

## WOMEN WORKERS IN UNORGANISED SECTOR: A STUDY OF ALIGARH LOCK INDUSTRY

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### ABSTRACT:

Globally, more than 90% of man power contributes in unorganised sector where 91% of women workers are rendering their services. In India, the unorganised sector occupies around half of the GDP and the unorganised workers cover almost 90% of the national labour force, where 94% are women workers. This sector is characterised by lack of expertise and education, contractual work, no rights, no safety measures and minimum wages. According to Census 2011, Aligarh Lock industry constitutes about 14.33% of women workers in the unorganised sector engaged in various processes of lock making. In this industry they have a tragic situation due to unskilfulness and illiteracy. This paper is an attempt to examine the working conditions, causes and problems of women workers in Aligarh lock industry.

**Key Words:** *Women workers, unorganised sector, working conditions.*

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## **Introduction**

In every society, women hold a unique position but still, they belong to a disadvantaged class of society due to various social barriers and impediments. Women are the most exploited and least privileged members of society and are more common to face humiliation and exploitation (Dutta & Nath, 2015, p.33). According to UNICEF 2007, globally women represent 91% of the population in the unorganised sector, and contribute 66% of the world work, produce 50% of the global food but receive only 10% of the income output and own 1% of property (Rajeshkumar & Rajendaran, 2014, p.86). The U. N. statistics on women indicate that globally majority of the women workforce is involved in unpaid family work. Quite of them work as employees, very few are self-employed or employers. An overall representation of women in the labour force still remains low (Verma, 2005, p.137). As per the country report, presented at the 4th world conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, only 4% of women are working in the organized sector. This means that only about 0.005% of India's population comprises of working women in the organized workforce (Chandrasekhar, 2015, p.109). According to NSSO survey 2009-2010, the total employment in the country was 46.5 crore comprising around 2.8 crore in the organised and the remaining 43.7 crore workers in the unorganised sector. Out of these workers in the unorganised sector, there are 24.6 crore workers employed in the agricultural sector, about 4.4 crore in construction work and remaining in manufacturing and service (D'Rozario, 2017, pp.14-15). As per census 2011, India's working population constitutes around 39% of the population and women constitute 32% of the working population. Majority of the working women are crowded in the unorganised sector. In India, 94% of women are engaged in the unorganised sector, out of which about 20% work in urban centres (Sansiya, 2013, p.3). In Indian constitution, there is equality between men and women in all spheres of life. But inspite of many efforts, women are getting deprived day by day as compared to the men. Women also do not have the first priority in social and economic decisions in her family (Arti & Shastri, 2014, p.138). The overall depiction is one of greater hindrance for women workers in general and those belonging to the unorganised sector in particular. Aligarh Lock industry constitutes about 14.33% of women workers in unorganised sector (Census of India, 2011, p.17) they are engaged in various processes of lock making. The situation of women workers in this

industry are poor. They are socially, economically and traditionally backward and least privileged. Almost all of them face ill-treatment, harassment, and exploitation work place.

### **Literature Review**

Mohapatra (2015) tried to unfold the extent of the plight of women workers in general and women working in the unorganised sector in particular. She said that women workers are easily marginalised and could not get any benefits from the new opportunities because of globalisation and an open and competitive world trade. Globalisation negatively affects the women workers it leads to violations of women's economic, political, cultural rights at large scale. However, women play an important role in the economic and social life of the country. They performs the dual role of performing household duties and also working outside the home in the factories. In an unorganised sector of India, women are overworked, their work is invisible, unremunerated and unrecognised; they are displaced by men due to the impact of technology. Also, there is a greater rate of physical and sexual exploitation of women but the economic necessity compels them to work outside for meagre wages without social security.

Dave (2012) studied about the problems of women who work in unorganised sector. In her paper, she used a Multi-Stage Stratified Random Sampling technique and explained the problems of women workers, their socio-economic conditions, wage patterns, wage discrimination and other difficulties which they faced at their workplace. The conditions of their work in the unorganised sector were unsatisfactory. Poverty, illiteracy, and indebtedness forced them to work for low wages and under unjust conditions, their contribution to the economy is unrecognized, yet their services are valuable.

