

Socio Economic status of women weavers in informal sector in Kokrajhar town-A study

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Abstract: This paper aims to highlight the socio economic status of women weavers in the informal sector in Kokrajhar town. For analyzing the socio economic status of women weavers in the informal sector in Kokrajhar town, 40 women weavers, 5 each from a weaving center have been picked up as samples. Data was collected from them during September and October' 2012 through personal interview with the help of questionnaire. The data collected was tabulated, simple percentages calculated and analyzed. It was observed that informal sector women weavers of Kokrajhar town do not weave in their own homes by her for commercial purpose, so samples have been picked up from the 8 weaving centers of the town. Field survey revealed that women weavers of the informal sector are one of the most disadvantaged categories of informal sector workers. Their jobs rely heavily on manual labor. Most of them have only a few years of schooling. Being faced with economic problem and having weaving skill they are bound to migrate to the town and engage themselves as weavers. Field survey also revealed that their working and living condition is not so good with total lack of job security. Family members and other people have the same attitude towards most of them before their working and even after their work.

Introduction : Women are almost half the adult population. They constitute two third of the world's working hours and yet earn only 1% of the world's property (United Nations, 1975). Women besides fulfilling primary domestic and child rearing roles, the reality of most women lives is that they are obliged by poverty and deprivation to seek an income outside the home, either as the sole earner or to supplement male earnings. In developing countries, when women are not engaged solely in subsistence agriculture, they tend to be involved in various services as weavers, tailors, vendors, domestic servants, washerwoman, beautician, constructional labor, peons etc. in the informal sector. In the poor countries, the competition for the better paid and more secure jobs is small and under developed formal or modern sector which may account for as little as 10% of the total employment is fierce and women cannot usually compete for this with men.

As defined by ILO in 1991, the term ‘informal sector’ refers to very small scale units producing and distributing goods and services consisting largely of independent self employed producers in urban areas of developing countries some of whom also employ family labour or a few hired workers or apprentices, which operate with very little capital or none at all, which utilizes low level of technique and skill, which therefore operate at a low level of productivity and which generally provide very low irregular income and highly unstable employment to those who work in it.

It is informal in the sense that they are for the most part unregulated and unrecorded in official statistics. They tend to have little or no access to labor markets, to credit institution, to formal education and training institution or to many public services and amenities, they are not recognized, supported and regulated by the government, they are often compelled by circumstances to operate outside the law and even when they are registered and respect aspects of laws they are almost invariably beyond the pale of second protection, labor legislation and protective measures at work place. Informal sector producers and workers are generally unorganized and in most cases beyond the scope of action of trade union and employers organization and they generally live in appalling, often dangerous and unhealthy condition even without basic sanitary facilities in the shanty towns of urban areas (ILO, 1991).

In Kokrajhar town, informal sector women weavers accounted for around 10 % of the total informal sector women workers. In the 8 (eight) centers as many as 70 women weavers were engaged to weave different items like shawls, dupatta, dokhna, aronai, gamcha etc.

Analysis and Findings: The study was taken up to analyze the socio economic status of informal sector women weavers in Kokrajhar town.

On the basis of the field survey it has been found that informal sector women weavers accounted for 10% of the total informal sector women workers. Field survey revealed that of the total sampled informal sector women weavers, 100% migrated from rural areas to the town for work. The profile of the total sampled informal sector women weavers of the town shows that most of them were Hindus (95%) and rest were Christians (5%). Caste wise distribution showed that most of them belonged to the ST (80%) and SC (20 %). Age wise distribution showed that most of the sampled women weavers were between 21

to 40 years (95%) and the rest were > 40 years and < 20 years. Nearly 95% of the respondents were single. Field survey revealed that, the literacy level was 98%. Though literacy level was high enough, only 5% of the literates got education upto intermediate level. Rest of them got education only upto high school or middle level or primary education.

