relations as being significant determinants of intra-household power relations.

In this study, I use the concept of ‘domestic regimes’, which draws on feminist analysis of the household and Sen’s model of cooperative conflict. Incorporating the insights of recent scholarship on the household, particularly on issues of power and ideologies, the concept of ‘domestic regimes’ brings into focus variations in the internal structure of households, different access to assets, and different degrees of vulnerability. The concept of domestic regimes incorporates the significance of gendered norms, power dynamics and differing notions of entitlements that affect female agency and the practice of citizenship within the household and the workplace.

**The Bridging Link: Agency/Citizenship in Practice**

There has been a resurgence of interest in the concept of citizenship as the dismantling of the welfare state undermines entitlements.\(^{23}\) Even in situations as in India, where a welfare state remained an ideal rather than a reality, the issue of citizenship is key to contemporary processes of restructuring. Citizenship entitlements are pivotal for understanding both the processes and the consequences of contemporary trends of global restructuring and flexible employment.\(^{24}\) The approach adopted in this study addresses processes of social exclusion/inclusion, the self-organization of people and the struggle for
entitlements expressed in the concept of ‘citizenship in practice’ in the context of economic restructuring.

T.H. Marshall, the most influential theorist on citizenship, distinguished between three components: civil, political and social rights, which had evolved from the eighteenth century onwards, expanding the circle of those who received these rights (Yuval-Davis, 1997:69). The Marshallian paradigm has been criticised for: projecting a universal evolutionary schema which did not account for variations and different historical trajectories by which these rights evolved in various countries; a silence on the exclusion of groups based on gender, race and the colonised; failing to provide an analysis of causal mechanisms which led to an expansion of citizenship; and not distinguishing between passive and active citizenship (Kabeer, 2002; Turner, 2001; Yuval-Davis, 1997). In post-colonial contexts in particular, the evolution of citizenship has taken a different form with pre-existing hierarchies of class, religious community, caste and gender being reconstructed, maintained and strengthened through state sanction.

Ruth Lister has noted that inclusion and exclusion are opposite sides of the citizenship coin. Women, as well as other ethnic, racial and caste groups, have been historically excluded from citizenship. It has been argued that in fact the exclusion of women has been constitutive of modern citizenship. When women did enter into the ranks of citizenship, it was on different terms than men. The critical assessment of citizenship from a feminist perspective has extended to claims for inclusion and for recognition of ‘caring work’ at an ethical level as well as in relation to social policies of the welfare state. Two models of inclusion have emerged - the Universal Breadwinner model characteristic of the US and UK and the Caregiver Parity model implicit in Western Europe and social democracies (Fraser, 1996:51-59; Knijn and Kremer, 1997; Sevenhuijzen 1998; Daly, 2001; Lister 2002). Assessments of these models and their limitations have addressed both normative/legal principles and social impediments from a gender equity perspective.

Recent feminist theorisation on citizenship has gone further than the distinction between formal and substantive citizenship, and has introduced the notion of ‘citizenship in practice’, which shifts the emphasis from citizenship as status to citizenship as process (Lister, 2000; Molyneux, 2000). It explores ‘how citizenship is lived in practice – in the courts, in the polity, in the household, as well as in the understandings different sectors of the population have of their rights and of the terms of their social participation or exclusion’ (Molyneux, 2000: 122).

Conceptualising citizenship as a process intersects with a concern with individual and collective agency. Citizenship rights are seen as developing ‘through a process of struggle through the exercise of social agency’ (Cook, 2000). Seen from this angle, the issue of citizenship has been present (often implicitly) in many studies which have incorporated recognition of agency at an individual and collective level in the workplace and the household. While some have focused on social agency at the workplace (Ong, 1991), others have seen
individual assertions of independence within the household as significant (Davin, 2000; Kabeer, 2000a; Eypehin and Erendil, 1999; Wolf, 1992). Lee's study on women workers in Hong Kong and South China documents numerous instances of individual agency (Lee, 1998). But in none of these studies is the challenge to family-based authority systems carried over to challenging managerial control at the workplace. However, other accounts of women workers produced in the eighties document numerous instances of struggle and collective action.