Nasir (2011a) in her paper reveals that in Aligarh lock industry about 80% of workers are Muslims and belong to *ajlaf* category (mean or lowly people). She reveals the impact of globalization on Muslim workers and their socio-economic status in society. Most of the workers live in poverty and face discrimination. Globalization also affects adversely the lock industry of Aligarh because of the availability of Chinese locks. The lock industry of Aligarh is struggling hard to compete with others in the market because the artisans are not in a position to compete with other countries locks. Globalisation declined the lock industry and this leads to the breakdown of the industry and their workers.

Geetika et al, (2011) in her article explains the situation of women workers who work in the informal sector of India, that women do not have the choice to work or not to work because they have to work at any cost for the desired need of income, and also there is no possibility of betterment and advancement of their efficiency and they hold the second place to men in the race of employment.

Devi et al, (2010) also mentioned the problems of women who work in the unorganised sector of the economy. They don't get equal wages like men for the same type of work and forced to take up low skilled jobs and as a result, they face sexual harassment at their workplace. They don't have any type of social security at their workplaces and have the double burden of earning as well as caring for children. They work in unhygienic conditions that affect their health. They also face the problem of low wages, unemployment, long hours of work and lack of facilities.

Pandya & Patel (2010) explained the status of women in the unorganised sector of India. A vast majority of India's population work in the unorganised sector. Around 94% of the workforce is in the unorganised sector whereas just 6% in the organised sector. According to NSSO 1994, around 92% of women are in the unorganised sector whereas only 8% are in organised sector. The condition of women workers in this sector is miserable as they work for extremely low wages, long working hours, and unsatisfactory working conditions with total lack of job security and social security benefits; they are not protected by any government legislation. Women's secondary and subordinate position is the outcome of faulty mainstream and development process. The unorganised sector of the economy is primarily labour intensive but less rewarding to the workers in comparison to their efforts in production. In the unorganised sector, most of the women labourers are either illiterate or having lower education. Therefore, they have to work in low paid and low skills labour work.

Sarkar & Anil (2005) discussed that a large proportion of the workforce are engaged in the informal sector. The workforce in the informal sector is getting increased due to several factors such as the impact of liberalisation, and privatisation, urban and rural poverty, shrinking agricultural sector due to the deployment of modern farming methods, unevenness of development of capitalism etc. They also examine that the jobs in the informal sector are more or less irregular and wage rates for female works are comparatively lower than their

male counterpart with equal qualification. Most of the women workers in the informal sector are illiterate and lack proper vocational training among them; they are under compulsion to stay in the informal sector. There is an urgent need for social security and minimum wages for the workers in the informal sector for their survival.

Sharma et al, (2005) examined the impact of globalisation on the lock industry of Aligarh and the workers engaged in manufacturing of locks in terms of output and productivity, their working conditions and competitiveness. The numbers of women workers were low as compared to male workers and were paid lower wages than their male co-workers. Authors emphasise that various laws are enacted in India for providing job security but are not applicable to the workers of lock manufacturing industry. The workers also do not have the union to fight for their cause. In India, the availability of foreign locks creates various types of problems for the workers of Aligarh lock industry, because this industry depends on the traditional mode of production resulting in high cost, low quality, and quantity of output.

Chen (2001) discussed the condition of women in the informal sector. He stated that informal sector is the primary source of employment for women. Informal sector accounts for over 95% of women workers. In India informal sector accounts for nine out of every ten women working outside agriculture, half or more of the female non-agricultural workforce is in the informal sector. The proportion of women workers in this sector exceeds that of men in most countries. At least 20% of women in the informal sector are casual wage workers. Since they are not fully captured in official statistics, they are considered as an unknown additional percent work as industrial home workers.

