

## WOMEN IN INFORMAL SECTOR (A SOCIOLOGICAL INQUIRY)

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### ABSTRACT

Woman constitute half of the world population, do two thirds of the worlds income and own less than a hundredth of the world's property. In India 90% of woman are employed in informal sector without fair wage and standard of living. This paper highlights the role of women in informal sector. Women's empowerment is a sensitive issue in this paper which has a deeply patriarchal and feudal social milieu. The Indian constitution grants women equal rights with men, but strong patriarchal traditions persist, with women's lives shaped by customs that are centuries old. In most Indian families, a daughter is viewed as a liability, and she is conditioned to believe that she is inferior and subordinate to men. Sons are idolized and celebrated.

The present paper has contextualized the role and status of woman in informal and unorganized sector. On the other hand the paper has outlined the problems of woman in informal sector. The paper has also discussed the contribution of woman in the informal sector. Workers working in the unorganized sector even though contributing a major share to the nation development are unsecured and backward socio economically, educationally, politically and in other aspects. Woman's are playing a dominant role in certain aspect in the informal sector such as agriculture, construction etc. the present paper discussed on the nature of work of woman in the informal sectors and analyzed the problems of the woman in informal sector.

**Keywords:** Informal sector, woman workers, problems and challenges of woman in informal sector.

### INTRODUCTION

The informal sector was 'discovered' in the 1970s when Keith Hart first used the term. The International Labour Organization (ILO) then embraced this. The informal sector refers to the part of the economy that does not fall under the purview of organized economic activities. This view largely saw the informal sector as "covering marginal livelihoods and survival activity outside the regulatory reach of state and not yet able to be absorbed by industry (and) emphasized the role (or failure) of formal sector employment in defining the informal sector."

In the late 1960s and 1970s, a large section of the population in the developing countries was still suffering from poverty and still working outside the organized sector in activities that were later

broadly termed as “informal”. Economic growth was not percolating down to the masses fast enough. Due to population growth and urban migration, the active labour force was growing at a much faster rate than the availability of jobs in the organized sector. The focus of development policies was gradually shifting from pure economic growth to growth with equity and the eradication of poverty. Interest was thus generated in sectors outside the organized economy that was providing a livelihood to a large section of the poor. Hence, the concept of the informal sector was born. (Varshney 2011:179)

The 1980s, however, saw the emergence of a more textured understanding of informality. Informal activity was then considered as much a rural or ‘urban’ phenomenon as it was an urban one. Nearly a decade back, the ILO 1998 World Employment Report characterized the informal sector in the following words: : *“Informal units comprise small enterprises with hired workers, household enterprises using mostly family labour, and the self-employed. Production processes involve relatively high levels of working capital as against fixed capital, which in turn reflects the relatively low level of technology and skills involved”.*

*On the other words we can say that “unorganized or informal sector is that sector in which labourers engaged in temporary forms of employment and who are unable to organize themselves due to illiteracy, ignorance, small industry etc.”*

India has a long past civilization and in every stage of its history, women constitute half of its population, but their position in society is not the same in all the ages of history. Their position has been variously estimated and diametrically opposite views are current their place in different stages of Indian civilization. (Praveen 2010:83)

**Research question:**

My central question was to find out the status and vital role of women’s in Informal sector and try to understand the problems and challenges which is faced by the women in informal/unorganized sector.

**Research objective:**

- To outline the role of women in informal sector.
- To understand the problems and challenges of women in informal sector.

## **METHODOLOGY**

According to John W. Creswell (1998) in his book ‘Research Design’ says that, ideas established that a research proposal or paper, we consider four questions: first, what is epistemology? It is the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective. Second, what is theoretical perspective? It is philosophical stance that lies behind the methodology in

questions.third, what is methodology? It is strategy or plan of action that links methods to outcomes. it governs our choice and use of methods, for example experimental research, survey research etc. fourth, what are methods? It is techniques and procedures that we purpose to use like questionnaire, interview, schedule etc.the methodology of the research topic is concerned with research methods. The present paper prepared on the basis of secondary literature that is articles, books, journal, newspaper etc.

