

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA  
HOME AFFAIRS  
LOK SABHA**

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:3792

ANSWERED ON:17.08.2010

CENSUS

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**Will the Minister of HOME AFFAIRS be pleased to state:**

- (a) whether the Hon`ble Supreme Court has recently issued any adverse ruling for classification of women as non-workers in the 2001 Census;
- (b) if so, the details thereof; and
- (c) the reaction of the Union Government thereto?

**Answer**

MINISTER OF THE STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS (SHRI AJAY MAKEN)

(a) to (c): Madam; the Hon`ble Supreme Court has not issued any specific ruling for classification of women as non-workers in the 2001 Census. It has, however, made an observation that "In the Census of 2001 it appears that those who are doing household duties like cooking, cleaning of utensils, looking after children, fetching water, collecting firewood have been categorized as non-workers and equated with beggars, prostitutes and prisoners who, according to Census, are not engaged in economically productive work." The Order further notes that "this approach of equating women, who are homemakers, with beggars, prostitutes and prisoners as economically non-productive workers by statutory authorities betrays a totally insensitive and callous approach towards the dignity of labour so far as women are concerned and is also clearly indicative of a strong gender bias against women." Ultimately, the Court has concluded as follows:-

"Though, Census Operation does not call for consideration in this case but reference to the same has been made to show the strong bias shown against women and their work. We hope and trust that in the on-going Census Operation this will be corrected."

In this regard, the following is to be noted:-

(i) In the Census 2001, work was defined as "Participation in any economically productive activity with or without compensation, wages or profit. Such participation may be physical and/or mental in nature. Work involves not only actual work but also includes effective supervision and direction of work. It even includes part time help or unpaid work on farm, family enterprise or in any other economic activity."

The System of National Accounts treats Household Duties as non economic activity for the reason that "If the production boundary were extended to include the production of personal and domestic services by members of households for their own final consumption, all persons engaged in such activities would become self-employed, making unemployment virtually impossible by definition." The SNA restricts the production boundary to market activities or fairly close substitutes for market activities. The UN Manual and the ILO has also treated Household Duties as economically non-productive activities.

Thus, the definition of work and non-work in the Census 2001 is in keeping with the National and International definitions/practices.

(ii) As regards the averment that women performing household duties are placed in the category of beggars, prostitutes and prisoners, it is to be stated that this is a sweeping generalization. The Census merely categorized them as Non-worker and presents data on six distinct categories viz,

- (i) Students
- (ii) Household duties
- (iii) Dependents
- (iv) Pensioners
- (v) Beggars and
- (vi) Others.

It is thus not correct that household duties have been equated to beggars, prostitutes and prisoners. Each of these categories of non workers is a distinct category for which separate figures have been provided.

(iii) On the averment that the Census suffers with gender-bias against women, it is stated that the category in the census is 'Household Duties'. The household duties can be performed by men as well as women. In fact 45 lakh males and 13 crore females have reported

household duties as their activity. The census tries to be gender neutral in its approach. In fact, special steps are taken at every stage to avoid any gender bias.

(iv) Women who indulge in any productive activity like sowing, harvesting, transplantation, cattle rendering are treated as workers in census and recorded accordingly.

(v) Finally, the census merely follows the definition that is adopted in the National System of Accounts and does not create its own definition of work and non-work. In the circumstances, the Census would have to follow the definition of work as set out in the National System of Accounts.