

WOMEN IN UNORGANIZED SECTOR OF ASSAM: DISCRIMINATIONS AND SOCIAL SECURITY COVERAGE PROVIDED BY INDIAN GOVERNMENT

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Abstract

Almost 402 million individuals (more than 85% of India's working population) work in the unorganized sector, with at least 120 million of them being women. Women working in the informal sector are not counted in official statistics, and their labor is undocumented, unskilled, low-paying, and without benefits. India was one of the first countries to provide women the right to vote in the world. The Indian constitution is one of the most progressive in the world, ensuring that men and women have equal rights. Despite the progress that women have made in many countries, women's issues are still treated as second-class citizens in practically every society. They continue to confront subtle and overt discrimination and marginalization, and they do not share equitably in the benefits of growth. Their contribution is underappreciated. In terms of employment level and quality, women in the unorganized sector trail behind men. This paper highlights how the women in unorganized sectors in India are discriminated and the social security's coverage for them.

Key words: Gender Discrimination, Social Security, Unorganized Sector, Assam

Introduction

India is the second largest populated country in the world. As the population increases the demand for basic need also increases. Today getting a secured job is very important to fulfill those needs. Population is increasing but formal jobs are very less in comparison to total population of the country. Around 93% of India's workforce is still working under unorganized sector to fulfill its basic needs.

Unorganized Sector can be defined as "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." (Report on condition of work and promotion of livelihood in the unorganized sector, 2008).

As per Times of India, Assam accounts for around 10 lakh unorganized workers, and as per that report Assam holds 8th position in unorganized sector. Though Assam is considered as one of the backward states of India, still people (around 90%) are engaged in different economic activities. Women are a very important part of the economy. Today every woman wants to be independent and contribute something to the society. Actually it's not a new concept women are always involved in some kind of productive activity be it household work or income generating work. But, much of the works are invisible. They are largely involved in low income, low skilled job with long working hours. 84.50% of women in Assam are working in informal sector (Saikia, 2019). They work in every sector be it construction work or domestic

work, weaving, farming, shop keeping etc, and this is how they hold a major portion in the countries unorganized sector. It's not easy to work in an unorganized sector as it does not have any social security because of that women has to face many problems like gender discrimination, wage discrimination, sexual harassment etc.

The present study has been conducted to highlight the different categories of women in unorganized sector of Assam. Discrimination faced on the basis of gender and various initiatives taken by government to help the women in unorganized sector.

Methodology

The nature of the study mainly a qualitative research and wholly depends on secondary data. The sources of secondary data are various journals, articles, Government reports and blogs in the Internet. Under this study, various categories of female workers in unorganized sectors are identified and discrimination regarding gender inequality is specified and on the last section various initiatives taken by GOI are mentioned properly.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Unorganised Sector

According to Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act, 2008, unorganized worker basically defines a self employed or wage gainer or preferably home based workers in the informal sector. It includes the workers of formal sector who is not protected by any of the acts specified in Schedule –II i.e. Employee's Compensation Act, 1923, the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, the Employees' State Insurance Act, 1948, the Employees Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provision Act, 1952, the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 and the Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972. Indian Government classified unorganized workers in four distinct categories- first on the basis of occupation includes leather workers, beedi maker, fishery worker, and workers of different industry like oil mill, paper mill, saw mill, landless farmer, bricks maker, second on the nature of employment adds contract, casual and bonded worker, third in terms of special distress category Head & Shoulder loaders, Scavengers, variety of labour works; the fourth Service category incorporates Hotel boy, Midwives, Air hostesses, barbar, masseur etc. besides these categories, handicraft workers, handloom weavers, pottery worker, physically handicapped self employed person, lady tailors, rickshaw pullers, carpenter, urban truck and auto drivers etc. are also considered as unorganized workers. Most of the unorganized workers are engaged in agricultural sector around 50 % as compare to other sectors. (Chatterjee.S, 2016). The total employment in both formal and informal sector in India is around 47 crores, out of this 9 crores are from formal sector and the remaining 38 crores from informal sector.(Annual Report, 2020-21)

Women in unorganized sector in Assam

Unemployment is a serious problem faced by most of the most of the backward states of our country. In Assam, around 15.49% women are working in an organized sector. Remaining population is either unemployed or working in an unorganized sector like handloom weavers, fishing, farming, carpenter, barbers, domestic workers, street vendors, etc. Today women play a very important role in economic growth and development. They are becoming self dependent and are ahead in every field like education, employment, business, sports, etc. so as in informal

working sector. As no such proper record related to informal sector is easily available, but it can be observed that today women population are mostly engaged in some or other kind of works in informal sector. On the basis of various reviews following are some of the categories of informal working sector where women are engaged.

