CHAPTER-II

MAGNITUDE OF THE PROBLEMS OF WORKING WOMEN

From time immemorial women have been working – working everywhere at home, in fields, factories and many other workplaces. However, women as a distinct segment of workers emerged and got recognition only with the emergence of industrial production. After the industrial revolution, the social situations changed throughout the world and so in India. The family no more remained a centre for production. Due to industrialization and urbanization new social norms and values emerged. Job opportunities, economic hardship and favourable cultural and social situation encouraged women to seek employment outside the home.

After independence of Country the number of women to come out of their houses for work increased day by day. They also took to education. In the early period women were mostly engaged in unskilled or semi-skilled occupations, as ayahs, nurses, midwives, water women, cooks, domestic servants, as labourers on construction sites, in agricultural farm and on plantations. But now they are increasingly being employed in services, industries, shops, establishments, offices and professional / technical occupations. This change enhanced the status of women on the one hand and Country prosperity on the other, but it gave rise to many problems and difficulties for them by way of exploitation, discrimination and dismal working conditions. They have to perform dual responsibilities respectively termed “reproductive” and productive. This is not an easy task for women to work at home and working place. The problems and difficulties got multiplied due to their peculiar social, biological and psychological conditions and due to their illiteracy and ignorance.

Problems of working women in Aligarh and Agra industries are not separate from India. They are same which is prevailing in India. Thus, this chapter highlights the problems of working women at home and at workplace.
1. **Problems of Working Women at Home**

   Our advancement in science and technology notwithstanding, the women remain backward and poverty stricken. The condition of women in India in general is considered to be very miserable. Women’s problems are linked with her general living conditions in society.

   The women perform many functions in society and for the society. They produce children, they are mother and wives. However, they are largely excluded from high status occupations and positions of power. They do cooking, mending, sewing, washing and many other odd jobs. But in terms of the rewards of prestige, wealth and power, women invariably come off worse. The problems of working women are multidimensional and differ from woman to woman.

   Women may be wage earner by her own right but within the home she is just a woman, subordinate to her male household chief, subservient to his will, she has to undertake everything that is expected. This is why exclusive purpose and reoccupations of women wage earners are to the family causes, more so its subsistence struggle. Wage earning notwithstanding, they cannot, skip or derelict their multifarious role and responsibilities within the family. Employment is only on addition to family obligation, widely regarded as the sacrosanct and inviolable responsibility of women, which *inter alia* include collecting, and fetching water, gathering wood, cooking, cleaning, caring husband and in-laws and bearing and rearing children.

   The problems are different for different sections of women such as rural and urban women, the educated and uneducated ones, single women and ones with family. Women in joint family, nuclear or extended family, of orthodox and modern family etc. again, have their own problems. Even the atmosphere in the place of work, attitudes of the fellow workers and the authority, age of women, kind of work, timings of works, distance of work-place from the house etc. are important factors in the lives of working women.

   **A. The Problems of Married Working Women**

   Women as a group, especially married women, have certainly become an important part of the workplace all over the world. The march of wives into the workplace is gradually changing finally, marriage and child bearing practices. In
other word the phenomenon of career couples is having its impact on the institutions marriage, sex, children, life style, and the dream of home. The double income does liberate both husband and wife from financial stringency and self-denial, but it creates more problems for working wives.

(i) **Dual Responsibility**

The major problems for working wives arise out of the dual responsibilities of the working women- house work and the factory work. Even though the employment of women is accepted, most of her in-laws and majority of the husbands have not accepted the changing life pattern. They are not prepared to share the responsibilities of the household and of looking after children. These duties are still considered to be exclusive of the wife. It is a common sight that the women get up early in the morning, prepare break fast, cooks the lunch, cleaning, fetching water and goes to work. In the evening when she returns the house job is waiting for her. She prepares tea and serves the husband and children attend pending work and prepare dinner. If it is a joint family the mother –in-law or the sister-in-laws feel that they work for the whole day in house when she is in the working place. Now it is her turn to work. If she is with her husband or children, they feel that she is not doing enough work for the house. They criticise and abuse her. They feel she is not earning for them or she is not obliging them by working that they also work a lot. At times her share of work is kept apart. Sometimes they remark that she has a change to go out in the name of work, while the other sisters–in-laws is totally confined to home. They are jealous of her freedom and the status she enjoys. Even derogatory stories are fabricated to hurt her. If the husband is sensible and sympathetic and does share some work to help her he is blamed as a “henpecked” husband. The in–laws do not like his attitude and criticize him also. However, even such husbands are only a few.5

**Krishna Chakraborty** in her study, the *conflicting worlds of working mother* found that employed housewives all over the world have to face this problem of adjustment among their varied role expectations. They are required by their position to play a dual set of roles one as home makers, wives and mothers and the other as employees. Being simultaneously confronted with the dual demands of the home and work, they are liable to face adjustment problems. At
home, in addition to biological functions, there are other duties which they are expected to perform because of the prevailing cultural norms and values. These new circumstances and responsibilities require a redefinition and reallocation of roles, duties and responsibilities, not merely for them but also for every member of the family. Unless and until it is achieved there is no chance of lessening the overload on working house-wives, and therefore, mitigating the severity of their problems whether it is out of their own choice or economic necessity that they have taken up employment outside, adjustment between their role obligations not an easy task. It requires not only ability and goodwill but also physical endurance and psychological acceptance.\(^6\)

**(ii) Conflict between the Two Roles**

In addition to the above described burden on the women, the dual role also demands of her two different sets of values. Difficulties arise because often these two roles make a simultaneous demand on the person whose physical capacity, energy, endurance and time have definite limits. Often the fulfillment of these two roles requires qualities of different and diverse kinds - one requiring cooperation and self-negation and other calling her competitions and self – enhancement. Women’s business functions require such qualities as efficiency, courage, determination, intelligence, sense of reality, responsibility and independence. In the professional sphere they are expected to act in ‘business like’ manner to be straight forward and non-sentimental. In addition to these characteristic and partly in conflict with them, women who is a wife also expected to be sweet and soft, sensitive and adaptable, gentle, unassertive, good humored, domesticated, yielding and in most cases, not too intelligent. Hence a kind of conflict arising from a lack of adjustment between two competing roles is likely to be faced by those persons who have to comply with dual obligation at a time. This problem would not arise if job and home were considered as two mutually exclusive fields of life. The typical woman is dedicated to her family. She may feel that one way of serving her family is by earning, additional money. At the same time she might feel that her husband would prefer her staying at home and rendering more domestic service, that and her children need her presence at home, and that her presence there would have prevented the emergence of some of their problems.\(^7\)
Being overtly obsessed with the infallible domestic chores women tend to land in conflicting and often perplexing no-win position. As women have primary obligation to the family, employment, outside employment in particulars, puts irreconcilable pressures on them. They have to be good wives and good employee as well. Torn between two incompatible roles women suffer, not silently.

