

Chapter- IV

Aspects of Ethnic Differentiation

This chapter deals with the various aspects of ethnic differentiation that is emerged mainly from the historical background of the ethnic group. The chapter mainly focuses on the cultural aspects for which the members of the particular ethnic groups are being stigmatized. The term ‘stigma’ is often used as a label or tag that is imposed on a particular group of people as identifying mark. The women labourers belonging to a Muslim ethnic group are involved in the unorganized sector due to their socio-economic background. They have not only dealt with the unregulated working condition but also have to face various socio-cultural stigmas for their ethnic group. The belongingness to a particular social group has differentiated them regarding the socio-cultural aspects from the other social groups in the study area.

Further, the chapter also attempts to analyze the attitude of employers in this regard from the point of view of women labourers. The behavioural expression of employers towards the women working as domestic and construction labourers has been analyzed by keeping in view the social/ethnic group of the employers. Thus, the chapter examines the various aspects of differentiation faced by the women labourers throughout their life in general and in the unorganized sector in particular on the basis of their ethnic group.

4.1. Backwardness of the Ethnic Group:

Amongst the multiple factors, the backwardness of a particular group of people has been playing an important role in their labour market participation. The socio-economic disaggregation of participation rates in India suggests that more disenfranchised social groups have higher rates of participation in the labour market

(UNDP, 2019). For example, in the Labour Bureau EUS 2014-15, it is clear that participation rates are higher for rural areas than urban areas, higher for transgender persons than female persons and higher for reserved castes than the general categories. In that similar way, socially disadvantaged women are more likely to be in roles without written contracts, with less paid leaves and shorter periods of engagement (UNDP, 2019). It indicates that although a number of factors determine the labour force participation of women and differential rates of participation between women and men such as age, marital status, educational level, etc., the social background of the women also have a significant role to play in this regard. It also reveals that socially disadvantaged women have higher participation rates in the unorganized sector of the economy than in the organized one.

In this regard, Raveendran (2016) in his study has divided the people of India into five combined socio-religious groups as- (a) STs, (b) SCs, (c) OBCs (except those belonging to Muslim communities), (d) Muslims (except those in the categories of STs and SCs) and (e) Others (those who have not been accorded any special status). Based on this categorization, the following Table 4.1 reveals that STs have the highest Labour Force Participation Rates with the least gap between women and men. Although SCs have a higher Labour Force Participation Rates than OBCs, they have almost similar participation rates with differences between women and men as shown in the table. In the case of communities, having no special status, have comparatively lower Labour Force Participation Rates for both men and women. But the Labour Force Participation Rates of Muslim women are consistently low in all three periods largely due to the restrictive social norms, though the Muslim men have participation rates comparable to those of OBCs (Raveendran, 2016). However, the Table 4.1 on women's Labour Force Participation Rates in Raveendran's study is based on employment-unemployment surveys undertaken by the National Sample Survey Organization in 1999-2000, 2004-2005 and 2011-2012.

Table - 4.1**Labour Force Participation Rates of Women and Men by Socio-Religious Group**

Year	Sex	ST	SC	OBC	Muslim	Other	Total
1999-2000	Men	87.5	85.2	84.8	84.5	79.2	83.4
	Women	62.8	45.9	42.1	22.8	27.8	38.1
2004-2005	Men	88.0	85.7	84.7	84.4	79.6	83.8
	Women	65.7	47.1	46.0	25.0	32.2	41.8
2011-2012	Men	84.0	81.1	80.0	81.4	75.7	79.7
	Women	50.2	34.7	32.4	20.2	23.6	30.7

Source: Raveendran, 2016

Therefore, it can be said that the rate of participation in an unorganized sector of the labour force doesn't determine decent work or participation by choice, it is the backwardness of the social groups which increases the rates of participation. Muslims as the largest religious minority group of the country is often lacking opportunities and hence, remain backward. Muslim women have the lowest participation rates in comparison to the women of other social groups due to their socio-cultural restrictions as is found in the above table. So, when Muslim women even from a particular ethnic group participate in the labour force, they are compiled with various socio-cultural stigmas.

The women labourers in the present study are known as 'Bhatiya', one of the ethnic groups within the Muslims of the region. The women labourers in the unorganized sector belonging to an ethnic group known as 'Bhatiya' are originated and traced their descendants from the people of East Bengal i.e., present Bangladesh. This group of people came to this region in the late 19th century as agriculturalists and settled in char areas of the district. But with the passage of time, these people are gradually engaging in various non-agricultural activities including service sectors of the region. At present, a considerable number of Bhatiya Muslims are found in a variety of unorganized activities. The women's participation from this particular ethnic group is also increasingly found in various unregulated activities of the district.

These people are regarded as backward in all spheres of life including education, economy, polity, culture, etc. Most importantly, they are placed at the lowest rank of upper strata in Muslim caste-like ethnic divisions as discussed in the second chapter of the study. It is because the people from other social groups in general, i.e. the non-Muslims, and the other Muslim ethnic groups, i.e. the Uzani or Deshi Muslims, in particular, considered them as a backward and lower ethnic group in the district.