In South Korea, in spite of repressive controls, single women workers became militant labour activists establishing support structures for day-care, laundry, etc. as well as building links between women wage workers and housewives through the Korean Women Workers Association. They asserted the right to, and support for, care work, and the right to decent work. Even within Free Trade Zones – in Sri Lanka, Philippines, the Caribbean, Mexico – with restrictions on unionisation, women managed to establish alternative organisations for voice representation: labour centres, centres for working women, hidden trade unions and autonomous women workers' organisations (Cheng-Kooi, 1996; Dunn, 1996; Rosa, 1994; Tirado, 1994; CAW 1995).

In spite of extremely harsh working conditions and disciplinary measures within the factory, women workers have organised and continue to do so. The first thing I saw when I began field research was the strike by the Calcom women workers. A month later I stumbled upon the Weston workers on dharna outside their locked factory. These women were by no means completely intimidated by factory disciplinary measures, nor were they completely subservient to patriarchal authority within their households.

The incorporation of women workers' own perceptions and voices in discussion of the three tendencies in the relationship between factory work and women's subordination, identified by Elson and Pearson in their seminal article, shifts the discussion beyond the simplistic dichotomy of the eighties debate on empowerment versus exploitation (Elson & Pearson 1981b). They pointed out the complexity and contradictory effects of waged work, which could either intensify existing forms of subordination, decompose them or recompose into new forms of subordination. However, these processes must be documented over time. Lim (1990) has noted that a stereotypical image of women workers emerged from studies done in the 1970s which drew on data from the first phase of export manufacturing. This image, which tended to portray factory work as negative for women, was then generalised across space and time. Reflecting on earlier work, Pearson acknowledges that an undifferentiated and uncontested notion of traditional gender identities and controls influenced analysis of women workers and the implications of factory work. She stresses the importance of the experience of involvement in wage labour, which shaped their consciousness and active agency.
Introduction

While we acknowledged early on that gender relations were socially constructed and fluid we gave less attention to the potentially liberating implications of collective action in the public sphere, even though many of the more radical development approaches to women’s emancipation stress collective action as a key element in ‘empowering women’. (R. Pearson, 1998:184)

My study offers a view that examines both industrial militancy and assertions of domestic autonomy, and explores the connection between the two. I approach these issues from the perspective of ‘social citizenship’. Although women workers in India are theoretically covered by legislation which addresses their needs as women and as workers, these laws remain formal rights and are rarely implemented. In fact women’s ability to act as citizens, to assert their rights, is constrained by legal and structural forces both in the private and public spheres.

With regard to entitlements based on labour regulations, the individual citizen is (formally) the bearer of rights, but these entitlements are not available to all employees: a complicated series of legal inclusions and exclusions govern access to and coverage by these laws.

Entitlements in the domestic realm are even more complicated in the Indian context, since these are mediated through membership of a religious community. The Indian Constitution maintains an uneasy tension between two notions of rights. Articles 14 to 24 denote the bearer of rights as the individual citizen, and Articles 25-30 denote the community as the repository of rights (Menon, 1998: 243). The latter, which grant religious freedom and the educational and cultural rights of minorities, allow religious communities to be governed by their own religious laws. These religious laws (called personal laws in India) deal with matters relating to the domestic realm: marriage, divorce, maintenance, inheritance, adoption and guardianship, which impinge directly on women’s rights.

An Indian is born into both a state and a community and therefore derives individual rights in relation to the state and also rights defined by membership in a religious community. The codification of these personal laws was a historical process that incorporated elite interpretations, and selectively homogenised a diversity of customs and practices to define the core principles of each law, thereby marking the boundaries of the ‘community’ by constructing a personal realm which constituted its ‘authentic’ identity (Chhachhi, 1991a, 1994; Prashar, 1992; Menon, 1998). This personal realm, the marking of difference and sense of selfhood was essentially male, based upon the discrimination, control and subordinate status of women in these communities (Menon, 1998:249).

