Exploring the links of multi-discrimination: Considering Britain and India

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Abstract

The concept of multiple discrimination – particularly in the labour market – is fast becoming common parlance among the policy-making circles. Economics and economists, however, have hardly addressed issues of multi-discrimination or intersectional discrimination. By surveying the economics literature, from the orthodoxy to the heterodoxy, this paper show how economists are unfortunately are lagging behind legal and human rights theorists in tackling the issue of multi-discrimination. Britain and India are used as cases in point in this literature survey to show the value and need to address multi-discrimination from an economic angle too. The importance of this preliminary research is also to highlight that the prevalence of multi-discrimination indicates the absence of decent work opportunities, with concomitant implications for poverty, social exclusion and development.

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1. Introduction

Understanding discrimination in the labour market is no longer about uncovering simple and dualistic links between two sets of social groups, such as men versus women, or blacks versus whites, or able versus the disabled. It is increasingly apparent that the nature and dynamics of discrimination is a complex process, where multiple positions of people are shaped by a variety of social attributes. The experience of Caribbean immigrant working women in Britain serves as an illustration, where they may face discrimination in the labour market because they are women, or immigrants, or blacks, or because of the dynamics between these social features. Exploring the relationship between the diverse forms of discrimination and the nature of multi-discrimination\(^1\) is the primary purpose of this paper. This is done by reviewing the literature\(^2\) to: a) examine the nature and dynamics of multi-discrimination, b) better understand these phenomena, and c) provide markers for potential exploration on the ways in which multiple forms of discrimination relate to or hinder development.\(^3\)

The nature and dynamics of multi-discrimination take both new and old forms. Conventionally, gender, class, race, ethnicity, religion, caste and nationality make up the latter, while the former are shaped by sexual orientation, disability, and HIV/AIDS. Consequently, discrimination in the labour market may take multiple forms and can be experienced in very different ways among and between social groups. For these reasons, deciphering the connections between diverse social positions, features, and relations is not easy – and the literature is scarce on the topic. However, the need to pursue these research questions is timely, especially in view of the focus on discrimination at work in the current Declaration’s Global Report on *Time for Equality at Work* (ILO 2003). This review, therefore, is an attempt to explore some of the links and key issues on the theme.

This paper is structured as follows. The next section, section 2, begins with a definition of discrimination as understood in the policy-making arena and in academic circles. A most apparent manifestation of discrimination pertains to earnings and occupational segregation in the labour market, which is an area of interest to economists. This part starts with defining discrimination as understood in the international community. After this, the economic dimensions of discrimination are analysed. A focus on the economic literature necessitates

\(^1\) There are three issues that need clarification at the onset of this paper. Firstly, the concept “multi-discrimination” is defined to mean discrimination where the various social attributes and positions of people interact with each other leading them to experience discrimination on several grounds (Makkonen 2002:10). Secondly, “multi-discrimination” in this paper is inter-changeable with that of “multiple discrimination”, which is slowly gaining common parlance in the discourse (ILO 2003). The third is that recent work from the legal field has distinguished between “multiple”, “compound” and “intersectional” discrimination, while acknowledging that in some instances “multiple” and “intersectional” discrimination is often substituted with each other (Makkonen 2002:10). This paper uses multi-discrimination to mean the same as multiple and/or intersectional discrimination, though the distinctions will be spelled out in greater detail in section 3 of this paper.

\(^2\) This paper serves the on-going research project on the fundamental rights at work and its relationships to economic development pursued for International Institute for Labour Studies by David Kucera.

\(^3\) The concept of development used in this paper is a broad-based abstraction that includes social and human rights dimensions to development along with economic growth.
surveying both orthodox and heterodox positions, especially since the latter poses the more difficult questions on the issues faced by marginal social groups.

Reviewing economic literature shows the limits of its approach in conceptualising multi-discrimination. Consequently, the need to explore outside the discipline takes us to the legal sphere as it has already begun theorising multi-discrimination. The legal literature reviewed in section 3 shows how multi-discrimination is shaped by social attributes of people as well as institutional factors. The institutional nature of multi-discrimination enables us to flush out how the occurrence and perpetuation of discriminatory practices is a denial of labour rights in employment. Therefore, it also contravenes a fundamental human right: the economic rights of people.

Britain and India are the two countries under consideration in exploring the themes on multi-discrimination. The reason for choosing these two countries is mainly motivated by the diversity and multi-ethnic nature of their social fabrics. Besides this, there is also a historical backdrop in these countries that enables us to better understand discriminatory processes at work over-time, and how changing economic factors impinge on the nature and form of discrimination at any given juncture.

Section 4 begins by looking at the empirical evidence from Britain. The purpose is to highlight the central themes relevant to the British case. By uncovering some of the key themes, the point is to investigate the relationships between these themes so as to appreciate the operation of multi-discrimination in the British labour market. A key issue that emerges is the need for nuanced analysis of labour market outcomes and how a reliance on data per se may not suffice to analyse the complexities of a varied social fabric. The next section, section 5, carries a similar exercise for India. In order to understand the dynamics of multi-discrimination in both Britain and India, I examine the following social variables: gender, ethnicity/race, class, and caste, and the interaction between them as grounds for discrimination in the labour market.

The penultimate section notes the nature and dynamics of social factors that have lead to multi-discrimination in the labour market in Britain and India. The previous analysis of qualitative studies from Britain and India, will set the stage for pulling together the key findings of the complex interaction between social variables that leads to multi-discrimination. These issues and themes will then be the focus of attention in section 6.

On the basis of this review, the conclusion, section 7, suggests potential research areas necessary to understand the different links between multi-discrimination, other core labour standards, and development. The purpose is to argue for the need to explore further the ways in which these links relate to and/or hinder poverty and development. Since the increasing recognition that the right to development is also about promoting, securing and maintaining

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4 An extensive literature search on multi-discrimination in economics lead to just a couple of finds, one by orthodox economists Akerlof and Kranton (2000), the other by feminist economists Brewer, Conrad, and King (2002). Their critical contributions on the theme are also discussed in section 3 of the paper, where multi-discrimination is conceptualised.

5 By linking discrimination as a denial of labour rights, and therefore the denial of economic rights it is possible to investigate the relationship to economic development through the rights discourse.

6 Categories of ethnicity and race are noted as social constructs, which may easily overlap with each other depending on the particular circumstances. For example, British South Asians see themselves as an ethnic group rather than a racial group, while British Africans and Caribbeans may see themselves both as a racial and/or ethnic group depending on the circumstances (Modood 1997). Similar attempts at constructing distinct identities can also be found in India. For this reason, this analysis will focus on racial/ethnic groups as one social unit. Besides this, it is also important to note that the racial/ethnic conceptualisation in Britain is primarily applicable to previous and present migrant workers. For convenience this paper will only focus on the labour market experiences of former migrants, namely the Caribbean, South Asian, and African diaspora. In other words, the migrant waves of the immediate post-colonial years as opposed to the migrants of post-1989 period, i.e. primarily Eastern Europeans.
social, economic, and cultural rights, there is a case to be made for eliminating discrimination from a poverty-alleviation and development perspective. The final section therefore, draws up concluding findings that may require further research to deepen our understanding on the larger question of the relationship between multi-discrimination and development.

2. Defining discrimination

At the root of discriminatory treatment lies the recognition that individuals are treated differently on perceived characteristics of their group rather than their individual capabilities. Even though this paper focuses on discrimination in the labour market – specifically on employment and occupation – it is equally important to recognise that differential treatment towards people from particular social groups occur in other social spheres as well. The existence of discriminatory policies and practices is also noted in education, unions, employer organisations, vocational training, social security systems, professional bodies and associations, media, etc. And not surprisingly inequitable treatment faced by social groups via these institutional structures is reflected and reinforced in labour market practices. This accentuates the need to recognise and acknowledge the dynamics and associations between different social institutions in the prevalence and perpetuation of discrimination.

Correspondingly, work done in the policy-making sphere and academic community attempts to capture the complex links between different institutional structures. In the sections to follow, the ways in which these respective communities understand discrimination is presented. By summarising the essential points on discrimination, the review highlights the appreciation of the concept over time. This enables illustrating if, when, and where progress has been made to come up with a theoretical framework for encapsulating the prevalence of multiple forms of discrimination. The next sub-section begins with the classifications and definitions of discrimination proposed and adopted by international governing bodies. This is followed by a synthesis of the ways in which the theme has been developed through and by debates in academic circles.

2.1 Towards international consensus?

Speaking about discrimination in relation to promoting and achieving decent work at the workplace requires us to begin with assessing the approach adopted by the International Labour Organisation (henceforth, the ILO) and other related international bodies. By starting with conventions adopted by different sectors of the international community, we are in a position to apprehend the extent to which these conventions take a holistic view of the different manifestations of discrimination. This exercise also allows highlighting the extent to which there is international consensus on the issue, and whether there is progress made towards recognising the prevalence of multiple discrimination.7

The relevant convention dealing with discrimination within the ILO is Convention No. 111, which seeks to “protect workers against discrimination on the basis of race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction or social origin” (ILO 2003:16). These protective measures extends beyond employment and occupation to other related labour market

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7 The purpose of this particular comparative exercise is not to examine the ways in which international thinking has evolved over time, but to analyse whether information flows and dialogue is taking place between policy-makers and academicians on the complexities of discrimination.
institutions, such as vocational training institutes, workers and employers organisations, unions, etc.

Furthermore, the relevant articles define discrimination as “any distinction, exclusion, or preference made on the basis of race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction, or social origin, which has the effect of nullifying or impairing equality of opportunity and treatment in employment or occupation” (ibid:16). The latter part of this article shows sensitivity to the difficult nature of discrimination. Discriminatory situations are not only where there is intention to discriminate, unequal outcomes also matter – with the articles covering direct and indirect discrimination. Therefore, the extent of deprivation or limitation of equal opportunities arising from differential treatment is considered valid grounds of discriminatory treatment.

A similar definition is adopted by the United Nations in its International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965). The conceptualisation upheld by the relevant article of the convention extends to all aspects of human rights and freedoms, including political, economic, social, cultural, and other aspects to public life (International Council on Human Rights 2001:4). This emphasises the critical point that discrimination can take place in very different institutional spheres, and thereby deny the full enjoyment of the basic human rights.

But how does either of these definitions, i.e. by the ILO or the United Nations, extend to encapsulating multi-discrimination?8 There is increasing recognition by the ILO that discrimination takes various forms and manifests itself in many ways, with the most recent Global Report on Time for Equality at Work analysing this particular point (ILO 2003). However, conventions themselves may not necessarily warrant the recognition that individuals may be discriminated against because their social attributes and identities intersect in numerous and various ways. The dynamic interplay between numerous social identities may lead to situations that employers find “distasteful” (as per Becker (1957)), which leads to multi-discrimination. Yet, the very recognition by the most recent Global Report (2003) is a step in the right direction to move towards further research and inquiry into the topic, and it is in a similar vein that this study has been carried out. Accordingly, the next section examines the relevant literature on the topic, and attempts to encapsulate a conceptual framework that is able to formulate the prevalence of multi-discrimination from a theoretical standpoint.

2.2 Economics of Discrimination: Orthodox Views

The subject of discrimination is a hotbed of activity for economists of wide-ranging theoretical perspectives. The literature indicates that there is much controversy and debate on the topic (Becker 1957, Krueger 1963, Bergmann 1971, Doeringer and Piore 1971, Arrow 1972, Reich, Gordon and Edwards 1973, Stiglitz 1973, Darby 1975, Blau and Jusenius 1976, Darby Jr. and Williams 1985, Williams 1987, Darby and Mason 1998, Mason 1999). Largely these varying points of view reflect the different persuasions found within economics itself, i.e. neo-classical, institutionalist, Marxist, and feminist economics. Yet each of these viewpoints has informed some aspect of policy-making on attempts to eliminate discrimination in the labour market and therefore needs careful deliberation.

