

CHAPTER-V

Conclusion:

This chapter summarises the findings of the previous chapters and attempts to draw conclusions and present recommendations for action on the part of the concerned authorities and the wider society. 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 two industries i.e beedi and brick industries in Goalpara district. The informal workers in general have comparatively inferior status compared 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 Goalpara district. From this study various important information regarding the employment pattern, extent of unemployment, wage discrimination, living and working conditions, poverty, various economic exploitations, family background, marital status, educational level etc are found.

Women constitute nearly half of the human population. Unfortunately women belonging to the vulnerable sections of society are unprotected, exploited

and discriminated. In many cases, women work harder than men who keep away from domestic activities. Women do two-thirds of the world's work hours but receive a tenth of the world's income. In the workplace also women have failed to make gains to the desired levels. In the developing countries the plight of the women is more pitiable than in the developed countries as they are not in a position to improve their economic position. Women put in more hours of labour than men. Men are not interested in doing the household activities. Rather they are more interested in leisure activities.

The main aim of this study is to highlight the socio economic and working conditions of the beedi and brick workers. My fieldwork has revealed the truth that the beedi industries and brick industries workers have not received a proper attention from the government, policy makers and scholars. In order to fill this gap, more extensive and in depth studies are needed. The present study is an attempt to provide information on the socio economic working and living conditions of the beedi and brick workers.

It is also found from the study that majority of the beedi workers and brick workers are not registered by their employers and are not provided identity cards. Low economic level has compelled the beedi workers to engage their children in rolling the beedis. They have only tried to enhance the family income.

From the study it is also found that most of the children aged between 10 to 14 years are engaged in both of these sectors. Most of them are girl child.

Child labour is engaged in each stage of brick making process. They are engaged in the beedi industries also. The employers and middle men think that a child can roll more beedis a day on an average than an adult.

The status of women labourers is poor. More than 90 percent of them are engaged in the informal sector. Indian women play a vital role in the Indian economy. Most of the families cannot run their families with the small earnings of the male persons. So, these families depend for survival on the earnings of women. Almost one third of the total labour force is occupied by women.

My field study reveals that most of the beedi industries in Goalpara district are female dominated. Here women workers are engaged in beedi rolling activities; they collect the raw materials from the employer's premises, deposit the finished products to the employer's house, and collect the wages from the employers and middle men. So, in all stages of production, the women workers are involved.

According to the government laws the employers should provide identity cards to the beedi workers. However, from this study it is found that majority of the beedi workers do not have the identity cards. There should be a practice to issue identity cards at least to one member of the family even though 3-4 members of the family roll beedis. Despite the efforts and the welfare policies of the government, the degree of organisation is still very weak. The efforts of the

government to shift the beedi industry from factory based production to home based industry have adversely affected the organising process.

In Goalpara district the informal women workers are employed in construction, beedi, brick, cot-making, pottery-making, handicraft, weaving, construction industries etc. In the brick and construction industries the women workers do not need to acquire any skill for getting work as they do the unskilled work like bringing the stone, sand and water in the work place and render all types of help to the skilled male workers.

The informal sector is competitive for the workers. For fear of losing their work the women have to come to the workplace as demanded by the owners. Even during the advanced stages of pregnancy, they come to the workplace, and after a few weeks of delivery of the child, they again go out to the workplace. Ill and old women also come to the workplace due to economic reasons. Vast majority of women labourers are ignorant and illiterate. So the employers exploit these illiterate women by taking the chance of ignorance and illiteracy. The main reason of such exploitation is their lack of organisation, educational backwardness, and low level of consciousness. This vast majority of women are untouched by the state benefits.

A woman worker has to do the household activities like sweeping the floor, washing utensils and clothes, pitching the water from nearest pond or river, cooking, and taking the care of their children. Besides doing these activities she has to go out to the workplace where she has to devote another 8 hours. The

beedi workers can prepare the beedis in their own home. The women take the raw materials which are required for preparing the beedis from the employers' premises. So, they manage their time to prepare the beedis. After making the beedis they take these to their employers' premises.

The socio-economic status of the women is also determined by their educational levels. Higher education creates higher job opportunities for the individuals. But from the study it was found that most of the workers were illiterate. Moreover, most of them are unskilled workers. So, they cannot manage any higher occupation. They are unable to engage themselves in any occupation other than construction work or work in the beedi and brick industries. As they are illiterate the women are completely unaware about their rights. The study also found that the child marriage prevails in their society. Most of the workers get married below the age of 18 years. Widow remarriage and divorce are also common. In case of divorce the women have to suffer as most of these are examples of desertion by the males, and the social norms favour the males.

