



## GENDER IN UNORGANIZED SECTOR

### KEYWORDS

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### ABSTRACT

*The labour market all over the world is undergoing a transition now. Informalisation of the previously formal sector jobs is also taking place. As a result, the economic crisis and other financial downturns of the industry will directly have a negative impact on the temporary workers. The laid off women workers have no choice other than taking up a job in the informal sector as a street vendor, a construction worker or any other work where there is no proper employer-employee relationship and social security. Some Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and similar social movements are also engaged in such activities for the welfare of the unorganised sector workers. It is very important to analyse the role of such organisations and their strategies in organising the unorganised sector workers, especially women workers.. Though the topic has been touched by a number of scholars and academicians, the studies on social movements for women with a right-based approach is limited. The study is important as more and more women are entering the informal sector work force to support their families and trade unions, (NGOs), (CBOs) etc. are trying to develop new strategies to organise the workers under a common umbrella. Otherwise, labour will lose its power ultimately.*

### INTRODUCTION:

The Indian Economy is characterized by the existence of a vast majority of informal or unorganized Gender labour employment. As per the Economic Survey 2007-08, 93% of India's workforce include the self employed and employed in unorganized sector. The Ministry of Labour, Government of India, has categorized the unorganized gender labour force under four groups in terms of Occupation, nature of employment, specially distressed categories and service categories.

### In terms of Occupation:

Small and marginal farmers, landless agricultural labourers, share croppers, fishermen, those engaged in animal husbandry, beedi rolling, labeling and packing, building and construction workers, leather workers, weavers, artisans, salt workers, workers in brick kilns and stone quarries, workers in saw mills, oil mills etc. come under this category.

### In terms of Nature of Employment:

Attached agricultural labourers, bonded labourers, migrant workers, contract and casual labourers come under this.

### In terms of Specially distressed categories:

Toddy tappers, Scavengers, Carriers of head loads, Drivers of animal driven vehicles, Loaders and unloaders come under this category.

### In terms of Service categories:

Midwives, Domestic workers, Fishermen and women, Barbers, Vegetable and fruit vendors, News paper vendors etc. belong to this category.

Though the availability of statistical information on intensity and accuracy vary significantly, the extent of unorganized workers is significantly high among agricultural workers, building and other construction workers and among home based workers. According to the Economic Survey 2007-08 agricultural workers constitute the largest segment of workers in the unorganized sector (ie. 52% of the total workers).As per the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO), 30 million workers in India

are constantly on the move (migrant labour) and 25.94 million women workforce has been added in the labour market from the year 2000 onwards. All the more every day 13000 Indians turn 60 years and they are expected to live another average of 17years. Unfortunately only 10% of the Indians save for old age. The tragedy is that the existing social security legislations cover only 8% of the total work force of 459 million in India.The latest report of the NSSO uploaded by the close of May 2011 about the casual workers in India between 2004-05 and 2009-10 compared to that of the period between 1999 – 2000 and 2004-05 very clearly shows that there is significant increase in the number of casual workers and decline in the number of regular workers.This report shows a substantial shift between 1999-00 and 2009-10 in the structure of the labour force which can be broadly divided in to self employed, regular, and casual workers. (casual workers are employees who do not enjoy the same benefits and security as tenured employees. All these NSSO reports are clear evidences to prove that the labour market of India has been undergoing tremendous transformations, including growth of informal sector activities, deterioration in the quality of employment (in terms of job security, terms and conditions at work), Weakening of worker organizations and collective bargaining institutions, marked decline in social security etc. To a greater extent, these transformation could be related to the ongoing globalization process and the resultant efforts on the part of employers to minimize the cost of production to the lowest levels. A closer analysis suggests that the growing informalisation of labour market has been central to most of these transformations, which inter alia highlights the utility of understanding the growth of unorganized sector in India and its implications.Many thought that India's growth could do no wrong, and took the administrative versions and interpretations for granted. Now it comes to a point that none of these can be taken for granted. Growth is slow, inflation is structural and structure of employment is not enough to cater to the growing labour force.

### Growing prominence of unorganized sector in India

Predominance of informal employment has been one of the central features of the labour market scenario in India. While the sec-

tor contributes around half of the GDP of the county, its dominance in the employment front is such that more than 90% of the total workforce has been engaged in the informal economy. As per the latest estimation of a Sub-committee of the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector (NCEUS), the contribution of unorganized sector to GDP is about 50% (NCEUS 2008).

This national level pattern of informal workers occupying around 90% of the workforce is more or less similar in the case of most of the prominent states in the country. Among the unorganized sector workers, a considerable proportion (about 65%) is engaged in agricultural sector, which in turn indicates the prominence of rural segment in the informal economy.

Further, the sector is characterized by excessive seasonality of employment (especially in the farm sector), preponderance of casual and contractual employment, atypical production organizations and work relations, absence of social security measures and welfare legislations, negation of social standards and worker rights, denial of minimum wages and so on. Poor human capital base (in terms of education, skill and training) as well as lower mobilization status of the work force further add to the vulnerability and weaken the bargaining strength of workers in the informal sector.