1. *Agricultural sector*: Assam is one of the agro-based states of the country. People who do not possess the right of ownership of land are called as workers of farming and they are also considered as informal workers. Most of the female of agricultural sector engaged in hand sowing or planting and harvesting of crops in the paddy fields. Many women are working under private tea gardeners but they do not get any privilege to work like any other women in formal sector.
2. *Garment sector*: India has a huge prospect for growth in the garment sector. It is the largest producer of cotton in the world. So, it has a huge prospect for cotton export and garment manufacturing (Unni, J. & Bali, N. 2004). Garment industry is basically a labour intensive industry where number of workforce is engaged in cutting, sewing, designing, knitting, embroideries, etc. A huge amount of women are engaged in such activities. We can see that from a town to village women are engaged in some kind of garment business like running a small boutique or running a tailor shop or even working there as helper.
3. *Handloom weavers*: The culture of Assam has been flourishing with handloom sector from the long decades. Almost in every rural household, women are engaged in handloom activities and they have at least a *tatihal* in which they use for either Personal use or for commercial purpose. There are different tribes in Assam and each tribe has unique traditional attire. They are also engaged into commercializing their attires.
4. *Construction worker*: construction worker requires both skilled and unskilled worker. Skilled jobs are highly paid jobs given to educated people. Unskilled jobs are basically given to poor, they are mostly the daily wage workers, which constitute both men and women workers. Almost half of the construction workers are women. They are usually unskilled and they do manual works like head loader, carrying bricks, cement, sand, water, etc. (Chen, M. 2007).
5. *Street vendors*: street vendors constitute the largest section of urban workforce. 2% population of every city is engaged in vending (National Policy for urban street vendor, 2006). Poor section of every country usually sustains through vending of different commodities like fruit, vegetable, bangles, pickles, utensils, cloths, etc. Survey conducted in 2010 shows that 27% of street vendors are women. (Bhowmik, S.K., 2000).
6. *Domestic workers*: in the present time having domestic worker is a new way of comfort. Every 7 out of 10 households has a maid, which ultimately has given rise to the domestic working sector. They are usually women workers. It is characterized by long working hours, low or moderate wages:
7. *Beauty and body fitness worker*: Fashion Industry is growing rapidly, so as the scope for beautician. Large numbers of women are working in the beauty and fashion industry. National Skill Development Corporation 2022 states that growth in personal care/body fitness would drive the demand for beautician. It also includes the fitness care worker. (Mohapatra, K.K., 2012). As people are becoming more and more health conscious this sector has a huge potential for future growth.
8. *Rag pickers*: rag pickers are those who collect waste material like waste cloths, steel, broken iron tools, broken glasses and bottles, plastics, papers etc. They come under the bottom line of

the informal sector of a country (A.Shaji George, 2019). Around 40% of the rag picker communities are women including senior citizen women. They are mostly illiterate and usually reside in slums.

9. *Snakes maker*: large numbers of women in unorganized sector are engage in food item making like papad, pickle, homemade sweets, traditional food items etc. they sell their product without any brand name and without any proper marketing. They directly go for door to door services.

Discrimination against Women in unorganized sector

It has been seen that various socio- economic variables impact the discrimination on women in unorganized sector. Inter-district and inter-state short-term migrant workers are another underserved sector in the labour market struggling to make ends meet. This population is at a higher risk of sickness and has less access to health care. Many migrants work as casual labourers, head loaders, rickshaw pullers, and hawkers in the city's informal manufacturing, construction, services, or transportation sectors. Because of their frequent changes of residence due to the casual nature of their jobs, they are unable to receive preventive care, and the working circumstances in informal labour arrangements in the city prohibit them from receiving proper curative care. Women and children are generally associated migrants, with the man of the home making the primary decision to relocate. They are more vulnerable as linked migrants because to fewer economic options and a lack of social support in their new destination location. Women migrants who are semi-skilled, low-skilled, or unskilled may find themselves in a low-paying, unorganised industry where they are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse (Mohapatra, K. K. , 2012).

Structural discrimination refers to institutional and other social structures' laws, conventions, commonly accepted attitudes, and behaviors that prevent subordinate groups from enjoying the same rights and opportunities as dominant groups. Discrimination can be obvious or unseen, and it can be deliberate or inadvertent. Women working in the informal sector belong to a class of employees who are viewed as second-class citizens due to structural factors affecting their social status and economic productivity stratum. In India, women in the informal sector face structural discrimination that has a negative impact on their health and access to healthcare. Apart from suffering gendered vulnerabilities, women workers confront additional prejudice as members of specific castes, classes, or ethnic groups. Early marriage and childbearing have a negative impact on women's health in India (Mohapatra, K. K. , 2012).