As and when women devote time and energy to the demands of the employment they would find less time to assign attention to the family liabilities which will in turn invite worth of the family. If and when they are preoccupied with the family responsibility they will surely neglect career demands thus they will be dubbed as negligent and inefficient employee. Reconciliation between two conflicting roles is delicate and whether and how women workers make the balance in between domestic and career demands will indicate their role and position in both fronts.

Often she is heard to make statements like a working women cannot be outstanding both at home and in job, she had to make a choice or it is hard to stay happily married while working or the quality of motherhood will suffer. When the mother engages in a full time job outside. Further religious rituals and customary practices are expected to be preserved and perpetuated by the women. ‘Despite her heavy work burden women, more than the men, are the loud wearies of the rituals. Thus the problem of adjustment of working women becomes more serious.

In fact carrying out almost all responsibilities single handedly the women are overstrained and get exhausted. The illusion of having new experience and variation from drudgery of routine housework soon fades away. All the aspirations are shattered. All these make a combined effect on her nature. They get irritated in trivial matters, get angry on children and husband. The home which is expected to be better than paradise, get disturbed and thus happiness and peace vanish.

The ideas of multiple responsibilities also create problems for working women. On the one hand they want to be efficient workers and try hard to fulfill the job-duties and at the same time they also want to be good wives, good mothers and better home managers. She wants to maintain her status in the society and be respected by the other members of the family. Her sincerity towards all the responsibilities is itself a cause of trouble. After finishing the home job, she runs
to the working place, if she is late, she is in tension. The employer would blame her for insincerity. If she has no put on some overtime work, she is late at home and she is worried for the children coming from school.

In some houses, of course, the working of women is appreciated. They are treated with great respect, her burdens and feelings are understood. Development of her personality and emergence into an enlightened status is encouraged. In such families working women have a comfortable position. They enjoy their work and aspire to do their best to be outstanding in their fields. But unfortunately this type of situation is found rarely.\(^8\)

(iii) Working Women and Children

Another type of problem experienced is the feeling of neglecting the children when the mother is working. The mothers often feel or made to feel that the children are not properly looked after, that they do not enjoy the facilities that the other children enjoy, that they have to let go many things, and that in addition they have to do some work at home to help the mother. When the mother is tired and gets angry, they feel that they are missing the mother’s love and get disappointed. In this situation the working mother’s experience, her psychological problems arising from inner conflict and a feeling of guilt, anxiety or tension are caused by the dual commitment and concern.

(iv) Socio-Economic Life and Habit of Husbands

It is observed that women are largely excluded from high status occupations and from positions of power. Thus, highest proportion of women workers belong to the lower economic strata. The sections which are economically very poor also occupy a lower position in the social scale. They are mostly agricultural labourers in the rural areas or coolies and casual labourers in urban construction sites, or employed in petty and menial services. That is to say, majority of women workers engaged in unorganised sector.

In unorganised sector the problems of women workers are more economic than social. The women in this section are compelled to work in order to make both ends meet. They just cannot afford the luxury of staying at home. Due to economic compulsion it is not possible for them to conform to any rigid social
values or norms. Men and women have to work together in fields or construction sites. They lead an ‘open life’ because they cannot have the luxury of privacy.

Hence, there is not much hypocrisy in their way of life. Huddled together in huts or in slums, they lend a community way of life. No family is complete without either men or women. It is in fact certain attitudes or behavioral patterns of the men that give rise to problems or inadequacies of women. The evil of excessive drinking which is very common among men in this category but also prevalent among women to some extent. Other problems which are faced by working women in this section that they have large size of families, extremely low level of literacy, lack of facilities for the care of children, unhygienic living conditions, lack of basic medical facilities, lack of minimum facilities of ‘privacy’ which every women is entitled to. In many cases the husband indulged in habits like drinking gambling and lottery, thereby, increasing their burden all the more. It was found that many husbands take alcohol every day before they go to sleep. Drinking is a wide spread social problem among the lower classes and families are ruined due to this social evil. Much of the quarrelling and wife beating in these families arise due to the men forcibly taking away what the women have earned. In most of the cases these husbands smoke bidis. Besides this the husband indulged in purchasing lottery or mapping committees and gambling. Majority of husbands indulge in bad habits because there is no organised system of recreational facilities for them. The only occasions of collective recreation are the celebrations of Festivals like Diwali, Holi, Dussehra and other religious ceremonies. Many husbands also take non-vegetarian food. These habits of husbands are monetarily very expensive and it is possibly one of the reason that these workers were not able to save any money and remained under debt.

(v) Control over Income

Even though many women work, not many of them have any control over the income they earn. A great majority of them have to hand over their salary to their husbands or in-laws. They are not supposed to manage their own income. The amount is spent in the expenses of home. In some cases they are not given even the pocket money or the amount to buy things for their perusal use. She has to demand and is given some money as a grace-granted to her. In short, the
working women is always short of pocket money to use for herself despite having her own income. Thus employment still does not mean control over money or economic independence for the women.

The problems becomes worse when some persons feel that the women are working to satisfy their whims or as hobby. There are also instances when the men gradually withdraw themselves from leaving much of the responsibilities of running the house on themselves and pass then into the women. In the beginning the women does not mind. But after some time she realizes that the husband has thrown the whole burden on her and this create strained relations.9

(vi) Participation in Decision making process in the Family

Participation in the decision-making process of a family is an indicator of the power and control over the affairs of that family. This power and control may rest either with the husband or the wife or both or any other member of the family. Generally in a male dominated society, as that of ours, the control rests with the male members only and the female remain subordinate to them. This situation, however, may vary in families where the women are working and contribute towards the family income. However in brick kilns, factories, mines, construction site, home based units, field, inspite of the women working and contributing towards family income, their position is only secondary in the process of decision-making of their families. Major decisions in the families of these women worker related to spending the money, occupation of children, marriage of children, purchasing cattle, plot or a house, size of family, managing the economy of the households, education of children. In normal circumstances, it is the husbands only who take the majority of decision. In cases, where husbands are addicted to alcohol, lottery or gambling, some working women take decisions themselves. So it is clear, that even if the wife is working, the decision making power lies with the husbands only, although, there can be a marginal variation in this trend from place to place and family to family.