All personal laws – Hindu, Muslim and Christian – deny equality to women, though there are variations in the degree of inequality as some laws have been reformed and others are under pressure to be changed. Thus women and men have different civil rights. More important, the sanction given to religion as a regulator of gender relations implies that the identities and affiliations seen as prevalent in the private sphere enter into the public sphere. This also affects the provisions in civil laws such as the Special Marriage Act (1956), which allows
the possibility for individuals to marry without recourse to personal laws (see Chhachhi, 1994, for details).

A demand for a Uniform Civil Code which would incorporate equal rights for women in the domestic realm, first articulated in 1937, has remained contentious and re-emerged as a key issue in 2003. Personal laws have become the battleground for the defence of ‘authentic’ community identity, polarising communities as well as the women’s movement. The debate on citizenship in relation to personal laws has hinged around the ‘universalism’ versus ‘particularism’ debate dealing with minority rights, multiculturalism and women’s rights in the context of the rise and growth of Hindu fundamentalism (Roy, 2001; Menon, 1998; Hasan, 1994).

I approach the issue of citizenship in the domestic realm from a different angle. The study does not address the broader debate on personal laws, or the content and implementation of these laws. Instead I approach the issue from ‘below’. I look at existing rights as they are articulated, negotiated, granted or denied within domestic regimes. Citizenship in the domestic realm implies **negotiations over the democratisation of gender relations**. Hence I focus on certain crucial aspects of this process: ownership and control over assets (particularly income), choice to work, ability to choose a marriage partner, freedom of mobility, recognition of care work, and equality in the domestic division of labour.25

The legal construction of entitlements in relation to the workplace and the domestic realm can result in **dual exclusion** – on the one hand within the household, which affects entry into the labour market; on the other hand also within the labour market, for instance through the absence, restricted coverage and non-implementation of labour regulations and the implicit gendered assumptions in these laws. Despite this, the entry of women into the public sphere through wage employment had provided enabling conditions for the awareness and exercise of citizenship rights. The women workers I met in the electronics industry were engaged in individual and collective struggles for substantive rights. Through formal and informal organising within the workplace, and negotiations for autonomy within the household, these women had acquired an awareness of their identities as workers/woman workers, developed self-confidence and had moved into action as political beings.

Employment-based entitlements, as well as entitlements in the domestic realm, have been and continue to be achieved through struggle: they are not handed over freely by the state. Labour market deregulation implies the withdrawal of hard won legal protections for workers. This undermines the enabling conditions for the assertion of rights in the workplace and in the domestic sphere. In a legal as well as a socio-political sense, current pressures of industrial restructuring are leading to a disenfranchisement of workers in general. For a section of women workers in the organised sector this implies a reversal of a process whereby they had entered socially and politically into the ranks of citizenship. For those in the unorganised sector, it wipes out even the
possibility to assert citizenship rights. In this study I demonstrate that contemporary processes of economic/industrial restructuring are in fact determined by, as well as have consequences for, these instances of 'citizenship in practice'.

Organisation of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 presents the analytical framework used in the study. Chapter 2 discusses two specific forms of state intervention in India: industrial policy and labour laws. It delineates changes in these as India moved from a state protectionist regime to taking up economic reforms in 1991 that opened the economy to foreign investment, global competition and World Bank directives on deregulation. An overview of the political economy of industrialisation up to the period of liberalisation is provided. Labour regulations are discussed, highlighting the inclusion/exclusion of different categories of workers. An analysis of the Maternity Benefit Bill and the minimum wage discussion reveal the embedded gender contract in labour regulations. This is followed by an assessment of recent debates on labour market rigidity. The chapter concludes with an overview of industrial restructuring in the electronics industry in response to changing policy regimes. It locates the enterprises and women workers in this study in relation to the structure of the industry.