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8 This paper also distinguishes between multi-discrimination and multiple forms of discrimination. The former is where the coming together of many social attributes people possess is the grounds on which they face discrimination. For example, an Asian man perceived to be HIV positive is discriminated against getting a promotion on grounds of colour, race, and/or perceptions of being HIV positive. Multiple forms of discrimination, on the other hand, is the notion that discrimination takes many shapes and forms, is both direct and indirect, and may involve discrimination in entering the labour market as well as when already in the labour market.
Despite the differences of standpoints the early work in the neo-classical tradition make three powerful points useful for progressive policy-making. The first is that “employers taste for discrimination”, including prejudice, ignorance and nepotism, leads to a misallocation of resources and is economically inefficient (Becker 1957:15-17, Krueger 1963:486).\(^9\) Second, it is only the absence of misperceptions that will eliminate discrimination in the long run (Arrow 1972:200). Moreover, discrimination against particular groups depends on the social and physical distance and relative socio-economic status between different groups (Becker 1957:16).\(^10\) Fourthly, and finally, there is also recognition that eliminating discrimination can increase occupational flexibility and mobility, and reduce the shortages of particular types of labour (Bergmann 1971:308).

Against this backdrop, what have been the main concerns of orthodox economists? Much of the early work focused on wage-discrimination (Becker 1957, Krueger 1963). This is defined as a case where persons with similar economic endowments and capabilities receive different wages and that these differences are systematically correlated with social attributes of the individual, such as race, religion, gender, etc. (Stiglitz 1973:287).\(^11\)

One of the foremost models developed by neo-classical economists is that of the “discrimination-preference trade” model, which builds on the idea of trading between capital and labour, possessed by white and black communities, respectively (Becker 1957, Krueger 1963). The prevalence of a trade barrier created by white people’s taste for discrimination, i.e. prejudice, results in lower average income for black people even though the outcomes of discrimination are not optimal for either communities (Krueger 1963:484, Darity 1975:227-8). Others extend this particular model to connect money income and utility maximisation, so as to make discriminatory behaviour economically rational rather than one of “taste” or “preferences” only. Here the result of discrimination is that the white community gains, while the black community loses – though there is no consistency to the distributional gains to the white community (ibid:230-1).

Early work in the tradition of neo-classical economics moved from this focus on wage-based discrimination to occupational segregation (Bergmann 1971, Arrow 1972). From a theoretical perspective it is shown that discriminatory attitudes of white workers can result in both wage and occupational segregation (Arrow 1972:198). Bergmann (1971) uses empirical evidence to elucidate this same point, showing that discrimination “crowds” blacks into particular occupations (1971:298). This concentration of marginalised workers into particular occupations leads to an over-supply, lowering their marginal productivity – and hence wages (ibid:310). Moreover, wages are also shown to be different for equally skilled occupational groups in this model (ibid:302). However, her findings do not inevitably imply that blacks are crowded into particular occupational categories for reasons other than their supposed lower

\(^9\) Darity and Mason (1998) point out, however, that recent neo-classical empiricists have tried to find a way of explaining the persistence of discrimination by identifying conditions where not discriminating may reduce profits of firms (1998:82).

\(^10\) The recognition that social distance and socio-economic status matters in perpetuating ignorance and discriminatory practices may be of central import for advocating social policies that attempts to bridge the gap between social groups in order to eradicate discrimination. In this respect a related research question that springs to mind then is to what extent do anti-discrimination, social welfare, and anti-poverty – to reduce social distance and socio-economic differences – strategies support and reinforce each other?

\(^11\) Orthodox economists do not deny that the focus on wage discrimination does not imply the existence of occupational discrimination, where people from a particular social group are systematically excluded from one type of job or another. Yet they go onto argue that occupational segregation does not necessarily imply wage discrimination (ibid:287). While this may hold true theoretically, later work has shown that in the “real” world occupational segregation and low-paid jobs tend to go together (Darity 1975:237).
productivity. This result can be produced by differences in supply relative to demand (Watchel 1992:243).

The inconsistencies and weaknesses in these seminal models from the neo-classical paradigm (which are partially redressed by human capital theorists, and will be discussed later), have led to responses from within the orthodoxy of economics itself. These later theories elucidate on how market failures – monopolies and oligopolies, dis-equilibrium in the labour market, minimum wage legislation, and efficiency wages – may be associated with discrimination (Stiglitz 1973:289-91). The important point that Stiglitz (1973) makes is that "one can construct a perfectly competitive model with which there is no competitive pressures for the elimination of discrimination" (1973:291). Stiglitz expands this basic orthodox perspective to show how informational asymmetries within and between groups may require one to analyse beyond the economic outcomes of different policies to that of “other political, social, and philosophical considerations” (ibid:291-5).

From an orthodox perspective, market imperfections are nonetheless held to fade in the long run. However, the dogged persistence of discriminatory practices in the labour market has compelled neo-classical economists to rely on other explanations. This has resulted in the explanation of human capital theory as leading to racial economic inequalities, where people in minority communities end-up holding low productivity jobs because of lower education, ability, or skill level (Darity 1975:232-3).

In the labour market, black workers end-up being discriminated against because firms use their prior knowledge on equating higher educational qualifications and skills with the majority community (Arrow 1972:199). Therefore, race is used as a means of sifting through the “high productivity” and “low-productivity” workers, and conjecturing the job performance of workers. Human capital theorists argue that there is validity in this particular reasoning because low productivity is usually associated with low levels of human capital, where race (and gender) correlates with productivity (Darity 1975:233). This phenomenon is identified as “statistical discrimination” where firms rely on easily observable social and physical attributes, such as race, sex, and ethnicity, as close enough approximations to the productivity level of workers (Arrow 1972:199, Darity 1975:233, ILO 2003).

From a policy perspective this particular thinking implicitly acknowledges that racial discrimination is an outcome of political and historical factors, which lie outside the domain of the economic sphere. More specifically, as the majority communities control public resources that lead to under-investment in education, skill and vocational training and so forth, minority groups bear the consequences. And in the particular context of the U.S.A., a historical legacy of
racism has resulted in blacks being isolated from acquiring cultural and social symbols, capital, and networks that prevent them from climbing the occupational ladder (Darity 1975:235).15

Aside from the policy implications, the apparent limitations of human capital theory is pointed out by Darity (1975), where he shows that the empirical evidence does not necessarily give credence to the human capital theorists (1975:235). Using the same set of data as that of a human capital theory proponent (Freeman), Darity shows that a) there is potential for the classic confusion between correlation and causation, and b) human capital theory does not hold as an explanatory device for “non-elite” blacks and whites income earning gaps (ibid:237). Moreover, empirically where schooling and family background have come together for blacks and whites, this has not resulted in the convergence of either racial earnings or unemployment rates (Williams 1985:4). Therefore, the need for other readings of racial discrimination in the labour market was picked-up by heterodox schools – and it is to these expositions that this discussion now turns.

2.3 Heterodox Explanations of Racism in the Labour Market

The theoretical and empirical limitations of neo-classical and orthodox perspectives have led to contributions from institutionalists and Marxists. This section begins with an overview of institutionalist theories on understanding the “black problem” in the U.S.A (Darity 1975:225), after which Marxist interpretations of the same are discussed. Going over the theoretical framework applicable to race provides a base for looking at how these views are applicable to gender-based discrimination too – and will be the topic of discussion in the next sub-section.16

Political economists developed dual labour market and labour market segmentation schools (Doeringer and Piore 1971, Reich, Gordon and Edwards 1973, Blau and Jusenius 1976, Watchel 1992).17 These theories base their explanations on the perspective that market imperfections are institutionalised. Oligopoly, high wages and occupational opportunities characterising the white core, while the black periphery is typified by intense competition, low wages, and limited occupational choices (Reich, Gordon and Edwards 1973:360, Darity 1975:241). The radical twist to this perspective is that employers in the core perpetuate the divisions, because they help sustain the economic and political status quo. In other words, by discriminating against minority groups employers replace class conflict by race conflict, as the former is perceived to be far more threatening to the prevailing economic structures and the interest of capitalist classes (Reich, Gordon and Edwards 1973:361, Darity 1975:244). By separating the labour market in this manner, employers preserve their oligopoly profits and divide workers politically. Reich, Gordon and Edwards (1973) argue that unions, with primarily white workers, have contributed to managing the internal labour market by creating barriers to entry for outsiders (1973:361). Discrimination then serves the interest of powerful segments in the political economic order (Watchel 1992:245).

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15 My use of social and cultural symbols, capital and networks resonates more with the seminal work of Bourdieu on the theme, than that of more recent adaptation by neo-institutionalists (Bourdieu 1977, 1998).

16 While the early theorising on the race and gender issues have focused on the U.S.A., much of this thinking can also be applied, with necessary qualifications and extensions, to understanding discrimination against minority social groups of different countries.

17 There is a link between the contributions made by dual labour market and labour market segregation theorists. The latter is primarily concerned with status of employment contracts between the core and periphery, while the former is concerned with occupational segregation, usually by race or gender, which takes place within employment situations as well. Therefore, while these schools of thought are distinct they are connected, with the labour market segregation school perceived as building upon dual labour market theories.
Though this analysis may provide credence to explaining more forcefully the divisions in the economy, there is not necessarily enough attention paid to the social, political, and historical factors that may equally warrant consideration. Deficiencies in exploring the social fabric and institutions may be partially responsible for the inability to tackle discrimination in robust ways to date. Tackling social structures that sustain discrimination in the labour market, of course, is a challenge. This, however, does not imply that an examination of the same should not be undertaken – and indeed a full analysis of heterodox perspectives requires focusing on radical contributions to the discussion.

Cultural variations of human capital theory used to explain ethnic and racial differences, is another issue taken-up. Radical economists argue that culture is not a static entity. They are argue that with the necessary policy prescriptions cultural inequalities between communities can be redressed. This especially since the market system has not demonstrated its ability to transfer “high-achieving cultural traits” to the lower end of the spectrum (Darity and Williams 1985:256-8). Besides this, the other shortcoming is that cultural explanations fail because there is consistent exclusion of social class in its historical analysis (ibid:259). An illustration is that of Jamaican migrants to New York and London, where the same cultural background fails to explain the different occupations this migrant community in the two respective cities. In London they are primarily employed in low-end occupations, while in New York this community succeeds in belonging to the highly skilled and educated groups. Darity and Williams (1985) contend that the answer is because they do not share the same class position in their home country, even though they are of the same national culture (1985:259).

Radical economists, however, argue that culture may have validity if material and historical conditions are taken into account in explaining the specific labour market experiences of particular ethnic and racial groups (ibid:260). They extend and apply a Marxian notion of competition where capitalists tends to concentrate and consolidate capital over time to that of workers, where those belonging to dominant ethnic and racial groups concentrate and consolidate their labour power. Consequently, “culture” brings together particular social groups to unite their access to privileged labour market opportunities (ibid:260, Williams 1987:10, Darity and Mason 1998). Even this version of culture still needs to take into account concrete economic conditions, without which the dynamics of social and political transformation is unlikely to be achieved (Williams 1987:4). Simply said, when formulating policies it is important to keep in mind the need to look at concrete economic conditions in their historical context.

Aside from “culture” this notion of competition is also used to show how productivity is determined by social relations, networks, and techniques of production that permit wage differentials to endure over time (ibid:9, Mason 1999:281). By using a classical notion of competition where there is free movement of capital, long-term market discrimination and competition can remain in perfect harmony. Moreover, the racial categories in use today, seen as a means of dividing the working classes, developed with the evolution of the capitalist society (ibid:10-11). Therefore, from this theoretical perspective under capitalist social relations the persistence of intra-class racial competition is not surprising, and the persistence of discrimination along ethnic and racial lines is understandable.