(vii) Impact on Marital Relations

The whole drama of the life of an Indian woman is played around the husband and his relations. Even though a man is well educated and dressed in western clothes, has a look of modernity and even advocates women’s
emancipation, in his relations with his wife he is still like traditional husband, with age old orthodox, attitude towards his wife. He may be a staunch exponent of equality of women with that of men. But at home he enjoys domination over his wife, who has to meekly obey him without questioning. He is not able to accept his wife arguing the truth. He likes his wife’s earning but it defiles his ego to accept her as his equal. He is not able to even accept the fact that his wife can efficiently handle the man’s job. He enjoys seeing her as weak, docile and always dependent on him. The problem becomes more difficult when the earning of the woman is higher than the husband’s or she is more able and efficient in her work. He tries to hide his feelings of inferiority complex, by manifesting it in actions that express exaggerated superiority over her. This breeds very oppressive conditions for the woman, who is neither able to give up nor face this oppression day in and day out. Thus working women face a severe problem when their salary is more than that of her husband. Aware of the man’s ego and the stereotyped notions of a woman being less than a man, women take extra care of their husband’s feeling, never express their superiority and deliberately adopt a low self image and low posture. But the husbands are always conscious of the fact, and this aggravates the oppression of women.

(viii) Restrictions on Movement

It is observed that in some cases the freedom of movement of the working women is also restricted. She is allowed only to go to the place of work. If she is late by half-an hour, she is answerable. She is not allowed to go elsewhere along. If she wants to go, she is accompanied by younger sister-in-law or someone else. Some women express that if they have to work late in the working place, they are misunderstood by their husbands or the in-laws. She is badly rebuked and a big fuss is made of it. Some women complain that even if they are physically unwell and badly exhausted and could not respond to the husband’s sexual needs, they are not only misunderstood but are alleged to have illegitimate relations with some co-workers or the boss. They are inhumanly treated, tortured and even beaten. Women feel hurt by such humiliating actions of the husbands towards them especially when their integrity is questioned. There are examples where the
husbands have illegitimate relations with other women and to hide their fault, they put on allegations on women and blame, so the latter may not question them.

(ix) **One New Way of Development and Modernity**

Another note-worthy change which has been observed is that by working outside the four walls of the house, women are thrown in the open-world. Every day they have new experiences and face new situations. Their mental horizons are widened, new aspirations aroused. Their ways of thinking is also changed. They want to give a new shape of their lives. They try to find new solutions to their problems. While the other members of the family are still having the same traditional outlook. The generation gap between the elders and the working women is increasing day by day. She is not able to cope with them though she wants to live with them. She hampers for the life of her thinking. This is a constant cause of increasing mental conflicts. If both the husband and wife are of a liberal outlook there is a free democratic family structure with the grab of autocracy fading away. The children grown up in this free atmosphere are able to develop their personalities. But when the grown up children take their own decisions and arrange their lives in their own way, the parents feel hurt. They feel, the grown up children now ignore them and do not recognize them. They comment that the latter do not take their advice or act according to it. They face the same problem which their elder used to face. They are happy to see the well developed and independent personality of the children but cannot throw away autocratic mentality inherited from the traditional culture and want to keep the children under their wing. It is a paradox which can never work. This also creates new conflicts and new problems.  

(x) **Other Related Problems**

There are other problems also. They are off-shoots of her being a working woman. The working woman is left with little time for relaxation or entertainment or social life. Apart from leading to her own over work, burden and tension, she becomes the buff of social criticism. For the major part of the day, the woman is working in the office or the workplace. After coming back she is busy with housework place. After coming back she is busy with house work and her family. She has no time left to maintain relations with her neighbours, friends and
relations. She is not able to visit them freely and spend time with them or join them in common programmes. She is not even able to go to their help when they need especially at the time of illness, marriages, deaths or other occasions. This is often mistaken for arrogance due to earning and the friends and relatives criticize her.

The working woman has not time of her own. She needs rest. She wants to thin of her problems or plan her future. She wants to read and write. She wants to undertake activities of her own interest, say creative arts. At times, she desires to be on her own not disturbed by anybody. There is no time for her. She cannot afford to be moody.

In all these worries the woman has no time left to look after her health. Still, she has to take care of her health and keep herself physically fit to work. She has to take to nourishing food and proper treatment when needed. Again due to hard work and overburdened by responsibilities, she gets into rapid ageing effects. The unending worries and tensions of modern life and the family also hastens the ageing process.

B. Problems of Single Working Women (Unmarried, Widow, Divorcee etc.)

Women as a group, specially single, have certainly become an important part of the workforce not only in India but all over the world. Women in general have to face so many problems, due to various factors. But being a single woman, she has to face some special problems. which are as follows:

(i) Problems of Getting Employment

Most of the women work to help their families in their economic disparities. However, the general impression of the society is to the contrary. When they search for a job, they have to compete with male candidates. The women in general suffer from some of the assumptions and prejudices which the authorities particularly the male, have towards them. The employer feels that women are not serious or efficient workers. They put in less work and came only to pass time. Their continued participation in the workforce would depend entirely on the decision of their future spouse. As soon as they get married, they will go away. If their husband decides that they shall not go to work, they would definitely
quit and stay back at home. Again even if they continue after marriage, they will
demand leave a number of times for domestic reasons. Maternity, childcare,
transfer of the bands, work demands of the husband and family which make them
give up jobs, play truant or become indifferent and efficient. For many such
reasons the women candidates are not preferred. Some employers even think that
the women may spoil the strict atmosphere of the work place. In fact this type of
discrimination with young girls is nothing but a crime against entire women
community.

Once they are selected, they are subjected to other type of oppression. The
stares and the banters of the male colleagues, their typical curiosity and their
uncivilised and unwarranted remarks, “she is charming and that is why she is
selected” etc. are some of these oppressive ways. If the young women mix freely
with them they are misunderstood. If they keep themselves confined to the work
alone they are labeled as arrogant. If the boss appreciates their work and they
enjoy the confidence of the authorities, they are scandalized. They crack jokes at
them and pass cheap remarks which in fact are unfair to the young women and
hurt them.