### **Study Area**

The Aligarh district of Uttar Pradesh has a total area of 3700.4 Sq. Km. It is an administrative district situated towards the south-east of Delhi and it is famous for Aligarh Muslim University. Aligarh till 18 century was known by the name of *Kol* or Koli but when British occupied the land in September 1803 the present district came into existence. Aligarh is situated 130 Km. from Delhi with 1/3 population of Muslims. The city is divided into 70 wards, which spread over two distinct parts i.e. the old city and the civil lines. Locks and Hardware are manufactured in Aligarh District. The locks of Aligarh are so famous that's why it is also known as *Tala Nagari* (BIPDA, 2016-17, p.3).

**Objectives**

The main objectives of the present study are:

1. To examine the working, economic and health conditions of women workers
2. To explore the causes and problems of the women workers

**Research Design**

The inductive logic of inquiry is used in this paper. The research strategy which is inductive in nature starts from the collection of data and then proceeds to derive generalisations (Blaikie, 2000). This study is based on both primary as well as secondary data. Primary data collected through interview schedule, case studies and observation methods (from Upper Fort and Shah Jamal) on the other hand secondary data gathered from books, research papers, journals and Census survey Report etc. This study is qualitative and descriptive in nature.

**Unorganized/ Informal Sector and Women Workers**

The term 'Informality' refers to both economic units and workers which are beyond the ambit of regulation and protection of government (Devi, 2014, p.56). The unorganised or informal sector of the economy in India is the largest in terms of the employment of the workforce. The term 'Unorganised Sector' was coined by the British Economist "Keith Hart in 1971", which emerged as one of the dynamic and vibrant sector (Rani, 2016, p.70). The term Unorganized workers have been defined as those workers who have not been able to organize themselves in pursuit of their common interest due to certain constraints like casual nature of employment, ignorance, and illiteracy, small and scattered size of establishment etc. The unorganized sector has no such clear-cut employer-employee relationships and lacks most forms of social protection. Having no fixed employer, these workers are casual, contractual, migrant, home-based, own-account workers who attempt to earn a living from whatever meagre assets and skills they possess (Keerthana & Singh, 2014, p.221).

In India, a very high proportion of underprivileged section of society is engaged in informal or unorganised sector because of an alternative source of employment, better livelihood opportunities and income. People choose informal or unorganised sector because they don't have a basic level of education and skill, to get job in formal or organised sector, which has led to large-scale migration (Bhat & Yadav, 2017, pp.1-2). On an average, workers in the

unorganised sector do not earn more than Rs 30-50 per day. Some may appear to earn more but the work is often seasonal and the total earning amount is the same after the long hours of work. Exploitation of workers is common and majority of them being unemployed and forced to work with no other alternative but as a means of survival (Selvaraj & Pillai, 2016, p.67). However, women workers don't remain confined to house only; they share a healthy percentage in formal and informal sectors. The women participating in the labour force has risen in most countries, which is also reflected in the changing sex composition of the total labour force. Female employment in India grew by 9 million between 1994 and 2010, but the ILO estimates that it could have been increased by almost double if women would have given equal access to employment in the industries and occupations as their male counterparts. Mostly, the women in the informal sector are facing the discrimination in wages, nature of work, availability of work, on the basis of sex and lack bargaining power which is mostly exploited by the employers (Bhat & Yadav, 2017, p.6).

The uncertainties of obtaining work and need to retain a position cause mental tension, strained social relationships and psychological problems to women workers. Also, the employment, underemployment and temporary work are more common among women than men. A woman worker does not have any security or health care benefits. Women are perceived as weak, inferior and second-class citizens (Dutta & Nath, 2015, p.34). To make a broad generalization, economic reason especially to supplement the family's income is the primary motive force which drives the women to enter the labour market. Through their labour, they are expected to aid their families to attain a better living standard (Kedia, 2016, pp.675-677). Another effect of the unorganised sector on women workers is their working conditions, like the effects of industrial noise who are exposed to it. Noise pollution is becoming more severe in industrial societies which is injurious to many aspects of health and also is an environmental problem of industrial societies. Hence, the life of women workers is very challenging despite their large contribution in Indian industries (Yadav et al, 2013, p. 41).

