



## Status of Women in Informal sector including traditional brick industry

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**Abstract:** Women work in brick kilns for the maintenance of their families. In order to maintain their families, maintainable earnings should be provided. Conducive working environment, healthy industrial relations, welfare facilities etc need to be extended to the workingwomen. The non-existence of the above factors may obstruct the resonance industrial relation, discourage the workers, create job dissatisfaction, and increase labour turnover and absenteeism. No denying the fact that good, favorable socio-economic condition of the workers may act as a booster, which in turn may establish congenial industrial relations. In this backdrop, an attempt has been made to find out the women role in informal sector.

**Key words:** brick industry, labour-intensive sector, Women

### Introduction

The nature of the work requires skilled labour especially for moulding and firing. There is large scale migration towards the major brick production clusters every season due to this. The last few years have seen a labour shortage as the newer generation does not want to be associated with the brick sector any longer. A phenomenon observed in certain clusters due to this shortage is the hoodwinking of entrepreneurs by labour by promising their services to multiple owners, taking advances and not turning up. Labour rates have also gone up driving down margins for kiln industry. The workers in the brick industry<sup>1</sup> are subjected to extreme working conditions and poor remuneration. Currently in India, brick manufacturing is a labour-intensive

sector, with crude techniques causing considerable worker drudgery. Even though the brick workers are exposed to the occupational hazards, coverage under any sort of insurance or medical facilities is virtually unheard of. Beside, in the brick sector, labour is brought in through a contractor (from distant places). Since they are not on the payrolls of the kiln owner, they are not covered under the current labour laws, e.g. Minimum Wages Act. The seasonal nature of brick production generates employment for a limited period of six - seven months in a year. Majority of the workforce has no option, but to engage as labour (generally as agricultural labour) for the rest of the year.

Women still play a large part in the field of production, even though their working conditions are not properly regulated. This sector is characterized by the temporary, seasonal and changing nature of employment often resulting in long periods of

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[http://www.ecobrick.in/challenges\\_Issue\\_s\\_in\\_the\\_Indian\\_Brick\\_Sector.aspx](http://www.ecobrick.in/challenges_Issue_s_in_the_Indian_Brick_Sector.aspx)



unemployment, absence of employer-employee relationship, failure of wages to meet minimum requirements, poor work environment, long working hours, irregular incomes and gender harassment which contribute to poor employment security of the workers. In this industry, women workers are working more than eight hours. They also lack social security and their working condition is very poor. Many of the employers are provident fund defaulters. The Indian Economy is characterized by the existence of a vast majority of informal or unorganized labor employment. An important component of non-farm segment is the unorganized sector of workers, especially in the rural population. India's workforce includes the self-employed and employed in informal sector. Predominance of informal employment has been one of the central features of the labor market scenario in India.

During the age of capitalism women actively entered into social production and their labor acquired great social significance. The large-scale employment of female workers characterized the capitalist structure and the era of machine production. Indeed, it was the use of machines that made it possible to employ female labor extensively. Capitalists found that female workers were essential to fill the need for a labor force and profitable as the source of additional profits resulting from discrimination against them in wages. Low wages for women also led to a wage cut for male workers. During the age of imperialism the use of female labor continued to increase, and the employment of women in social

production rose. In the 20th century women became extensively involved in social production. At the beginning of the 20th century 20 percent of the working population consisted of women engaged in production. By the mid-1960's, this figure had reached 30-35 percent in many capitalist countries

### Labour force in Informal sector

Unorganized or informal sector constitutes a pivotal part of the Indian economy. More than 90 per cent of workforce and about 50 per cent of the national product are accounted for by the informal economy<sup>2</sup>. A high proportion of socially and economically underprivileged sections of society are concentrated in the informal economic activities. The high levels of growth of the Indian economy during the past two decades are accompanied by increasing informalisation. There are indications of growing interlinkages between informal and formal economic activities. There has been new dynamism of the informal economy in terms of output, employment and earnings. Faster and inclusive growth needs special attention to informal economy.