With the advent of globalization and resultant reorganization of production chains led to a situation where production systems are becoming increasingly atypical and non-standard, involving flexible workforce, engaged in temporary and part-time employment, which is seen largely as a measure adopted by the employers to reduce labour cost in the face of stiff competition. No doubt, it obviously indicates that these flexible workers in the new informal economy are highly vulnerable in terms of job security and social protection, as they are not deriving any of the social protection measures stipulated in the existing labour legislations. The insecurities and vulnerabilities of these modern informal sector labour are on the rise, as there is a visible absence of worker mobilization and organized collective bargaining in these segments owing to a multitude of reasons.

The alarming expansion of informal sector, in recent times, has adversely affected employment and income security for the larger majority of the workforce, along with a marked reduction in the scale of social welfare / security programme.

**Exploitation of the Women Workers:** Exploitation of the Women workers is increasing day by day, particularly in the unorganised sector. The workers are paid nominal wages which are much lesser than the minimum wages and they are not in a position to question and raise their voice against this exploitation. This is because of the fact that they are helpless and illiterate. They don't have any other option than to obey their masters. A number of middle-men are there who used to take advantage and major share of the profit, where there are a number of home-based workers and domestic workers, the exploitation is maximum. The role of middle Women is also visible there. Women has to work to complete the embroidery work in a piece of cloth for two to three days and at the end of the day they will be paid in paisa per piece which is very less. The same item, when it comes to the market, will cost hundreds. The same is the case with domestic workers also. Also they have to work in three to five houses a day to earn around Rs.1500/- a month. They don't have any leaves or offs and they are supposed to work on Sundays also. They don't have any time left with them for their own families and society.

**3.4 Conditions of the Workers** The conditions of the unorganised sector workers are terrible. They hardly have a single room to stay and sometimes that too on rent. Even if all the family members work, they are unable to meet all their expenses. At the work place, no one is there to

take care of them. The employer is worried only about the work and not about the worker. The work place may be a small room where more people have to sit to work. This makes the room congested and the workers may not even be able to sit properly. Women workers often suffer much under such conditions. There are no toilet facilities for the women at the work place and so women suffer from various urinary infections. The clever employers will manage the work in such a way so as to escape the Factories Act, 1948 and other laws which safeguard the interests of the unorganised sector workers. There are no properly implemented social security measures for the unorganised sector workers.

**Suggestion and conclusion:** One of the major reasons for this is the lack of proper unionisation in the informal sector. Its only through trade unions that collective bargaining and wage negotiations can be done. Minimum Wages The Minimum Wages Act, 1948 provides for the fixation and enforcement of minimum wages in India. It prevents the labour from exploitation through payment of low wages. The Act offers a minimum subsistence wage for the workers. The national floor level minimum wage from November 2009 is Rs.100/- which has been increased from Rs.80/- in 2007. But still the minimum wage is far less than these levels Another important aspect is that the union gives its members respect and an identity in the society. The employers may not be concerned of an individual employee, but they may consider the union and its strength. So the employers may hesitate to cheat the workers who are union members. In the case of domestic workers, if they are unionised the workers will be able to take a day off in a week and the union may be able to provide somebody else in place of her for ensuring an uninterrupted service. The customers will be happy in such cases and the payment to the alternative worker can be done through the Union. In addition to that, a minimum wage for the domestic workers can be determined. The domestic workers board can negotiate for an additional service charge if the customer needs service on Sundays also. The surplus labour in the informal economy gives a choice to the employers and this causes the wages to be lower than the minimum wages.

Meanwhile, due to currently prevailing poor conditions of the workers working in the unorganised manufacturing sector, their welfare should be adequately addressed by the government. Any social security scheme along with providing for the contingencies of life should also be capability enhancing. Moreover, such facilities should be sustainable in nature. As in majority of the enterprises the workers are poor and the enterprises too have very low level of value addition, the tripartite arrangement among workers, employers and the government may not work, therefore the welfare schemes of these workers should be mainly contributed by the government. Though, the role and contribution by the government would always be very important, yet, these can also be contributed by the workers, wherever the earnings are comparatively higher. The participation of the NGOs should also be encouraged. These prove to be more helpful in identifying and organising the deserving workers as they have more information about the sector and region specific problems and needs of the workers working in the unorganised sector. Lastly, since this particular sector is providing employment to increasing number of women workers, their specific needs at the work place should also be addressed. This would enhance their working hours and would also increase their share in full time jobs. As we have also noticed that a majority of the women workers are concentrated in low productive traditional sectors which must have been the cause 265 of low income of the women workers, any policy targeting the welfare of women must address this particular sector and appropriate programmes and policies should be framed to promote and protect the women entrepreneurs through access to credit, skill development, vocational training etc.