



Condition of Women Working in the Unorganised Sector

KEYWORDS

Dr. Madhu Sudan Dash

Reader, P.G.Department of Law, Vani Vihar, Utkal University

ABSTRACT *Labouring women in the informal sectors are an important segment on the labour force in India. But the plights of the women working in the unorganized sector are more awful as compared the organized sector. As far as the impact of technology is concerned, there is shift from subsistence to a market economy which has a dramatic negative impact on women.*

INTRODUCTION:

All over the globe the contribution of women in economic development of the country is significant. In every aspect, the role the women is *sine qua non* in the socio-economic life of the country.

But, the majority of women work in the unorganized sector for low wages and at low levels of skills. The number of women workers during last four decades has more than doubled from 40 million to 90 million. Out of 407 million total work force, 90 million are women workers largely employed (about 87 percent) in the agricultural sector as workers and cultivators. In a developing country like India, the women workers in the unorganized sectors work in terrible conditions which not only affect their social status but hamper their income, health and other aspects.

CONDITION OF WOMEN WORKERS:

In a study conducted by the International Labour Organization about four decades back it could be established that 27 out of 100 women were found to be economically active and about one-third of the world's labour force comprised of women. At the same time it was also highlighted that participation of the women in economic activity varies considerably from one region to another due to varying economic, social and cultural conditions prevailing in each region. It was well established that the rate of participation by women in economic life varies from a maximum of a more than 40 per cent in Eastern Europe and the USSR where women force constitute more than two-fifth of the total work force on the one hand to that of minimum of less than 15 per cent in Latin America where women could constitute only one-fifth of the total labor force. At the same time participation of women in labour force was also found to be high in Western Europe where women comprised one-third of the economically active population and most of them were found to be gainfully employed in all age groups.¹ In some of the developed countries like Denmark, Germany, Japan, Australia, etc, a major part of women labour force is engaged in agriculture and their participation is also high in non-agricultural activities. And on the whole overall rate of participation of women labour force in these countries tends to be higher as compared to other developed countries. It has been observed with regard to developing countries that one group of countries, namely, Haiti, Nepal, Thailand etc., rate of women participation in economic life exceeds 40 per cent of the total female population while in other group of countries, namely, India, Malaya, Morocco, Tunisia, etc, the rate of women's participation is comparatively less in the range of

30 to 40 per cent of the total agricultural work force and between 20 to 25 per cent of the total female population.²

In Addition to economic factors, technological advancement has also played a significant role in enabling the increased number of women to seek employment due to the fact that mechanization has simplified the nature of the job required to be done by the female employees, thereby making it feasible for the employers to utilize the female labour force even without any skill or technical training.

On the whole technological advancement has on the one hand provided attractive employment perspective to women while on the other hand it has operated against their interest in the sense that the other related factors adversely affecting the employment of the women has cumulatively made the position of women workers comparatively difficult.³ The relevance of varied factors having direct impact on the scope of employment opportunities available to the women workers vary from one country to another and the patterns that emerge had to be interpreted within each country against the whole complex of social, historical, technical and economic factors which formed the highly coloured objective and subjective background with the employment of the women in society which are passing through the process of rapid economic change and social development.⁴

In most of the developing countries wide spread unemployment and under-employment pose varied problems for the working women. In order to understand diversity involved in this regard it becomes imperative to study each specific case in the context of existing plan and the complexities involved in respect of prevailing unemployment and underemployment among the women workers. Leaving apart agriculture, in other sectors of employment the women workers have to face the competition with the men workers and due to that the women workers are deprived of work opportunities, particularly, in the modernized industries and at the same time mechanization of small industries has also resulted in replacement of women workers by their male counterparts and due to these reasons majority of the women workers continue to get employment in rural sectors of employment. One peculiar feature which is common invest majority of developing countries has been that women seek employment without having vocational qualifications which might not be having direct nexus to the existing needs of national economic problems and the aspect of social development. This aspect

is required to be taken care of in the right perspective mainly due to the fact that the general economic, social, psychological factors create adverse impact in terms of employment opportunity admissible to the women workers due to the fact that their employment necessitate for their employer to take measures for their protection due to which the subsistence of women workers in the context of prevailing traditions and attitudes become difficult to some extent in terms of the employment and vocational advancement of women. Such factors have adverse effect on the employment scope available to the women workers. All these factors necessitate for the State, particularly in the developing countries to provide vocational training to the women seeking employment so as to ensure optimum scope for their employment.⁵

Labouring women in the informal sector are an important segment on the labour force in India. According to an estimate of the National Commission of Self Employment of women, 94% of the total female work force operates in the unorganized sector. They do arduous work as wage earners, piece rate workers, casual labour and paid family labour. The coverage of labour laws has not benefited these women workers in many areas of wages, working conditions, maternity benefits and social security.⁶

The Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi has made several studies in a wide range of occupations in the unorganized sector on women. Studies which were conducted in the various parts of the country reveals the awful conditions of the women labourers in the unorganized sector. It has been observed that a significant percentage of the jobs in this sector are managed by women drawn from lower caste and lower class women. Ignorance, tradition bound attitudes, illiteracy, lack of skills, seasonal nature of employment, heavy physical work of different types, long hours of work with limited payment, discrimination in wage structures of men and women, lack of guarantee of minimum wage, lack of job security, lack of comprehensive legislation to cover these labourers in unorganized informal sector, lack of minimum facilities at the work-site, ill-treatment, migration and disintegration of families, bondage and alienation, etc. are the characteristics of the employment women in this sector.⁷

Women's economic participation can be mentioned in the field of production of goods and services accounted in the national income statistics. However, female work participation has always been low at 26% compared to 52% of men. The problem is that women have always been at work; only the definitions of work and work plan have never been defined or realistic to include their contribution to the economy and the society.⁸

Women work mainly for economic independence, for economic necessity, as some women are qualified enough to work, for a sense of achievement and to provide service to the society. Most Indian women by and large undertake "productive work" only under economic compulsion. This is the reason for high female participation rates in economically under privileged communities. Usually upper class women are limited to homes. Work participation rate is found to be higher among rural women (27%) than the urban women (10%). women usually go in for temporary and standby jobs because of the prevalent hesitancy to employ women in regular jobs and providing them with good working conditions. The main workers are those who "work" for the major part of the year. Female main workers constitute 14.65% of the population and men- 50.54%.

Female marginal workers constitute 6.26% of the population, whereas males being only 0.98%.⁹ In 2005, for the first time, agriculture was no longer the main sector of employment for women and this trend continued in 2006. The service sector now provides most jobs for women. Of the total number of employed women in 2006, 40.4 per cent work in agriculture and 42.4 per cent in services.¹⁰

Most of the women are found to be employed in agricultural activities and in the unorganised sector. The employment of women is high in the unorganised sector such as part time helpers in households, construction center, tanneries (setting, parting and drying), match and beedi industries etc. An estimate by the World Bank shows that 90% of the women working in the informal sector are not included in the official statistics and their work is undocumented and considered as disguised wage work, unskilled, low paying and do not provide benefits to the workers. Statistics show that vast majority of Indians work in Agriculture where 55% of the population is female agricultural workers and 30% of the men are labourers and not cultivators.¹¹

It is a strong perception that women's economic dependence on men is determining factor as to their power within the family. With increased participation in income-earning activities, not only will there be more income for the family, but gender inequality could be reduced. This issue is particularly salient in India because studies show a very low level of female participation in the labor force. This under-reporting is attributed to the frequently held view that women's work is not economically productive. If all activities including maintenance of kitchen gardens and poultry, grinding food grains, collecting water and firewood, etc. are taken into account, then 88 percent of rural housewives and 66 percent of urban housewives can be considered as economically productive. Women's employment in family farms or businesses is rarely recognized as economically productive, either by men or women. And, any income generated from this work is generally controlled by the men. Such work is unlikely to increase women's participation in allocating family finances.¹²

CONCLUSION:

As far as the impact of technology is concerned, there is shift from subsistence to a market economy which has a dramatic negative impact on women. Where technology has been introduced in areas where women worked, women labourers have often been displaced by men. Violence against women and girls is the most pervasive human rights violation in the world today. Economic necessity compels women to work outside for meager wages and without social security. Women face a lot of sexual harassment in the course of employment. Due to their inability to work for long hours stands in the way of their job career.

SUGGESTIONS:

- Since women workers lack in skill, skill development programmes should be provided to them to enhance their skill level.
- It is very much essential to creat awareness among women workers about the instituational support available to them to protect their rights.
- Mass media can play a great role to change social outlook towrds women workers.
- A comprehensive law is needed to protect the rights of women workers.

➤ Any kind of exploitation including sexual harassment of women workers is to be prevented and stringent action needs to be taken against the wrong doer.

REFERENCE

➤ INTERNATIONAL LABOUR CONFERENCE-FORTY EIGHTH SESSION, 1964: WOMEN WORKERS IN A CHANGING WORLD (ILO, Geneva, 1963). | ➤ Nancy David, Unorganised Women Workers: Problems and Prospects in UNORGANISED WOMEN LABOUR IN INDIA 17 (S.N.Tripathy ed., 1996). | ➤ Singh Mohinder, Women and Development Process in India, KHADI GRAMODYOG, XXXV, No.4, 200-2001 (January 1989). | ➤ Senagupta, Prantika, Condition of Women Working in the Unorganized Sector available at <http://www.legalservicesindia.com/article/1432> (2010). |