A large number of people working in unorganized sectors as unorganized workers; transitional nature of the Indian economy, disparity in education, skill and training are some of the major factors abetting such a large concentration of workers in an area most vulnerable to exogenous economic

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<sup>2</sup> Report of " The National Commission for Enterprises in the unorganized sector (NCEUS)", 2008, and The Times Editorial ,11/01/2016



vicissitudes. A noticeable aspect is the existence of artisans in this informal sector. These artisans comprise blacksmiths, carpenters, weavers (carpets, durries, khesh, sarees, etc.), potters, mudha makers, hand tool makers, farm implement makers, metal wares (silver, brass, copper) makers, sculpturists (wood, metal clay, stone), handicraft makers, *brick making* etc. These artisans, on one hand, are regarded as custodians of the heritage of India, and on the other, play an

important role in the village life through their repairs and maintenance services. This informal sector possesses vast potential for opening-up employment opportunities, generation of rural income, and strengthening of purchasing power of the rural people.

The data shows us that an estimated 93.46% of the labour force (at 5% GDP growth) is employed in the informal sector by the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan (Table 1.1).

Table 1: Estimated labour force in the informal sector by the year 2012-17

_Year	GDP Growth Rate (%)	Employment (million)			Percentage share	
		Formal	Informal	Total	Formal	Informal
2004-05	Actual	32.79	368.35	401.13	8.17	91.83
2006-07	Actual	33.87	393.06	426.93	7.93	92.07
2011-12	9	34.54	453.13	487.67	7.08	92.92
	7	34.18	442.18	476.36	7.18	92.82
	5	33.83	431.4	465.23	7.27	92.73
2016-17	9	33.93	521.96	555.9	6.1	93.9
	7	33.08	490.46	523.54	6.32	93.68
	5	32.26	461.05	493.31	6.54	93.46

Source: National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector (NCEUS), 2017

### 1. The Major Characteristics of the unorganized Workers

Besides the above, the unorganized labour is overwhelming in terms of its number range and therefore they are omnipresent throughout India. As the unorganized sector suffers from cycles of excessive seasonality of employment, majority of the unorganized workers does not have stable durable avenues of employment. Even those who appear to be visibly employed are not gainfully and

substantially employed, indicating the existence of disguised unemployment.

The workplace is scattered and fragmented. There is no formal employer - employee relationship. In rural areas, the unorganized labour force is highly stratified on caste and community considerations. In urban areas while such considerations are much less, it cannot be said that it is altogether absent as the bulk of the unorganized workers in urban areas are



basically migrant workers from rural areas. Workers in the unorganized sector are usually subject to indebtedness and bondage as their meager income cannot meet with their livelihood needs. The unorganized workers are subject to exploitation significantly by the rest of the society. They receive poor working conditions especially wages much below that in the formal sector, even for closely comparable jobs, i.e., where labour productivity is no different. The work status is of inferior quality of work and inferior terms of employment, both remuneration and employment. Primitive production technologies and feudal production relations are rampant in the unorganized sector, and they do not permit or encourage the workmen to imbibe and assimilate higher technologies and better production relations. Large scale ignorance and illiteracy and limited exposure to the outside world are also responsible for such poor absorption. The unorganized workers do not receive sufficient attention from the trade unions and inadequate and ineffective labour laws and standards relating to the unorganized sector.

Moreover, with the advent of globalization and resultant reorganization of production chains led to a situation where production systems are becoming increasingly atypical and non-standard, involving flexible workforce, engaged in temporary and part-time employment, which is seen largely as a measure adopted by the employers to reduce labor cost in the face of stiff competition. No doubt, it obviously indicates that these flexible workers in the new informal economy are highly vulnerable in terms of job security and social protection, as they are

not deriving any of the social protection measures stipulated in the existing labor legislations. The insecurities and vulnerabilities of this modern informal sector labor are on the rise, as there is a visible absence of worker mobilization and organized collective bargaining in these segments owing to a multitude of reasons<sup>3</sup>.