But the Muslim caste-like divisions denoting the status groups are not always precisely defined. The reason is that there is disagreement among the members of the different groups regarding the positions in the social hierarchy of the ethnic/caste-like Muslim groups. This is what happens in the district of Goalpara because the Uzani known as Deshi Muslims are regarded as superior to the Bhatiyas and the Bhatiyas claim that they are superior to the Uzani (Ahmed, 2010). Despite such disagreements and superior or inferior positions of the Bhatiyas in the district, the backwardness of the group, particularly of those labouring class, reflecting in their way of living and thinking has made it a different ethnic group to be studied.

Although a number of Bhatiyas are gradually upgrading their living standards and engaging in different sectors, most of them are still holding the same attitudes and opinions by making themselves a separate group, particularly those belonging to the labour class. A huge number of labourers in the district are found from this particular Muslim ethnic group and they are holding their group identity. The strong holding of ethnicity and their culture are mainly reflected in the lives of women because women could be the best measuring point of development of any section of the people in society. The women of this ethnic group are more backward due to the patriarchal norms in which men have a superior position and most of the women have supportive nature regarding such norms.

The illiteracy of most of them can be regarded as the main reason for the backwardness of this ethnic group. There is no doubt that the reason for illiteracy is their poor economic condition, but regarding women, it is their opinion that education of women is not much more necessary thing than their marriage as soon as possible.

Although they don't show any preference between a boy and girl child, their attitudes towards girls reflected the male dominating culture of the group. The most important thing in this regard is that women themselves are supporting and encouraging such age-old tradition of the group. Even those women, who don't want to support, have remained silent regarding such norms as an obligation of their ethnic group.

The women have no role in decision-making related to the family plans, even though women labourers are contributing to the economic condition of the households. The issue of family planning is solely dependent on the male members of the family. Thus, the main role of women of this ethnic group is to manage the household responsibilities that include domestic works, childbirth and child-rearing, taking care of family members, and gradually contributing to the family income. The economic independence is considered as one of the powerful weapons for empowering women. But the economic contributions of this group of women have not brought any changes in their status. Further, it overburdened them due to the domestic activities at their home.

4.2. Socio-cultural Stigmas faced by Women Labourers:

The term stigma simply means 'label' and stigmatization means the act of labelling or tagging. It does not include any kind of action, but it stigmatized or labelled something which reflected in opinions or attitudes and such stigmas may be positive or negative. As most of these people are backward for a number of reasons and considered as different in the district, it leads to some kinds of negative attitudes towards the Bhatiyas. The negative attitudes of the other groups of people towards the members of this ethnic group have compelled them to face various socio-cultural stigmas. A number of people from this group are gradually engaging in various government jobs, i.e. the organized sector of the economy and they are equally participating in many developmental services along with the mainstream society. But the majority of them are found to be engaged in unorganized activities in which the

people from the labour class are in the most backward position. Although ethnic stigmas towards the Bhatiya Muslims are present for all of its members, it is mainly experienced by the poor and backward classes of labourers. Hence, they are more vulnerable, particularly the women, for such ethnic differentiation than the other members of this group due to their physical appearance, way of dressing, language, occupation, etc.

Therefore, the socio-cultural stigmas are examined from the perspectives of women labourers belonging to Bhatiya Muslims based on their experiences throughout their life. The socio-cultural stigmas faced by these sections of women labourers are mainly related to their historical background and their settlement in this region, their language and dressing patterns. The backwardness in some of their cultural attitudes is the main reason for their stigmatization in the present time. The stigmatization faced by women labourers can be explained as-

National Origin- This ethnic group of Muslims, to which the women labourers belong, came during the later period of the 19th century and simultaneously settled with local Muslims of the district. They are originated from East Bengal (present Bangladesh) which was known as Bhatidesh during the later medieval period and hence, they are named as Bhatiya. As the term Bhatidesh denotes a downward country, the people who came from this land are considered as lower in the district (Ahmed, 2010). On that basis, they are often stigmatized as illegal migrants from Bangladesh and placed at the lowest rank of the social hierarchy of upper strata. Thus, the historical background of the people of this ethnic group has often associated them with stigmas at each stage of their life as illegal migrants. Despite the fact that they migrated from East Bengal (present Bangladesh) in the decade before the partition, this group of people particularly those engaged as labourers are stigmatized.

It is said by a number of women labourers that they are often viewed as Bangladeshi or considered their ethnic group as distinct by the mainstream society. The reaction towards them, sometimes, is so humiliating that expressed by the

derogatory terms and facial hatred of the people. About 21 women labourers said that they are frequently confronted with the questions like whether their name is properly enrolled in the voter list or their name come to the NRC (National Register of Citizens) list. For example, one woman labourer explained her experience as:

“My son, studying at the 8th standard, was asked by most of his friends in his school who are from the other social groups/non-Bhatiyas that whether his and his family members’ name come to the NRC list during the time of NRC list publication and when my son answered that yes, their reactions were like oh, your name has come or like oh, you Bangladeshis also come to the NRC list. After hearing the incidences from my son I felt so differentiated from the other people of the area.”