### **Work Processes and Women Workers in Aligarh Lock Industry**

Women labour is an important segment of the total labour in Aligarh lock Industry. According to the 2011 census, the total number of workers in Aligarh is 31.97% in which 47.61% are male workers and 14.23% are female workers. The total participation of workers in

household industries is 6.69% in which 4.68% are males and 14.33 % are females. A large number of female workers than the male workers are engaged in the unorganised sector of Aligarh city (Census of India, Uttar Pradesh, 2011). The unorganized sectors of the economy especially in India and in U. P. are prone for various types of exploitation and discrimination.

Now, locks of different types are made in Aligarh, sent to different places of India and also exported to many countries of the world. The lock industries in Aligarh city mainly come under the small-scale and cottage sectors. They are largely unorganized and unregistered and consist of many households units and workshops. Locks are made in Aligarh both by the traditional and modern method. The traditional method is used in making heavy locks of brass and iron and the smaller locks are made in factories with modern method of production. There are various types of work processes in the making of locks. Generally, these are power press, hand press, cutting, bending, grooves making, buffing, electroplating, spray painting, piercing holes in locks and keys, smoothing, assembling, packing. But, the majority of the women are engaged in the process of making liver *chirai*, hand press, assembling, packing etc. (Nasir, 2011a, p.46).

The process of Globalisation also affects the lock industry of Aligarh and their workforce especially women workforce, because they are the unskilled workers. Consequently, they realise themselves incompatible with the new modern technology and are socially excluded. In Aligarh, there are 5,000 lock factories, which are under the threat of Chinese locks due to globalisation. The Lock industries of Aligarh are still lagging behind in the process of modernization in terms of technology and advancement of making locks, influenced by inappropriate policies of the government, and heavy power shortage. Earlier the lock industry of Aligarh captured 90% of the Indian market but now it owns less than 50% of the Indian markets. Resultantly, the lock industries of Aligarh are losing their position in both the Indian and the foreign markets. So, the process of globalization damages the economic base of the Aligarh lock industry and makes the poor, poorer and the rich, richer. It increases the socio-economic gap between poor and rich people and marginalized people continuously being subjected to exploitation, deprivation, and discrimination (Nasir, 2011b, pp. 96-98).



### **Case Studies**

**Case 1:** Shameem, a 50 years old lady, lives in Shah Jamal, with her six children, four daughters, and two sons. She lives in a rented house with her family and pays Rs. 800 monthly as rent. She works in a lock *karkhana* nearby her house. She works 9 hours daily on a power press and earns Rs. 1200 per month. Once, while working on the power press, her two fingers got injured. Due to lack of regular treatment, she got her hand infected that made her unable to work properly. Her husband is a mason, his work is irregular, but he earns approximately Rs. 1500 per month. He is suffering from arthritis and needs regular treatment for his ailment. Because of poverty, Shameem neither fulfils the basic needs nor sends her children to school and also worried about the marriage of her daughters. In order to supplement the income, her elder daughter sews the ladies suits on labour rates. But she finds herself unable to save sufficient money to solve the problems of her family. All of them are working hard to overcome their hardship but all in vain.

**Case 2:** 18 years old Shaheen lives in Shah Jamal. She works on power press performing *Taale ki Chirai* for about 9 hours daily and earns Rs. 900 in a week. She is engaged in same work for the last 6 years. Being the eldest member in the family she owned the responsibility after her father's death to arrange bread and butter for her mother, two brothers, and one sister. Her economic condition is very traumatic. Though she was inclined to education, but the exigency of money forced her to join work affecting her physical and mental condition. Destitution keeps her doing work restlessly at an early stage, she was compelled to work in the hazardous environment by putting her life in danger for the small amount of money.