The alarming expansion of informal sector, in recent times, has adversely affected employment and income security for the larger majority of the workforce, along with a marked reduction in the scale of social welfare / security programme.

### **Women in unorganized sector**

Women comprise a huge part of the Indian population. They take part in a very important role in developing Indian economy. Their involvement to the society cannot be gainsaid. They are the pillars of the families. They clutch the main key in maintaining their families. They give up their expensive time in bringing up their siblings. They are rendering their services in different customs. They are also working in brick kilns for the maintenance of their families. Women work to make up for the low income of their men folk when the household's income is not adequate for the support of the family. In many rural areas, it is customary for women to take part in agricultural operations irrespective of their economic conditions.

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<sup>3</sup> Eckhard Siggel (2016), The Indian informal sector: The impact of globalization and reform, International Law Issue, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1/j.1564-913X.2010.00077.x/>



Women are employed in the least skilled jobs in most industries and with low wages<sup>4</sup>. Women working in the unorganized sector deserve a separate mention as they are much marginalized. Women have always worked, albeit the definition of work – if seen only through the prism of contribution to national input- will mean different things to different people. Women, who might not be ‘working’ in the narrow definition of work, are still engaged in socially productive and reproductive labour.

The skewed percentage participation of women as against men could well be the lack of availability of work throughout the year and their suitability to women, amongst other factors. The rural sector comprises of the major chunk of unorganized labour force. Lack of education, skill and training are – sometimes abysmal – at very low levels compared to their urban counterparts. The labour force and the workforce percentage participation rates also stand skewed. A stark contrast can be clearly observed in the levels of male to female participation owing difference in the levels of education

Table-2 shows the details of the unorganized workers by gender across the states. The male workers are 90.7 and female workers are 95.9% in unorganized workforce. The female workers are more than male workers in unorganized sector as well as unorganized workers. The unorganized

workers of male and female are higher in Bihar. It is very low in Goa state.

### **Brick industry in India**

In the unorganized sector, the construction sector is an important part of the Indian economy with the contribution of 10% in the GDP and is registering an annual growth of 9%. Brick is one of the most important building materials or unit of construction in India. Clay fired bricks are the backbone of this sector. The Indian brick industry is the second largest producer of bricks in the world after China. As per the latest estimate annual production of bricks in India is 51,000 million from 45,000 small/cottage scale units distributed throughout the country. Brick-making is an important economic activity in rural India. There are over 100 000 brick kilns producing more than 140 billion bricks per year. The brick industry provides livelihood to an estimated number of 15 million people<sup>5</sup>. India is estimated to produce more than 14000 crores of bricks annually, mainly by adopting age-old manual traditional processes. The brick sector consumes more than 24 million tonnes of coals annual along with huge quantity of biomass fuels. Due to large scale construction activities in major nearby towns and cities, a number of brick plants have been set up on the outskirts of these places.

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<sup>4</sup> Georgina Jaffee, (1988), “Commuter Labour Changing Women’ Lives, Changing Households”, Agenda Empowering Women for Gender Equity, Vol.No.3: p.3.

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<sup>5</sup> Sahasrabudhey, Sunil CoSmiLE, (Competence Network for Small and Micro Learning Enterprises), Energy-Environment Technology Division TERI, New Delhi, India VOLUME 2 ISSUE 1 March (2007), pgl