Some of the women, i.e. about 12 women labourers, said that they also have to face or experience some stigmas when they are in public places for doing some of their official works like in banks, govt. or public offices, etc. When people talk about them as some distinct kinds of people, they remain silent in such situations for the sake of peace and security. In this connection, a woman labourer dictated her experience as:

“I was standing along with my mother in a long line outside the bank for taking the form to make Aadhar cards since early morning. Some women standing behind me, they might know each other, were talking in small voices that these Bhatiyas are always trying to do their things before us, what they will do by making Adhar card or what is the reason to make it by standing in a long line since it is more important for us. At that moment, I felt like why, according to them, it is more important for them only, but not for us.”

Thus, the historical background and their national origin still have a so strong impact that they are often confronted with the questions of their legal identity in the area. Although the district has a large concentration of Muslim population, the Muslims belonging to the Bhatiya ethnic group particularly the labourers are frequently confronted with such situations. Even their legal identity also could not bring much change in the attitude of mainstream society. The women labourers have

often experienced differentiation for the ethnicity and the national origin of their descendants.

Language- Language as the medium of communication is related to the culture of a particular society or a group of people. Language and culture have a complex homologous relationship, where communication acts as the manifestation of a particular culture. In the same way, the language is spoken by the Bhatiyas also represents their distinct cultural identity. But their language often becomes one of the aspects of stigmatization for them. The members of other social groups have stigmatized the Bhatiyas for their medium of communication, i.e. the language. They speak in Bengali but it is not purely Bengali because there are variations in some terms used by the Bhatiyas. It can also be said that it is the mixture of Bengali with their own dialects which they used to call as 'Bhatiya'.

A number of women labourers said that they have often hesitated to interact mainly in public places like offices, banks or health care centres, etc., with people from the other social groups because of their language. For example, one woman labourer explained as:

"I went to the bank along with the other two women residing nearby my house in order to open an account, but in filling up the form we faced difficulties because of our lower educational status. A person was there who helped us in filling up the forms but most of the time that man was showing his annoyance because of his difficulties in understanding some of our terms due to language."

However, the children of women labourers have faced more stigmas regarding their language than the women labourers themselves. About 45 women labourers, i.e. 75%, said that their children are often stigmatized as backward for being a 'Bhatiya' at school when they have interacted with children from the other social groups. It is also said by some women that their children don't want to introduce their parents to his/her school friends. The inability of the women labourers and their children to speak

Assamese fluently have always stigmatized them and caused some derogatory treatments. In this connection, one woman shared her experience as:

“My son was studying in a private school up to the 5th standard. One day, after the death of my husband, I was called to my son’s school because of his violent behaviours in those days. When I went to his school and talked to the teachers then I came to know that my son always fights with his classmates even a boy was bled due to his punch. At that moment, I thought of talking to him about this matter at home, but surprisingly when he came back home on that day, he was so angry and shouting at me that why you went to my school, they will again make fun of me that I am a Bhatiya and my whole family could not speak Assamese properly. Then I realized why my son was violently fighting with his classmates. After that, I shifted my son to a government school where most of the children are from poor sections of people.”

Dressing Patterns- The dressing styles of an individual can establish his/her identity as well as their place in society. Like the language, the pattern of dressing can also be considered as the cultural expression of a particular group of people. The dressing behaviour of the women labourers is often found different by the people of other social groups in the area. Thus, the women labourers are stigmatized on the basis of the dressing behaviour as the identity of their ethnic group. The way of dressing followed by the women labourers has compelled them to face stigmatization. The habit of wearing saree by the women and lungi by the men with some colourful designs is another reason for the stigmatization of this group of people. Gradually, a considerable number of these women are starting to wear nighties almost everywhere which also stigmatized them as Bhatiya. They wear nighty for their own comfort and also because their unorganized sector of activities doesn’t have any dress code to be followed. In this matter, the women folk belonging to some other social groups often stigmatized them as Bhatiya as it is said by 17 women labourers. For example, a woman labourer explained her experience as:

“One day I went to the hospital with my mother-in-law and sitting outside the doctor’s chamber. One small girl maybe of 8-10 years of age came with her mother, who is non-Bhatiya, and sat nearby me, but her mother took her to another place to seat. I felt differentiated at that moment for my clothes because there were enough vacant seats nearby me, but her mother took her to another place to seat.”

Thus, the dressing behaviour of women labourers is also marked as their identity of belongingness to the Bhatiya ethnic group. The wearing of cotton saree with some colourful designs is often stigmatized as Bhatiya even before the interaction by the people of other social groups in the area as is revealed in the study.