This analysis, however, has only focused on race – and heterodox economists appear to move in the correct direction to theorise racist reality and its complex nuances. Yet, discrimination is not always an issue with a single dimension, and other social attributes may

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18 This is where all sectors of capital need not be equally productive, as long as each sector earns the socially determined “normal” rate of return.

19 Certainly, Williams uses many interesting examples from economic history of the United States to support and verify her point (Williams 1987:11-12).
equally factor in discriminatory situations. For example, some studies find that the racial and ethnic composition may be more important than gender in hiring or promotion decisions (Firth 1981, Wrench and Modood 2001). The experience of young, black or coloured women and men in entering the labour market elucidates the point. They are more likely to experience discrimination because of the coming together of their colour, age, ethnic and racial composition rather than their white counterparts irrespective of their skills, experience, capabilities or qualifications (Wrench and Modood 2001:1). The intersection of these different social factors and the likely multi-discrimination faced by diverse social groups require a theoretical framework to understand the operation of multi-discrimination in the labour market.

On the whole economics has contributed in limited ways on the intersection of different social variables leading to multi-discrimination. This, therefore, requires moving into the legal sphere, which has engaged with the subject matter in exciting and promising ways (Makkonen 2002). Before moving into the human rights discourse, it is important to recognise that feminist economists did investigate the intersections between gender and race, and its relationship to discrimination in the labour market. Therefore, it is apt to present a short synopsis of these contributions before addressing the rights discourse on multi-discrimination.

2.4 Gender, class, race, or their nexus?

Before responding to the query on the importance of the nexus between social features of individuals and multi-discrimination, it is important to briefly look at theoretical accounts of gender-based discrimination. This issue was tackled from an institutionalist perspective in the early days, with later feminists building upon this work to extend this particular analysis to uncover the patriarchal dimensions in labour market operations.20

In the institutionalist framework described in the previous section (section 2.3), promotions and wage structures are linked to occupational categories. Because women workers are perceived as secondary income earners, there is greater likelihood of them being segregated into jobs at the low-end of the occupational ladder. This experience continues to hold even in recent labour market experiences (Rubery and Grimshaw 2002:10). Consequently, there is a link between occupational categories and wage rates, with segregated occupational assignments also tending to cause wage-differentials (Blau and Jusenius 1976:193). In this situation decisions on hiring, promotion, working conditions and benefits are usually assigned to the occupational structure, over which working women may have little choice. Therefore, occupational assignment rather than occupational choice is a more accurate description of labour market realities. Consequently, occupations themselves may become variables that embody discrimination against women (Darity and Mason 1998:69).21

Women are disproportionately represented in the informal sector, where wages and working conditions tend to be poor, and there is little or no socio-economic security. This is the other way in which women continue to play second fiddle in the labour market. In this sense the high concentration of women in the informal sector continues to reinforce pre-held notions when they participate in the formal sector. But is gender the demarcating tool used to separate workers between formal and informal sectors, and within the formal sector? Clearly this is not

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20 Strictly speaking this may be a moot point, as this issue – the relationship between patriarchy, women’s participation in the labour market, and occupational and wage discrimination – was keenly debated by early Marxist-feminists as well (Humphries 1977).

21 According to Darity and Mason (1998) this is when education and the level of job experience is partially shaped by social expectations and perceptions of the amount of education that women need – which are themselves variables that embody discrimination against women (1998:69).
the case in the “real” world, as the previous section showed how the same theoretical tool was used to analyse the experience of Afro-Americans.

Some economists have emphasised the importance of the class-race-gender nexus of having more explanatory power in elucidating the complexities of discrimination in the labour market (Williams 1987, Darity and Mason 1998). Equally, the recognition that analysing discrimination needs to move beyond simple dualism have been argued by legal theorists too (Crenshaw 1991, Fredman and Szyszczak 1993, Hepple 1993, 2001, Fredman 2001, Makkonen 2002). The notion that patriarchy operates in ways that are conducive to a particular segment of society, usually white men from privileged social groups, lies at the root of this thinking. More concretely, upper-class white male workers may have utilised a variety of political, cultural and economic tools – including networks and social capital – in securing a privileged position in the labour market should be addressed too (Williams 1987:12, Darity and Mason 1998, Mason 1999:266). As a result, “race, gender, and class interact in such a way that the histories of white and racial ethnic women are intertwined” (Williams 1987:12).

Not surprisingly, therefore, there is likely to be competition and co-operation between women of different social groups. Moreover, in particular circumstances the experiences of white and black women of low-income classes may be very similar – for example that of single working mothers. And at other times they may be starkly different, as is the experience between an educated Algerian migrant woman working as a janitor and an equally educated Australian migrant woman in Europe working as an administrative assistant. It is this very difference, however, that is used as a mechanism through which discrimination is perpetuated against women. Women, who may otherwise have overlapping interests to overcome prejudices they may encounter in the labour market (such as sexual harassment, poor working conditions, inadequate social security and protection) may not necessarily see themselves as sharing a common ground when in different occupations.

Thus, the need to pay closer attention to the ways in which people occupy multiple social positions with them struggling with aggravated forms of discrimination is apparent. Thus the need for a theoretical framework that conceptualises the complex nature of social reality is brought out in the following sections. This will set the stage from which we can make sense of the literature on qualitative studies for Britain and India.

3. Conceptualising multi-discrimination

Institutional and radical economic contributions on understanding labour market discrimination may enable encapsulating multi-discrimination within its framework. However, with a few exceptions, the discipline of economics remains largely silent on the subject of multi-discrimination (Akerlof and Kranton 2000, Brewer, Conrad and King 2002). The simplicity of basic assumptions upon which orthodox economics builds upon its theories may be a partial explanation for the paucity of theorising on multi-discrimination, but heterodox economics has not entered this terrain either. This suggests the need to explore outside economics for theorising multi-discrimination that arise out of interactions between diverse social attributes of individuals. Sub-section 3.1 begins by summarising the main points made by economists on the need to recognise and incorporate the intertwined nature of social identities. This overview is followed by the legal discourse, sub-section 3.2, which has moved forward in theorising on multi-discrimination.

3.1 Economics of Identity

Orthodox readings on multi-discrimination appear non-existent. Yet, the initial steps on the need to incorporate a person’s sense of self and how these may affect economic outcomes are
finally entering the orthodox economics discourse (Akerlof and Kranton 2000). Therefore, the very recognition that social identities and positions of individuals may affect economic outcomes and collective action of social groups is given some consideration. This sub-section of the paper, therefore, summarises the main threads of this new thinking from economics.

Akerlof and Kranton (2000) define identity as the behavioural prescriptions that arise from arbitrary social categorisation, which are important because of the salience of social categories in human interaction and behaviour (2000:716-7). Therefore, individuals mostly follow prescriptions associated with their identities because it is a way of maintaining concepts of the self, though there may also be positive externalities and pay-offs by following identity-related actions (ibid:721). Internalisation, learning the rules, and identification, where sets of rules and values conform with the group and contrast with the others, is the main way in which social identities become beneficial to individuals (ibid:728). Similarly, there is recognition that social identities need not be mutually exclusive, and individuals can be mapped into several social categories (ibid:718).

Such conceptualising of identity appears to be forward thinking with much potential for fruitful analysis of social issues and situations, and in this case of the labour market. Despite a few progressive caveats there appears to be limited application of the identity model, with the choice of identities very often considered to be constrained by physical attributes (ibid:726). Besides this, the application of the identity model to social situations, such as the labour market, poverty and social exclusion, falls back on separate and dualistic identities — men versus women, blacks versus whites, husbands versus wives. It does not consider the overlap of multiple social identities.

Notwithstanding the limitations of this model Akerlof and Kranton (2000) do come up with novel explanations for previous economics analysis. Indeed there is acknowledgement that changing social norms and gender association may partially explain changing labour market patterns. But the salience of gender associations — and therefore, one would think racial associations too — they argue may necessitate legal intervention to bring about shifts in social attitudes that will lead to changes in employment patterns (ibid:733).

In this respect the orthodoxy appears to be making bold steps in moving into unfamiliar territory, though it falls short of applying multiple identities into analysing economic and social situations. How then do the heterodox schools fare? The only explicit consideration of intersectional analysis, i.e. recognising the intertwined nature of gender, race, class, ethnicity, religion, disability, caste, etc., appears in feminist economic analysis (Brewer, Conrad, and King 2002). Rightfully, these scholars recognise that economics generally neglect the interconnections of social positions and categories, which are usually socially constructed and embedded in a historical and social context (ibid:4). Equally, there is emphasis on the need to move towards incorporating the intertwined nature of social identities, and they argue that feminist economists are best placed to do so because of their willingness to embrace other disciplinary perspectives. Moreover, since the subject matter of feminist economics requires examining the connections between market and non-market relationships, there is adequate ground to make the necessary breakthroughs (ibid:8). However, they point out that even within this circle there has been a general tendency to compartmentalise and analyse different social categories (ibid:9).

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22 In a footnote (footnote 31), Akerlof and Kranton (2000) say, “when an individual’s identity is associated with multiple social categories, the ‘situation’ could determine, for example, which categories are most salient” (2000:731).

23 Similarly, in the application of the identity model to poverty and exclusion, there is acknowledgement that “legal equality may not be enough to eliminate racial disparities” (ibid:744).
Against this backdrop, the feminist economists point at the need to investigate the inter-linked nature of social identities, which requires analysing the relationship between social and political-economic structures (ibid:6). Starting from this vantage-point, it becomes possible to explain the interplay between agency and social structures, where the analysis of social construction of identities is noted as specific to time, place and historical location. In other words, researchers are reminded that social categories and identities are constructed and contested as they may vary from context to context (ibid:7). Besides noting these key points and the challenges that lies ahead for feminist economists, there is no explicit conceptualisation of multi-discrimination in the economic literature. For these reasons, this review crosses disciplinary boundaries to learn about the ways in which other fields have theorised multiple discrimination.

### 3.2 The Legal Discourse: Ahead of the Game?

The legal discourse on multi-discrimination – i.e. cases where persons discriminatory experiences are aggravated because of the ways in which social attributes intersect – is useful for this review. Legal theorists have shown the need to uphold prevailing equality and human rights measures in eliminating multi-discrimination (Crenshaw 1991, Fredman and Szyszczak 1993, Hepple 1993, 2001, Fredman 2001, Makkonen 2002). They, therefore, reason that it is necessary to see the workings of discrimination in its specific context to understand the complex interactions that come into play, and how such a nuanced analysis is important and useful in comprehending the mechanics of multi-discrimination. This review, therefore, turns to some critical contributions from the legal sphere.

The fundamental building block of conceptualising multi-discrimination is the recognition that “people can belong to several disadvantaged groups at the same time, and suffer aggravated and specific forms of discrimination in consequence” (Makkonen 2002:1). Since people inhabit different social positions and have multiple identities, the reasons for them to experience multi-discrimination has much to do with the social constructions of identities, roles, and positions – and the perceptions of these social constructions. The example of discrimination faced by *dalits* in India through generations serves as a case in point, which has been more due to religious representations that the *dalit* community is “untouchable” rather than because of their faith or ethnic origin (Guardian Weekly January 30-February 5, 2003:30).

Discrimination faced in such instances is therefore not about an “objective” characteristic, but about disliking the “other” to defend the interest of the “self” and his/her group (Fredman 2001:148). However, there are situations in which people may be discriminated against because of visible physical characteristics, such as for pregnant women (Fredman and Szyszczak 1993:218). Hiring such women is seen as leading to higher costs, which is not simply due to a biological function of women (pregnancy itself) but also has much to do with the way in which social relationships are structured. In other words, the social roles and expectations assigned to soon-to-be-mothers impose additional costs on employers. While “soon-to-be-fathers” are relieved of such duties and roles, and therefore, men belonging to this group do not usually exact extra costs to employers, and are rarely, if ever, discriminated against.24 In this sense the numerous social characteristics and positions that we inhabit are precisely no more than this: “social”. Simply, the various categories into which people are inscribed are socially constructed, and it is this process that leads to various expectations regarding roles, values, and attitudes to be associated with each social construction. The reality is that social conditions,

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24 Or, where paternity or parental leave does exist, the costs are not the same as that of maternity leave, simply because the length of time for the former is usually much less than that of the latter.
expectations, and relationships construct gender, race, ethnicity, disability, etc. (Fredman 2001:148-9).

