

***Caste, Female Labor Supply,
and the Gender Wage Gap in India:
Boserup Revisited***

BY

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KANIKA MAHAJAN is an Assistant Professor of Economics at the School of Liberal Studies at Ambedkar University, Delhi. Her primary research interests include empirical development economics in the field of gender, labor, and environment. Her recently published articles look at the effect of female labor supply and rainfall shocks on gender wage gap in India and the effect of NREGA on casual wages in rural India. Currently, she is working on differences in agriculture productivity across male and female farm managers in India and exploring the structural linkages between agriculture and decline in female employment in rural areas. She earned a Ph.D. in Quantitative Economics from the Economics and Planning Unit of Indian Statistical Institute, Delhi in 2015.

About the Lecture:

The gender wage gap is notable not just for its persistence and ubiquity but also for its variation across regions and countries. How does greater work participation by women matter to female wages and the gender wage gap? Within India, a paradox is that gender differentials in agricultural wage are the largest in southern regions of India that are otherwise favorable to women. Boserup (1970) hypothesized that this is due to greater labor force participation by women in these regions. This is not obvious, as greater female labor supply could depress male wage as well. Other factors also need to be accounted for especially since women have fewer opportunities for non-farm employment. Professor Mahajan undertakes a formal test of the Boserup proposition—econometrically, she estimates district level inverse demand functions that relate female and male agricultural wages to exogenous variation in female and male labor supply to agriculture. The conceptual challenge is to identify exogenous variation in female and male labor supply to agriculture.

About CASI

Founded in 1992, the Center for the Advanced Study of India (CASI) at Penn is the first research institution in the U.S. dedicated to the study of contemporary India. The Center's key goals are to nurture a new generation of scholars across disciplines and to provide a forum for dialogue among the academic, business, and foreign policy communities.