(ii) Single Women and Status in the Family

In a study carried out by Arora, Bhattacharya and others\(^\text{11}\) on the
unmarried working girls employed as typists, clerks, receptionists or telephone
operators in Bombay, it was found that “with the majority of respondents their role
of an earner in the family had not earned them a new freedom from parental
control except perhaps in the area of marriage, nor were their status very much
changed in the family with an exception of few where they got much more
importance because of their economic contribution towards the maintenance of
family. In fact being an employed member of the family her responsibility
increases and the family expects something from her without changing her
traditional status.

(iii) Problems of Parental Responsibility

There are families where the parents and other members of the family are
totally dependent on the income of the young girls. They are mightily afraid of the
girls getting married. They avoid settling the latter’s marriages on one excuse or
other. The young girls, emotionally attached with the parents, feel guilty in moving out and neglecting their responsibility to parents. The marriageable age passes away. This causes a great frustration to unmarried girls.

An eminent social scientist had the same opinion, when she observed in Bombay on the unmarried women office workers, that their parents were not interested in their daughters getting married, they postpones the latter’s marriages because, if the daughters got married, the parents would not get their daughter’s earnings, and thus they would be at a great disadvantage. Such working girls feel most insecure and uncertain of their future and have no one, who is interested in finding a suitable match for them. It was also pointed out by this sociologist that the number of abortions amongst the working girls was increasing which created both social and emotional problems for them.¹²

(iv) Problem for Residence

A single woman, married, unmarried and widowed if alone, faces a problem of residence in India. Except in some of the big cities, there is no provision of working women’s hostels. If it is there, it may not be well managed. In these hostels the working women are protected like children and these conditions restrict their freedom and ultimately hamper their wishes. While it is difficult to have a rented house in a limited income, the house owner looks at the single women with suspicion and is not willing to rent it. Thus the unmarried women have many problems to face in housing.

Thus, the working women, married and unmarried whether employed in organised or unorganised sector face variety types of problems at home level. Almost all of these problems are not of her own creation but due to the societyle traditional outlook. Society in India does not favour employment of women as they are still looked upon as reproductive and not productive actors. It also relegated women to a secondary position and confined them to play the role of home-maker. The responsibility of solving these problems, hence, should belong to the man and society, though the working woman often tends to believe herself to be responsible. A changed family relation based on a changed and egalitarian power relation within the family and between man and woman is thus a need.
2. Problems of Working Women at Work Place

The condition of working women in India as well as in the entire world in general is considered to be very distressing. Working women in general are subject to discrimination at various levels. The problems and difficulties of working women are multi-dimensional, varying from woman to woman at personal level, and section to section at general level and hence need to be analyzed in depth. There are very serious problems of wages, employment, income and standard of living and sexual harassment among working women. They are not able to get any advantage of social security schemes. Due to their ignorance and illiteracy they are not benefited from present welfare schemes.

As per the International Labour Organization report *Time for Equality at work* women constitute the single largest group discriminated against at the workplace with low wages, adverse working conditions, low rate of employment and greater insecurity on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, age and disabilities. The report warns that neglecting the widening socio-economic inequalities in the world of work would not only amount to accepting a “waste of human talent and resources” but could have disastrous effects on social balance and political stability.

There has indeed been a growing realization that the women workers form an integral part of the process of national development. This has made the government make continuous effort to give women workers a better deal in spheres of work and to recognize their contribution to the socio-economic development of the Country. However, what has been done remains a drop in the ocean and the women worker remain exploited and unprotected working hours, conditions of work, wages, types of job and other situation is still not favourable to women workers. Women workers have many problems and problems of working women are more serious and server.

(i) Poor Health

Health of an individual is closely linked to his/her status in society. Women universally have lower status and are seem only in their reproductive roles. Women anywhere in the world have to suffer from some in built disadvantages, compared to men, because of certain biological reasons. They have to put up with
menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, lactation, child rearing and menopause and their various complications. Physically, they are less strong. They are also are vulnerable to sexual aggression and abuse. The different cultural, social and economic situations in India have given different focus to these biological disadvantage of women. These situations also influence the way these biological disadvantages affect the health of the working women.

The law prohibits women employment in dangerous and heavy operations in organised sector as well as in unorganised sector. However, majority of them work in the unorganised sector and consequently, get hardly any benefits made by the provisions of the law. Women get less money for their work; get no medical and other benefits that the employment rules provide. Women have double disadvantage because of these discriminations because women bear a triple burden of reproduction, production and domestic work. Each of these has its own problems and women having to perform all the three of them, and being denied proper working conditions, results in their poor health.

The Factory Act 1948 which seeks to ensure protection to millions of women covered by it. It applies to any premises (i) where 10 or more workers are employed and where a manufacturing process is carried on with the aid of power or (ii) where 20 or more workers are employed and where a manufacturing process is carried on without the aid of power. The Act is enforced by the State Governments through their factory inspectorates. It was amended in 1976 to include the three sections which deal specifically with health hazards that the workers face.

The Act outlines the principal health risks to factory workers, which arise from dangerous gases, acids and dust, harmful bacteria and micro-organisms, compressed and rarefied atmosphere, improper lighting, extremes of temperature, humidity and excessive strain. But it is silent on the impact of all these on women workers. The repercussions on women can be slightly different from those on men because of the additional physical and psychological factors and can be complicated by pregnancy, maternity and gynecological issues. Further environmental factors like heat, humidity, repetitive work, toxic substances also
affect women. They can adversely condition pregnancy, child birth, lactation, child rearing and menopause and their various complications.

What the Factories Act 1948 does say is that women must be prohibited from employment in dangerous and heavy operations. No women worker should be asked to clean or lubricate or adjust any machinery while it is in motion, if her work exposes her to the risk of injury from any moving part. No women workers should be employed for pressing cotton in any part of a factory in which a cotton opener is at work. There are also specified limits on the amount of weight a woman worker can carry. The state governments can, therefore, restrict or prohibit the employment of women in only operation which may expose them to serious risk of personal injury.

The Act also says that there should be separate toilets and sanitary dressing rooms for women workers. It specifies the need for keeping both clean. Besides the obvious health reasons, what is not so well known is that modern industrial processes subject employees not only to dangerous dust and vapours, but a variety of diseases – breeding organisms that can be transmitted by fellow workers to one another. Hence the need for eliminating unhygienic contacts between workers. There is women workers’ complaint of the absence or shortage of separate toilets at their work place. The fact is that the Factories Acts which are enforced by the factory inspectors are not implemented. Thus in different industries women workers are suffering from innumerable difficulties and nothing has been done to alleviate them.