Makkonen (2002) is of the view that the constructing social categories itself need not necessarily imply that these groupings will be positive or negative (2002:7-9). However, since many categories are often associated with stereotypes, whether good or bad, it is the link between stereotypes and the ways in which people act upon these preconceived notions that lead to discriminatory behaviour. In other words, because stereotyping usually involves forming unfounded opinions and feelings about groups, it is this that leads to prejudiced attitudes that usually results in discriminatory behaviour (Crenshaw 1991:30). While the causal relationship between prejudiced attitudes and discriminatory behaviour is shown to hold, the need to pay attention to the specifics of the situation should also be emphasised. There are three factors that are noted as encouraging or eliminating discrimination. They involve: a) social acceptability of discrimination, as in apartheid South Africa, b) costs to discrimination – i.e. legal proceedings and social censure, such as the MacPherson Commissions findings on institutional racism in Britain, and c) monitoring – i.e. whether other people are “watching” or not, such as the ignoring of the recurrent discriminatory experiences of *dalit* in India seems to indicate.

However, it is not simply these factors that matter. The relationship between attitudes and behaviour is a complex process, with socio-economic differences equally factoring into the process (Hepple 1993:26, Makkonen 2002:8-9). In this spirit Makkonen accentuates social distance between groups of people in shaping attitudes and behaviours, and so depicts the “vicious circle of discrimination” in the following manner:

![Vicious Circle of Discrimination Diagram](source: Makkonen 2002:9)

This vicious cycle of discrimination is not simply about an economic reality but is also about a historical process that has led to a particular institutional arrangement. As institutions both reflect and structure social relationships, the stereotypes and prejudices that people hold reflect this conflicting and complimentary relationship to historical institutions (Hepple 1993:28). Consequently, the nature of stereotypes and prejudices that individuals hold is complex and gets reflected in behaviour towards “other” social groups. These “other” groups, however, are not simply a sub-set of the major groups – and indeed the predominant groups can be classified into different sects, such as men, white, Christian, able-bodied, and heterosexual. Moreover, those belonging to one dominant group may occupy another social attribute that makes them a minority in another respect, such as black men in Britain, or men from migrant, poor, and lower-caste communities in India. The social position that people occupy are also shaped and reinforced by historically formed economic relationships and factors. And it is the

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25 This observation is in a sense a more complex interpretation of the relationship between various factors of discrimination made by Becker (1957). The important point of the linkages between the various facets is that at one level the relationship between social exclusion and discrimination is recognised even this scenario (see footnote 10).
historical nature of institutions and social relationships that help explain the diverse forms of
discriminatory practices, and particularly that of multi-discrimination.  

From this viewpoint, then, discrimination need not be a single status issue, and it is for
these reasons that it becomes important to distinguish between the different forms of
discrimination. As pointed out in the introductory footnote to this paper (footnote 1), the types
of discrimination are separated into multiple, compound and intersectional discrimination
and they are defined in the following way (Makonnen 2002:10):

i) Multiple-discrimination – This is where discrimination takes places on one ground at a
time, but is accumulated over time.

ii) Compound discrimination – When discrimination on the basis of two or more grounds add
to each other.

iii) Intersectional discrimination – This occurs in situations in which discrimination based on
several grounds operate and interact with each other concurrently, and people’s experience
are specific to these different grounds intersecting with each other.

It is the final form of discrimination, coined as intersectional discrimination in Crenshaw’s
(1991) and Makkonen’s (2002) work, which is of interest for this paper – and has been termed
multi-discrimination throughout this literature review. The particular point made by them is
that when multi-discrimination (or, intersectional discrimination) takes place, it is difficult to
analyse whether a person was discriminated against on one ground or another, because these
different grounds intersect and interact with each other and are specific. The experience of
minority and immigrant women getting excluded when speaking about eliminating gender or
racial discrimination in the labour market elucidates the point that multi-discrimination may be
because of several grounds intersecting with each other.

The important point of this framework useful to this paper is that it shows the interaction of
institutional factors that lead to multi-discrimination. Therefore, it is critical to acknowledge the
varied ways in which different institutions interact with each other, and how they may affect the
labour market. Equally, it is also necessary to recognise that eliminating discrimination may
require more than simply implementing equality policies in the labour market. This is
especially so where there are apparent links between social and patriarchal structures in the
operation of the labour market – and as the following sections show, this holds true for both
Britain and India.

4. The Spectrum of Multi-Discrimination: Evidence from Britain

The framework of multi-discrimination lays emphasis on the social construction of categories,
and how these identities are shaped by historical relationships between different social groups.
Historical factors, however, are not the only determinant of the multiple positions and identities
that are inhabited by social groups. Material conditions and economic relationships equally
play a pivotal role in the construction of social identities. Hence, the particular place of social

26 The work of legal theorists is what has brought about the conceptualisation of multi-discrimination has come into
parlance. But it is important to note that in the review of the economic theory on the topic the work of radical
economists, notably the work by Williams reviewed in this paper, does stress the need to understand economic
relationships in light of historical links and institutional factors. In this respect, the work by her comes closest to
potentially uncovering multi-discrimination from a political economy perspective as well.

27 It is important to remind the reader the point made in footnote 1 (page 1) of this paper: namely, that there are
instances in which multiple and intersectional discrimination are commonly interchanged with each other. However,
for purposes of clarity Makonen (2002) appears to be keen on distinguishing between these two types of
discrimination, and it is these distinct forms of discrimination that is reviewed in this paragraph.
groups is shaped by many factors, including culture, religion, and politics, coming together. There is, therefore, a need to play close attention to the ways in which different social attributes intertwine and interact with each other in shaping discriminatory practices.

The relevance of this particular reasoning and its application to almost all countries should be borne in mind. Race/ethnicity and class histories in Britain and India are also likely to be intertwined with the experiences of working women. This section of the paper reviews qualitative evidence, by focusing on the gender, ethnicity/race, class, and caste variables, on the interactions of these social attributes in the labour market experiences of diverse social groups. The focus of this section is Britain.

Most studies on discrimination usually focus either on the gender or racial dimensions, and this paper too will follow suit – though here the entry-point is on the gender variable. Yet, since a purpose of this review is to move beyond the simple dualistic nexus, it will progressively move into those areas where evidence of multi-discrimination is found.

4.1 The First Port of Call: Gender Dimensions of Workers’ Experiences

When marginal social groups are given reduced rewards, in the form of wages, for equivalent efforts and skills, this is an evident case of discrimination in the labour market (Rubery and Grimshaw 2002). This is not to deny that discrimination has multiple outcomes, but rather wage inequalities between social groups is an apparent and measurable manifestation. This is similar to occupational segregation, which is another obvious and quantifiable form of discrimination. While many studies focus on the computable aspects to gender discrimination, these analyses conventionally limit themselves to comparisons between two social groups. This is partially determined by the nature of available data, which limits itself to calculable categories.

As discussed previously individuals occupy diverse social positions and have numerous social ascriptions. This does not make possible neat categorisation but still may matter in the labour market. Consequently, these multiple social constructions are not captured in data gathering exercises. Bearing this caveat in mind, it is still worthwhile briefly looking at findings of standard wage and occupational inequalities as an indication of gender-based labour market discrimination.

The discriminatory experiences of working women in Britain continue to be diverse, partially reflecting the institutional regimes, social security systems, and welfare rights (Bruegel and Perrons 1998:103). These institutional structures, however, have not remained the same, with deregulation of the labour market having repositioned socio-economic structures. Thus, the ways in which women workers in the labour force have gained (or, lost) differs because of labour market deregulation. Against this backdrop, what do gender-based working experiences reveal about new shapes and forms of discriminatory practices?

A key theme pervading the labour market functioning is that patriarchal culture continues to implicitly determine gender-based social valuation of different activities. Moreover, the perpetuation of patriarchal values in the labour market affects and shapes the organisational structures, career paths, and incomes of working men and women differently (Horrell, Burchell and Rubery 1994). Here working women across the board face gender-based employment opportunities that leave women with limited choices, and one in which subordinate gender roles are perpetuated in the market place. In this sense almost all women workers continue to be discriminated because their work activities and tasks are determined by pre-conceptualised gender-based roles irrespective of their skills and capabilities.

Given this analysis the need to be aware of gender outcomes for workers is important. This is because women as a social group, irrespective of other social attributes, is likely to face a gender-based disadvantage when participating in the labour market. Hence, deregulation of the
British labour market is likely to impact upon men and women in very different ways. In short, the absence of a level playing field will mean differential outcomes for men and women workers. This is articulated by Bruegel and Perrons (1998) as follows: “women as individuals are to have equal opportunities to compete but not the social support as a group that would enable them to counter structural barriers to their progress” (1998:106). In a context of gender-based valuation of labour market activities workers experiences across the board will have a gender dimension. The following paragraphs elucidate some of the main issues.

Women workers in the formal sector in full-time employment appear to have made gains into higher-paid occupations in the 1981-1991 period (ibid:115). Moreover, women’s pay in these occupations appears to have risen relatively faster relative to men. This points to the possibility that women are still gaining annual salary increments in the 1990s, which no longer holds true for working men as their increases may have peaked out at an earlier period. There are similarities here with the case of public sector workers during the 1980s, where women workers saw an increase in their salaries during this decade whereas working men had already reached their peak earlier (Elliot and Duffus 1996). By entering the high-end of managerial and professional employment women workers continue to reduce the full-time gender wage gap during the 1991-1995 period. These changes also partially reflect the better and higher education qualifications of younger women (Bruegel 1997).

The experience of part-time women workers is significantly different. Firstly, the over-representation of women workers in part-time and flexible work is a cause for concern. This implies the prevalence of low-working conditions, precarious working situations, and mediocre wages (Rubery and Fagan 1997). Some significant instruments of indirect discrimination then continue to be used against women workers in Britain. Moreover, it also means that the long-term prospects of this group continue to be disadvantaged. This is especially the case given the lack of adequate legislative protection along with technological changes that makes part-time and atypical forms of employment more commonplace (MacLaughlin 1995).

Secondly, there is not only a gender wage gap for women part-time workers, but there is also a wage gap between full-time and part-time women workers (Bruegel and Perrons 1998:117). On the latter, the position of low-paid women relative to low-paid men is improving, but only because men in low-paid employment have seen a deterioration in the male median wage (ibid:120). On the former, the increasing wage inequalities between women workers are an important finding for a review interested in multi-discrimination. In this sense, class still matters in the British labour market – and those in the upper and lower ends of the social spectrum continue to participate in and gain from the labour market in widely different ways.

These two issues show the need to uncover other social attributes of women workers at the top and bottom ends of the labour market. This is because it indicates the possibility that they may belong to other marginal social groups as well. Similarly, the need to pay attention to other social features of working men in low-paid occupations and those that have seen a fall in male median wages should be emphasised at this point.

4.2 Minority Social Groups in Britain – Including Gender, Race, and Ethnicity

Despite the fluidity of racial and ethnic identities, they are powerful variables in marking and distinguishing identities between groups. In the labour market these racial/ethnic markers are
important because they may disadvantage people coming from marginal groups. Usually, however, people belong to one or more of these social groups, and such situations usually result in the multiplication of disadvantages faced by these people. The only exception to the rule is when an individual possesses social attributes of the dominant group, which in the case of Britain are native, white men. In short, there is a greater susceptibility for people from marginal social groups to face multi-discrimination in the labour market because they occupy various marginal positions vis-à-vis the principal group.