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.

They are illiterate. They are not given equal wages though the Indian constitution (Part-IV, Directive Principles of State Policy) mentions giving of equal payment for equal amount of work as a desirable goal of the state and laws have also been passed to give effect to this directive through which women can protect their economic rights. My study has found that in the brick industry women labourers are not paid same amount of wages for their work. Both the male and female workers have to work for more than 8 hours. But after finishing their work, the female workers return home with lesser wage compared to the male labourers. This shows that these women labourers are exploited. They do not get just wages. But they do not protest against such injustice, as they think that such inequality, discrimination and exploitation are natural. So far the wages of women informal workers is concerned the differences in their wages are observed at different levels, viz, differences in wages between men and women workers, difference in wages at operational levels. The wage discrimination i.e. the analysis of comparatively low wages of informal women workers than that of men confirms the discrimination more or less in almost all units of informal sectors. Analysis of income and expenditure of women workers under the study suggest that what is earned by them is just sufficient for their subsistence having no margin of savings or capital formation at all. Almost 70 percent of the total expenditure of informal women workers is spent on food alone. So, far the working condition of the women workers is concerned this is far from being satisfactory. With low wages and with no scope for any improvement either in wages or in the living

and working conditions of the female labourers in Goalpara district are the worst in the real sense of the term. They are the worst victims of exploitation. Wage differentials are always maintained in their case. Unemployment and under employment are the main problems for them. These women workers face double exploitation .i.e. the exploitation in the work place and exploitation in their own family.

Increasing cost of essential commodities has made it difficult for the informal workers to maintain their families only with the income of the male members. Therefore the women have to come out of their homes in search of jobs. However, women are only secondary earners. They supplement family income. With their incomes they are able to run their families in an appropriate manner. Economic crisis has forced the women to take a job. Earlier parents would not permit their unmarried daughter to go outside for doing a job. They were kept inside the home. Parents did not like to engage their daughters in any job. Accepting a woman's earnings may hurt the male's ego and prestige of the family. But now social changes have occurred and a working woman is rather welcomed. My study found that in case of majority of respondents, their husbands want their wives to be working women. Only a few males want their wives to be housewives. Majority of the families have been forced to permit their women to work outside for wages due to economic constraints. Interestingly, the study found that majority of the women labourers prefers the status of a working woman. But the low wages have contributed to the disadvantage of women

workers in the informal sector. The wages are insufficient and inadequate for running a good and comfortable life. The society considers the woman as a member of family and not as an individual. It does not try to understand the individual identity, rights, and desires of the women. The employment of women is yet to be socially recognised in Indian society. In the backward rural areas people are not much familiar with the new changes and new roles of the women.

Long hours of work have hampered the physical and mental health of the women workers. The women have to work in the workplace for more than 8 hours. Lack of minimum facilities at the workplace and unpleasant work situation creates problems. So, long hours of work, manual nature of work, and improper working conditions have affected their health, morale and efficiency.

The women have to work both in the workplace and in their homes. They are not free from family burdens. Sometimes due to being overburdened with work, conflicts occur among their family members. Despite their bread-earning work their contribution is not recognised. No one comes forward to provide some psychological relief to them. The low prestige and low wage rate for women workers have reduced them to the condition of most deprived and marginalised section in the society. The wages and the prestige of the women workers remain significantly below those of male workers in the brick industry. Discrimination in wage rates between males and females has created inequality. For this inequality the women have to suffer from deprivation. Their hard work does not provide them any special treatment. They have to work during illness or even in advanced

stages of pregnancy. They continue to be the secondarily important persons in their family and are not given due respect. These women employed as informal workers do not enjoy high status.

This research inquiry in the working class women workers of Goalpara district set out with the following main objectives-

Objectives:

- (1) To know the working condition such as the nature of work, job security, wages, benefits, employer's attitude to the women workers etc.
- (2) To know the socio-economic status of women workers in the informal sectors.
- (3) To examine the women worker's awareness about their own rights, their status and the level of exploitation over them by the employers.

Keeping the above objectives in view I formulated the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis:

- (1) Lower social status leads to lower self esteem of the women workers.
- (2) Lack of education contributes towards exploitation both within and outside the family.
- (3) Women workers in particular lack the opportunity of upward mobility from unskilled to skilled workers.

