

CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN WORKERS IN THE URBAN UNORGANIZED SECTOR: THE MALWA BELT OF PUNJAB

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INTRODUCTION

In today's world every effort is being made by the women to be on equal footing with men. But she still has to face various types of discrimination whether at home or at work. She cannot take the economic and social decisions independently. In every sphere of life she has to depend on her male counterpart. In the recent past, there has been rise in the number of women workers in various types of employment whether it be in the organized sector or unorganized sector. The recent data reveals that a major chunk of women workers are employed in the unorganized sector. The Indian society is basically the believer of patriarchy form of family set up. So women has to face many problems not only at her house but also at the work place.

UNORGANIZED SECTOR

Unorganized sector plays a significant role in the Indian economy as far as contribution to GDP is considered. The statistics layout that of the total workers 82% in rural area and 72% in the urban area are engaged in the unorganized sector.³ Realizing the importance of unorganized sector National Commission for enterprises in the unorganized sector (NCEUS) was established in 2004 as an advisory body.

According to NCEUS, "The unorganized sector consists of all unincorporated private enterprises owned by individuals or households engaged in the sale and production of goods and services operated in proprietary or partnership basis with less than ten total workers."⁵

NSSO defines informal sector enterprises comprise of all unincorporated proprietary and partnership enterprises. "In this sector the activities or collection of data is not regulated under any legal provision or these enterprises do not maintain any regular account.

The salient features of this sector are seasonal employment, no employer and employee relations, lack of social security, no

entry and exit, the nature of work may be legal or illegal, no record of income.

PUNJAB SCENARIO

Punjab is basically an agriculture based economy and many women workers work in the unorganized sector of rural area but in the Malwa region of Punjab consisting of 11 districts and with cities such as Ludhiana, Patiala, Bathinda and Mohali. Women workers work in the unorganized sector as in the brick making, domestic paid workers, household industries etc. This region which is known to produce white Gold, is also the employer of many women workers in the unorganized sector.⁶ Many migrant workers also come in this area in search of job and end up with finding one in the unorganized sector.

OBJECTIVES

- To get a better understanding of the nature of work of women workers in unorganized sector.
- To analyze the present working conditions of women workers.
- To gain knowledge about the challenges faced by urban working women in the unorganized sector.
- To outline the measures taken by the government to prevent workers exploitation.
- To suggest the remedies to empower women workers.

DATABASE AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research is basically of descriptive nature based on secondary data. Secondary data have been collected from various reports, journals, books and official websites relevant to the present study. The study is limited to the Malwa belt of Punjab. So, the data retaining to the main districts of this region has been used.

Working women in the unorganized sector

As the data reveal that large percentage of women works in the urban unorganized sector. In this sector because of various reasons they have to face the problems and challenges, right from the recruitment, the leave and the wages, the benefits nothing is organized. The women workers in this sector have to face various types of exploitation. They can't get the benefits which their counterparts can enjoy in the organized sector. The working conditions formed in this sector are not satisfactory. The women workers have to face discrimination as they are considered inferior than men. **The following problems and challenges can be highlighted.**

- The nature of employment is temporary women workers cannot work with sense of security, this can affect their performance.
- In general the women workers in this sector are unskilled, illiterate and not properly trained.
- Not only at the work place but also in their own family they cannot raise their voice.
- They have to face sexual harassment, mental pressure and safety issues.
- Child rearing problems are always faced by the women workers.
- People make their own perception or draw conclusions about the character of working women.
- Face discrimination due to gender inequality.
- Lack of enactment and implementation of proper laws and acts on the part of the government.
- Migrant female workers have to face problems due to caste and custom.

ACTS AND PROGRAMS FOR WOMEN WORKERS IN THE UNORGANIZED SECTOR

Government tries from time to time to bring the changes in the already enacted laws and also make new programs and acts to solve the problems of the women workers in the organized sector. In this direction the Interstate Migrant workmen regulation of employment and condition of service Act, 1979, the Bonded Labour system (Abolition) Act. 1976, Maternity Benefit Act. 1961 were enacted to name a few². In the past

few years government has moved a step further in this direction and has enacted the following acts to name a few:

- Domestic workers welfare and social security Act. 2010 was established by the government to protect and safeguard the women workers who work as households help, to help them to regularize the working hours, job security etc.
- Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) enacted in 2005 is an Indian Labour law and social security measure that aims to guarantee the 'right to work'. It aims to ensure livelihood security in rural areas by providing 100 days of wages employment in a financial year.
- Unorganized workers social security Act. 2008- This is enacted to provide for the social security and welfare of the unorganized workers.

There are some measures which indirectly help the unorganized women workers :

- Janani Suraksha Yojna: was launched on 12 April 2005 to decrease the neo-natal and maternal deaths and to provide for safe motherhood.
- National Family Benefit scheme: It is component National Social Assistance programme (NSAP). In central assistance is given in the form of lump sum family benefit for households below the poverty line.
- Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojna: This is insurance scheme for the Indian poor. It provides for cashless insurance for hospitalization in public as well as private hospital, it started on 1st April 2008.

Empowerment of women in unorganized sector

Some measures are suggested

- Providing Basic education so that they can become aware of schemes and facilities and their basic rights.
- Skill up-gradation, technical education, training programs can be initiated for them from time to time.
- Proper guidelines for the recruitment, working hours, health hazards, child care, maternity should be laid.

- Trade unions should be formed.
- Non-government organizations (NGO's) can play a vital role for the benefit of the women workers in the unorganized sector.
- A supervisory body should be established to monitor the proper implementation of provisions.
- Government should focus on promoting gender equality at the social level in various states.

CONCLUSION

The social set up of India and particularly Punjab is such that women are not considered equivalent to their male counterpart both at the workplace and at home. The government has realized the problem and has undertaken various programmes and schemes for the betterment of the women in the unorganized sector but still the target is not achieved and a lot more has to be done not only by the government but also by the NGO's, political parties, society and the women herself.

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