

Socio –Economic Status of Women Workers in Informal Sector: A Case study of Brick Industries of Rangapara in Assam.

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1. INTRODUCTION: -

Informal sector is the main source of employment for women. In most developing countries it accounts for 95 per cent of women workers in non-agriculture (UN 2000). Informal sector which is known as informal sector internationally provides employment to a vast mass of illiterate and unskilled women as this sector generally does not require much training or education. Even skilled women are absorbing by the low paid Informal sector because they are allegedly discriminated against in the labour market which favours men.

NSS data clarify that about 96 per cent women workers in India and about 84 per cent of women workers in Assam are absorbed in informal sector. Despite the advances women have made in many societies, women's concerns are still given second priority almost everywhere. They face discrimination and marginalization everywhere and do not share the fruit of development equally with male. Their contribution is not given due recognition. Women workers in informal sector not only bear all the hazards of this sector, but also they are exploited within this sector as they are discriminated against male in every sphere. They are made to work for long hours and wages paid to them are not according to their work. These women workers are living below the minimum accepted standard. Women workers in informal sector lag behind the males in terms of level and quality of employment. They are paid lower than males even for the same jobs. These women workers are generally illiterate, unskilled, socially backward and economically weak. Poverty, lack of access to education and inadequate health facilities are their major problems. Informal sector women workers are overwhelmingly present in agriculture, forestry, fishing, plantation and allied activities with the highest proportion working as agricultural labourers and cultivators. They predominately concentrate in certain industries such as garments, textiles, food and electronics. These women workers are subject to various exploitative practices including attempts to depress their wages or remuneration. Though they are economically active and contribute to the national economy, they remain invisible and poor (NCL 2002).

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM: -

The problem women workers in the informal sector engaged in brick industries of Rangapara is more or less similar to other towns of the country. Majority of the women workers are faced different types of problems such as unhygienic food, drinking water, shelter, lack of education, lack of vocational training, long hours of work, low wages etc. The aim of this study is to highlight the socio economic and working conditions of brick manufacturing industry of Rangapara in the Sonitpur district of Assam.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

The term 'Informal Sector' was first coined by Keith Hart in his study of urban Ghana in 1971. Hart described the informal sector as that part of the urban labour workforce which falls outside the extent of the formal/formallabour market. This concept of informal sector has been redefined by the International Labour of Organizations' (ILO) Kenya Mission Reports of 1972.

ILO (1991) defined Informality as a way of doing things characterised by- "(a) Ease of entry, (b) Reliance of indigenous resources (c) Family ownership (d) Small scale operations (e) Labour intensive and adaptive technology (f) Skills acquired outside of the formal sector (g) Unregulated and competitive market."

3.1 National Perspective:

According to the National Commission for Enterprises in the informal Sector (NCEUS) "Informal workers consists of those working in the informal sector or households, excluding regular workers with social security benefits provided by the employers and the workers in the formal sector without any employment and social security benefits provided by the employers"

3.2 Classification of the Informal Workers: -

The Indian Economy is characterized by the existence of a vast majority of informal or unformallabour employment. The Ministry of Labor Government of India, has categorised the informal sector labor under four groups depending on occupation, nature of employment, distressed categories and service categories

Informal Sector worker can be categorized broadly under the following four groups-

- 1) In terms of Occupation: Land less agricultural laborers, Small and marginal farmers, fisherman, leather worker, artisans, weavers, beedi rolling, labeling and packaging, those engaged in animal husbandry, building and constructions, oil mills, sawmills etc.
- 2) In terms of nature of employment: Agricultural laborers, migrant workers, bonded laborers; contract and casual laborers come under this category.

- 3) In terms of specially distressed categories: Scavengers, toddy tappers, carries of head loads, loaders and unloads, drivers of animal driven vehicles belong to this category.
- 4) In terms of service categories: The service sector includes the various service categories, Beauticians, Barbers, Domestic workers, Vegetables and fruit vendors, newspaper vendors etc.

3.3 Literature on socio-economic status of informal workers

Status is a very important factor in understanding the social differentiation and stratification of human society. In every society, the status of differentiation and stratification, hierarchy of status are the significant features of every type of human society. It is a necessary component of each society. The social and economic status of women in a society is guided by the social, economic, cultural structure of a society.

K, Khan (1989) holds that the status of women in a society is determined by a number of factors. Women's status will be the lowest in a society characterized by firm differentiation between men's work and women's work.

Dr. Samal (1990) has studied the economics of Jabalpur town. In his findings he has mentioned that majority of the families are poor since their per capita income is below the poverty line. Tendency of exploitations is higher in the unregulated and Informal sectors. Tripathy in his paper "Women Labor in Construction Sector" has examined the socio economic condition of the women construction workers in Ganjam district of Orissa. He has found that lack of skill, lack of education, lack of job security; long hours of work, ill treatment are some of the features of the construction workers.

Rekha Pande (1996) in her study "Child Labor in Beedi Industry of Andhra Pradesh" reported that beedi making process was dominated by the girls. She reported that after coming back from the schools, children rolled 100-250 beedis per day.