Both men and women can be working on the same jobs, but women can for a variety of reasons be affected more than their male-colleagues. A survey of the agate workers in Gujarat, revealed that lungs disease had affected 70.6% of women and 60.4% of the men. Pneumonia and T.B. affected 19.6% and 21.6%, respectively of the women, compared to 17.9% and 12.9% of the males.

It is well spread belied that the physical structure and maternal functions of women place her at a disadvantage. But practices do not follow this. Women have never shirked hard labour, whether it is farming, planting, transplanting, winnowing, weeding, harvesting, grinding, pounding, nothing holds them back. It has been seen that work which is physically very strenuous is done not by men but
by women like head-loaders, handcraft pullers, construction workers etc. Any “disadvantage” that women’s maternal functions may cause is largely man-made. So these responsibilities have to be seen as vital functions to perform for which a woman must be adequately compensated. Male refusal to take on specific home and child-care responsibilities has also placed a dual responsibility of home as well as work place on working women. These responsibilities cause mental as well as physical problem which ultimately leads to health hazards.\(^\text{16}\)

(A) **Emotional Problems**

Unemployment, underemployment and temporary work are more common among women than among men. With no special security or health care benefits, the work-related illness, which they suffer from, remain hidden. As per available research, unemployment is harmful to health and constitutes a serious risk for the workers’ emotional stability, because it leads to poverty, deteriorates self-image and self-esteem. A large no. of women workers complain of symptoms such as irritability, mood swings, and depression, sadness and concentration problems, which very often is related to their type of work and work conditions.

(B) **Physical Health**

A large number of women workers complain of frequent headaches, back pain, circulatory disorders, fatigue, and emotional and mental disorders. Poor nutritional status, anaemia due to poverty and the cultural practices where women eat last and the increased workload due to domestic responsibility, loads to fatigue among women. Worry responsibility, strong emotions, concentrated attention or precision required by some jobs like embroidery, assembly of electronic or electronic appliances, setting of gems, jewellery etc. and exhaustion caused by intellectual or mental activities also produce fatigue. Lack of basic facilities like toilets, rest rooms, dining spaces etc. at the workplace causes a lot of physical discomfort and mental stress besides leading to urinary tract infections and other diseases, particularly among pregnant women. Women working in some industries like construction, brick kilns, electronics, industry etc. suffer from gynecological problems, miscarriages, premature deliveries etc. and give birth to babies with low birth weight or with birth defects.\(^\text{17}\)
There is adverse effect of work on the health of women workers, this is due to long hours of work, lifting weights, overburden, poor working conditions, lack of light, ventilation, water space etc. Thus, work related health problems from which women have been suffering is given here:

(a) **Problems Related to the Posture at Work**

Women who cook on low level platforms or on the ground, making chapattis, bakeries, cutting vegetables, women who roll bidis or papadams, zardozi and zari workers, Chikan lace weavers, gunny bag stitchers, garment and tagai workers, carpet makers and entire section of women who are involved in strenuous work, bending forward and working in the same posture for hours a day and day after day, suffer from various disorders like low back pain, upper back pain, and spondilytis are some of them. Even women in packing and assembly jobs suffer from these complaints and may suffer from complete debilitation.

(b) **Problems due to being in Contact with Hazardous Material**

Constant contact with wood smoke while cooking dyes, cashew oil, chemicals and chemical fumes, tobacco dust, silica and other dust while mining, cotton dust, gases like carbon monoxide, formaldehyde, etc. give rise to a host of respiratory problems like shortness of breath, constant discomfort, byssinosis, tuberculosis, silicosis, cancer, etc. Women engaged in the operation of sowing in agriculture, experience these symptoms due to the fertilizer powder mixed with seeds. Mostly, the women complained of burning sensation in the hands, irritation of the upper respiratory tract and sweating of the palms. Generally speaking, women are not provided with any equipment or gear to protect themselves.

Women working with certain chemicals like hormones and bronchodilators and other life – saving drugs are known to have experienced heavy menstrual disorders as well as miscarriages.

Different chemicals, fumes and dust have affected women who do diverse types of work – housework, photocopying, electronics, mining, agriculture, building and construction. The effects on women’s health have been disastrous with severe morbidity and also fatalities.
(c) **Problems related to Women’s Work Environment – Lack of Light, Ventilation, Water, Space etc.**

Inadequate lighting, long working hours with extremely minute work like chicken embroidery, lace making, zari embroidery, tagai work, etc. cause severe problems like poor vision, eye-strain, and headaches.

In small-scale factories and the millions of galis in industrial estates all over the Country, too, women work in cramped conditions, in rooms which have extremely high temperatures like glass industry, garments, diamonds, plastics, cosmetics, electricals, electronics and so on.

Women in the mining industry, in agriculture, women vendors, women rag pickers, etc. have the opposite problems – having to work in the open, all through the day, in the hot sun and rains. Apart from other effects, it causes them to sweat, losing precious water and salts.

(d) **Problems Related to Lifting Weights**

Women in building and construction, on Employment Guarantee Scheme work in brick kilns, women who have to carry water over long distances, often, while also carrying their children on their backs, have to constantly carry very heavy weights during all their working life—often from childhood to old age, also immediately before and after child birth. These give rise to health problems like menstrual disorders, prolapsed of the uterus, miscarriages, back problems, especially those related to spinal column, causing serious and long term repercussions. Accidents and injuries to themselves and to their children are other serious health problems these women face.

(e) **Problems Related to Long Hours of Work**

Most of the serious health problems get aggravated due to the long hours of work women have to put in. The postural problem women face, in most of the work they do, get much worse, as women work for 8 to 14 hours each day. The effect of the chemicals, fumes, gases and dust that women in mines, in slate-pencil making, in fish-processing are exposed to, worsen the health problems, culminate in serious morbidity or even death, due to long periods of continuous exposure and due to the non-availability of rest to recover from health impairment.
Problems Related to their Work Actions and Repetitiousness of Movements

When women lift heavy weights, there are certain problems they face. But when they do the same work over and over again, the health problems are compounded many times over.

Also when women who work as packers in several industries, as assemblers, fitting circuits and use only one or two path of their bodies, such as hands and shoulders, in repetitive movements, they often suffer from a condition termed tenosynotitis or repetitive strain injury, which is a very painful condition of wrist, to the extent of not being able to use it at all.

Problems Related to Mental Health

Women are known to have to work in at least two shift, if not three. They have to do or take the responsibility for almost all the household work, child care, caring for the old and sick as well as earning a living. In whatever way women try to combine these different equally strenuous roles, it gives rise to extreme mental strain.