A particularly sensitive aspect to incorporating the racial/ethnic factors into an analysis of labour markets, is the fraught nature of identity politics in Britain (Modood 1997, Wrench and Modood 2001). Sociologists and cultural theorists are keen to point out that in Britain racism in recent times is increasingly more ascribed to cultural differences rather than simply physical or biological differences (Hall 1988, Modood 1997). Besides the white-black dualism amongst British people, non-white groups further sub-divide themselves into cultural groupings – usually based on apparent forms of socialisation, customs and upbringing (Modood 1997:156). Religion, particularly among British Asians, is also quite central to ethnic identity formation. This is not the only means of separating one self into groups, and there are many complexities in structuring ethnic identities and affiliations. Yet, religion is usually an intricate part of forming collective identities in Britain (ibid:158).

Such ethnic identity formations downplays gender, socio-economic and class differences within these groups, which are equally vital markers in forms of labour market participation by marginal social groups. On the issue of gender, women are important for maintaining ethnic identities among minority communities because as mothers and daughters they are the bearers and carriers of cultural values (Moghadam 1994, Huang, Teo and Yeoh 2000). The process of ethnic identity formation is then about perpetuating gender differences as it is about promoting and protecting the interest of minority communities. How do minority women negotiate with gender and ethnic identities in ways that prevent them from facing discrimination due to stereotypical images held by employers? The response is likely to be complex. This section of the paper starts with a review of labour market experiences of minority racial/ethnic groups. After this, the narrative is complicated by recognising that these racial/ethnic identities also have a gender-dimension, noted as “racialised gendering”, that require us to note the particular experiences of women workers.

The Labour Market Experiences of Ethnic and Racial Minorities in Britain

At the outset, it should be noted that the literature on the topic is rare and scattered. But the few studies that do document such labour market experiences are useful in pointing to some key themes. The findings of early attempts to document the discrimination faced by minority social groups are reviewed here.

Firth’s (1981) research seeks to understand the prevalence of racial discrimination in the British labour market. This was done by carrying out a study where fictitious candidates, from various minority social groups, applied for job advertisements. Workers under consideration in this study were all professionals, and the fictitious applicants were both white and non-white. A key finding of this study was that non-whites had poorer chance of getting jobs even though they had similar qualifications and work experience to white counterparts (Firth 1981:265). This finding is not altogether surprising, as significant discrimination against minority races had been noted in white-collar and professional occupations in previous studies as well (Jowell and Prescott-Clarke 1970, McIntosh 1973, cited in Firth 1981). The more interesting finding was that the level of prejudice against minority groups varies with nationality, language, ethnicity and race (ibid:267). Equally, national minority racial/ethnic group applicants were more likely
to face discrimination than did minorities from other white countries, such as Australia or France (ibid:269).

During the two decades since the study by Firth (1981) many changes have occurred, with the situation of minority communities generally improving (Wrench and Modood 2001:2). However, non-white immigrants/ethnic/racial communities continue to bear the burden of an ethnic penalty (ibid:72). How does this get translated into the everyday labour market experiences of minority social groups?

Labour market participation rates of minority ethnic men and women are notably less than that for those from the dominant groups. Unemployment rates for minority ethnic groups is also found to be much higher (ibid:12). Yet there are noteworthy differences between different minorities, with some sections of minority groups making gains while others have not. For instance, British-African and British-Caribbean people have economic activity rates comparable to white counterparts, while this is not the case for British-Asians – though here too, British-Indians fare better than other Asian minority groups (ibid:5). Yet, Black-British men have higher unemployment rates than men from all other ethnic groups – though this does not hold water for Black-British women (ibid:5). At this current juncture in Britain, the picture that emerges for minority communities then is significantly more complex than previously found. Still, there are a few clear-cut themes that cut across most ethnic communities in their quest for stable and secure employment.

The decision of minority communities to participate in the labour market is linked to their perceptions of discriminatory practices encountered in the labour market plus the economic and social cohesion among their communities. Therefore, where economic disadvantages are more pronounced, these factors carry over into the labour market. An issue reiterated constantly by respondents in many of these studies is that workers from marginal communities have to be “better than the average” to secure stable employment (Wrench and Modood 2001, Dale, Shaheen, Kalra and Fieldhouse 2002). This belief is supported by other studies too. An analysis of labour force survey for minorities finds that workers from racial/ethnic groups were better qualified than their white counterparts in similar occupations, which indicates the prevalence of an ‘ethnic penalty’ (Cheng and Heath 1993, Wrench and Modood 2001).

Where economic deprivation and polarisation was high, the perceived opportunities for minority communities was either to aim for higher qualifications or rely on unskilled work in an ‘ethnic’ labour market (Ram 1999, Dale et al. 2002:950). This is reflected in national-level studies too. Firstly, the incidence of part-time employment for ethnic minority groups is higher than that of white men – though this did not hold true for minority women in comparison to white women (Wrench and Modood 2001:6). Moreover, there is also a clear distinction in the occupational distributions for white and non-white ethnic groups, with minority groups generally under-represented in the corporate sector, professional categories, and in skilled manual jobs (ibid:8).

Another consequence of discrimination and social exclusion is that many minority workers become discouraged, and withdraw altogether from the labour market (ibid:1, Dale et al.:945). This is particularly true for youth in minority ethnic communities, who are more likely to express their frustration by not engaging in the labour market (Dale et al.2002). The material poverty and the extent to which minority groups are removed from values and culture of the dominant classes, i.e. the lack of cultural capital, play a significant role in the decision to participate in the labour market. It also shapes the kind of work they will pursue.

Racial discrimination faced in the labour market also has its spillover effects in small enterprises. Firstly, a motivation – though not necessarily the underlying reason – for minority entrepreneurs to set-up their own small businesses is labour market discrimination (Barrett, Jones, and McEvoy 1996, Ram 1999, Wrench and Modood 2001). Secondly, there appear to be cultural and structural factors that help explain the prevalence of self-employment among ethnic
minorities. Namely, community links within ethnic communities and employment conditions in the labour market, respectively, are important (Wrench and Modood 2001:16).

An analysis of the ways in which ethnic minority small-enterprises impacts upon the labour market provides mixed evidence. At the national level, there are economic benefits to ethnic minorities (ibid:14). It appears that self-employment is an important form of economic activity for minority groups – particularly for British-Asians. Moreover, those ethnic minorities engaged in self-employment earned more than their white counterparts, which indicates that it is a form of economic activity that contributes towards narrowing the aggregate wage gap (ibid:11). Hence, self-employment and small enterprises positively contribute to the position of ethnic minorities in the labour market.

However, there is an underside to this story too. Namely, where the self-employed hire other employees, they turn to the weak labour market position of marginal groups. This group provides a sound labour pool from which minority small business enterprises draw upon for employment. This usually translates into employees in such small business enterprises, usually from the same ethnic/racial community, getting paid lower than the going market wage rates (Ram 1999:687-8). By exploiting unfavourable labour market conditions wage-based discrimination is perpetuated by minority community employers against employees from the same and/or similar communities. Such corollaries of labour market discrimination may well be potential trouble spots for advocating legislative measures combating one form of discrimination (wage-based discrimination) with respect to other forms of discriminatory outcomes (unemployment and social exclusion). The need, however, for comprehensive instruments that tackle the varied aspects to discrimination is apparent.

4.3 “Racialised Gender” – The Difficult Position of Minority Women

Working women from minority communities face dual difficulties. They have to negotiate with their identities both as women and as members of a marginal social community. The difficulties manifest themselves in the decisions to participate in the labour market and their encounters. Some qualitative studies elucidate the labour market experiences of women workers from marginal social groups, where the particularly fraught nature of gender and ethnic identities is revealed (Dwyer 2000, Evans and Bowlby 2000, Huang, Teo and Yeoh 2000, Dale et al 2002).30

Identities of minority communities are contextual and relational, with strong gender and class inscriptions (Dwyer 2000:475-6). This means that gender expectations of ethnic/racial identities are not fixed across all socio-economic groups, with very visible class differences among the same ethnic communities well noted (Dwyer 2000, Evans and Bowlby 2000, Huang, Teo and Yeoh 2000). For low-income and working classes this usually means increased patriarchal control of their women, which is partially attributed to social exclusion and racism faced by these marginal communities. The ostracism faced by minorities, as low-income and working class people within an ethnic-based minority, reinforces a defence mechanism that calls for protecting their identities within these groups (Dwyer 2000:478, Dale et al 2002:957). As women are perceived to be nurtures, their role in transmitting cultural values of ethnic groups is usually considered important for the welfare of the community.

30 Unfortunately, all these studies focus on the British-South Asian community. An extensive literature search for similar themes among the British-African and British-Caribbean failed to come up with any relevant studies. This is a lacuna that needs to be filled, in light of the interesting findings for women workers from the British-Asian community.
Gender identity formation among low-income social groups is an equally important factor in the decision of younger girls in the type of education chosen. While there is increasing consensus that education is important, there is constant reiteration of the need to maintain family honour (Dale et al. 2002:962). Therefore, the decisions to educate themselves, and the level and type of education they think is appropriate is largely shaped between the need to balance family honour and education. Equally, these younger girls and women recognise that an education may pave the way for “getting out of the house” through eventual secure employment (ibid:959). Still since there was an implicit expectation on the part of this group that they will marry and have families, they thought it would be foolhardy to compromise their long-term welfare through ‘unacceptable’ social behaviour and conduct (ibid:958).

The ways in which this thinking process reflects on the kind of occupations chosen is apparent when considering working women from low-income and working class minorities. Because women’s identities were so closely tied with their roles as mothers and nurturers, most working women – particularly from the low-income and working class backgrounds – tended to find themselves in part-time work (Evans and Bowlby 2000:466). There was, however, general consensus amongst these women that part-time work is bad work. But where such work is carried out in ‘all-female’ working environments, this is seen to keep with their cultural values and norms, and these women find it easier to negotiate with their spouses, in-laws, and the family community as to their need to work.

An equally important factor in the kind-of employment minority working women were able to secure was their access to reliable social networks – which is not readily available for women of low-income and working class backgrounds. The ability of minority community members, irrespective of gender, to secure stable employment, is influenced by the strength of their social networks (Ram 1999). This is in keeping with research done for other countries, where the social capital and networks maintained by ethnic and migrant communities determined their labour market experience in important ways (Portes 1995, cited in Evans and Bowlby 2000). Similar findings are found to hold true for the British Asian community too. The kind-of employment opportunities available to minority working women from low-income groups was largely found through word of mouth and community connections (Evans and Bowlby 2000).

Uncovering these links is important for a review on multi-discrimination, because it highlights the complicated aspects to discrimination in the labour market. The unfavourable positioning of ethnic, racial and migrant communities matters in the kind-of labour market opportunities available to them. And there appear to be visible links between social exclusion and labour market discrimination, where the former is conducive for exploitation by employers. In this respect, protective measures for vulnerable workers are clearly necessary. However, this is only part of the story. Equally, it is important to recognise and promote awareness raising of the rights discourse as a means of dealing with the multi-faceted issues in dealing with minority working women. In short, tools to eliminate discrimination – while critically important – alone may not suffice to deal with various dimensions to discrimination, and its corollaries, such as poverty, deprivation, social exclusion and marginalisation.