S.M. Lipset and H.L. Zetterberg in their book: *A Theory of Social Mobility* have observed that women workers normally receive lower remuneration or wages than their male counterparts for the same work and are thus discriminated against. Their dual responsibilities as earners and as housewives and mothers leave them little or no freedom of thought and action that their male counterparts enjoy in Indian society.

Pitchard (1965) holds that position of women is lower compared to the men especially in case of marriage. The working class is exploited by the managerial class. Women's position is placed lower in the hierarchy of stratified societies. Women in large numbers are employed in the Informal or informal sectors, both in urban and rural areas, but they remain the most vulnerable section in society.

4. OBJECTIVES:

1. To know about the socio-economic status of the women workers in brick industries in Rangapara of Assam.
2. To offer some suggestions for the improvement of bricks industries women workers.

5. DATA SOURCE AND METHODOLOGY: -

The present study aims to focus on socio-economic status of the women workers in brick industries of Tezpur in Assam. So the present study is based on both primary and secondary data. For this, various methodological techniques have been used such as sampling, interview, observation etc. For the interview, structured schedule was made to capture the background of the women workers. The method of simple random sampling was followed to interview the women workers. Besides the primary data, important publications including books, journals, and Government reports are reviewed. The targeted population consisted of the women workers engaged in brick industries situated in Rangapara of Assam.

This study is based on primary data collected through field surveys covering three brick industries situated in Rangapara in Tezpur of Assam. A simple random sampling is selected. From each brick industry, at least 25 women workers are selected randomly for interview and total of 100 workers have been selected. The schedules and questionnaire contained items like age, education, marital status, size of the family, income, wage payments, working hours, nature of job, behaviour of the employer, social awareness, habits of the workers, assistance of the family members, attitude of the husbands, and number of children of the respondent . After selecting the list of respondents, they were contacted in their workplace or in their house for conducting interviews confidentially. The data is collected through questionnaire, observation, interviews and field-notes by making several visits to their workplace and their houses. The collected field data have been arranged in tabular form, followed by analysis and interpretation APA (**American Psychological Association**) has been followed.

6. RESULT AND DISCUSSION: -

Generally, working conditions include the situation of work, the facilities provided by the employers at the work place, the number of working hours and the service conditions. These facilities include proper sanitary arrangement, leave, holidays, sick leave, canteen, transport, medical facility, maternity benefits etc. Good working conditions make a worker healthier, more efficient, more hard working and increase his/her interest in the work. Ultimately good working condition helps the employers to make more profits. A worker can work longer and harder in a healthy environment than in unhealthy ones. Thus, whether in the Informal or organised sector, healthy working conditions have a great significance in the production system.

The present study attempts to analyse the socio-economic status of the women workers engaged in the brick industries have been analysed. There are more than ten brick industries in Sonitpur district. Lots of women and men are engaged in these brick industries. The economic and social status of the women workers are analysed in this study. The women have to play dual roles that are familial roles as daughter, wife, mother and house wife and other role as employee. Due to these dual roles she has to adjust herself otherwise a conflicting situation occurs. "The backwardness of the women in social, economic, educational fields ultimately hinders the process of rapid social change. The women, who constitute about 50 percent of Indian population, have till now not been able to make their contribution to the development of our society." (Sultania, 1994)

6.1 Socio-Economic Scenario of the Informal Workers:

i) Nature of Employment in Brick Industry

Table: 1 Nature of the Employment

Nature of the employment	Percentage
Permanent	16
Temporary	84
Total	100.0

Source- Field survey

The above table shows that most of the workers (84 percent) are temporary and a few (16 percent) are permanent. In the brick the nature of their work is purely manual. In the brick industry they are required for unskilled jobs such as loading, unloading and carrying bricks, stones, water, soil etc. The brick industry in itself does not guarantee permanent work since during the rainy season this industry remains totally closed. So, in the brick industry, employment is not generally available during the rainy season. As a result of their temporary nature of employment, the economic position of their workers and their families has deteriorated over the years. Despite their uncertainty and unpredictability, thousands of women work in the brick industry.

ii) Daily Wages of the Women Workers in the Brick Factory

Table: 2 Daily Wage of the Respondent

Wage	Percentage
150-200	41
201-250	36
251 and above	23
Total	100.0

Source: Field Survey

Table 2 shows that in the brick industry 41 percentage women workers are given 150 to 200 rupees while 36 percent women are given 201 to 250 rupees. Only 23 percent women get 251 and above rupees. In the brick industry, the amount of wage is different. In different brick industry, the wages vary. In case of paying wages to the workers the mentality of the employers works.

iii) Caste:

Table: Distribution of Respondent by Caste

Caste	Percentage
General	42
OBC	34
ST	21
SC	3
Total	100.0

Table 4.7 (b) reveals that 42 percentages of the female brickworkers belong to the general caste, 34 percentages of the total workers belong to the scheduled caste and 21 percentages belong to the scheduled tribes and remaining 3 percent are belongs to SC categories.