## **ROLE AND CONTRIBUTION OF WOMAN WORKERS**

Indian woman, constituting nearly half of the total population play a vital role in the domestic sphere and rural field, particularly in the agriculture sector. Yet our traditional attitude is two treat women as second class citizen. This is so in spite of the fact that woman have prove their mettle in every walk of life but their contribution is not given due credit. According to an ILO (Indian labour organization) estimate, the value of unpaid household work, constitute 25 -39 percent of GNP.

Cultivators or as agricultural labours. They take up a wide variety of activities like sowing of seeds, transplanting, and weeding, harvesting, preparation of compost and manure pits, application of manure, storage of seeds and food grains. An active farm woman spends a 8-9 hours on the farm during the peak agricultural season.(sundaram.1996:1)

In India, almost 94% of total women workers are engaged in informal sector, of which about 20% work in the urban centers. Majority of women workers in informal sector come from those sections of the society which need income at any cost. Nearly 50 per cent of these women workers are sole supporters of their families. Another startling fact is that out of all women workers a mere 7.5% are availing the membership of authentic registered trade unions. Yet another fact to cause concern is that women have to work, unpaid, even outside home, for some 5-8 hours to help their other family members. This fact has to be considered alongside the fact that an average woman has to work at home for some 7-8 hours doing household chores including upbringing the children. Most of the women workers lack proper training. They have very few options to avail as far as gainful jobs are concerned. The quiet contributors to the effortless movement of the social carriage, the women workers engaged in informal sector are poor, perhaps poorest amongst poor, uneducated and weak.

According to the 1981 census, nearly 90% of woman work in the unorganized sector which does not offer fair wages and decent terms of work. Nor is there any opportunity to improve the earning potential. There is no supportive service like crèches, fuel and water. in the sphere of farm family labour, woman contribution is immense but no effort has been made to estimate this. According to the 1991 census estimates about 81 percent of female workers are employed in agriculture as labourers or cultivators, constituting 81 percent of women work force in rural areas and 17.5% in urban areas. (sundaram.1996:3)

## CATEGORIES OF WORKERS IN INFORMAL SECTOR:

On basis of previous researches and other reports, women workers in the informal sector have been identified in the following categories:

**1. Construction labour:** women labour have to work always as unskilled labour carrying construction material on their heads to the construction site, while the skilled/ semi-skilled work is done by men.

**2. Domestic workers:** this category of employment goes mainly to women, especially young girls. In 1997-98, there were some 1.68 million female domestic workers, while the number of male workers was only 0.62 million. The household workers include part-time and full-time workers.

**3. Garment workers:** these women work with some big drapers, boutiques and stores; here too same bias is evident that the women work as helpers to male tailors (called as masters). These workers include those involved in knitting woollens.

**4. Vendor:** this is the most scattered category, which includes women engaged in selling different types of commodities, like broomsticks, cane baskets, making beedi, utensils, petty cosmetics, bangles, vegetables and those running roadside tea stalls, etc. Nearly 40% of total vendors are women and 30% of these women are the sole earning members in their families.

**5. Sales girls:** these workers are further divided in two categories, one, those moving from door to door and place to place, other, those working in shops (mostly women related items like jewelry, Garments and cosmetics etc.(gupta:2011)

An overwhelming presence of women is manifested in the informal sector, both in rural and urban areas. The National Commission on self Employed women estimates that 94% of the total female work force is to be found in this sector. They participate extensively in agriculture, animal husbandry, dairing, social and agro-forestry fisheries, handicrafts, khadi and village industries, handloom weaving and sericulture. In agriculture, their activities range from sowing to weeding, transplantation and harvesting. In agro-forestry, they are engaged in the collection of minor forest produce and medicinal herbs. Apart from this women have a great deal of involvement in handloom weaving and handicrafts and in a variety of khadi and village industries. Rural area accommodates the majority of women workforce and they work in large number in home based production and also under self-employment basis. Typically, they do work in small trades, making garments, rolling beedis.(pattnaik.1996:44)

**Problems of women workers in the unorganized /informal sector:**

The concentration of women in informal sector occupations that characterized by low wages, low capital intensiveness, low energy and use of crude technology. Home based production employing women workers lacks visibility depends mostly on merchant contractors or industrial capitalist and subject to non-applicability of labor legislation, loss of employment and involvement of family labour often turn out to be unpaid labour.