Because of their low socioeconomic status, low intake of a balanced diet, illiteracy and ignorance, social and traditional biases, consulting unqualified persons such as dhai (midwife), and lack of antenatal check-ups by qualified doctors, many informal women workers face serious problems during pregnancy (Mohapatra, K. K. , 2012)

Women in the informer sector endure a disproportionate amount of the health burden due to their poor and unsanitary living and working conditions. Accepting that women workers in the informal economy are vulnerable is not an exaggeration.

Women must always work as unskilled labour, carrying construction materials to the construction site on their heads, while males perform skilled/ semi-skilled work. (Masood, H., & QaiserJahan, M.)

Women work for some of the largest drapers, boutiques, and stores; here, too, the same bias is obvious, with women serving as assistants to male tailors (called as masters). Knitting woolens is one of the jobs that these individuals do.

Because they are in desperate need of money, informal women workers have no other option but to work. The few alternatives accessible to women are primarily low-paying, low-status positions in the informal sector, with no opportunities for advancement, efficiency improvement, or training to enable them to graduate to better jobs in the future. In the general situation of unemployment and lack of opportunity, women are a distant second to men in the search for work. It has been noted that women have a harder time breaking into the organized sector's regimented framework.

On the basis of sex, there is discrimination in salaries, nature of job, and availability of work.

Various schemes and policies initiated by Government for Unorganized sector

1. eShram-

This portal was launched on 26th August, 2021 for the registration of unorganized workers across the nation. It will provide a complete National Database of Unorganized Workers (NDUW) in India. The portal will play as a helping hand for delivering welfare schemes to crores of unorganized workers in the country. There is no cost of registration for workers.

2. Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-dhan (PM-SYM)-

Basically this portal is launched by GOI in order to protect aged workers and provide social security of unorganized labourers. Unorganized Women workers who perform work like street vendors, agriculture related work, driver of e-rickshaw etc. can avail the benefit under this scheme and also who are not covered under EPFO/ESIC and not qualified as a taxpayer.

3. Aam Admi Beema Yojna-

According to Ministry of Labour and Employment 93% of workers are from unorganized sector in India. Most of the workers are not covered under any social security acts; hence a bill was passed by Government of India for providing social security to the unorganized workers.

4. Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana-

In unorganized sector, the major problem among the labourers is regular health related issues and they need proper medical care and hospitalization facilities. Moreover, in informal sector the women have been facing common illness such as weakness, cough & cold and skin disease. Besides this, most of the women workers have suffered from backache, Urinary Tract Infection, Anaemia, Dysfunctional Uterine Bleeding etc. (Mohapatra K, 2012). The unorganized poor people cannot be able to bear the cost of severe medical treatment, so to safeguarding them, GOI has introduced this scheme in India.

5. National Pension Scheme for Traders and Self-Employed Persons (NPS-Traders) 2019-

This scheme is for basically self-employed persons, shopkeepers and retail vendors whose turnover is not exceeding 1.5 crores in India and most importantly should not be engaged in organized sectors. Women engaged as shop keeper or sales girl, Beauticians, Lady Tailors. Handloom weavers etc can easily avail the benefits of old age pension under this scheme.

6. GRANT IN AID SCHEME TO NGO'S FOR WELFARE OF WOMEN LABOUR-

In Unorganized sector, female are most unskilled and have very little knowledge of their rights and duties regarding their workplace and also they are not educated, hence the GOI has

introduced this scheme and planned to provide awareness regarding various issues. Under this scheme, the GOI provides financial grant to the NGO's or the voluntary organization which are built in order to help the poor needy women worker. After receiving the fund, NGO's arrange campaigns so to spread the information regarding different schemes and rights of women in a workplace.

Conclusions

The current awful state of affairs of women in the unorganized sector of Assam could be attributed to a variety of factors. It is primarily due to a part of the job market that is biased against women. Aside from a lack of organization among female workers in terms of forming trade unions, the negative impact of technological growth on women's labour, the lack of a purposeful human resource development policy aimed at improving women's employability through training, and insufficient legislation and ineffective enforcement of safeguards to protect female workers, particularly in terms of sexual harassment, of their working conditions etc. are few of the major causes leading to pitiable condition of women workers. Under these existing conditions it would not be out of context to say that the government of Assam should make efforts to improve their working conditions in terms of occupational safety, working hours, payment of adequate wages to them so that the women workers engaged in unorganized sector of employment may have mandatory decent and dignified work .

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