**Case 3:** A 70-year-old woman named Anwari lives in Mehfooz Nagar with her son's family because her husband died 15 years back. She works on hand press because her only son forces her to do work, but her age resists proper working. The owner provided a job on her request with the warning to discontinue the job if she does not work properly. She is getting a meagre amount for the work. Being exploited by her own family as well as by the owner, she is leading a miserable life without any proper care and attention. She also performs her household chores after returning from the *karkhana*.

**Case 4:** Hina who is 28 years of age lives in Upper Fort with her two sons and husband who does the work of polishing in lock factory. She also works on hand press in the lock factory. She spends a large amount on the treatment of her diabetic mother in law. Despite her pregnancy she works for 9 hours daily due to poor financial condition. She was recommended by the doctor not to work hard in this condition but due to her responsibilities she can't take rest and has to be in the same position for long hours she is willing to send her children to school that's why she saves money for her children's better future.

**Case 5:** Naseema, a 65 years old home based worker of lock making, lives in Upper Fort with her two sons and three daughters. Her children also help her in work. They all live in one room and have a small corridor for doing their work of making locks. They start working from early morning till late night with one break of lunch. They have to assemble all the parts of the lock to make a single lock, and get up to Rs. 2000 weekly which is very less amount to meet out their daily needs. Her 70 years old husband was also working in the lock factory, but now he left the work due to asthma. A considerable amount of the earned money is spent on the treatment of her husband. Despite her willingness, she couldn't send her children to school due to poverty. Her eldest daughter was very keen to go to school but forced to remain busy in doing household chores she also helped her family in the making of locks and suffers from a headache, due to the noise of hammer which is being used by her eldest brother to merge the parts of the lock easily. Sometimes it becomes difficult for Naseema to manage the basic requirements of family because her work is not regular and is based on the raw material which is supplied by the employer.

### **Discussion**

The study reveals that in Aligarh lock industry women workers face various types of problems related to their nature of work, long working hours, unequal wages etc. Majority of the women workers are engaged in liver *chirai*, assembling, packing etc. Some are engaged in the work of hand press and *Chabi Bandhai* and very few of them work on the power press, electroplating, buffing and spray painting. Nature of their work signifies their exploitation by being engaged in unskilled work and getting insufficient wages. They are discriminated and exploited on the basis of their sex, in terms of their wages and job opportunities. According to the constitution of India, there is an equal pay for equal work but in Aligarh lock industry, equal pay for equal work is a dream for many women workers. Generally, women workers in

lock industry are illiterate and have poor socio-economic conditions. Due to poor income they are unable to send their children to school and they keep them engaged in various types of work for fulfilling their monetary requirements, subjecting them to intense exploitation. Their health conditions are getting worse because of the unhygienic environment of workplace. Moreover, most women workers are hired on a contractual basis and are therefore not part of any union. Working without job security, they accept insufficient wages and hesitate to ask for even basic rights.

### **Conclusion**

India has witnessed a three-fold increase in population over the last half century. Women constitute 50 percent of the population and are the backbone of their families. There has been increasing evidence that more and more women taking up pecuniary jobs have led to better living standards for their families. Government across the country as well as various developmental organisations are actively undertaking various schemes, incentives and promotional measures for women. But despite various policies and programmes, there is no improvement in the conditions of women workers in unorganised sector. Women remain to be stigmatised in modern society. Ample provisions of social security enshrined in Indian Constitution fail to implement the laws for the organised and unorganized labour force. So the government should have to initiate furthermore policies and programmes for the upliftment of women workers. Women should get equal pay for equal work. A vital responsibility of the government is to organise awareness programmes in relation to rights and welfare schemes of unorganized labour. There is a profound need for the effective implementation of various schemes and laws for empowering the women workers. Workplace need to be made conducive to them. They should be able to live without fear so that they can explore their potential. They must prepare themselves to fight for their rights and exploitations against them.

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