

CHAPTER- V

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter summarizes the findings of the study based on the objectives and research questions and attempts to draw a conclusion by providing suggestions for the concerned authorities and the larger society. Women are often found in unprotected, exploited and discriminated conditions, despite their crucial role in the society. Women labourers in the unorganized sector of the economy constitute an economically productive and numerically large, but socio-economically marginalized section of the population (Devi, 2015). Women's works are generally unrecognized because of their nature of work which is mostly informal and they perform economic activities along with their household chores. Hence, the women in the labour market have to invest more hours of labour and work harder than men due to their domestic activities at home.

Thus, the nature of women's work to a great extent remains uncounted and underestimated by the investigators in the census. The main reasons for the invisibility of women's work from statistical data are: (a) cultural constructions of women's work; (b) insensitivity of the society towards women's work; (c) difficulties in measuring women's work in the family, agriculture and unorganized sector (as the line between economic and non-economic activities here is very thin); (d) women's socialization in counting their work as insignificant; (e) the dominant social bias to regard men as heads of family and to push home-related, home-based activities to secondary category; (f) inadequate format of questions, and (g) insensitivity of the investigators (especially if they are men) and data-collecting agencies (Desai & Thakkar, 2001). Further, it is considered that women from the socially disadvantaged group are more likely to be in unregulated kinds of the labour market, i.e. in the unorganized sector.

The social background of women often puts them in a more vulnerable position in this sector.

5.1. Summary of the Findings:

This present study entitled “Problems of Women Labourers in Unorganized Sector: A Sociological Study in Goalpara District of Assam” has mainly attempted to describe and explore the problems of women labourers in the unorganized sector by focusing on their socio-economic and cultural aspects. The study is undertaken among the women labourers engaged as domestic and construction labourers belonging to a particular Muslim ethnic group known as ‘Bhatiya’ in the district. The study was carried out in the municipal areas of the district by taking 60 women respondents, i.e. engaged in construction and domestic works, as sample size. The study was undertaken by emphasizing on unorganized women labourers in their certain socio-economic and cultural, i.e. reflected in their ethnic group, aspects. The whole study has been divided into five chapters and the present chapter is aimed at summarizing the findings of previous chapters of the study and drawing suggestions in this regard.

The study has been undertaken with the objectives of studying the historical background of Muslim ethnic groups in the district for which the women labourers are treated as a lower ethnic group, their working conditions by identifying the extent of security at the workplace, examining various socio-cultural differentiation faced by them due to ethnicity and analyzing the attitude of their employers. All these objectives have been explored through the lens of unorganized women labourers belonging to the Bhatiya Muslims.

Based on the above objective, the Second chapter of the study highlights the socio-economic and demographic profile of Goalpara district along with the historical background of various Muslim ethnic groups in the district. It is found that the district has several socio-cultural, religious, ethnic groups and the different groups of people have their own history of evolving as the people of the district. Among them, Muslims

in the district are not only forming one major religious group but also representing several ethnic groups within itself. As Monirul Hussain (1993) said, “Muslims of Assam are not a single religious community: rather, they are a group of several identifiable distinctive ones”. Many of them came to this land during the time of Mughals and settled here by adopting Assamese culture, language and way of life such as the Sheikh, Syed and Pathan families in the district.

It is found that a group of Muslims designated as Uzani are the people of the upper region and some of which are Koch-Rajbongshis converted to Islam. These local Muslims are known as ‘Deshi’ people and composing one of the important ethnic groups in the district. Another important ethnic group of Muslims are constituted by those Bengali speaking peasants who came from East Bengal (present Bangladesh). They had started to come after the Yandaboo Treaty in 1826 and occupied vast tracts of land in Goalpara in the decades before partition and after independence. Although they settled in char areas of the district, gradually, they migrated to the towns and its nearby areas of Goalpara by engaging in a number of unorganized non-agricultural activities which has been emphasized in this study. These Bengali speaking Muslim peasants are popularly known as ‘Bhatiya’ in the district because during the later medieval period East Bengal was known as Bhatidesh (Ahmed, 2010). Besides these two major ethnic groups of Uzani and Bhatiya, some other Muslim ethnic groups have also been found such as the Charua, Dathiya and Baramasi or Sandar in the district.