But it is not only the class position that factors into identity formation. Of equal importance are the social origins and backgrounds of ethnic minorities in their home countries (Evans and Bowlby 2000, Dale et al. 2002). Not only does the class position of these women in their home countries matter, but also whether they originated from urban or rural areas along with their educational and skill attainments are of equal importance (Evans and Bowlby 2000:467). Therefore, the social and class background of ethnic minorities will influence the

31 The important exceptions are when the women are older – when they apparently can no longer engage in sexual transgressions – and where the husbands are unemployed. In these situations, these women sought work in full-time and secure occupations.
shaping of gender identities and their participation in the labour market. Consequently, women from middle and upper class backgrounds with professional qualifications are more able and willing to challenge patriarchal conceptions of gender roles and relations. All these studies found that these women, by virtue of their privileged class position, education, and social background, are better placed to secure employment that reflected their needs, aspirations and qualifications (ibid:471, Dwyer 2000).

However, they too faced discrimination – which is of an institutional nature. The racism by white British colleagues against them is cited as a reason for some of them to curb their decisions to seek promotion and career mobility. Many of these women constantly repeated that when it came to such decisions, they were made to feel the “outsiders” – and presumably, therefore, not worthy of promotion and/or a career (Evans and Bowlby 2000:471). In the words of one woman, “promotion’s difficult being Asian... I felt self-conscious of my accent, I didn’t fight for promotion” (cited in Evans and Bowlby:471). Besides this, there were instances in which qualifications and work experience obtained in their home countries was not accepted within the British context. Consequently many of these women were de-skilled and they had to do several years of voluntary and/or “unqualified” work, such as being ‘unqualified teachers’, before their professional qualifications were accepted and recognised in the labour market.

It is apparent that anti-discrimination laws and protective legislation can deal with the kind-of discrimination faced by professional women from ethnic/racial communities. The battle here, on the face of it, is somewhat easy. However, a common theme pervades working women lives from all ethnic communities – that of gender roles and norms. Gender ascription, albeit of varying magnitudes, continue to mould decisions made by women across the class divide, and is best articulated by a respondent as follows. “There are no jobs unsuitable for Muslim woman, just jobs that are hard to get into because of stereotypes of what a woman can and can’t do” (cited in Evans and Bowlby 2000:470).

The double-edged sword for minority women, however, is that by virtue of belonging to these communities, they have to break down many barriers when participating in the labour market. Firstly, there are preconceived notions of cultural difference vis-à-vis the dominant community these women have to deal with. An example of this is where they are unable to secure employment in the corporate world commensurate with their professional qualifications if they wear ‘traditional’ attire, such as shalwar kameez or hijab, because such attire does not keep with a ‘corporate image’ (ibid:471). Secondly, many of the gender notions – such as being mothers and carers – found applicable to native British groups was equally prevalent in the minority communities too (Dwyer 2000, Evans and Bowlby 2000). The bottom line for women from these communities, however, when participating in the labour market is that they have to negotiate with both gender and ethnic/racial identities – hence the notion of “racialised gendering” coming into play (Evans and Bowlby 2000:462).

5. Segmentation or fragmentation? Multiple discrimination in India

Indian society is enormously diverse and varied. This heterogeneity has not always worked for the benefit of all social groups in India. Massive poverty levels found in the country testify to this. This review is interested in examining the ways in which this diversity has worked itself out in the labour market in order to explain the persistence of material deprivation and social exclusion for notable segments of people. Given the various social groups and class interest, what does this imply for discrimination in the labour market? Moreover, what forms does this take? The latter is especially important, because social diversity implies that no group of people belong to only one social category. In other words, people are likely to occupy many social positions – marked by class, caste, gender, ethnicity, religion, migrant status and so on – which
may have an impact on labour market relations. This section of the review will, therefore, focus
on the ways in which the prevailing social structures in India shape and form multi-
discrimination.

Rodgers (1994) makes the case that the varied nature of India’s social structure and labour
market relations is less a case of segmentation and more a case of fragmentation (1994:122).
He focuses on dimensions of community networks, caste, and mobility in the organised and
unorganised sectors of the labour market to show its fragmented nature. By extending labour
market segmentation analysis, he argues that “the more dividing lines within society, the easier
it is for the labour market to fragment” (ibid:117). This standpoint underscores the need to
recognise the labour market as an institution, reflective of the wider social, economic and
political structures. In this respect the labour market and the job structures created are a social
process, which can only operate effectively and efficiently when there is an appropriate
institutional context.

Furthermore, by drawing on previous survey studies undertaken by Rodgers (1994), he
shows that there is a very close link between labour status – which is defined in terms of
regularity, protection and autonomy – and poverty (1994:112). This particular relationship is
shown by highlighting the differences in the level and heterogeneity of income between
numerous labour status groups identified in the study (ibid:113-115). The importance of this
finding is that it has implications for the kind of employment creation and development
strategies formulated, where it is not only job creation that is important. Embedded here is the
notion that it is equally important to investigate how the labour market distributes existing
employment opportunities as well as newly created jobs.

One reason for promoting this particular line of thought is to show that market
liberalisation may not necessarily overturn these informal social rules and norms, which
perpetuate fragmented labour market conditions (ibid:118). The need for appropriate strategies
to eliminate labour market discrimination is an obvious corollary of this reasoning. Nearly a
decade onwards, how have these two issues been played out in the Indian labour market? And
what does new evidence suggest in relation to fragmentation and multiple discrimination faced
by various social groups? The next sub-section begins to review the evidence – and I begin
with an examination of the gender issues, primarily for the sake of consistency with the
previous analysis on Britain.

5.1 Making gender matter: Women workers in the Indian labour market

Evidence from the formal sector

The case of women workers is particularly worthy of attention, because contradictions between
reality and rhetoric blatantly manifest themselves in their lived experiences. To begin with,
gender equality measures are enshrined in the Indian constitution – which is a progressive
measure. However, legal frameworks alone are not sufficient for ensuring gender equality. The
Indian scenario shows that this may be a necessary condition but it is clearly not sufficient: in
many cases legal instruments merely pay lip service. In other words, while there is
constitutional protection for women, the pervasive nature of patriarchal practices and norms in
its social structure is a well-recognised reality. Not surprisingly, therefore, women and men
workers – across the occupational spectrum – have significantly different experiences when they
participate in the labour market. And this is the case despite notable strides made by women
entering professional fields and occupations (Duraisamy and Duraisamy 1999, Madheswaran
and Shroff 2000, Ruwanpura 2004). To understand the particular position of this group, once
again the most apparent manifestations of gender-based discrimination – wage and occupational
inequality – is examined below.
Gender-based job stratification and wage inequalities that discriminate against women workers is like almost elsewhere linked to patriarchal norms and values that shape opportunities and outcomes in the labour market (Deshpande 1999, Duraisamy and Duraisamy 1999, Nanavati and Patel 1999, Madheswaran and Shroff 2000, Sharma 2003). There is nothing particularly new or startling about this observation. There is, however, an interesting point made by Deshpande (1999), similar to Rodgers (1994), on the importance of particular sources of information, such as family, caste, networks in searching for formal employment. Deshpande (1999) finds this holds valid for women workers too, where the pattern of job access for women is noted to be via other working women (1999:121). She goes onto observe that the importance of this network restrict women’s entrance to other occupations, thus, providing another rationale for the persistence of gender-based occupational segregation. Ironically, therefore, an important way in which women find employment is also one that may perpetuate discriminatory practices in the labour market.

Such observations show that employment per se may not necessarily lead to the empowering of women or indeed in helping them realise their capabilities. These nuances in labour market relations help accentuate the point that striving for gender equality must move beyond generating employment for men and women. Otherwise, as a recent regressive Supreme Court decision on women workers in Air-India shows, gender justice in employment is easily flouted by creating different categories of work even when the work content is the same for men and women workers (Sharma 2003). Therefore, the types and forms of employment that attempt to break down gender-based occupational barriers in sustainable ways should be treated as equally worthy of consideration and importance by policy-makers.

Quantitative evidence for the 1980s and 1990s reviewed in India shows gender-based discrimination taking place at three levels (Deshpande 1999, Nanavati and Patel 1999). Firstly, there is occupational segregation. Much of the Indian workforce is concentrated in agriculture and cultivation, which is noted for its very low productivity levels – and consequently wages. For women workers this is the main occupation, with agriculture and cultivation employing 79.0% of women and 60.0% of men. Even within this sector, however, women are found mainly as agricultural labourers rather than cultivators (Nanavati and Patel 1999:101).

Similar occupational segregation patterns are also noted in the urban sector and professional fields. When women aged 15-59 are compared to men of a similar age cohort and same levels of schooling, these groups of women were largely found in limited and lower-paid occupations compared to men. Specifically, 86.0% of urban women workers are primarily found in seven “women’s” occupations (Deshpande 1999:122). When considering the upper-end of the market, educated women faced higher rates of unemployment than men – and had to wait for longer period to secure suitable jobs (Duraisamy and Duraisamy 1999:600).

The literature appraisals of occupational wage surveys in professional fields and urban sector also note the prevalence of gender-based wage discrimination. The differences in wages paid to women workers in the same occupations of different industrial groups as men workers are notable. In 31 of 37 occupational groups compared, the average wages of women workers were lower than the minimum wage paid to men. Moreover, the maximum wage paid to

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32 This is where a legal case was brought against the national carrier Air India because separate occupational categories were used for men and women airline crew. This lead women crew members to retire from flying at 50 years and opt to work as ground staff until 58 years, while men could continue to work as cabin crew until they are 58 years. Keeping women and men crew members in separate categories – as ‘air hostesses’ and ‘pursuers’, respectively – is argued to be discriminatory because the content of the work done by both women and men is the same. However, the Supreme Court decision did not see this as being discriminatory because of the need for men and women working in the travel industry to have a ‘pleasing appearance’ – with the concomittant implication that all women over 50 did not look pleasant while men did! (Sharma 2003).
women was lower than for men in 33 of these occupational groups (Deshpande 1999:124). Evidence of wage discrimination is apparent in professional fields as well (Madheswaran and Shroff 2000:126). Stronger evidence of such practices, however, stems from the private sector rather than the public sector (Duraisamy and Duraisamy 1999:606-11).

Discrimination faced by women workers spill into the ineffective implementation of social security legislation as well. Namely, reduced or non-payment of maternity benefits, and non-provision of childcare facilities (Deshpande and Deshpande 1999:124-5). Such practices show the ease with social security legislation put in place to protect and promote the social welfare and rights of women workers are flouted. This issue shows that legislative framework alone, while critical and important are unlikely to bring about gender equality. Equally important is worker education and gender awareness training of labour officers, who ought to have the mandate to ensure the effective enforcement of social security legislation in work places.

Women workers in the informal sector

The sketch above indicates that the position of women workers in India’s formal sector is troubling. Their situation unsurprisingly, however, appears to be more precarious in the informal sector. The most disquieting aspect is that a majority (92.0%) of the workforce – over 350 million – is found in the informal sector, which is defined as workers in both the urban and rural sector not covered by basic labour legislation (Harriss-White and Gooptu 2000:89, Hensman 2000:249). This alarmingly high proportion of workers in the informal sector is partially attributed to the non-implementation of existing legislation, but inadequacies in legal instruments are also identified as other contributory factors (ibid:249).

The rampant discrimination encountered by women workers in the informal sector is a reflection of the social prejudices they face, which tend to shape labour market institutions too (Harriss-White and Gooptu 2000:90). Therefore, inevitably women workers in the informal sector too face discriminatory treatment. Most informal sector women workers are found in the agricultural sector, where in the 1990s their wages were 71.0% those of men. Moreover, the increased feminisation of agricultural tasks is also noted, as almost all tasks with the exception of ploughing and work with machinery are forced upon women workers (ibid:97). Those in non-agricultural work fare no better, as they are concentrated in the lowest end, and are paid on piece-rate rather than time-rate (ibid:97). The latter is usually the practice for men, and consequently women workers earn much less than men engaged in similar informal sector occupations and activities.