Table - 4.2
Socio-Cultural Stigmas of the Respondents

Socio-Cultural Stigmas	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
National Origin	33	55
Language	45	75
Dressing Pattern	17	28.33

The above Table 4.2 has been made to summarize the themes and frequencies on the three major grounds of socio-cultural stigmas which the women labourers have directly experienced in their lives. It is found that the majority of women labourers are stigmatized due to their language which affected them by their children’s experiences. It is about 55% and 28.33% of women labourers have experienced stigmatization due to their national origin and dressing pattern respectively. Although the frequencies are different regarding the three major themes, the intensity or the level of stigmatization is the same as it is experienced by almost all the women labourers.

Besides these above mentioned major grounds of differentiation, there are also some habits and cultural attitudes that are observed to be the aspects of differentiation for the Bhatiya women labourers. These aspects are also becoming the basis for their

differentiation because the Bhatiya women labourers themselves assumed it as the culture of their group. They are-

The Concept of Marriage- Marriage, as a universal social institution, refers to a system under which the union of a man and a woman has been given social and legal sanction as husband and wife. The concept of marriage is surrounded by early marriage because it is very much common among the Bhatiya women labourers. This group of people prefers the early marriage of both boy and girl child, but in most cases, women are more vulnerable to such child marriages. It not only deprives them from their childhood but also from their fundamental right to education. Although marriage is regarded as a necessary part of the social system in a country like India, the marriage of a person at an early age restricts and takes away many rights. It affects not only the development of the persons involved in it but also the society and the nation as a whole (Sultana & Gogoi, 2019). Therefore, the concept of marriage has a significant role to play in each individual's life.

The marriage at an early age, which is termed as 'child marriage', is widely found among the socially disadvantaged groups of people, despite various laws in this regard. UN Women has proposed that child marriage can be defined as a forced marriage because they believe children under the age of 18 are incapable of giving legally valid consent. The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 defines "child marriage" as a marriage, or a marriage about to be solemnized, to which either of the contracting parties is a child; and child for purposes of marriage is defined based on the gender of the person - if a male, it is 21 years of age, and if a female, 18 years of age. Therefore, child marriage can be considered to be a violation of child rights.

Table - 4.3
Age at Marriage of the Respondents

Age at Marriage	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Below 13	16	26.67

13-15	36	60
16-18	8	13.33
Above 18	0	0
Total	60	100

The incidence of child marriage is very common among the women labourers that have been found in the study. The above table is clearly showing the existence of child marriage, where no woman labourer has been found to be married after 18 years of their age. It is only 13.33% of women labourers are found who married between the age of 16-18 years. It is found that 26.67% of women labourers were under the 13 years of age at the time of their marriage. However, the majority of them are found to be married between 13-15 years of age, i.e. 60% of women labourers as shown in the Table 4.3.

The socio-economic and cultural factors of a particular group of people are the main reason for child marriage. The women labourers are socially deprived, economically poor, educationally and culturally backwards which have largely affected their age at marriage. But they are considering it as the culture of their group to be married off at an early age, particularly for women. All the women have married before their 18 years of age and even, some of them married before they have attained the age of puberty. It is said by 7 women labourers that they married before their puberty and it caused many health problems along with some family issues. For example, one woman labourer shared her experience as:

“When I was married at that time I had not attained puberty and might be because of which I had to face many complications during the birth of my first child which was possible after the 7 years of marriage. Further, I had to go through many difficulties in doing the household works because I was not able to do it properly for which my mother-in-law was often shouted at me and sometimes, I was beaten.”

Despite such experiences of getting married at an early age, most of the women labourers have supported the marriage of their children, particularly the girls, as soon

as possible. It is said by 37 women labourers that the age for marriage should be 18 years only because the government has imposed the age limit at 18 years and the violation of which is considered as a crime. In this regard, one woman labourer shared her opinion as:

“I want to arrange my daughters’ marriage as soon as possible, I have three daughters and it will be good for me if I could arrange their marriage at their 13-16 years of age. It is because among our Bhatiya people early marriage of girls is more preferable and if the girl eloped with someone then it will harm our family honour before the community. Further, it will also reduce some of my economic burdens, but because of the age limit imposed by the government, I could not do that.”

Moreover, four women labourers have no opinion on the issue of marriage because they said that the decisions regarding marriage are taken by the elders and the male members of the family. But it is said by 19 women labourers that early marriage discriminates a girl from education, it will also cause many health-related problems and therefore, the marriage of a girl should take place only when they are matured enough. For example, one woman shared her experience as:

“I want to educate my daughters so that they don’t need to work like me as a labourer and I also don’t want that my daughters would face the same health problems during pregnancy as I had faced due to my early marriage. But I don’t know I could do it for my daughters or not because the final decision is taken by the male members in our society.”

Thus, marrying their girl child at an early age is the main concern of most of the women labourers because it is well accepted among them. Although there are some women who don’t support early marriage, they are not in a position to restrict it. It is the poor educational and economic background that contributed to the prevailing early marriage which is regarded as the common feature among the Bhatiya women labourers by the mainstream society.