The Third chapter of the study highlights the socio-economic problems of women labourers in the unorganized sector. Evidence has been found from the field study that the women labourers are composing the socially backward and economically poor sections of the society. As the women labourers between 20-50 years are distributed in a variety of age groups for the study, the majority of them are found within the age group of 26-45 years covering about 80% of women respondents where most of them are engaged as construction labourers. On the other hand, women engaged as domestic workers are found within each of the age groups, unlike the construction labourers.

It is found that the majority of women are married followed by divorced/separated and widow. No unmarried woman is found between 20-50 years of age which reveals the existence of early marriages among the women labourers. The poor educational status is another reason for prevailing early marriages among the women labourers as it is found in the study. The majority of women labourers are illiterate where only 23 literates are found but with the poor educational status, of which two women are found to be complete their education up to the HSLC level. The poor economic condition of the household, lack of awareness about the importance of education among their parents, the belief among themselves that female education is not necessary and the concerns among them for girls' marriage as soon as possible, i.e. early marriages, are the main reasons for their poor educational status. Thus, both the poor educational status and early marriage are found as inter-dependently related to each other.

Regarding the family structure, it is found that the majority of women labourers are living in medium-sized nuclear families. Although most of the women labourers are found in nuclear families, it falls within the medium-sized family, i.e. having 5-7 members. It is because the women labourers are not concern about any family planning for which the majority of women labourers have more than two children. Moreover, the early marriages among the women labourers have also given scope for the birth of more children. Thus, the poor educational status of the women, lack of concern regarding family planning, early marriages and also their husband's educational status are playing a significant role in this matter.

The housing condition of all the women labourers is revealing their poor living conditions as found in the field study. They are found in Assam type houses, often on a rental basis, of which only a few have their own land to live. The majority of them have to pay rent to the owner either for the house in which they live or for the land in which they built their houses. It is also found that the majority of them are living in houses with tin walls and roofs having only one room without any electricity facilities. It is about 14 women labourers are found in houses with brick walls of which most of

the women could build such houses due to the loans provided by the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY). Further, the majority of households are structured without the proper toilet facility and hence, most of the women labourers living in a particular area have to share one or two toilets among 6-8 families. The lack of electricity facilities in most of the houses and the use of kerosene is also indicating their poor economic condition.

However, the working condition of the women labourers is revealing the same kinds of problems for both the domestic and construction labourers but the intensity of such conditions is different. It is found that the women are employed through the contractors at a low amount of wages in the construction sites and are mainly engaged as helpers of the male labourers for carrying materials. The construction industry is one of the largest sectors of employment which absorbed unskilled labourers. The construction industry is established on the basis of activities that require last “skill orientation” (Sultania, 1994). In the study area, it is found that the women labourers are getting daily wages of Rs.150 to 350 for unskilled labour, whereas the males are getting Rs.350 to 500. Thus, it can be said that there is no fixed amount of wages for labourers and a huge gap is found between the wages on the basis of gender.

On the other hand, the women engaged in domestic services are the most invisible kinds of labour which are mainly dominated by womenfolk. It is found that this area of the labour force for women is different from that of the construction sites where they get wages on daily basis, but in domestic works, they are employed on monthly basis. Women are employed through their mutual contacts or in nearby households and provide services of domestic help including cooking, cleaning, washing, caring for children and elderly people, etc., at employers’ households. It is found in the study that they are basically engaged for a few hours of services in the employer’s households, that is, for a part-time or half-day of services unlike the construction labourers, where they have to work for the whole day, even for overtime without any proper extra remuneration.

Despite that women are found to be in construction sites because of its daily income and if it is counted, the daily income of domestic workers would be 15 to 150 rupees only. This is the main reason for the women labourers engaging in the construction industry for the whole day and even for overtime labour. But a number of women labourers are engaging in domestic works because of its regular income which is not found in the construction works. Although the income level of women labourers at the construction works are higher than at the domestic works, it also cost higher physical labour than in the domestic services. Therefore, it is found that the construction industry is mainly composed of women labourers of the young and middle age, i.e. within 26-45 age groups and the domestic works are done by women from all the age groups. Further, it is found in the study that women are not employed in the construction industry at their very early stages of young age. It is because of the emergent economic crisis in their life due to the separation/divorce from the husband or after the death of the husband, they have started to engage as construction labourers. It is also found that the inability to manage the expenditure by the low income of husband after the expansion of family has compelled them to participate in the construction industry.