The challenge of workers in the informal sector is the need to organise them in ways that ameliorate their precarious position (Hensman 2000). The informal sector by definition is an area in which there is non-enforcement of labour legislation. Yet the exploitative working conditions of informal sector work in India show the need to promote and protect their interest (Harriss-White and Gooptu 2000, Hensman 2000, Harriss-White 2002). Evidence of attempts at collective action via non-traditional unions and civil society movements in India highlights the problems and potential of such efforts. Still the coming together of co-operatives and non-traditional unions suggest that these social actors may be instrumental in improving worker welfare (Hensman 2000:254).

However, the successes of these local efforts are scattered at best, and usually the focus is local and small-scale. Equally, rarely do informal labourers forge alliances across those in

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33 Similarly, in the urban informal sector the labouring position of migrant workers appears to be more precarious with this group more likely to face wage-based discrimination (Duraisamy and Narasimhan 1997). Moreover, where migrant and ‘low’ caste status converge, incidence of forced and bonded labour situations (more perverse forms of discrimination) arising ought not to be discounted.
similar situations across different occupations (Harriss-White and Gooptu 2000:105). In this sense collective action is prevented because the number of workers in informal units are small, and workers are unable to protect their interests (Duraisamy and Narasimhan 1997:223). But this need not necessarily be the main reason. The volatility of informal economic activities coupled with fierce competition can equally undermine collective action. While the role of non-traditional civil society actors appears to be critical at this particular juncture, it is just as important not to overestimate the ability of these newly emerging institutions to effectively champion worker rights in more widespread ways. In this respect, these micro-level efforts, while important, should not be regarded as a panacea for protecting informal workers rights more generally.

Speaking about women workers in the informal sector is not to negate the important influence other social markers have on the particular position of those labouring in the informal economy. The few studies on India that have begun to note the convergence of diverse social attributes and identities do shape and influence labour market discrimination in particular ways (Harriss-White and Gooptu 2000). While rarely acknowledged the primary reason for this is that the market place relies on social forms of regulation, which tends to perpetuate and re-work social identities as economic institutions (Harriss-White 2001:10). Obviously, therefore, caste, ethnicity, religion along with gender becomes relevant in discriminatory outcomes of labour market institutions. The next section of the paper, therefore, reviews the literature that has sought to look at these intersections.

5.2 Caste considerations in the Indian labour market

Literature on caste dimensions affecting the labour market usually does not analyse multiple discrimination. Many studies limit themselves to the single issue of caste, and examine labour market discrimination only from this perspective (Banerjee and Knight 1985, Ahmed 1999). In this literature not even the class dimension is taken into consideration, which given the notable poverty levels in India seems a likely contributory factor. Class-caste synergies are incorporated in later works (Dhesi 1998, Deshpande 2001), with more recent studies investigating the overlap between gender and caste (Deshpande 2002, Narasimhan 2002). Yet studies on gender and caste dimensions do not explore the specific field of labour market discrimination. However, since the literature sheds light on the interconnections between different social markers, they provide a critical backdrop in this literature review. In this sense, the literature points at the convergence of various possibilities on multiple discrimination taking place.

Caste inequities in the labour market is linked to discrimination ‘prior to the market’, which reverberates in discriminatory labour market outcomes. Both demand and supply factors lead to such results. On the supply side, because members of scheduled castes are exposed to caste prejudice and discrimination, particularly in rural areas, their experiences and socialisation influence their attitudes and expectations (usually negatively) in their search for employment (Ahmed 1999). A study by Banerjee and Knight (1985) finds that this holds to be the case even where scheduled caste groups have migrated to urban areas in search of better labour prospects (1983:285). They explain that this is because previous discriminatory experiences continue to shape social and economic roles and expectations of scheduled caste groups. Consequently, caste differentials in occupational attainment among urban natives and rural migrants are noted to be remarkably similar (ibid:285). This is despite the opportunity for scheduled caste groups migrating to urban settings to indulge in a sanskritization – i.e. namely conceal their true caste

34 My thanks for Manuela Tomei (IFP/Declaration) for pointing this out.
affiliation and emulate upper caste practices, ritual and symbols – process (ibid:284). Thus, new urban settings appear to do little to thrust job expectations of scheduled caste groups into higher levels, which can be attributed to institutional factors.

Job and wage discrimination is commonplace for scheduled caste groups. A study by Banerjee and Knight (1985), based on a large-scale survey (among 10,000 household heads) for Delhi, find notable differences among the scheduled and non-scheduled castes. The former group is concentrated in unskilled manual, while the latter group is in white-collar occupations. There was 13.0% more scheduled caste in unskilled manual work, while 9.0% more unscheduled workers were in professional and clerical work (ibid:286). Similarly, the earnings function favour non-scheduled castes in all occupations. The exception is clerical workers, where the mean earnings are higher for scheduled castes (ibid:296). A decomposition analysis done shows that the ‘unexplained’ components accounts for a bulk of gross earning differences between the scheduled and non-scheduled groups (ibid:296).

Income inequalities that result from caste discrimination in the labour market also appears to have a direct relationship with social exclusion, income distribution, and educational achievements of scheduled castes. Literature extending to analyse pre-market discriminatory factors finds the importance of education in bringing about caste and gender inequality (Ahmed 1999:77, Deshpande 2001). There are notable variations in the levels of education between scheduled castes/tribes and non-scheduled groups, with low literacy and education levels for the former. Despite these poor achievements, the work force participation and unemployment rates are higher for scheduled groups vis-à-vis non-scheduled groups. Equally, a gender dimension is noted, with women from scheduled groups having higher work force participation rates than men (Ahmed 1999:85). This is a possible reflection of their severe economic deprivation and poverty, forcing them to accept any kind-of wage and employment simply to ensure survival. These situations also reflect possible reasons for forced labour to be primarily found among scheduled groups, showing the links between social exclusion and discrimination. Moreover, it shows the ways in which caste, class, and gender intersect to make those from vulnerable social groups more likely to face multiple discrimination.

The formal sector appears to have more cases of caste-based discrimination rather than the informal sector. This is owed to two factors. Firstly, there is resistance to hiring scheduled caste members in private formal sector jobs but not the public sector jobs, which in any case is comparatively scarce. Secondly, because informal networks and contacts are important sources of securing employment scheduled caste groups possibly lack the contacts in occupations at the higher-end (Banerjee and Knight 1985:302).

The underlying reality for scheduled groups is one of struggle, whether in securing stable formal sector jobs or working in the informal sector – and this holds to be the case in both rural and urban areas (Banerjee and Knight 1985, Ahmed 1999, Harriss-White and Gooptu 2000). Caste discrimination manifests itself in the labour market in the form of occupational and wage-discrimination. The effect of caste prejudice and promotion/protection of particular socio-economic groups, usually upper classes, is to perpetuate economic inequalities – and these

35 The notion that sanskritization may be a way out of the oppressive caste hierarchy may be considered a moot point from some quarters. A more recent study has noted that with the spread of capitalism what one witnesses in contemporary India is more an emulation of “high” class consumerist values rather than caste norms (Kapadia 2002:1-40).

36 The exception is professional workers, where the ‘explained’ component largely accounts for income differences between the two groups.

37 This is because reservation policies introduced by the Indian Government in 1951 are supposed to reserve government sector jobs for scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward castes (ILO 2003:65).
economic interest in turn preserve the caste system (Banerjee and Knight 1985:303). Even when there is no overt discrimination, the effects of caste prejudice and discrimination is still carried over in the limited occupational choices pursued by scheduled castes.

**Discrimination and class-caste overlaps**

An underlying issue on class-caste synergies is the relationship between economic inequality and discrimination. Inequalities relate to unequal economic, social and cultural resource distribution across different social categories. To understand discrimination it is important to identify contributory parameters, namely the institutional organisation and social structures that divide rights and responsibilities across different social categories and groups.

Social groups and categories will determine in important ways the sources of prejudice that have discriminatory outcomes outside of the market too. These prejudicial perceptions impact upon distribution of opportunities and behavioural responses of those adversely affected. Inequalities and discrimination are then related to and reinforce each other (Dhesi 1998:1030, Deshpande 2001). However, the previous section showed that there is a lack of analysis on the intersection between caste and other social categories. While many authors point to possible links, none of them investigate these relationships in detail.

Ideologically the caste system is an unequal system that impresses upon the social organisation of groups both within and outside – namely, within the dominant religious group, Hindus, and other religious groups. Caste is determined by one’s birth, which in turn has profound implications on ways in which human, social, cultural, and economic capital and resources are acquired and utilised (Dhesi 1998:1034). Moreover, since the caste system has strong economic overtones, disparities within poverty groups also do have caste variations (Deshpande 2001:139).

There are two issues at stake. Firstly, the importance of economic structures in perpetuating the caste system is apparent in the ways in which class relations are mediated via diverse caste and religious categories. While “lower” social categories are disproportionately poor, these social groups are highly diverse and hierarchical. This implies that affirmative action programs are more likely to benefit those in the upper strata of these marginal groups rather than improving the general socio-economic level of the whole group (Dhesi 1998:1035).

Secondly, because the caste system is complex and fluid, the *varna* and *jati* categories and associations may imply inter-group variations within poverty-level groups as well (Deshpande 2001).\(^{38}\) A close analysis of inter-caste deprivation within overall patterns of poverty shows that the association between caste hierarchy and economic power continues to hold. Moreover, it is reflected in the socio-economic spheres of occupation, education, landholdings, assets and livestock (*ibid*:133). When these variables are aggregated into a *caste deprivation index*\(^ {39}\) and analysed for regional differences, the importance of combining particular welfare policies and social reforms for labour market outcome is highlighted (*ibid*:136-9). Furthermore, the failure of high economic growth to eliminate inter-group disparities is emphasised. In this respect Kerala and West Bengal, two states noted for extensive land and social reforms and promoting universal education, come out better for low disparities despite slow economic growth (*ibid*:136-9).

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\(^{38}\) The meanings and nuances of the relationship between *varna* and *jati* is provided by Deshpande (2000, 2001) and Prashad (2001).

\(^{39}\) The *caste deprivation index* is calculated similarly to the UNDP methodology on human development indices, and is based on five variables that are indicators of the standard of living for the three main caste/tribe groups – i.e scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and others [For more see Deshpande (2001).]
Besides these two issues, the ubiquitous presence of patron-client relationships – which is a key aspect of India’s political system – largely follow the high/low caste social hierarchy. Subsequently, the dominant caste/religious/class groups have managed to represent their interest effectively and stake a larger claim to a limited economic resource base.

Against this social, economic, and political milieu, analysis of the educational and labour market spheres shows the caste-class synergies at play. A main thesis in the literature is that there is discrimination against the accumulation of human capital of low-income/caste groups with policy strategies that favour subsidisation of higher viz. primary education (Dhesi 1998, Deshpande 2001). The former benefits the dominant class/caste/religious nexus. Neglecting the latter cost marginal groups their ability to acquire mass literacy and human capital – so necessary for alleviating their socio-economic status (Dhesi 1998).

To identify these biases, Dhesi (1998) measures the resource intensity, i.e. unit costs, education coverage, and government subsidisation data (1998:1037-41). He finds that the gap in literacy rates between the average and scheduled castes and tribes are high. More disturbingly it widens further when other disadvantaged groups, such as Muslims and other lower castes, are excluded (ibid:1038). Similarly when access to schooling is analysed at different educational levels for diverse social groups, class factors in admission to schooling.

The monopolisation of higher education by high caste Hindus and Brahmins, and high dropout rates for disadvantaged groups is indicative of the discriminatory class/caste dimensions (ibid:1038-41). They have a corollary on labour market outcomes and opportunities available to people from diverse social groups. Lower castes are concentrated in manual and unskilled work because they lack sound primary education achievements, and this occupational differentiation gets reflected in earnings inequality (ibid:1041).

In other words, the overlap between discrimination of caste/religion and class leads to accentuating class inequalities, which takes place even within poverty level groups. Therefore, this review shows the central import of taking these factors into account if development and social policies are to counter the regressive ways in which economic expansion and identity politics can go together.