The family profile of the respondents showed that most of them came from nuclear families (99%). 95% of them come from big families comprising of 4 to 8 members and the rest 5% have very small families having less than 4 members or very big families having greater than 8 members. 80% of them reported that their father or husband are uneducated who were small farmers, laborers, vendors, rickshaw pullers, fisherman etc.

As per the survey, it is found that informal women weavers live in precarious condition. 100% of the samples migrated seasonally or permanently & they lived in rented house in the town. It has been also found that most of them (90%) lived in shared living rooms with shared extra kitchen. The remaining lived in single room with no extra kitchen facility. 90% of them had access to house owner's private well/tube well that lie inside the premises. Though 100% of them had electric facility in which they lived, the compound and the room in which they lived were congested, without fan facility and entertainment facility like TV to enjoy during free time. 50% of them reported that they dispose their waste products in the road side and the rest 50% of them dispose either in drains or around the house. All this indicated their poor economic condition which does not permit them to have a proper living place with all facilities.

Almost for 100% of the sampled women weavers of the town the workplace is their employer's house. Their payment solely depended upon their quality of manual labor. They worked for 9 to 12 hours per day. The work place condition was also deplorable. These working places were cramped, congested, ill ventilated and noisy. They were given hand loom machines to work. Although they were given water and toilet facility they were not given resting place or fan facility which affects their productivity in hot season.

The survey shows that 60% of the weavers were compelled to work to supplement their family income. 20% were compelled to work because of poverty. And the rest were compelled to work due to having dependent father /Husband, divorced, bad habits of father/husband illness of father / husband and death of father/husband.

All the sampled women weavers reported that they were paid in cash on length/piece basis. They were paid differently for different items and quality of work. For gamcha, aronai, pachra, dokhna etc. they were paid Rs. 20.00 to 30.00, Rs. 20.00 to 150.00, Rs.80.00 to 300.00, Rs. 100.00 - 800.00 respectively per piece. The monthly income of the weavers varies between Rs.4000.00 to Rs.8000.00 per month. 70% of the sample reported that their total family income is Rs.5000.00 to Rs.10000.00 PM. The rest 30% reported that their total family income is Rs.10000.00 to Rs.15000.00 PM. In case of income contribution, 60% weavers respondents reported that their contribution to the family income is greater than 50%. Field survey also shows respondents average spending on food articles is 61%, clothing 10%, health care 6%, house rent 5%, miscellaneous items 5%, fuel 4%, education 3%, travel 4% and entertainment and recreation 2%. None of the sampled women weavers were found borrowing from financial institutions. The reason that has been observed is ignorance. Only a negligible percentage (1%) was found to be in debt borrowing from private money lenders. The reason observed for the less people borrowing even from private money lenders is the high rate of interest that prevails in the district both at the rural and urban areas.

Women weavers have to face number of problems at home, at work place and deplorable health condition due to work in unhygienic condition. The problems faced at the house front were money related, the most important one being sharing of earnings and ill treatment by their family members. 100% of the sampled women reported that they have to share their earnings in different activities of the family. 60% got ill treatment by their family members and negligible involvement in decision making process. Several problems were faced by them at work place like long hours of work, low wages and no provision of leave with pay, lack of provision of basic services, welfare programs and social security. 90 % of sampled informal women weavers reported of suffering from common illness – like backache, leg ache, weakness, gastritis, eye sight problem. Both the living and working conditions were deplorable and at both places women were exposed to all the risk factors.

Conclusion: In India, the sharing of economic activities by women is nothing new. From time immemorial women have been working both in the house and outside. In fact, the backbone of the Indian workforce is the informal sector. According to 2001 census if India, women constitute a significant part of the workforce in India. Of the total female population, female workforce share in the formal sector is only 4.2% while the rest 95.8% are in the

informal sector. Yet there is a tendency to ignore this vast mass of workforce who belongs to the informal sector. Hence, there is a need to understand the problems of the women as informal workers.

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