It is found that both kinds of women labourers are facing almost similar kinds of health issues but the intensity of such problems are different. The women working as construction labourers have faced more physical problems than the domestic workers due to their heavy loads of work with long working hours in the unhealthy working conditions. The study found that all the women construction labourers have more or less the problems of muscle pain due to their work-loads along with other health problems like allergy, cough or asthma. But the women in domestic services have considerably fewer health-related problems. Even that, a significant number of women's participation could be found in such hazardous works due to its fast and higher income than in domestic works where the income comes in a regular but on a slow process. But the number of women's participation in domestic works is also not very less because it absorbed the women from all ages.

Further, the working condition of the women labourers is largely dependent on their family responsibilities. It is found that household works and child care are having a significant impact on their condition of work in the unorganized sector. The majority of women labourers are found in doing their household works without any assistance from family members. The husband of most of the women labourers doesn't want to do/help in the household works because of the traditional association of women with household works. It is found in the study that 9 women construction labourers and only 4 women domestic workers are assisted by family members like husbands, children or in-laws. It reveals that the long working hours of women construction labourers in comparison to the women domestic workers who often engaged as part-time workers determine the issue of getting help from family members in household works. However, despite the several reasons for managing household works alone, the patriarchal norm of women's association with unpaid domestic works is found to be the major reason in this regard.

But the differences have been found in the matter of child care between the women domestic and construction labourers because of the different nature of their work. It is found that the majority of women construction labourers have brought their children to the workplace which is not similar to the case of domestic workers. It implies that the long working hour for women construction labourers and the part-time contract of working as domestic workers have determined the matter of child care. Further, the availability of other family members in the house is also playing a significant role in this regard. It is found that women labourers living in joint or semi-joint families are getting more help in order to take care of their children than the women labourers living in small-sized nuclear or single-parent families. Therefore, although the nature and period of work is the main reason, the patterns of the family are also determining factors in reducing or increasing the burden of women labourers on child care. However, the construction sites have no crèche facilities for which the unhealthy environment often affecting the child's health at an early age.

Moreover, it also found that the social security measures like The Payment of Wages Act (1936), The Factories Act (1948), Maternity Benefit Act (1961), The Equal Remuneration Act (1976), The Building and Other Construction Workers' (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act (1996), The Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act (2008), etc., are not applicable. The lack of proper knowledge about the terms, conditions and benefits of these protective laws contributes to the exploitation of women labourers in the unorganized sector. Therefore, the women labourers are found to be characterized by low wages, long working hours, heavy workload inside and outside the home, maltreatment by the employer and male members in the family, malnutrition, etc.

The Fourth chapter of the study highlights the various aspects of ethnic differentiation that are experienced by the women labourers throughout their life and at their workplaces in particular. It is found that the women labourers have to face some socio-cultural stigmas based on the historical background of their ethnic group. The national originality of descendants of the women labourers is found as the major ground for the stigmatization faced by them. The women labourers are often experienced hatred by the mainstream society for being a Bhatiya which traced its origin from present Bangladesh. It is also found that although they have legal status in this region, they are frequently questioned about their legal identity due to the ethnicity.

Further, the language and dressing pattern as cultural manifestations of the women labourers belonging to the Bhatiya ethnic group are also found to be the reason for stigmas for them. The language of the ethnic group is actually Bengali, but there are variations in using some terms for which they are recognized as Bhatiya. It is found that language is one of the major grounds for stigma faced by them as 75% of women labourers have said about facing stigmas due to their language. The way of dressing is also found to be another ground for stigmatization faced by the Bhatiya women labourers.

Besides these, the concept of early marriage, prevalence of domestic violence and polygamy system of marriage are also observed to be the reason for stigmatization. It is because they themselves assumed these as normal things that happened among them and the mainstream society has considered it as the characteristics that existed among the Bhatiyas. It is found in the study that all the women labourers were married before 18 years of age and marrying at an early age is well accepted among the Bhatiyas. It is also found that all the women labourers have experienced domestic violence at least once in their lifetime and they generally don't support in raising their voice against it and assumed it as a common thing in a marital relationship. But the incidence of polygamy marriage could rarely be found among the Bhatiyas. Although it is also considered as a common thing among them, only one such case has been found in the field study.

The ethnic differentiation is also faced by the women labourers at their workplace which is expressed in the behavioural pattern of the employers. The attitudes or behaviours of the employers towards the women labourers have expressed some kinds of ethnic stigmas. But the difference has been found between the women domestic and construction labourers because of the employers' social group. It is found that the construction sector is mainly dominated by Bhatiya employers, i.e. the contractors, for which the women labourers are not much stigmatized as being a Bhatiya, like in the private households for domestic services where employers mainly belong to the other non-Bhatiya groups.