Table 2. Percentage of Unorganized Workers by gender across the States

S. No	Name of the States	Unorganized Workers		
2.	Andhra Pradesh	92.5	96.1	94.0
3.	Arunachal Pradesh	83.9	94.4	88.9
4.	Assam	89.8	91.4	90.2
5.	Bihar	97.1	99.2	97.5
6.	Goa	71.9	75.0	72.8
7.	Gujarat	88.6	97.6	91.6
8.	Haryana	87.4	96.6	90.2
9.	Himachal Pradesh	85.5	95.8	90.2
10.	Jammu & Kashmir	85.7	96.3	88.5
11.	Karnataka	90.0	95.3	91.9
12.	Kerala	82.0	79.6	81.3
13.	Madhya Pradesh	93.1	98.2	94.8
14.	Maharashtra	86.6	95.0	89.6
15.	Manipur	84.8	95.5	88.8
16.	Meghalaya	88.4	91.1	89.6
17.	Mizoram	81.0	92.9	83.9
18.	Nagaland	76.0	94.7	83.9
19.	Odisha	92.9	97.7	94.5
20.	Punjab	89.5	94.3	90.9
21.	Rajasthan	93.0	98.5	95.2
22.	Sikkim	82.2	90.5	84.8
23.	Tamil Nadu	87.2	94.3	89.9
24.	Tripura	89.5	88.5	89.4
25.	Uttar Pradesh	94.6	98.8	95.8
26.	West Bengal	90.5	93.8	91.2
27.	Delhi	94.6	98.8	95.8
28.	West Bengal	990.5	93.8	91.2
29.	Chhattisgarh	92.7	98.6	95.2
30.	Uttaranchal	87.0	97.1	91.0
	All India	90.7	95.9	92.4

Source: NCEUS, 2013-2014

For the production of clay bricks, top soil to the extent of 350 million tonnes is used every year, which is a reason for concern. Since this brick sector is labour intensive, it limits its capacity to produce any other type of bricks. With the introduction of NREGA scheme in various states, these labour intensive industries are facing the shortage of manpower. Thus the brick industry has

started exploring other options like introduction of partial/full-scale mechanization in this sector and caused to lower remuneration to labour.

A number of legislations/ legal obligations have been passed by the Indian Government such as “Energy Conservation and Building Code (ECBC)”, which encourages





construction sector to adopt energy efficient and energy saving products, leading to green building design. The use of "Resource Efficient Bricks" (REB), would also lead to the compliance of such legislations.

### **Women labour in Brick industry**

Brick industry is a labour intensive industry. Workers are one of the pillars of each and every industry<sup>6</sup>. Needless to mention, that a well-clad, well-fed and satisfied, pleased worker is a plus point to any industry. So the owners of the industries need to pay attention towards the development of the workers engaged in the industries. Known to all that a large numbers of women workers are affianced in industries. The brick industry is not a special one. At least 10 million labourers in India are employed in the unorganised brick kiln industry, working under unhygienic conditions. Women are working in various phages of brick making along with men and campaigning less privileges. Meanwhile, the concept of equal pay for equal work is still not within the reach of women folk. There is no doubt that in principle "equal pay for equal work" has been fully applied in the service sector, while it may not be so in many of the unorganized sectors<sup>7</sup>. In this backdrop, an attempt has been made to find out the socio-economic conditions of the

women workers engaged in the selected brick kiln factories.

**Conclusion :** The character of their participation is determined by the socioeconomic structure of the society. In an exploitative class society, private ownership of the means of production gives rise to social inequality for women, including job discrimination. The liberation of women and their full equality with men are possible only with the establishment of public ownership of the means of production and the abolition of the exploitation of one man by another. With the rise of private ownership during the first stages of the development of class society, female labor became focused on the household and lost the social significance that it had had in the primitive communal system. Women were deprived of their former predominant position in the family, and their lives were restricted to the home. They became slaves to their husbands, on whom they were economically dependent. As the productive forces of society, the cities, and the market exchange system continued to develop, the significance of female labor gradually changed. Women began to participate in the production of material goods.

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<sup>6</sup> Ghosal, Pallab Kanti (2008), *Prospects and Problems of Brick Industry*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi

<sup>7</sup> Anitha Banerji and Rajkumar Sen, (1998), *"Women and Economic Development"*, Deep and Deep Publications Pvt., Ltd., New Delhi: p.295.