

Female Workers in the Unorganised Sector in India

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Abstract--Even though there has been an evidence of progressive transformation in the society and the status of women in workplace, still the trends in this direction are not satisfactory. A professional women of today still struggles with the harsh realities of discrimination, exploitation and violence in organizations, societal and family pressures and suffers from the bitter effects of the balancing act which she is expected to perform for handling work place and household chores. In this article efforts are made to unfold the extent of plight of female workers in general women working in the unorganised sector in particular.

Globalisation is a multi-dimensional process of economic, political, cultural and ideological change. It has led to increasing violations of women's economic, political, cultural rights in large measure due to withering away of the welfarist / developmentalist State, the feminization of poverty, the expansion of religious fundamentalisms and new form of militarism and conflict. Often being unorganized, facing recurrent inequity in employment and harassment at work and violation of their human rights, with low levels of education, limited technological skills, women workers easily become marginalized and hardly derive any benefits from the ever new opportunities emerging in an open and competitive world trade.

Keywords-- Globalisation, welfarist, marginalised

I. INTRODUCTION

ACCORDING to Indian tradition since the inception of society woman has been treated with great honour and dignity, though occasionally we do find derogatory references to woman. She is the pioneer for the transformation of organizations and society. She is the mother of the race and liaison between generations laying the foundation for new relationships. Women now a days are advancing in every walk of life. Even male dominated fields are invaded by them. This woman has broken out of the confinement of four walls of a house and conventional domestic duties of the household she has been playing since times immemorial. Ironically, sometimes she is admired for playing multifaceted role but more often than not, accused of not conforming to the traditional and the unquestionable societal code of conduct laid down for her.

In the post-independence period, the Indian society has been experiencing a constant ebb and flow of changes influencing the status of women. The foundation for independent woman in independent India was laid by the British who introduced the legislative structure. Therefore, through Five year plans, attempts are being made to understand and define the role of women in the development of the economy.

The concept of employment of women has started playing a dominant role in economic life of country

throughout the world. Employment opportunities available to the women have assumed wider dimensions with the advent of industrialization not only in developed countries rather in developing countries as well. It has been increasingly realized that women along with men play a meaningful role in the context of prosperity of the country as well as for the purpose of raising standard of living of the residents of that country. It has been well established that women play an important role in economic and social life of the country.

Globalisation has drawn millions of women into paid employment across the developing world. But these women workers are systematically being denied their fair share of the benefits brought by globalization. Commonly hired on short-term contracts or with no contract at all women are working at high speed for low wages in unhealthy conditions. They are forced to put in long hours to earn enough to get by. Most have no sick leave or maternity leave, few are enrolled in health or unemployment schemes and fewer still have savings for the future. The harsh reality faced by women workers highlights one of the glaring failures of the current model of globalization.

Objectives of Study:

- I. To ascertain the condition of working women world wide.
- II. To reveal the condition of female workers in India.

Research Design:

In this study exploratory approach has been adopted and data are collected from secondary sources such as: published research articles, books, reports and literature available in website.

Hypothesis:

- I. The condition of female workers are poor in terms of work force participation, working conditions and level of exploitation.
- II. The reason of poor condition of female workers can be attributed to economic necessity and technological advancement.

Condition of Female Workers:

The International Labour Organisation says that women represent:

- i) 50% of the population
- ii) 30% of the labour force
- iii) Perform 60% of all working hours
- iv) Receive 10% of the world's income
- v) Own less than 1% of the world's property.

As per a report by International Labour Organisation released on the International women's Day on March 8, 2007, it is depicted that though the status of a working

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woman dose not surprise many, there is surprisingly a significant gender inequality in terms of wages, job security, etc. In all the regions women either work for poor wages or are unpaid contributing members of the family. In South Asia, India and Bhutan rank 108th and 131st among 189 countries as far as percentage of women lawmakers in the lower house of parliament in 2006 is concerned.

Women account for 32% of the workforce in the informal economy, including agriculture and 20% of the non agricultural workforce. 118 million women workers are engaged in the unorganized sector in India, constituting 97% of the total women workers in India. The informal sector in the non agriculture segment alone engaged 27 million women workers in India. Work participation rate is found to be higher among rural women (27%) than the urban women (10%).

In the unorganized sector Women are Overworked, Women's Work is -- Invisible, Unrecognized and Unremunerated, women are displace by men due to the impact of technology, high incidence of Physical and Sexual exploitation of women.

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

¹ International Labour Conference-Forty Eighth Session, 1964: Women Workers In A Changing World (ILO, Geneva, 1963).

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

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

II. CONCLUSION

However there has to be the promotion of the positive aspects keeping the negative aspects in mind. The 'working women' today aids the economic status of the household and the society as a whole. For an independent India, the saying is apt, "A free race cannot be born of slave mothers." This civilization is yet to witness the real power of the women carving picture perfect in the present day world of globalisation and liberalization.

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

⁶ Nancy David, *Unorganised Women Workers:Problems and Prospects* in UNORGANISED WOMEN LABOUR IN INDIA 17 (S.N.Tripathy ed., 1996).

⁷ Singh Mohinder, *Women and Development Process in India*, KHADI GRAMODYOG, .XXXV, No.4, 200-2001 (January 1989).

⁸ Senagupta, Prantika, *Condition of Women Working in the Unorganized Sector available at http://www.llegalservicesindia.com/article/1432 (2010)*.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

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.

III. 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 create awareness among women workers about the institutional support available to them to protect their rights.
- ✓ Efforts shall be made to change social outlook towards women in general and women workers in particular. Mass media can play a great role to change social outlook towards 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.
- ✓ Mass media should be used to communicate the social message relating to women's equality.
- ✓ Criminal justice system should be more effective to deal with the cases relating to the exploitation of women workers and punishment should be very high in comparison to the degree of exploitation.
- ✓ Last but not the least a separate women grievance cell headed by a woman should be established in every organization employing women workers in the organized sector and in case of unorganized sector women to form self-help groups for their protection.

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