Secondly, most women have to work in extremely insecure conditions. Socially too, women are extremely vulnerable. This exposes them to various forms of oppressions, including sexual harassment, wife beating, systematic violence, the sexual division of labour at home, in society and at the workplace and restrictions on the freedom of mobility.18

Thus, the most common diseases of the women workers appear to be directly related to the environmental and living factors. If the employers look into providing them good and clean houses with proper facilities of kitchen, water and toilets along with making provisions for their safety at work, most of these diseases can be prevented. The owners can also make arrangements for periodic medical check ups taking help of some, social welfare and government agencies working in the area to improve the health standards of these workers.

Wage Related Problems

Women works to increase the income of the family or widow works for self dependence. Number of women working only for hobby or to get an employment is very less in India. Thus wage rate they are getting is an important factor to be
considered. Most significant problems of female labourers are problems relate to wages. Females get less as compared to males. It is unjust that a worker spends many hours at difficult work and does not even earn enough to feed himself and her family.19

There is difference between wages of male and female working in same kind of environment and doing the same kind of work. Females do get less, in wages, as their kind of job is different. They work in less important or primary sectors, where the possibility of getting good wages is less. For less wages given to female labour social and traditional system is responsible. International Labour Organization in its special report on why women gets less wages quotes that only constant factor affects the female labours wage rate. That factors in male is reference to women in training. For this these are two reasons. There are inadequate facility for training of women and women is less interested in increasing its skills. Traditional sectors in which women works is below standard. It is understandable that women get low wages in traditional sectors.20

In the Countries where there is no specific standard of wage rate, there is the same situation prevailing.

So far as earnings of the female workers are concerned, according to Labour Investigation Committee, they were lower as compared to those for male workers in case of cotton textile industry. However, recently as a result of the awards of different industrial Tribunals, the same basic wages have been fixed both for male and female workers in most of the centres of industry. In the jute mills, the differences in their earnings are narrowed down considerably. In the mines the earning of the female workers are lower than those of the men. However, the piece rates in the coal mines are usually the same for male and female workers. Similarly, minimum time rates in the coal mines in Bihar and West Bengal are the same for male and female workers. In mica mines also they are equal. But in the manganese mines, they are different. In plantations also wages are different for male and female workers. Average monthly earnings per workers at work in Assam valley during 1959-60 were Rs. 61.18 for men and Rs. 55.80 for women. For Cachar Surrma Valley, they amounted to Rs. 51.91 and Rs. 40.21, respectively. In brief, the greatest proportion of women workers is still
concentrated in the lower paid unskilled jobs and their overall annual earnings are still much less than those of the male workers.  

There have been quite a few micro-studies that show that women workers in unorganised sector invariably get paid much less than men. *G.D. Gambhir in his study on “Labour in small scale industries in Madhya Pradesh with special reference to women and child labour in cotton ginning, bidi making and rice milling and shellac manufacture”* found that wages of unskilled women workers ranged between 65% to 75% that of the unskilled men workers. Men coolies earn double that of women coolies.  

There is enough evidence that women are paid less than men for the same work. Committee on Textile Industry of Bombay government has reported this in its report, “Problems of Women Labour should be examined differently. Australia, Canada and America has decided on minimum or basic wage rate for women. Their evaluation standards are different from male labourers.” But, a Committee favoured the low wage rate for women workers engaged in road construction and building construction, 1948. Women are being paid less compared to male labour is beneficial to female labourers otherwise they would be out of job.  

For the majority of women engaged in paid economic activity, the fact of being female means being paid less than men for their work. Gender based wage disparities exist across all sector and all occupations. One study calculated the earnings differentials for the year 1989, 1991, and 1995 for manufacturing, plantations, tea and mines. Earning differentials are higher in the manufacturing and tea sectors and are lowest for plantation. Manufacturing Sector appears to be the most discriminatory towards women. Women construction workers are paid uniformly lower wages than their male counterparts inspite of the fact that she is doing equally, if not more hard work in comparison to men. In fact women in the unorganised sector as well as the organised sector are discriminated directly or indirectly. One can take a look at the wages in the organised sectors.  

Only 7 percent of the Country’s female workforce is employed in the organised sector. The organised sector comprises units registered under the Factories Act of 1948 and covers those using power and employing ten or more workers, as well as units not using power but employing 20 or more workers. In
addition the organised sector is governed by legislation such as the Minimum Wages Act, Labour Welfare Regulations, and Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act. Strictly speaking violations of those Acts can be challenged in a Court of Law.

In the organised sectors of the economy, people are selected for job-positions and their rate of emoluments is fixed primarily in relation to the nature of the jobs concerned. There could therefore, be theoretically no sex-based differences in wages in the organised sectors. It is, however, possible that some establishments try to separate some jobs carrying less pay and it may so happen that only females get recruited to such jobs. This may not “technically amount to sex-based discrimination,” though “such categorization of jobs” may also sometimes be done purposely.

Even in the public sector, where employment has gone up substantially, a large proportion of women are shunted into low paid jobs. At every level of work, they are paid lower wages defeating the constitutional position of equal pay for equal work for both men and women. Wage discrimination is problem all over the world, especially in the third world countries, where the process of industrialization is still going on.26

Thus the wage-discrimination is a universal phenomenon and it needs a world-wide awakening and revolutionary movement to wipe out the basic discrimination at various levels of the economy and for this not only women but also men have to come under one-banner and fight against it. 

(iii) Lack of Social Security

It is now axiomatic that society has the responsibility to relieve economic distress faced by individual members on account of contingencies beyond their control. In the employment front the state is expected to regulate the working ambience so that human dignity is endured and unforeseen eventuality in the lives of workers can both be averted and minimized. And such measures are tersely termed as social security.27 Social security still eludes most workers in the informal sector, especially women workers. In the unorganised the concept, more so its practice, is hardly applicable or observed consistently or categorically and the framework and thrust seldom satisfy the nature of work and plight of workers.
For the women component those protective provisions may be most urgent but they are either not-existent or being flagrantly flouted.

Recently, the *Unorganised Workers’ Social Security Act 2008* has been passed. The Act contemplates the delivery of benefits to unorganised workers in instances of sickness, disability, maternity, unemployment, old age and the death of a family’s breadwinner. The Act has defined ‘Unorganised Workers’ in a wide and liberal manner so as to include those who are casually employed and receive daily or monthly wages as well as ‘home-based workers’ and even farmers who work on shall land-holdings. Hence, the legislative intent is to expand the social safety net as wide as possible.

