

Female workers and their Socio-Economic Profile: A study of Unorganised Sector in India

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Abstract

The relation between nation's prosperity and women condition can be best understood by the famous quote given by Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru. "You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women".

Indian constitution assures equality of opportunity in all aspects of life including employment and guides the State to secure equal rights for livelihood, equal pay for equal work as well as healthy conditions of work for all. In spite of the rigorous efforts of the State, the economic status of female is lagging far behind their male counterparts. Women work in the most difficult way, they earn the least in life. The additional social responsibilities shouldered by them, their subordinate status in society, male dominated family set up, socioeconomic backwardness, proneness for occupation in the unorganized sector with low productivity and marginalization in employment opportunities account for their poor or low earning capacity. (Kumari and Rammna, 2001). A Majority of women work in unorganized sectors for low wages due to low level of skills, illiteracy, ignorance and surplus labour and thus face high level of exploitation.

Female workers form the largest segment of India's unorganised workforce. As per council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), almost 97 Percent female workers are involved in the unorganised sector. The unorganised sector includes many forms of employment. These forms include home-based work (e.g. Rolling papads and beedis, stitching, traditional painting, etc), self-employment (e.g., selling vegetables), employment in household enterprises, small units, on land as agricultural workers, labour on construction sites, domestic work, and many other forms of casual or temporary employment.

There are number of families where either earning of male is not sufficient to support the family or there is no male partner present to earn. In both the circumstances the female partner forced to become bread earner for the family. In such cases the female workers has dual responsibilities. On one hand they have responsibility to look after their family and at the same time they are forced to go out to earn money to support. The education level in backward area is very low. Among these the education level of female is even worst. Since child hood they need to start supporting in household work or forced to become labour, they do not get chance to education. They fail to get better jobs because of absence of basic education. On top of that there is no formal training available for these female workers to enable them to do reputable jobs. The situation is little better in urban areas but the rural areas are the worst affected. There are less job opportunities in rural areas as compared to urban areas. Lack of basic infrastructure such as electricity, water, roads, transport facilities, are either unavailable or not adequate enough to attract the decent sized industries.

The social and economic profile of female worker is greatly affected by the nature of industrial sector where they work. Inadequate facilities, stressful, unhygienic and unsafe working environment affects their social life. At the same time underplayed and uncertainty in employment puts their economic status in difficult situation

Keywords: Organised Sector, Un-organised Sector, Formal and Informal Sector, Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Wage discrimination

The Unorganised sector and female workers

As per National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS), the employment in India can be expressively grouped into four categories to replicate quality and its sectoral association. The groups are (a) formal employment in the formal or organized sector, (b) informal employment in the formal sector, (c) formal employment in the informal sector, and, (d) informal employment in the informal sector.

Unorganised sector can be classified into four groups:-

1. Occupation Based
2. Employment Nature Based
3. Service category and
4. Special category

These groups include various types of labour. The major labour types are as below.

- Contract labour including workers,
- Casual labour.
- Labour employed in small scale industry.
- Handlooms/power looms workers.
- Beedi and cigar workers
- Employees in shops and commercial establishments.
- Sweepers and scavengers
- Workers in tanneries.
- Tribal labour.
- Workers in domestic help.
- Other unprotected labours.

Indian Economy is one of the top 10 economies in the world. A large part of the industrial sector in India is unorganised. (For the ease of understanding, unorganised and informal sector name is used interchangeably in this study) An

industrial sector consisting of all unincorporated private enterprises owned by individuals or households engaged in the sale or production of goods and services operated on a proprietary or partnership basis and with less than ten total workers, is called an unorganised sector. This sector has a smaller scale of operation with local ownership. They operate using lower technology based methods and insufficient storage facilities. The legal status of such sector is uncertain and do not have adequate access to government schemes for

finance and aid. Usually the brand name is non-existent and the products coming from such sector has flexible pricing and less sophisticated packing. The employees can easily enter without any specific qualification. Majority of the employees are the migrants but they get a lower rate of compensation. They have lower job security and poorer chances of growth, with no leaves and paid holidays. They have lower protection against employers indulging in unfair or illegal practices.

Table 1: Estimated labour force in the informal sector by the year 2012-17

Year	GDP Growth Rate (%)	Employment (million)			Percentage share	
		Formal	Informal	Total	Formal	Informal
2004-05	Actual	32.79	368.35	401.13	8.17	91.83
2006-07	Actual	33.87	393.06	426.93	7.93	92.07
2011-12	9	34.54	453.13	487.67	7.08	92.92
2013-14	7	34.18	442.18	476.36	7.18	92.82
2015-16	5	33.83	431.4	465.23	7.27	92.73
2016-17	9	33.93	521.96	555.9	6.1	93.9
2018-19	7	33.08	490.46	523.54	6.32	93.68
2020-21	5	32.26	461.05	493.31	6.54	93.46

Source: Centre right India, women in unorganised sector, by Zoya Khan May 28, 2013

The above analysis shows that in last decade the situation has worsen where labour in informal sector has always been more than 90% . This is expected that by the end of 12th five year plan (2012-17), 93.9% of the labour force (at 5% GDP growth level) will be employed in the unorganised sector that leaves less than 7% workforce working in organised (formal) sector. This is really a scary reality which needs to be faced and plan to formulate policies which can transform the situation.