Prevalence of Domestic Violence- Violence against women is one of the most common phenomena that prevail in any society. The term violence means an act of aggression or a state resulting in injuries and destruction. Due to violence most of the women do not participate in public activities in which they have to face men. Therefore, the women and their works which have a tremendous value to family, society and the nation as a whole, has remained invisible (Desai & Thakkar, 2001). The violence against women could be found not only outside but also inside, i.e. within the four walls of their houses, which is the worst thing that happened to a woman and which we termed as ‘domestic violence’. Despite the various legal provisions like the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005), most of the cases of domestic violence are remained hidden as women do not prefer to report against their families. Thus, domestic violence against women is becoming a legacy being passed on from one generation to another.

In that similar way, the occurrence of domestic violence seems to be a culture of this ethnic group. The women labourers have experienced domestic violence by their husbands at least once in their lifetime. Most of the women labourers have never tried to resist or raise voice against domestic violence and accepted it as the culture of their ethnic group. They said that among the Bhatiyas, the incidence of wife-beating is very much common. It is said by 32 women labourers that they are often beaten by their husbands and never raise their voice because it might lead to the breaking of the marital tie which they don’t want to do. A woman labourer stated:

“My husband often beats me and it is quite normal as it is not only me, other women like me are also beaten by their husbands. I know I can raise my voice against such violence but it will ultimately lead to separation or divorce, but after that how I will survive without any support, how I will manage the upbringing of my children, what will happen to them.”

There is another five married women labourer who said that domestic violence against them has been reduced because they are becoming the sole earning member of the family and have the courage to raise their voices, but they have also faced violence

after marriage. However, 13 separated or divorced women labourers are found and domestic violence was the main reason for their separation despite some other factors. They said that they were beaten even for some minor issues like for talking with the neighbours or not cooking properly etc. In this regard, one woman labourer shared her experience as:

“My husband had beaten me almost daily during my five years of married life, sometimes without any reason, and every time I stopped myself from breaking the marriage because of my two children, but I separated from him in order to survive and to give my children a better life than their father and started to work as construction labourer as I am not so much educated to get a better job.”

Thus, domestic violence seems to be common for the women labourers belonging to this ethnic group and they accept it as a normal thing in their life. They said that it is quite more common among the Bhatiyas than among the other social groups in the area. Although it is prevalent due to their educational backwardness which is still holding the patriarchal norms, domestic violence is considered as one of the characteristics of this ethnic group by the mainstream society.

Incidences of Polygamy- In our ancient Indian societies, polygamy marriages were widely practised, and there was no such prohibition. It was in 1955, the Hindu Marriage Act was drafted to prohibit the second marriage when the first spouse was alive. Thus, polygamy marriage was considered to be illegal from 1956 in India for all of its citizens except the Muslims. Muslims in the country come under The Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act of 1937, which permitted them to have four wives, but it was legally prohibited by the Supreme Court of India in 2015. Although polygamy marriages are prevalent in India depending on some socio-religious groups, Muslims are largely found to be practising monogamy marriage as an ideal type of marriage system in present times.

The system of polygamy marriages is said to be rampant among the Bhatiya ethnic group, particularly among the labour class. The polygamy system of marriage is

another aspect, like early marriage and domestic violence, for which the Bhatiyas are often differentiated. But in this regard, only one such case has been found in which the respondent's husband is practising polygamy by having two wives. In that case, the woman labourer said that she is not living with her husband's second wife in one household. When her husband married another woman she left that house, but her husband is still taking care of her and their children along with his second wife. So, the woman labourer has never asked for a divorce from her husband and leading her life as it is going on.

Thus, it can be said that incidences of polygamy can rarely be found among the Bhatiyas even among the most disadvantaged group of women labourers. But they are differentiated for practising polygamy marriage because it was more prevalent among them in earlier times. It was when they came to this land during the late 19th century, the incidences of polygamy were more common for which they had more children and it contributed to changing the demographic profile of the district. On that basis, they are still differentiated for practising polygamy as the culture of their ethnic group by the mainstream society.

4.3. The Attitude of Employers:

The aspects of ethnic differentiation have also been found in the attitude of employers at the workplace. The attitude of the employers is attempted to analyze by the behaviours expressed towards the women labourers at their workplace. The women labourers have to face some derogatory treatments at the workplace because most of their employers belong to the other social or ethnic groups in the area. In order to analyze the employers' attitude properly, it is essential to provide the social background of the employers, i.e. their social group. Therefore, the following Table 4.4 is provided to distribute women labourers on the basis of their employers' social group. The social groups of the employers have been divided into three categories, i.e. (a) Bhatiya (in which the women labourers are found), (b) Muslim ethnic groups (it

includes all those ethnic groups within the Muslims, particularly the Assamese, Uzani or Deshi Muslims) and (c) Other social groups (it includes all those social groups in the study area except Muslims).