IV) Religion:

Table: Distribution of Respondent by Religion

Types of Religion	Percentage
Hindu	64
Muslim	21
Christan	9
Other	5
Total	100.0

Source: Field Survey

This table 4 shows that the number of Hindu workers is more than that of the Muslim, Christian and other workers in the Brick industries. Almost 64% are Hindus, 21% are Muslims, and 15% are Christian and other. Majority of the population in Rangapara belongs to Hindu category so the field survey result also prove that Hindu have occupied dominant place in the study area.

V) Age: -

Table: 6 Distribution of Age of Sample workers

Age	Percentage
Below 20	19
20-30	29
30-40	34
40-50	10
50 and above	8
Total	100.0

Source: Field Survey

In India women and children participate in the labour force at an early age with a view to supplementing to the family income. Child labour is found everywhere. This table reveals that most of the workers belong to the 20 to 40 age group. Persons below 20 years of age are regarded as teenagers; 20 to 40 years of age as middle aged and those above 40 years are regarded as old. Table 6 shows that 19% respondents are found in the age group of 20 years, 29% and 34% respondent are fall between the age group of 20-40 years and remaining 18% are fall between the age group 40 and above tears.

VI) Education Qualification:-

Table:7 Education Qualification of the Respondent

Education level	Percentage
Illiterate	31
Primary	32
Below Secondary	21
Secondary and above	16
Total	100.0

Source: - Field Survey

Table 7, shows that among the 100 respondents, 32 percent of the workers have primary level of education, 21 percent workers have below secondary, 16 percent workers passed HSLC and above and almost 31 percent are illiterate..

Marital Status:

Table: 8 Distribution of Respondent by Marital Status

Marital Status	Percentage
Married	70
Unmarried or widow	30

Source: - Field Survey

In table 8, it is observed that among the 100 respondent of women workers, 70% workers are married and 30% are either unmarried or widow.

7. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY: -

- i) In case of nature of the employment, almost 84% of the workers are temporary and 16 percent workers are permanent.
- ii) 41 percentage women workers are given 150 to 200 rupees while 36 percent women are given 201 to 250 rupees. Only 23 percent women get 251 and above rupees.
- iii) The Caste distribution of women respondent reveals that 42 percentages of the female brick workers belong to the general caste, 34 percentages of the total workers belong to the scheduled caste and 21 percentages belong to the scheduled tribes and remaining 3 percent are belongs to SC categories.
- iv) Hindu occupied dominant place in the study area. Almost 64% are Hindus, 21% are Muslims, and 15% are Christian and other. Hindu occupied dominant place in the study area.
- v) Among the 100 respondent of women workers, 70% workers are married and 30% are either unmarried or widow.

8. SUGGESTION:-

1. Normally women informal sector labourers receive lower wage than the men even in doing identical jobs, although there is constitutional backing in the form of equal wage for equal work. The Government must effectively enforce the concerned Act.
2. Shortage of capital is another chief problem of informal sector workers. The commercial bank as well as regional rural bank seems to reluctant give money to the informal sector workers. So Central Govt. as well as State Govt. should formulate proper policy to abolish these types of problems.
3. Children often engage in waste picking, to contribute to the family income or to survive on their own. Waste picking, particularly at open dumps, is among the worst forms of child labour. It can damage children's health and stunt their development.

4. In order to eliminate the socio-economic and cultural barriers, female children and women should be educated through formal and non-formal channels. The voluntary agencies have also got a significant role to play in this regard.

CONCLUSION: -

Women workers in the informal sector constitute an economically productive and numerically large but socio-economically marginalised section of population. This study has attempted to understand the socio-economic status of this section of workers with case studies of informal women workers in brick industries in Rangapara. The informal workers in general have comparatively inferior status compare to the formal or organised sector workers. Along with the analysis of socio economic problems and the conditions of women informal sector workers in general (based predominantly on secondary and primary data); the present thesis carries a case study on the status of and working conditions of women informal workers of Rangapara in Sonitpur district. From the study it is also revealed that majority of women have to depend on the decisions of the males. Though most of the women are earning members of their family, they are not independent either economically or socially. Major decisions in their families are taken by their male heads. Thus we can say that the socio-economic status of the women is lower than that of the males. This clearly indicates the dominance of patriarchy. So, a situation of double deprivation among the women exists. These working women are socially disadvantaged. Both the central and state governments have formulated certain specific schemes to support informal workers but which fail in meeting the real needs and requirements of the informal or informal labour force. The government should make efforts to improve their working conditions in terms of occupational safety, working hours, payment of adequate wages to them so that the informal workers engaged in informal sector of employment may have mandatory decent and dignified work. Apart from this, government should take necessary actions to facilitate easy credit facility, encourage small and micro enterprises create steps for ensuring some sort of job security for this sector. Informal sector employment should be handled as a part of the solution to not only growing unemployment but also as a means of mitigating poverty.

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