Self employed worker unlike some of the home based workers and the workers in the casual wage sector do not have an identifiable employer-employees relationship.

Wage employment includes women working in construction and domestic service and women employed in rural areas as agricultural casual labourer. Women working in the unorganized sector lack supportive service like crèches and child care centers where women could leave their children's during working hours. Sexual harassment is very acute in the sector. Contractors exploit young girl's even women, and women many a situation circumvent to their lust. Lack of organization also hampers the bargaining power and the power of resist exploitation. (David.1996:22)

### **Conditions of women in the informal economy**

Within the informal economy, women are concentrated in work associated with low and unstable earnings and with high risks of poverty. Outside of agriculture, women are more likely than men to be own account workers, domestic workers, unpaid contributing workers in family enterprises and industrial outworkers or home workers. A significant proportion of women working in agriculture are also unpaid contributing workers on the family farm.

Women spend long hours in unpaid household work. These responsibilities lead to labour segmentation – women get restricted to own-account or home-based employment, where in most cases, they earn less and lesser than men's in the same type of informal employment. In countries where women's mobility is not restricted, women are market or street vendors or hawkers where they face risks to physical safety and health.

The lack of access to formal child care due to its cost exacerbates female informal workers' work burdens. They are dependent on support from family or from neighbours to take care of their children while doing their work. It is also common for them to bring their children to their work places when informal sources of child care support are not available.

Finally, despite the low earnings and precarious nature of much of women's paid informal work, in both developed and developing countries, their work can help keep a family out of poverty. (Bertulfo.2011:3)

Women labourers in the informal sector do not by and large have the advantages of maternity benefit, equal remuneration and child care facilities in spite of existing legislation. The implementation machinery is weak, legal procedures are expensive and cumbersome and women having no viable alternatives of employment are in no position to resist vested interest. The current processes of industrialization have not resulted in any significant occupational, diversification of

female labour force in economy, women have penetrated only in a few modern industries, by and large they remain predominant in low-skilled work Their role in management and decision making continues to be very limited and their employment status remains poor. (shramshakti, 1988:55).

**Policy implications:**

Labouring women in the self-employed and informal sector are an important segment of the labour force. They do arduous work as wage earners, piece-rate workers, casual labour and paid and unpaid family labour. The economic and social conditions of the women are dismal. This has been a matter of concern not only for persons outside the Government, but also within the Government. SEWA in Ahmadabad and working women's forum (WWF) in madras and few other non-governmental organizations are worth maintaining the problems of women in informal sector. Job in the rapidly growing informal sector provides work and income for the majority of urban women workers.

It is suggested that the industrial sector to adapt more labour intensive production methods and create more. India must develop an integrated view of the manufacturing and service sectors. National commission on self-employed women [shramshakti 1988] is working on the problems of women in informal sector and making protective legislation in the critical areas of wages, maternity benefits, child care and social security has not benefited a great majority of women in poverty. More productive employment on a durable basic appears to be the only panacea to the pitiable plight of the unorganized. Women workers who can seek better treatment only through collective action. The opportunities for wage employment are limited. Hence, problems of women workers in the self employment sector deserve immediate attention.

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

This review examines the evidence from research paper based on different countries on female informal employment. Women participation in the labor force has risen in most countries, which is also reflected in the changing sex composition of the total labor force. Women's share in total labor force has risen. With a fall in women's participation in agriculture in most countries, an increasing number of women are turning to the non-agricultural sector for jobs, most of which are located in urban areas.