Table - 4.4
Social Group of Employers of the Respondents

Social Group	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Bhatiya	19	31.67
Muslim Ethnic Groups	34	56.67
Other Social Groups	7	11.67
Total	60	100

It is found that the majority of women labourers, i.e. 56.67%, are employed under the employers belonging to other Muslim ethnic groups followed by 31.67% of employers belonging to Bhatiyas and only 11.67% of women labourers are employed under the other social groups of the area. It is because the district has a majority of the Muslim population and in the unorganized sector, particularly the construction industry is often observed to be dominated by contractors belonging to Bhatiya Muslims. There are some more women employed under Bhatiyas along with other ethnic or social groups at the same time, but the focus is mainly given on the attitude of the employers belonging to other groups. Therefore, the women labourers working only under Bhatiya employers are counted for the study and for those, who are working under both Bhatiyas and non-Bhatiyas at the same time, are counted as non-Bhatiya.

However, the women labourers employed under Bhatiyas don't have to face any kinds of derogatory treatments for ethnicity because they are from the same group. But work-related discomfort and the attitude of extracting more labour at a cheap price are there among the Bhatiya employers as one of the characteristics of the unorganized sector. It is the women labourers, who are employed under the other ethnic or social groups of employers, have to face the derogatory treatments related to their ethnic

group in addition to their employment at a very low rate for maximum labour. It is found that the employers of women domestic workers are mostly from other ethnic groups of Muslim. Hence, women employed in private households are often facing some stigma or derogatory treatment related to their ethnic group.

Further, depending on the different nature of work between the domestic and construction labourers, the experience of women labourers regarding the attitude of their employers have been separately studied. In this regard, the attitude of the employers have been categorized as - (a) bad, i.e. showing discomfort by shouting at the women for not doing the works properly or according to the employer's instructions; (b) very bad, i.e. behaving very rudely by some derogatory treatments based on the ethnic group of women labourers like ethnic stigmas; and (c) worst, i.e. not allowing or not giving scope for child care at the workplace along with some derogatory treatments.

Table - 4.5 (a)

Attitude of Employers towards the Respondents in Construction Works

Attitude/Behaviour	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Bad	11	36.67
Very bad	3	10
Worst	16	53.33
Total	30	100

The relationship between the employer and employee is very much unsatisfactory in the construction industry. The behaviour or the attitude hold by the employers, i.e. the contractors, towards the construction labourers is very rude, particularly for the women. Even the behaviour of other male workers is also, sometimes, found rude towards the women labourers in the workplace. It is found that almost all the women labourers are unsatisfied with the employer's behaviour. The majority of them are experiencing the worst behaviour, i.e. 53.33% followed by about

36.67% of bad behaviour and 10% of very bad behaviour from their employers as revealed in the above Table 4.5 (a).

Table - 4.5 (b)

Attitude of Employers towards the Respondents in Domestic Works

Attitude/Behaviour	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Bad	12	40
Very bad	16	53.33
Worst	2	6.67
Total	30	100

The behavioural patterns of the employers towards women domestic workers are often found unsatisfactory. Most of the women labourers providing their services to employer's houses are not experiencing some good employer-employee relationships. It is found that 40% of women are experiencing bad behaviour from their employers followed by 53.33% of very bad and only 6.67% with the worst attitude from their employers.

Based on the Table 4.5 (a) & (b), it is found that there are different kinds of attitudes held by employers against women labourers which are also depending on various factors. It is said by 11 construction and 12 domestic workers that they have only found some bad behaviour from their employers for not working sometimes according to their demands. Those attitudes from their employers have never been found as derogatory related to their ethnicity because most of the employers belong to the same ethnic group. Although a number of employers belonging to other groups are also there, the women labourers said that they have never faced stigmas related to their ethnicity.

The difference has been clearly revealed between the women domestic and construction labourers in experiencing employers' attitude based on women's ethnic group, i.e. the stigmas related to ethnicity. It is mainly because the women

construction labourers are mostly employed under the contractors belonging to Bhatiya Muslims, and the women domestic workers are mostly employed in the private households of other ethnic groups of Muslims. It is said by 16 women domestic workers that they have to face some derogatory treatments by their employers which differentiated them as a distinct group of people. The derogatory treatments are like showing hatred for their ethnic group by using some terms like ‘Chorua-Bhaital’ or by maintaining some distance in having food together, etc. In this connection, one woman shared her experience as:

“I am working in two households of which one is Bhatiya Muslim and another one is Assamese Muslim. In the household of the Bhatiya Muslim, I often seat in their chairs and sometimes, have food with them at their dining table. But I have never been allowed or given scope to seat along with them together in the household of the Assamese Muslim.”

Further, the women labourers also have to face some hatred for their dressing pattern which is often expressed in the way of talking of the employers. For example, one woman labourer said as:

“The three households of the non-Bhatiyas, where I am working as a domestic worker, have gifted me some clothes mainly saree during the time of IED every year. But the woman of the one household have often gifted me silk sarees or mekhela-chador which I have never worn and hence, I rejected to take that every time for which she said like you Bhatiyas will never be going to change your way of dressing and that is why people have always suspected you as Bangladeshi.”