Despite of these laudable achievements, women workers have no social security benefits. Registration is necessary to get the benefits under this Act. There may also be difficulties in registering the workers on account of the suppression of facts by employers and contractors.

It has been observed that the elements of job quality – job security, good working conditions, and remuneration commensurate with the work, adherence to workers’ rights, social protection and conducive human resource management – are missing in the informal sector. They toil for more than eight hours a day without the luxury of weekend holidays. They number in millions, yet they are not part of any organised system of work. They are not on any list, register or master roll.\(^28\) For the millions in the unorganised sector or informal economy, social security continues to be a missing link in their struggle for survival. And yet, it is these unorganised workers who are the poorest of workers and are most exposed to shocks and multiple risks that threaten their very survival.

The problem is more acute for women workers. They play, the triple role of a worker, housewife and mother. The lack of capitals and assets, low and irregular income, aided by frequent accidents, sickness and other contingencies, poor working and living conditions, low bargaining power and lack of outside linkages and opportunities for skill upgradation – all these interlinked factors drag these women into deprivation, trapping them in the vicious circle of poverty.

Child care provisions and maternity benefits are the crucial needs for the women worker. These provisions are missing in informal sector. The most
productive years of a women’s life are also the reproductive years of her life. In the absence of any provision for maternity leave and child care, a women worker often has to leave her job to have a child and take care of the infant.29

On the one hand, the welfare Acts apply to only a tiny section of industries in unorganised sector while bulk of the workers is out of the ambit of those Acts. The nebulous nature of the employer – employee relationship as in case of home based, casual, seasonal workers makes enforcement of those Acts yet more uncertain and difficult. Due to ignorance, cumbersome procedure or tactics of break of service used by the employer to deny the benefits majority of workers cannot avail the benefits that protective legislations offer.

Beside this, recently passed, The Unorganised Workers’ Social Security Act, 2008 appears to have excluded vast sections of unorganised workers like agricultural labourers, the unorganised labourers in the organised sector including contract labourers and the informal labourers in the formal sector, the anganwadi workers, para workers like ASHAs and parateachers, and those the cooperative sector. The Act is applicable only to a small section of unorganised labourers whose income limit is expected to be notified by the government. The special problems of women unorganised workers do not figure in the Act. The problems of security, sexual harassment, proper accommodation for migrant women workers issues relating to nature of work and industrial safety, gender wage gap, non-payment of wages, child care facilities at work spot etc. have been totally neglected.

On the other hand, the existing schemes of social security in the organised sector are basically income maintenance schemes as distinguished from income support schemes. In unorganised sector there is greater need for income support schemes. Unless a person has an employment or a source of income, the question of maintenance of his income cannot arise at all. In the unorganised sector, the workers are engaged either in wage employment or self-employment, which are basically irregular or seasonal and the income is very low. The unorganised sector worker with irregular employment is not in a position to claim security in conventional sense. It is desirable that in such a situation, more immediate is the security of employment or means of adequate income. At the same time other
measures to ensure minimum relief in the event of old age, sickness, employment injury, maternity, destitution, invalidity and death should also be made available.

In the case of the organised sector workers it may be plausible to have contributory or employer’s liability schemes but this is not easily feasible in the case of unorganised counterpart. This is due to the fact that the workers suffer from low earnings uncertain employment, change in nature of employment and change in employers. Hence any social security scheme for the unorganised sector, particularly in rural industries, has to be a social assistance scheme to bring succour to the most disadvantaged sections of the society.

Right from the inception the need for and provision of social security for women workers revolved around the special requirements of women and most of the provisions were consistently parried in most working places. Conditions of work such as hour of work, period of rest and maternity related issues were sought to be regulated in earlier times. The underlying conviction was that women workers have very special problems: they have to perform reproductive role as wife and mother, they are physically vulnerable and therefore, every kind of work is not suitable for them. And most of the amenities accrued not because of their demand of struggle as such but as ‘generous gesture’ extended or provided by the state. Gradually emphasis shifted to the necessity of overall minimum standard of labour condition such as working hour and other amenities in and around works. But still now women are being regarded as special kind of workers having their physical incapacity and reproductive responsibility.

How far the growing volume of welfare legislation has benefited women remains dubious. In making existing welfare measures available to women there has been overt resistance from the employers – one reason being sheer economic. Throughout women workers have been preferred as and when they are relatively cheap. But because of statutory compulsion to implement beneficiary schemes or permit leave with pay s in Maternity Act, employing women tends to entail more cost and inconveniences. Though the relationship between welfare provision and declined of women’s employment is not categorically clear, it is not illogical to expect that women will be discarded as and when employers have compulsorily to provide special amenities for women component. There may be no direct
correlation in the public sector but for the private enterprises cost factor so involved will possibly deter management/employer to desist from recruiting women worker. When economic advantage of women workers will disappear they are expected to be shunned or abandoned.

However, absence of open manifestation of decline of women’s empowerment with the advent of security provisions is not because factory owners have acquiesced to the extra cost involved but because they have own strategy how to discard the welfare measures. When women are actually engaged they are mainly as casual workers so that enacted provision can be pushed aside. Even when women are technically working employers deliberately retreat from those facilities under this pretext or that and laxity on the part of enforcement officials makes such skipping not much difficult. 30

(iv) Absence of Child Care Facilities

Women working in the informal sector do not have any child-care facilities (crèches are absent or ill equipped even in the organised sector). Most often women workers, particularly in the informal sector, are forced to leave their children at home, under the care of their elder children, or old people or neighbours. 31 Simply because of lack alternative arrangement by themselves and for this reason they do not generally take infants to the factory area. Women generally place their infants to other family member like mother-in-law or minor children who are not working elsewhere. This causes great anxiety and emotional strain. Many even give up their livelihood that further deteriorates the matters in context of financial constraints.

A few women, particularly migrants, cannot place their infants or very minor child at the safe keeping of any one in the barrack and they do take them along to working arena. In Brick Factory, laying children in the floor of the brick making pit and taking care of them as bay feeding when required, women continue their tasks. For some local women also it is not possible to deposit infant to others and for indispensability of wage they have anyway to join the job. Sometimes those local women who come from far off cannot take along their child. Also because of non-availability of the facility women are compelled to design their own child-care arrangement. Thus, one often see under-nourished child crowing
around in the dust and mud or playing near heaps of mud. It can also be seen that children are trailing their working mother. Few infants are also placed on a piece of cloth under the sun or tree and they are crying for the attention. Any serious visitor should not find such scene scarce.