From the study it was found that although the women workers besides doing most of the work in the house were wage-earners contributing to the family income, their social position did not improve much and in the patriarchal social structure their position continued to be inferior compared to their male counterparts. This leads to lower self-esteem and they do not have any higher aspirations. Rather they seem to be reconciled with their lower socio-economic position both in the family and in the workplace. It was also found that most of the women workers were illiterate. Education has been recognised as an important factor for realising the status of women. From the study it was found that more than 75 percent women were illiterate. Only 4 percent had qualified the HSLC examination. This illiteracy among the women workers makes them vulnerable to exploitation. The hypothesis that lack of education contributes towards the exploitation both within and outside the family has been proved to be correct. The third hypothesis has also been proved to be correct as most of the women workers employed in the brick and beedi industries were unskilled. To prepare the beedis very little training or skill is required. In the brick industry, the main activities of the women workers were to supply the sand, water, and stone to the male labourers. This activity does not require any training. Women do not get the opportunity to acquire skilled work. The lack of education, skill and opportunity contributes towards the lower social status of women workers, which in turn leads to the lower self-esteem of the women workers.

Methodology:

This project aims to study the socio-economic status of the women workers in beedi and brick industries. For this, various methodological techniques have been included such as sampling, interview, observation and participant observation, administration of questionnaires, and study of existing literature relating to the topic. Both quantitative and qualitative questions have been applied. For the interview, structured schedule is made to capture the background of the women workers. The method of simple random sampling is followed to interview the women workers. Both primary and secondary data is used for collecting the important data. For applying the observation method, the women workers are observed at their workplace. Though the interview schedule is prepared in English, the questions are put to the respondents in the local languages. Information regarding the socio economic status, family background, their status in the society and their family, their own educational background, educational background of their children, their economic condition, , their reasons for opting foremployment, are collected through interview and observation methods.

Regarding educational attainment the study found that most of the women were illiterate. They were not much interested to send their children to the schools. Rather most of the workers bring their little children to the workplace with them. They think that their children will help them in earning money. So they engage them in work. They do not understand the value of education.

Though the government has introduced the midday meal scheme in the schools, in many cases these illiterate workers are ignorant of the importance of education. Education is regarded as an essential condition for a better life. The darkness of life can be removed with the help of education. Education helps in the development of the society and in bringing social changes. But the study found that most of the women workers were educationally backward. The girl child is not given education. Most of the girls are given marriage at an early age. So the custom of child marriage is prevalent among the uneducated families. The number of girl dropouts is more than that of the boys. Marriage is one of the causes of such dropout. Moreover most of the girls are engaged by their parents in different household activities. They have to take the responsibility of their siblings besides helping their mothers. So, they do not get time to give attention to studies.

Chapter 3 presents the impact of several Acts and legislations, policies and programmes brought by the government. It also discusses the impact of these Acts on the living, working conditions status of women, minimum wages, and maternity benefits. Indian constitution has made the provision of equality of status and opportunity for both men and women. But in real practice, it has remained only a social document. In fact, they are faced today with greater exploitation, and constraints. From the study it is clear that most of the workers are not aware of the existence of the **minimum wages act**. The government is failed to implement the provisions of minimum wages act properly with respect

to the informal women workers. So the effective implementation of the provisions of this Act particularly for women informal women workers in Goalpara district is not important but inevitable.

The socio economic study of the informal women workers in Gopara district highlights how this section of people have been leading a dissatisfied life in the vicious circles of poverty, exploitation and negative environment. A large number of them undertook the job of rolling beedis in their youth and continue to struggle. Almost all of them belong to low sections of the society and are illiterate or just literate. Thus, they do not get an opportunity to take up any other occupation. “A trade union plays an important role in safeguarding the economic interest of the workers such as higher wages, dearness, allowances, bonus etc. and securing better conditions of work in the industry for its members. It is well known that the stronger the union, greater is the possibility of ensuring improved conditions of work like shorter work hours, better rest timings, good environment etc.”(Sultania,1994:P, 79). But in Gaoalpara district trade union movement has developed at a very slow pace. The women workers are not aware of the trade unions. “The women workers are indifferent to trade unions also because they have countless domestic chores to attend too and after their work have little time for other activities”. (Ibid, p, 80). From the data collected, it was found that there were no united efforts on the part of the workers in both beedi and brick industries to protest against the unjust and lower amount of wages, inhuman treatment is done on them by the employers. They are fragmented group of

workers. They are scattered. They are not organised. They do not have the power to protest against the exploitations of their employers.