Chapter 3 introduces the women workers: their social backgrounds, the regions and households they come from and the different trajectories by which they entered the electronics factories in Delhi. The distress entry and household strategy theses are critically assessed. Chapters 4 and 5 enter into the ‘hidden abode of production’ in four co-existing gendered labour regimes: two were established in the pre-liberalisation era, and two in the post liberalisation period. Managerial practices of labour control, workers’ responses, the construction of gendered work identities, and the interplay between factors of structure and agency are described. Chapter 6 considers the emergence of citizenship in practice: collective action at the workplace and negotiating autonomy within the household. The enabling conditions as well as the structures of constraint in the assertion of citizenship by women workers in both arenas are highlighted.

Chapter 7 looks at the linkage between two contemporary processes: informalisation of the labour market and increasing vulnerability of the household in the era of liberalisation. The first section identifies managerial strategies of restructuring in the four gendered labour regimes. The second section documents household responses to the broader process of economic restructuring, and the gender differentiated effect of adjustments to price rise and changes in access to subsidised food, education and health services. The chapter analyses household assets in mediating vulnerability, and shows that labour is the main asset of women worker households in the study. The final section describes the experience of workers who have lost their jobs, and illustrates how informalisation in the labour market and increasing vulnerability
of the household are undermining and eroding the conditions enabling the practice of citizenship. The Conclusion summarises the main empirical findings and their theoretical implications. The study ends with a discussion on recent state responses and possible directions for policies to ensure decent work and security for women workers.

Notes

1 The precise mix varies in different countries however as Bakker (1994:6) points out even in developed countries, entitlements are often based around a ‘definition of citizenship that rests on employment or a continuous stream of income above the poverty level. Even in China entitlements are based on other criteria such as urban residence (Davin, 2000).

2 Hirst and Thompson (1999) argue that globalisation is not a new phenomenon, while Harvey (1989, 1999) posits a radical break from earlier forms of capitalism.

3 The thesis of the new international division of labour had been questioned by pointing to the limited increase in and regional concentration of industrial manufacturing in developing countries. Direct foreign investment continues to be concentrated in developed countries, and de-industrialisation was not a direct result of competition from exports (Jenkins, 1992).

4 ‘Internationally female participation rates have risen and male participation rates fallen in the 1980s. Employers round the world use more female labour absolutely and relatively’ (Standing, 1989). ‘Trends in female employment in India parallel those observed internationally’ (Deshpande & Deshpande, 1999:226).

5 A. Kundu notes that there is a process of feminisation of the workforce and argues that the increase in women’s employment is due to subcontracting, reflecting a process of ‘organised informalisation’ (Kundu, 1999:65).

6 Banerjee states clearly that, ‘For flexibility and cheap labour contracts in India, women are by no means the only candidates’ (Banerjee, 1999b:311).

7 The National Sample Survey continues to be restrictive in its definition of economic activity although it does take into account some household enterprises, artisan production and transacted service provisions. It does not include the complete list of economic activities defined in the UN System of National Accounts. This implies an underestimation of economic activity and work participation rates of women (Ghosh, 2000:4). Given this, it becomes difficult to accept ‘any generalisations regarding women’s ‘declining participation’ as a result of overall economic trends’ (Omvedt, 1990, cited in Breman, 1996:227, see also Unni, 2001).

8 As Feldman has pointed out, it is micro-studies which ‘map processes by which people make choices to mediate costs of economic change and to organise efforts to restructure control of production and distribution. These choices are made through interaction with a range of social institutions and individuals that represent competing and conflicting as well as shared interests’ (Feldman, 1992a:8).
Introduction

9 In this case feminisation is defined as ‘the conversion of all industrial employment into the (inferior) conditions endured by female labour’ (Pearson, 1998:176). See Chhachhi and Pittin (1996b) for different referents to the term ‘feminisation’.

10 The employment potential of the electronics industry must be treated with caution. A report prepared by the Institute of Manpower Research for the Department of Electronics projected that employment would be created for 15 million people at the end of the VIII plan period (IAMR, 1991). However this employment creation was mainly in allied and derived sectors (rather than in manufacturing), and there was no guarantee that women would have access to these new jobs.

11 Although Nirmala Banerjee (1999b) pointed out that the link between export orientation and feminisation is not so relevant, since India’s competitive advantage lay in traditional, craft-based skills which have been male preserves, recent data show that women are entering into non-traditional crafts such as brassware (GOI 2003).