Anvita Gupta states that the women workers do not have a choice to work, or not to work, due to desire need of income. The limited opportunities available to women are mostly low paid, low-status jobs in the informal sector; jobs which do not have any possibilities of betterment, advancement of efficiency or training, to enable them to enter better jobs at a later stage. In the overall state of unemployment and lack of opportunities, women hold a secondary place to men in the race of employment. It has been observed that women find it difficult to enter the structured system of organized sector. It is also found, that there is no economic reason for paying lower wages or giving only a particular type of work to women workers. When they work for themselves,

their wages and work is quite comparable with those of male workers (For example in case of vendors). There is discrimination in wages, nature of work, availability of work, on the basis of sex. Bargaining power is mostly with the employers, so exploitation is naturally the fate of these poor workers. They come from that section of the society which must work to earn their livelihood and which is socially, economically and traditionally backward and least privileged. There is diversity in the nature of work. Some of them are construction workers, some are domestic servants, and some others are garment workers while few are petty traders in miscellany of goods. But there is little or no variation in terms of job like wage discrimination, job insecurity, leave / holidays and other benefits.

Dunlop & Velkoff (1999). Argued that Informal Sector is an Important Source of Work for Women since Indian culture hinders women's access to jobs in stores, factories, and the public sector, the informal sector is particularly important for women. More women may be involved in undocumented or "disguised" wage work than in the formal labor force. There are estimates that over 90 percent of working women are involved in the informal sector and not included in official statistics (The World Bank, 1991). The informal sector includes jobs such as domestic servant, small trader, artisan, or field laborer on a family farm. Most of these jobs are unskilled and low paying and do not provide benefits to the workers

According to Jennings (1994) that "Women as a reserve army of labour". The capitalist economic system has also treated women as a "reserve army of labour". In developing countries women are used as a temporary labour reserve responsive to agriculture's seasonal demand for labour. This not only leaves women, especially those who are heads of households, and their families in an insecure, vulnerable position but can further alienate women from access to productive assets.

## TERMS

**Workers (or employed):** Persons who were engaged in any economic activity or who, despite their attachment to economic activity, abstained themselves from work for reason of illness, injury or other physical disability, bad weather, festivals, social or religious functions or other contingencies necessitating temporary absence from work, constituted workers. Unpaid helpers who assisted in the operation of an economic activity in the household farm or non-farm activities were also considered as workers.

**Self-employed:** Persons who operated their own farm or non-farm enterprises or were engaged independently in a profession or trade on own-account or with one or a few partners were treated as self-employed in household enterprises. The essential feature of the self-employed is that they have autonomy (decide how, where and when to produce) and economic independence (in respect of choice of market, scale of operation and finance) for carrying out their operation. The remuneration of the self-employed consists of a non-separable combination of two parts: a reward for their labour and profit of their enterprise. The combined remuneration is wholly determined by

the revenue from sales after netting out value of purchased inputs used in production Categories of self-employed persons: Self-employed persons were categorised as follows: Own-account workers: those self-employed persons who operated their enterprises on their own account or with one or a few partners and who, during the reference period, by and large, ran their enterprise without hiring any labour. They could, however, have had unpaid helpers to assist them in the activity of the enterprise;

**Informal economy:** The ILO defines the informal economy as follows. While the informal sector refers to informal enterprises; informal employment refers to informal jobs. Employment in the informal economy can be defined as the sum of employment in the informal sector and informal employment found outside the informal sector.

## CONCLUSION

"The female labour force constitutes one third of the rural workers in India. Womenworkers face serious problems and constraints related to work such as lack of continuity, insecurity, wage discrimination, unhealthy job relationship, absence of medical and accident care etc. The exploitation of female labourers in rural regions happens both horizontally and vertically. It is time to address the issues and discuss the kind of policy reforms and institutional changes required for the emancipation and empowerment of rural female labour force. Empowerment should aim at changing the nature and direction of the power structures which marginalize the women labourers."

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