Their low social status is evident from the fact that there are no any organisation which is interested to upgrade their position and living work in conditions. So from the analysis of interviews done with the respondents it becomes clear that most of them are not aware of any trade union, they do not know what a trade union is and what are its functions. The main reason behind this is the illiteracy of the workers. This illiterate and just literate section of women workers are completely out of the access to information from any external source. “The absence of any scope for interaction with the external world has an obvious effect on their level of awareness and has influenced their views about their own position or of women in general”. (Sultania, 1994: P, 81).

Their low social and economic status has forced them to do the monotonous and dangerous works over the years. Their conditions are deplorable. They are unable to get even the minimum necessities of food, clothing and housing. The Government seems no interest to protect rights. Actually the Government is not interested to extend any protection to this section of women workers. Despite their hard work, women workers do not receive good social attention and treatment. Their illiteracy and ignorance make them secondary citizens and these two factors force them to play a secondary role both in their own family and at the work spot.

Construction industry has become one of the largest industrial enterprises in any society. The construction industry has attracted the unskilled workers. The beedi industry is included in the construction sector. The construction industry is established on the basis of these activities which need last “skill orientation”. (Sultania, 1994: P, 88). Women workers are exploited. Women’s work is not honoured by the family members and she is compelled to do all types of domestic activities because these activities cannot be shared by male members for the reason of culture of patriarchy. Lack of minimum facilities at the construction site and unpleasant work situations often creates troubles. Repressive work situation, manual nature of jobs affects the health and working efficiency of the women workers. From the study it is found that hard work and difficult jobs do not result in any special treatment towards the women workers in society. They continue to be of secondary importance in the family set up.

In the earning of money it was found that most of the women got less amount of money compared to the male workers. The increase in prices of essential commodities has created many problems for these poor families to run their families. In the beedi factories, the wage is much less compared to the brick industries. In the beedifactories the women workers get only 40 to 60 rupees for making 1000 beedis per day. Moreover this remuneration is not same. It varies from factory to factory. Actually the rate of remuneration depends on the mood of the employers. If they do not want to provide more than 40 rupees to the workers then the workers cannot protest much. Informal sector is very much competitive.

The workers always fear their replacement by other workers. They also fear that if they protest against the exploitation, lesser wage and deprivation, they may be fired by their employers. It is not easy to find any other work immediately. If they lose their work they would be unable to sustain their family. So, they remain silent against such exploitation.

From the study it was also found that 40 percent of the workers belong to the age group between 20 to 40 years. Interestingly in the brick industries only 10 percent workers were found above the age of 60 years. In the brick industries over-aged persons were not found, because such persons cannot work so much. As work in the brick industry requires more physical strength, the employers prefer the young, active people. But the study found that a few workers aged more than 55 years were engaged in the brick industries. Their poor economic condition had compelled them to engage them in the brick industries. Besides they may not be looked after by their children. So, they had to go out to the brick and beedi industries for earning money.

Fourth chapter has revealed the irresponsible attitudes of the males towards the household activities. They do not take any responsibility of the household. Rather they think that it is the responsibility of the women to do all kinds of household activities. They think that the main duty of the males is to earn money. So, they have to go out to other place in search of jobs. Their main responsibility is to earn money. Moreover, the males also think that it would be an insult to do any house work. They are interested only in shopping for

vegetables and other essential grocery items. They think that it was their duty to provide all the essential daily things to their family members. So, in such situation women cannot expect their husbands to perform any household activities. This clearly indicates the subordination of the women in the hands of the males. Towards her labour there is no one to show any respect. These women always have to remain under severe physical and mental strain. These women cannot give up their jobs. Because working gives them extra money with which they are able to help their husbands in running the family. Sometimes quarrels occur between the husband and wife. From the study it was found that 36 percent quarrels occurred between the husband and wife. Sometimes quarrels occurred between the women respondents and other family members. The cause of such quarrels may be the performance of the household activities. After spending 8 to 10 hours in working place the women respondents have to take all the responsibilities of their family. Sometimes they lose their temper. So in such situation they engage in quarrels with their family members.

From the study this has become clear that the employment of women workers is indispensable for the survival of poor families as well as for the maintenance of the socio-economic system. Women contribute to the family income. They are also responsible for all major works such as cooking, cleaning, and childcare. Interestingly employment does not lead to a higher social status for the women. Because major decisions in the family are taken by the husbands

or other male figures. Women accept the superior position of their husbands or their fathers.