Further, the difference has been found in the attitude of employers for women labourers in construction sites and women domestic workers in the matter of child care. It is found that women in construction sites have to face more derogatory treatments from employers than the women employed in private households as domestic workers because the majority of women construction labourers have brought their children to the workplace.

5.2. Conclusion and Suggestions:

The women labourers, thus, in the unorganized sector have to face numerous problems which are started from their own house to their workplace and even in various public places as found in the study. Women's multiple exploitation and discrimination are visualized by their involvement in the unorganized sector rather than the organized sector (Das, 2014). Although the women labourers are contributing to the development of society and family income, their contributions are undervalued. Even the scattered nature of work in the unorganized sector has trapped the women with double burdens, i.e. for their economic activities outside the house and domestic activities inside the house. The women labourers are suppressed by their traditional status at home where the male members are taking the higher authority in the family, and by the employers at the workplace where they are employed at a low price for maximum labour. Moreover, different aspects of ethnic differentiation have been faced by the women labourers, due to their belongingness to a particular ethnic group, in different forms at different spheres of their life. The women labourers engaged in the unorganized sector are more subjected to ethnic differentiation due to their occupation than the other members of their ethnic group.

Therefore, it is a need of the hour to implement necessary strict laws for the protection of these women labourers and for making a detailed survey of the extent of such social security measures to the targeted groups. Further, a comprehensive effort is needed from both the side of employers by changing their attitudes towards such unorganized labourers, particularly for women, and the women labourers, i.e. the employees, by making themselves aware and concern about their rights and interests. In this context, the following suggestions have been provided for the study as:

1. There should be a fixed minimum wage system and should provide basic facilities for women like toilets, drinking water, crèches, etc., as per the various social security measures.
2. The provision of equal pay for equal labour should be enforced and women's labour in the development of society should be recognized.

3. The provisions for training and skill development programs should be made for women unskilled labourers through proper legislation.
4. The provisions should be made to restrict the employers or contractors from violating the laws and rules of the unorganized sector.
5. The provision should be made to organize legal awareness programs from time to time so that the unskilled and illiterate women labourers could understand their rights and exploitation carried out by the employers.
6. The provisions should be made to arrange these women labourers through properly organized unions so that they could be made conscious and could protest against such exploitation.

The evidence has been found that the existing labour laws are not implemented in the unorganized sector, particularly for women. A well-organized effort is very much necessary on the part of the government for their better living standards. The unorganized labourers must be provided with the benefits of social security measures like the security of service, fixed minimum wages, equal pay for equal work, regulation of working hours, etc. Further, the attitudes of society should be changed towards this group of women labourers. They should be given the opportunity to educate themselves in a proper way so that they can step forward to remove their backwardness. In this regard, the larger society should take the huge responsibility of changing their attitude by understanding their contribution to the development of society. Particularly, the children of these women labourers should be protected from the ethnic stigmas because they are going to be the constructor of society in future.

Scope for Further Study- It is expected that this present study will make people aware and understand about the enormous problems faced by women labourers in the unorganized sector which will help in bringing change in society by reducing the gap between existing provisions and its application in reality. Moreover, the study is an attempt to highlight the problems of women labourers belonging to a particular ethnic group of Muslims. Although several studies have been done on the issues related to Muslim women labourers in the unorganized sector, it is also important to

highlight the problems of those Muslim women labourers who are differentiated based on their ethnic groups. This present study focused on the socio-economic status of the women labourers, their backwardness, their working conditions in the unorganized sector, their ethnic, i.e. socio-cultural stigmas based on language, dressing pattern, etc. This study will help in understanding the problems of women labourers and their contribution to the development of society. It will also help in bringing change in the implementation process of existing laws for the unorganized sector and the attitude of people of the society for those women labourers belonging to that particular ethnic group.

However, the support from both the concerned authorities and mainstream societies is important in order to improve the condition of women labourers by removing their difficulties from the grassroots level. The process of urbanization, modernization and industrialization are making the problems of women labourers in the unorganized sector more intense day by day and they are facing different kinds of challenges based on the different societal situations. To bring the solution and develop the condition of the unorganized labourers, particularly the women, there is a need to understand the different types of problems that they are facing in society. Thus, the present study is providing with new scope for further study in this direction.

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