12 Numerous studies have documented ways in which employers escape from the employer/employee nexus as well as from the purview of labour regulations (Mathur, 1992; Vanamala, 2001).

13 Pollert locates the ideological basis of this singular focus on flexibility in the functionalist paradigm of industrial society theory and the post-industrial convergence thesis. The argument of radical breaks from Fordism to Post Fordism, and from mass production to flexible specialisation, are based on an assumption of future industrial harmony (Pollert, 1991:10-11).

14 The differences between the north and the south in terms of kinship systems and labour force participation of women have been identified as a reason for the better sex ratio reported for the south (See Miller, 1981). However, recent studies note an increasing negative sex ratio in South India as well (Kapadia, 2002).

15 For instance, Moser’s comparative study of four completely different urban communities in Zambia, Philippines, Ecuador and Hungary, concludes that in all communities women’s employment increased (with the vast majority entering the informal sector), children entered the labour market or took up household responsibilities, and male employment became casualised. In all four communities the burden of coping with economic crises fell on women, with an increase in their total labour time. This was accompanied by an undermining of family relationships, an increase in domestic violence, and increasing strain on the social fabric of communities (Moser, 1998).

16 Truong has pointed to the weakness also of the Human Development framework which constructs well-being and agency within the archetypes of the ‘economic man and social woman’ and excludes sexuality from the domain of care work/reproduction (Truong, 2000:163).

17 Chambers mentions primarily economic security, but other areas of security – social, physical, and personal – become equally important (Chambers, 1988; Chambers and Conway, 1992).
Despite the incorporation of this approach in Participatory Poverty Assessments and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, reviewers have pointed out the methodological bias in a continued use of the money metric measure of poverty; the absence of a clear analytical gender framework; the absence of data on intra-household distribution; limited use of evidence from participatory methodologies, and the marginalisation of gender in broader policy recommendations (Bamberger, Blackden, Fort and Manoukian, 2002; Whitehead and Lockwood, 1999).

Wolf demonstrates there is an identity equivalence which would pre-empt the one being a function of the other: ‘A strategy is everything a household does and everything a household does is a strategy’ (Wolf, 1992:20).

Rakodi made the suggestion that the term ‘strategy’ could be used as shorthand for the set of choices constrained to a greater or lesser extent by macroeconomic circumstances, social context, cultural and ideological expectations and access to resources (Rakodi, 1995:417).

That this notion of the household continues to underpin macro-level policies is a reflection of the rigidity of macroeconomics. Through the seventies and early eighties, feminists had provided a critique of development policies which were based on the ‘western’ assumption of the family as a nuclear unit consisting of husband, wife and children; of the household as only a unit of consumption; and of assuming the male breadwinner/female housekeeper as the norm. Using examples from Third World countries, feminists noted the wide variations in household types and structures, pointing to the household – particularly in rural areas – as a unit of production as well as distribution and consumption; the power relations based on gender and generations within the household; and the wide variations in the sexual division of labour (Whitehead, 1981, Harris, 1981).

The variability in forms of the household has led many to abandon the concept of the household altogether (Pittin, 2002; Roberts, 1991).

The historically specific form of citizenship has meant that debates on the concept differ. For instance, American debates have tended to focus on migration, access and social mobility, while the British debate has focussed on class and access to basic rights such as housing, education and social security (Turner, 2001).

A significant point Molyneux highlights, relevant to my study, is the switch in recent policy discussions from a focus on citizenship and rights to a more benign policy emphasis on social capital (Molyneux, 2002).

Cheng-Kooi noted how these women had changed over the years: ‘Earning a wage, living communally with each other, away from their families and learning to survive independently – all these have helped them to mature and grow away from the protective environment from which they originally came. Their own experience through years of fighting for better wages and unionisation, while gaining little ground to articulate and fulfil their needs as women, taught them that they have to fight their own battles’ (Cheng-Kooi, 1996:249).
Other aspects related to significant areas of biological reproduction, such as the choice to have children and the domain of sexuality, are not addressed in this study.