In the informal sector none of the protective labour laws such as **Maternity Benefit Act (1961), Employees State Insurance Act (1948), Factories Act (1948), Equal Remuneration Act (1976), the Shops and Establishment Act (1984), the Plantation Act (1951) and the Mines Act (1951)** are applicable. This contributes to exploitation of the workers. Actually the workers are not aware of these laws. What are the terms, conditions, benefits of these laws are not known by the workers.

Recommendations:

Mahatma Gandhi stressed on the equality of women. He involved women in the freedom movement as he thought that women had the capacity to lead non-violent movements for human liberation. After independence, a new era for Indian women began. The Indian constitution made provisions for liberating the women from the old slavery and inequalities. Through the Fundamental Rights it proclaimed equal status for women ensuring individual liberty and rights of citizenship for women. The Directive Principles of State Policy seek to enforce equal pay for equal work for both men and women. Moreover, Indian constitution has made free and compulsory education a Fundamental Right for every child.

Injustice towards women workers in the informal sector can be changed by changing the social attitudes. If want to bring progress, prosperity to our nation, then we must have to include the uncared, uneducated and underdeveloped labourers in the mainstream of our society. All the labour-related laws must be properly implemented. To make women aware of their rights, empowerment is essential, which can help them get access to economic, social and political resources. Mobilisation and organisation of women is essential for empowerment, which is linked to the issues of social justice and equality.

In the context of my study the following suggestions are given below:

- (a) The principle of “equal pay for equal work” must be enforced.
- (b) Provisions should be made for skill up gradation for women workers. This will be possible through proper legislations.
- (c) Provisions of housing, toilets and crèche must be provided to the workers.
- (d) Labour laws should be amended to provide facilities and powers to the women workers.
- (e) Violation of laws and rules by the middle men and employers should result in cancellation of licences and penalties should be imposed.
- (g) Hours of work for workers in the brick industries should be restricted to six hours.

- (h) Provision of safe and clean drinking water should be made as diseases break out due to unclean water.
- (i) In case of accidents, medical facilities should be given to the workers.
- (j) A legal literacy programme should be brought so that the workers can understand the exploitation, deprivation and oppression carried out by the employers.
- (k) As the women workers have to perform monotonous and unskilled work both in the brick and beedi industries in unhealthy working condition they should be provided with protective measures. The employers should be made responsible for providing good working conditions.
- (l) Attempts should be made to organise these women workers. Labourers should be organised for uplifting their living standards. Without the well-organised unions the workers cannot protest against such exploitations. So these workers should be made conscious about the formation of workers' organisations and unions.

It is plain truth that existing policies and welfare programmes have been predominantly gender biased, missing the welfare dimension of women. There should be a balanced emphasis on the welfare of the women workers in the policies and Acts. Well thought and organised efforts on the part of the government are very much needed to better of the deteriorating lots of women

labourers in Goalpara district. “In fact a shift from male dominated ‘policy design ‘to a female oriented “policy mix” is the need of the time. There should be due place of provisions and schemes benefitting the women in developmental programmes and policies.”(Verma, 1993: P, 194).

The informal workers both men and women must be given benefits such as security of service, regulation of working hours , prompt payment of wages and provident fund . “There is also the need to bring some attitudinal and institutional changes to remove the prejudices against women and remove the general feeling that women are good just for purely household and unskilled work”.(Verma,1993:P,195).

The suggestion for the welfare of the informal women labour are given below-

- (1) Equal remuneration and fixation of minimum wages.
- (2) Crèche and maternity benefits facilities.
- (3) Training and education should be extended to the informal women workers.
- (4) There should be a well organised organisation for informal workers.

These informal workers should be provided some basic facilities, so that they can raise their status. They should not be kept in dark position. They also have the right to live a life with dignity. They should be brought forward so that

they can lead their life in a proper way. The attitudes towards women have to be altered. Inequalities; injustice and exploitation over women still persist. If we want to prosper our society, we must have to include the hitherto uncared workers in the main stream of our society. Till today women suffer from inequality of class status and power. All these attempts will be successful if the government try to spread the value and importance of education among all sections of people. The laws should be properly implemented. Particularly the Maternity Benefit Act should extend to the informal sectors also. It is very sad to see the attendance of the pregnant woman in the workplace. These should be stopped. Working in work place by a pregnant woman is detrimental both for the mother and child. So, if the government wants to produce a healthy society then this Maternity Benefit Act must be provided to the informal sector. For producing healthy child, health of the mother is very important. Because today's child is tomorrow's nation builder.