Socio Economic status of Female

Female working in unorganised sector are much marginalised. As per International labour organisation (ILO) women represents:-

- 50% of the population
- 30% of the labour force
- Perform 60% of all working hours
- Receive 10% of the world’s income
- Own less than 1% of the world’s property

Despite having this large population contributing in Indian industries, the life of female workers is very challenging. The main problems faced by female workers includes:-

- *Lack of Education:* - Illiteracy is the biggest problem because they do not get time to educate themselves. In childhood, they have to start working early which do not allow them to go school.
- *Insufficient skill & Knowledge:* - Majority of female worker do not have proper training and skills aligned to their task. This results is excessive stress and inefficient working.
- *Extreme Work pressure:* - Female are overworked, they work twice as many hrs as worked by their male counterpart. In agriculture sector the condition is the worst. When n measured in terms of number of tasks performed and the total time spent, it is greater than

men.as per one study in Himalayas which found that on a one-hectare farm, a pair of bullocks’ works 1,064 hours, a man 1,212 hours and a woman 3,485 hours in a year.

- *Irregular wages payment:* - There is lack of controlled processes in unorganised sector which results in to untimely payment of wages to the workers. When it comes to payment to female, it is even worst.
- *Wage discrimination:* -Female do not get similar payment to the male for same task.
- *Seasonal employment:* - Many of the unorganised sector industries are seasonal. These industries includes fruits processing, pickle making, agricultural sector, construction sector etc. They have to fetch another employment when there is no work during offseason.
- *Physical problems:* - The working conditions are not healthy. Work place is not ergonomically designed. This results into workers facing fatigue resulting physical problems. Female workers are mostly on such tasks where they need to remain in one position such as agriculture. This results in to saviour problems such as backache and knee-ach.
- *Insufficient employment benefits:* - Benefits such as structured leaves, medical facilities, provident fund, compensatory off, insurance, pension etc. are completely absent from unorganised sector.
- *Exploitation of the female labour:* - female worker are more vulnerable to exploitation by employer. They can be easily threatened of their job for indecent favours.
- *Insecure job:* - Absence of strong legislation controlling the unorganised sector makes the job highly insecure in this sector.
- *Non sympathetic attitude of employer:* - Temporary nature of employment in this sector do not allow the bond between the employee and employer to establish and become strong.

Unorganised sector and law:-

In India there are many laws have been introduced to ensure a safe and healthy working environment for the female workers – the Trade Union Act (1926), the Minimum Wages Act (1948), the Maternity Benefits Act (1961), etc. Most recently passed act is the Unorganised Workers Social Security Act of 2008, which provides benefits to workers registered with the District Administration, including some health insurance and maternity benefits. Though these laws are there still health and health services remain demoralising. The government has taken special measures to protect the workers in unorganised sector. The most dangerous situation faced by the working class in the area is unorganised sector is the increasing threat to job. Unorganised sector is growing very fast. To give the workers freedom from “Hire and Fire” NDA government had introduced ‘fixed term’ employment through and administrative order which continues under subsequent governments.

The factories Act, The Doc Workers act and The Mines Act are the regulations with the provisions to regulate the health of the workers in industrial sector. The employees state Insurance Act and the workmen’s compensation Act provide health and compensation to the workers in cases of ill-health and injuries, accidents etc. But in the unorganised sector where the majority of Female workers are concentrated, (Prantika Sengupta) no occupational safety and health safeguards are in place. Even in the organised sector, where these are applicable, safeguards are rarely provided for the workers, either male or female. Usually the safety devises are designed keeping the male workers in view and become unsuitable for women workers. Besides, the social aspects of work are not considered risk factors. As a result, more emphasis is given to work related accidents than to illnesses.

Conclusion:-

The unorganised sector is larger in rural areas as compared to urban areas. The female participation in this sector is more than male. Women worker face grave problems. Their condition is highly unpredictable and have constraints related to their work such as insecurity, wage discrimination, absence of medical and accidental care, lack of continuity etc. This is high time to address the issues and discuss the need of policy reforms and institutional changes required at national level. The aim should be women empowerment. On one hand where author suggests the requirement of these reforms, it is also clear that self-awareness and education are the magic wands which will fuel the revolution.

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