It is said by a number of women construction labourers that they have experienced worst behaviour from the employers, i.e. the contractors, because of bringing their child at the workplace. Although about 20 women are found to bring their children to the construction sites which mostly distract them from their work, it is said by 16 women that their contractors behave very rudely for their child care during the working hours. It is mainly because of the unorganized nature of work, employers’

intention to extract maximum labour and not having any social security measures for the women labourers. In this regard, only 2 women domestic workers are found who said about experiencing the worst behaviour from their employers. It is mainly because only 5 women domestic workers are found to bring their children to the workplace and also they work for 2-3 hours in a household. As a result, bringing their child at the workplace is not becoming so much problematic for the employers unlike the employers of construction sectors. Thus, a number of factors like the social or ethnic group of the employers, nature of work, working hours, etc., are contributing to the differential attitude of employers towards the women labourers at the workplace.

4.4. Findings of the Study:

The unorganized sector of the economy and the women, particularly from a socially disadvantaged group, has a very close relationship which reveals in the study. The women labourers belonging to a particular group, which is considered to be backward mainly for their distinct cultural traits by the mainstream society, are significantly found in the unorganized sector. It is found that the women labourers are facing various socio-cultural stigmas due to their ethnic identity. Such stigmas are related to the cultural traits that mainly emerged from the national origin of their descendants as exhibited above. It is found that the aspects of ethnic differentiation have been traced from the historical background of the Bhatiya Muslims, and it prevails in the study area in different forms.

The major grounds for differentiation or stigmas, i.e. national origin, language and dressing pattern, are directly experienced by the women labourers in their life. Regarding these three major grounds of stigmas as examined above, the women labourers have different experiences. It is found that the national origin of their descendants often stigmatized them as Bangladeshi by using their Bhatiya ethnic identity as a derogatory term. It often leads them to be confronted with various questions about their legal status in the region. The culture of the Bhatiya women

labourers manifested in their language and way of dressing are also the major social grounds to stigmatize them as a different group of people in the area. The women labourers as a socially disadvantaged group of the society and their belongingness to a particular Muslim ethnic have made them more vulnerable to such socio-cultural stigmas imposed by mainstream society.

Further, the concept of early marriage, prevalence of domestic violence and the incidences of polygamy have also provided the extra impetus to differentiate them from the larger society. It is said by most of the women labourers that early marriages are very common among their Bhatiyas and they mostly prefer it because it is well accepted among them. It is found that all the women labourers chosen between the 20-50 years are married before they have attained the age of 18 years. Even, it is said by 7 women labourers that they were married before attaining their puberty which causes many difficulties during their pregnancy. Despite the difficulties faced by them due to their early marriage, most of the women labourers have shown their support for marriage as soon as possible, particularly for the girls.

In the same way, the prevalence of domestic violence is considered to be the common incidence among the women labourers. They assumed it as the common feature of the marital relationship and opposing of which will lead to the separation or divorce. Although a number of women labourers are found to be divorced out of such violence or some other major reasons, their opinions about taking divorce revealed that it placed them with various insecurities in life. Therefore, it is found that all the women labourers have faced domestic violence at least once in their life, but still, they are not in favour of raising voice against it. Although they are facing violence almost on regular basis without any valid reason, breaking the marital ties due to such domestic violence are not fully supported. Moreover, the incidence of polygamy, which is said to be prevalent among the Bhatiyas, could rarely be found with some exceptional cases. Among the women labourers, only one such case of polygamy has been found in which her husband married another woman in her presence.

However, ethnic differentiation can also be found at the workplace in the attitude of employers. In this regard, the two types of women labourers, i.e. construction and domestic, have different forms of experience. Although the district has a significant number of Bhatiya Muslims and employers, i.e. the contractors, particularly in the construction sector is mainly dominated by them, the Bhatiya women labourers still have to face many derogatory treatments. Such treatments are mainly caused by the nature of work in the construction sites which requires long working hours with maximum labour at a very cheap rate. But they are not facing so many ethnic stigmas at the workplace due to the belongingness of most of the contractors from the same ethnic group. Whereas, the women engaged in private households have to face more ethnic stigmas because their employers mainly belong to the non-Bhatiya groups of the people. The attitude and behaviours of employers at the workplace have created a sense of differentiation among the women labourers. As a result, the women labourers are employing under the employers without any security measures, as discussed in the previous chapter, along with some differentiation based on their ethnic group.

Thus, the various aspects of ethnic differentiation have been faced by the women labourers in different forms at different spheres of their life. The women labourers engaged in the unorganized sector are more subjected to such ethnic differentiation due to their occupation than the other members of their ethnic group. In this way, the women labourers in the labour market have faced problems not only because of the unregulated nature of work and the sexual division of labour but also because of their belongingness to a particular ethnic group.

4.5. Case Studies:

Some of the case studies have been conducted in order to support the findings of the study. In addition to the primary data collected from 60 respondents, another six case studies have been conducted in order to highlight the findings of the study. The

six case studies have been chosen, and it consists of three case studies from women domestic workers and the other three from women construction labourers.