**Gender dimensions to caste/class discrimination**

Conventionally, the thinking is that lower and scheduled caste women usually have more freedom and mobility compared to upper caste women. Yet, women from the former group are supposed to enjoy materially better living conditions because of their privileged caste positions (Deshpande 2002:25). Underlying such views shows that caste not only imposes a social division of labour but also shapes a sexual division of labour, albeit largely caste based. Furthermore, historically this appears to be the case from both religious texts and evidence of social practices controlling women’s sexuality and labour (ibid:24). How has the present historical juncture and socio-economic realities reinforced or reshaped the gender nexus of caste-class relations? The need to understand the nature of these relations will shed light on the possible dimensions to multiple discrimination experienced by the most marginal social groups.

According to Deshpande (2002) the notable division between the experiences of upper and lower-caste women no longer hold in a distinctive manner (2002:25). She reasons that this is because of and the extent of the *sanskritization* process underway, which makes the different experiences between upper/lower castes women superfluous (ibid:25). So the “benefits” lower caste women have enjoyed in terms of freedom of mobility and movement is increasingly rendered irrelevant through the *sanskritization* process. She proceeds to claim that the relative deprivation of the *dalit* castes bear upon the living conditions of women of this group, thus making their standard of living worse than that of upper-caste women (ibid:26-7). There is likely to be much truth this claim. By showing that there is a higher proportion of women from
upper castes apparently making their “own-decisions”, she controversially claims that material conditions matter more in women’s decision-making process (ibid:27).40

This may seem to be the case at the level of quantitative analysis. Yet, it is deeply problematic to make the case that better material conditions at the level of the household will necessarily create an enabling context for women to become more involved in their “own decision-making” process (Sen and Grown 1988, Kabeer 1994). Without a qualitative analysis that probes into the numerous causes – such as better educated daughters possibly influencing the decisions of their mothers that may factor into this apparently “better” position of upper-caste women – these claims remain at best suggestive.

Making this point, however, is not to deny the possible reality that material deprivation, social exclusion, and impoverishment of dalit castes does negatively bear upon the welfare of women from these social groups. Material deprivation and social exclusion may provide an opportune context for possibly a higher incidence of domestic violence (Deshpande 2002). Though the author is also, correctly, quick to point out that this higher reporting of domestic violence by dalit caste women may also be because there is more frankness in expressing the difficulties and problems they encounter (ibid:28).

Social exclusion and material deprivation faced by dalit caste and its women situate them in a particularly precarious position. Their particular predicament has an impact upon their educational attainments, with women from scheduled caste groups having lower educational and literacy levels (ibid:28-30). An obvious consequence of this is that their labour market opportunities are likely to be limited, with the persistence of low-income earnings (ibid:32). It is no surprise then that incidence of forced labour situations among scheduled caste women, such as devadasi’s, is high (Bales 2000). Therefore, despite scheduled caste women’s ability to greater movement and mobility, there is an equal need to be cautious of equating this particular feature with greater autonomy.

Within this backdrop, the caste/class/gender nexus provides an ideal scenario for the occurrence of multiple discrimination. Unfortunately, however, there appears to be no qualitative studies done that investigates the labour market experiences of this social group in detail. Yet, as emphasised by Harriss-White (2002) at this current juncture in India “identity is stressed and class differences are downplayed” (2002:8). This despite class remaining a powerful social, political, and economic construct that leads to very different experiences for diverse social groups both “in” and “out” of the economy. Hence, the intersections between the social constructs of gender, caste, ethnicity, and class and the ways it impacts upon the labour market still remains to be better understood.

6. **Emerging themes: The case of Britain and India**

The experience of ethnic minorities, marginal social groups and women in the British and Indian labour market is complex and varied. The existing literature, though limited, draws attention to the thorny aspects of multiple discrimination in various communities. Equally, gender outcomes are multifaceted, and the need to pay attention to the intersection of class, caste and ethnic dimensions is noted. Before concluding this survey, there is a need to recapitulate the main themes and issues. As this paper is also interested in pointing to possible

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40 Deshpande’s claims are contentious because the thrust of her thinking seems to imply that the it is irrelevant whether it is the man or woman who earns an income within the household, and simply better material conditions will necessarily enable women to make their own decisions too.
links between multiple-discrimination and development, the relevant themes are summed in bullet-point in this section of the paper. This will draw together some of the focal issues and key themes that have transpired in the review.

- Across all communities, i.e. the dominant and minority, the gender division of labour appears to be firmly entrenched in the labour market. This is partially attributed to patriarchal conceptions of gender-based work activities and tasks in the labour market.

- The ways in which the gender division of labour manifest differs from community to community, and is shaped by the wider institutional and political economic structures. This is reflected in women workers choices, with those from minority and socially excluded communities searching and securing employment in avenues that they feel are acceptable in the community. So, for example, women from low-income and ethnic minority communities in Britain may opt for atypical forms of employment because such employment apparently allows them to maintain their perceived role as cultural bearers of the community. Similarly, women from materially deprived and socially excluded communities in India are found in informal sector activities. Ironically, however, since there are less social constraints on their mobility, it is material deprivation, low educational achievements and social exclusion that shape their relegation to the informal sector.

- Women workers, from all social groups in both countries, are disproportionately represented in part-time and flexible work and in the informal sectors, which is noted for its poor working conditions, precarious work, and low wages. Similar observations are made for men from ethnic (Britain) and caste/religion (India) minority communities. These men are found in greater numbers in the informal sector than men from the dominant community.

- There is a continuing wage gap between full-time and part-time workers, irrespective of gender. Socio-economic background and class continue to matter. Therefore, their class background shapes the ways in which social groups participate, gain and loose from the labour market.

- Racial and ethnic identity formation is complex and fraught with various nuances. In Britain these identities tend to slide over gender and class differences, and the ways in which women from low-income and working class backgrounds bear these identities are different from their men. The difference in India is one in which class/caste synergies intersect in critical ways with religion/ethnicity so as to make those women in the upper-strata materially better off but not necessarily empowered. Consequently, the ways in which women and men negotiate their ethnic, class, caste, and gender identities has a bearing upon their participation in the labour market.

- Discrimination continues to be an issue faced by minority ethnic and social communities. These social groups – across the class spectrum – in Britain pay the price in terms of an ‘ethnic’ penalty. Simply put, minority ethnic communities have to be better than the best to gain entrance and succeed in the labour market. In India, in contrast, discrimination faced by marginal social groups may even result in forced and bonded labour situations.

- The decision of minority social groups to participate in the labour market is influenced by perceptions of discrimination, and the economic and social exclusion faced by these groups. In Britain where marginal social groups are unable to relate to the dominant cultural and social values, their withdrawal altogether from the labour market is not uncommon. This occurs in India differently: those members from minority social groups

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41 Development is defined here not only as economic growth but also as encompassing social dimensions that enhance capabilities of people (Sen 1981).
have limited/lower expectations of their labour market options. Accordingly, they mostly seek employment in the lower-end of the occupational ladder.

- In Britain setting up of self-employment and small-enterprises is not an unusual option for minority social groups, especially where this is seen as a way of overcoming discrimination in the labour market. However, the impact this has on the labour market is mixed. On a positive note, it appears that minorities engaged in this activity help reduce the aggregate wage gap. Nevertheless, case study evidence indicates that when they hire other ethnic minorities, they exploit and perpetuate susceptible ‘ethnic’ labour market conditions.42

By summarising the main themes the purpose is to emphasise the relevant points on multiple discrimination. Essentially, it shows that speaking of discrimination should no longer limit itself to simple binary categories of people, important as this may be. Additionally, race, ethnic, gender, caste and class factors, to name a few social attributes, continues to shape labour market relations.

This particular point is nothing new. The important issue for this paper is that multiple discrimination in the labour market seems to be intricately linked to social exclusion and material deprivation, which may hinder development. Therefore, in the concluding section of this literature survey, some connections between these issues are brought out so as to indicate possible avenues for further research and exploration.

7. Conclusion

The awareness of multiple discrimination from an economics perspective is at best sporadic. Consequently, there is limited economic literature on the ways in which multiple social attributes intersecting shape and determine labour market outcomes for diverse social groups. A partial reason for this neglect is the complex nature of the subject matter and the methodological limitations of orthodox economic theories. Yet, heterodox economics, i.e. political economy readings, has not fully risen to the challenge of conceptualising multiple discrimination.

The growing corpus of knowledge from the legal and human rights discourse has begun to theorise a framework for understanding multiple discrimination, which remains a beacon of hope. This literature has reiterated the necessity for analysing multiple discrimination given, a) the complexity of social reality, and b) by the limitations of existing economic theories. Taking a cue from this thinking, this paper has made an effort to look at evidence from the social sciences on the prevalence of multiple discrimination in the British and Indian labour markets.

For Britain there is a growing and rich body of evidence, though largely qualitative, which shows how the intersection of social attributes forms labour market participation and outcomes. Expectations, participation, and outcome in/of the labour market for different groups is shaped by their particular social positions. Social positions and groupings in turn are influenced by institutional and political economic considerations.

Many of these qualitative studies reiterated that not only do gender, ethnicity, race, and class matter, but the ways in which these social features interact can lead to markedly different labour market experiences for sub-groups. Equally, where social exclusion, material deprivation, and low-income come together for particular social groups, their vulnerability in the labour market is likely to be most acute. So where multiple discrimination is found, it is also intricately bound with social exclusion and material deprivation.

42 Unfortunately, literature examining similar themes in India was not found.
In India, while the mechanics and processes of multiple discrimination are different, the linkages between social institutions and political economic structures remain. Studies on multiple discrimination in India are limited – and this despite the very variegated nature of the Indian social fabric. However, the available literature supports the view that where intersections of social features come into play, they can ultimately manifest itself in the most perverse forms of multiple discrimination – such as forced and bonded labour. Here too, social exclusion, poverty, and material deprivation come together in most situations where multiple discrimination takes place. The convergence of social exclusion, material deprivation and poverty together with multiple discrimination shows the need to pay attention to labour market realities and development.

Decent work, which lies at the core of the discourse promoted by the ILO, is about the need to employ a broad rights-based approach to conditions that preside over all segments of workers. To realise this paradigm, it is necessary to create and effectively operationalise institutions, with a genuine political commitment to champion appropriate social, political, and economic arrangements (Sen 2000:123). Failing this, it is unlikely that economic expansion per se will lead to the eradication of regressive identity-based group solidarity. This is primarily because the market relies on social forms of regulation. Moreover, as the literature survey for India illustrates, there is support for the view that the prevalence of identity-politics can hinder any meaningful social progress and development.

The importance of inequalities, whether based on gender, race, ethnicity, religion, caste, or whatever other social feature, as a dimension and cause of poverty and social exclusion emerged through the empirical literature for Britain as well. While Britain’s development record may not necessarily be compared to that of India, the existence of pockets of failed development should not be discounted. Youth from socially excluded and minority social groups withdrawing from participating in the labour market are symptomatic of failures or weaknesses in development. So where social groups perceive that their options of obtaining decent work in the labour market is frustrated because of their social attributes and positions, then this is also a marker of a failed development process.

The need to understand the operation of multiple discrimination in the labour market is not simply important for its own sake. It is also necessary because the prevalence of multiple discrimination indicates the absence of decent work opportunities, which is defined as productive work with a sufficient income together with adequate social protection (Hepple 2001:13). This in turn has particular implications for human progress and socially sustainable development – a development process that comprehensively moves beyond mere economic expansion. As Sen (2000) notes, “the linkages between economic, political and social actions can be critical to the realisation of rights and to the pursuit of the broad objectives of decent work and adequate living for working people” (2000:127). This then also ought to be the cornerstone of understanding the processes of multiple discrimination as well.
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