Case study 1- Mrs A said that she was working as a domestic worker since the age of 8 years due to economic hardship. When she was unmarried, she was working in an employer's house about 80 km. distance from her parents' house. So, she stayed there for about 3 years and was bound to work continuously from morning to night. She was beaten up by her employer if she worked slowly for her physical weakness. After 3 years she came back home and soon at the age of 12 years she got married to a plumber. In her marriage life also, she has faced lots of troubles from her in-laws and husband. She was the victim of domestic violence for 9 years, i.e. until her first boy child was born. Gradually, her husband became a gambler and so idle to work, and therefore, she was again bound to work as a domestic worker to support her family with five members and to educate the children. At present, she is working in three houses from 5:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. with Rs.3800 monthly income, and she is the main source of income in the house.

Case study 2- Mrs B said that she started to work as a domestic worker at 9 years of her age, i.e. after her mother's death and her father married another woman. At the age of 16, she married a carpenter and she was happy with him for about one year. But unfortunately, her husband died in an accident when she was pregnant and her in-laws don't allow her to stay in their house. So, she came back to her father and stayed there with her stepmother until her baby attained the age of 6 months. After that she started to work as a domestic worker and within 6 months she shifted to a rent house. At present, she is working in a house from 6 a.m. morning to 6 p.m. evening with a monthly remuneration of Rs. 3000. And she is working hard only to educate her 11 years old son. She said that her son is gradually feeling humiliated for being a Bhatiya and not capable to speak Assamese properly at school.

Case study 3- Mrs C said that at the age of 10 years she got married to a rickshaw puller and after the 5 years of the violent marriage relationship, her husband refused to take care of her because she could not give birth to a child. Her husband

married another woman with whom he started to stay and never come back to look after her. She was often stigmatized for being a Bhatiya due to her language by the employer when initially she started to work as a domestic worker in a house. So, she left that house and started to work in another employer's household by staying at her brother's house. At present, she is working as a domestic worker from 6 a.m. to 2 p.m. with a monthly income of Rs. 2500.

Case study 4- Mrs D said that she is working as a construction worker in road construction sides after her husband's death. But she gets only Rs. 200, where other male workers get Rs. 300 per day. She has three children of which two are going to a nearby school, and one is only two years of old whom she used to carry with her at the workplace. Her husband was a plumber whose occasional income was not sufficient to manage the family expenditures. But she was not allowed to work outside the home by her husband. It is only after her husband's sudden death she has started to work as a daily-wage labourer in road construction and tried to save money of 30 rupees daily for the education of her children. She said that her children have never faced any kind of stigmas at school, but she has faced lots of differentiation in her lifetime based on her language, dressing pattern, etc.

Case study 5- Mrs E said that she started to work as a domestic worker at 8 years of her age, i.e. after her mother's death and her father was not working properly for income. At the age of 15, she married a carpenter where she faced lots of domestic violence by her husband and in-laws. After 6 years of marriage, her husband got married to another woman and she came back to her parental home along with her two children. She started to work as daily-wage labourers in order to manage the household expenditures after her father's death. At present, she is working in building construction areas from where she earns only Rs. 250 per day. It is very difficult for her to manage all the family expenditures as she has to take care of her stepmother too who is paralyzed. So, she dropped out her daughter's schooling in class-v and employed her as a domestic worker in a nearby house in order to educate her son.

Case study 6- Mrs F said that at the age of 13 years she got married to a shopkeeper and after the 5 years of the violent marriage relationship, her husband refused to take care of their two girl child. Her husband married another woman with whom he started to stay. So initially, she started to work as a domestic worker but when her daughters became capable to take care of themselves, she started to work as a construction labourer from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. with a daily income of Rs. 200-250 depending on the type of work. She works with a hope to provide a better life and education to her daughters but they face a kind of stigma for being a 'Bhatiya' at school by their classmates of other social groups. Due to such stigmas, her daughters have felt differentiation as they could not communicate with others in the Assamese language properly.

Summary of Case Studies- The following findings can be drawn from the above case studies:

1. It is revealed that the socio-economic background of the women labourers compels them to engage in the unorganized sector of the economy at a very low price.
2. Due to the low level of income, the women labourers could hardly manage to save money for their future needs because it is very difficult for them even to manage the basic household expenditures.
3. It is found that some of the women labourers have shifted from domestic works to construction works because of the daily income system in working as construction labourers.
4. The daily-wage system in construction works is also revealing the existence of employing women at a very cheap price without any fixed wage system, i.e. unregulated income and discrimination based on gender.
5. It is revealed that the concept of early marriage is very much common among women labourers along with domestic violence in marital relationships.

6. It is found that most of the women labourers have faced ethnic stigmas due to their language and dressing patterns both at their workplace and in public places.

Thus, the above case studies have highlighted almost all the findings of the study and it reveals the various problems of women labourers engaged in the unorganized sector.

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