In fact crèche facility is non-existent in all most all small-scale industries. The common causes are: these factories, which are seasonal in nature do not come under the ambit of the legal provision. Lack of space for implementing the provision is also cited as one impediment. Employers also deliberately avoid recruiting or engaging married one or women with infants for escaping shouldering of extra bit of expense. Lack of knowledge about the applicability of this very provision and absence of bargaining power to force employer to provide the facility are few other reasons.

(v) Home-Based Work

Home-Based Work is a significant source of employment for many, especially womenfolk. Women, who may not be seen on the factory floor, work in household units along with their children. Home-Based work is considered more productive as it paves the way for the term “flexible work” responsibilities. Despite increased recognition at the policy level of the contribution of the home-based sector to the overall economy, home based workers largely remain invisible in data and statistics and are deprived of access to any form of organizational support, wage protection or employment benefits. Irrespective of high growth (chemical industry) or medium growth industry (wearing apparel, tobacco products), women receive low wages and home-based women workers even receive lower wages. The wage differential between males and females is also quite stark in home-based work. Women home-based workers are providers of child care and old age care, hence their productivity is affected by frequent interruptions. It may be noted that home-based workers cannot be easily placed within a dichotomous classification of self-employed and wage employed workers.

(vi) Gender Discrimination

Striking contrast is that in industrial and organised sector women’s share is very marginal, men monopolising the better paid and secured jobs. But down the
ladder, women workers abound in insecure, part time or uncertain and laborious jobs. Women predominate in those activities, which are characterised by informality, flexible hour and location of work, which can be carried out from home base and can easily be combined with domestic duties including reproduction. In most of the societies women perform almost similar tasks and this is because of sexual division of labour. Gender refers to how biological differences between men and women work in social spheres. At economic plain, gender appears as sexual division of labour where some types of work are related to men and women separately. In broader sense, production is men’s and reproduction women’s.

Together with different kinds of work, men’s and women’s labour is valued and remunerated differently, in accordance with the gender of the workforce undertaking the task. Almost universally, women encounter discrimination both in terms of range of choice of employment and rewards to their work. Though more and more women are now entering into paid work they are regarded as secondary wage earner with their primary responsibility laying to home and hearth. Women’s employment is found concentrated in few specific segment of economy and this is tersely dubbed as feminisation of labour force. If the overall work participation of Indian women is closely looked at, it transpires that most of the working women belong to lower castes, they have seasonal nature of employment, they are engaged in strenuous tasks with longer working hour, they earn less compared to male counterpart, face ill-treatment, job security is a far cry for them and basic amenities in the working place seen day-dreaming for them. Gender inequalities in various forms pervade all operations / activities in which women are engaged. The division of labour is highly sex segregated and biased. Skilled and higher wage earning jobs are male preserve and arduous/ unskilled of women’s. Even when both males and women are doing the same type of work, women in general get about 30 percent less wage.34

Discrimination is manifest at every stage of employment, from recruitment to remuneration, occupational segregation and at time of lay-off. Men and women tend to work in different sectors of the economy and hold different positions within the same occupational group. Women tend to be employed in a narrower
range of occupational group. Women tend to be employed in a narrower range of occupations than men and are more likely to work part-time or in short term. They also face more barriers to promotion and career development. Inequalities remain as regards pay, hierarchy and promotion. Occupational segregation also persists in emerging areas of work, for instance, in information and communication technologies, once hailed as a window of equal treatment and opportunities for women.

In all occupations women stand at the bottom of the hierarchy, they work mostly as helpers or are engaged in supplementary or secondary rule, do the arduous and risky work and get lower wage. In construction work, for instance, all skilled operations are manned by men. In unskilled category male helpers dig earth, mix mortar and carry cement bags. But woman carry bricks, mortar and supply water.

In the garment industry where women are in higher proportion, men generally undertake tasks like master cutter, machine operators or electric maintenance workers while women are confined to assembly line.

Right from the inception, proportion of women workers in tea plantation is very high. But in the plantation works women suffer ignominiously. Tight schedule of both tea garden works and household duties go side by side. Those women are preferred for plucking of tea leaf, which is hard manual and ‘inhuman’ work. Planters adjudge women as best and fast puckers. By such branding some sort of status is attached to women. They are treated as cheap labour force with natural rather than professional skill. Those plantation women are paid less than male counterpart despite the advent of Equal Remuneration Act, 1976.

The Indian Judiciary to a certain extent has taken lead in securing socio-economic justice to women. The creative thinking that is evident in cases like Kishori Mohanlal Bakshi v. Union of India, C.B. Muthamma v. Union of India, Air India v. Nargeesh Meerza, People’s Union for Democratic Rights v. Union of India, Randhir Singh v. Union of India is a good sign of Judicial activism. The Court rightly maintained that women are the participants in the mainstream and deserve equal treatment. Old laws making women’s biology as a basis of segregation are unreasonable and the Supreme Court has held such laws
unconstitutional. The Supreme Court has interestingly maintained recently that giving preference to women in jobs was only an affirmative action and need not be deemed as reservation. Inspite of the judiciary efforts, gender discrimination has been seen everywhere.

Women workers are yet to be freed from discrimination in matters especially of wage. The discrimination partly stems from their own unconcerned outlook towards their employment as they are ready to work at whatever wage rate they can get for supplementing the meager income of their families. Thus, employers find it easy to exploit the situation. Somehow or the other, the employers have a preconceived notion that women workers are not efficient as men. Some are dismayed and reluctant to take on women workers as they fear that their very presence would breed unnecessary and unforeseen trouble in the labour front.  

(vii) Globalization

Globalization has posed new challenges to women working in the unorganised sector. In the changed economic scenario, privatization, competition, free marketing, specialization and sophistication have systematically kept away women from the production processes. With the onset of economic liberalization and the globalization of the Indian economy, it is likely that women from the disadvantaged sections will be further marginalized. Meenu Anand talks about the current movement from traditional to a modern economy, where the family labour is substituted by competitive individualized labour. This invariably results in the decline in women’s participation as technological changes introduce the demand for new skills. The higher the technology the greater is the demand for basic skills like education and specialized training from its workers. Women in developing societies, constituting the largest share of world’s illiterates, lack educational and training opportunities for acquisition of higher level skills. So their traditional skills will be no longer needed leading to a decline in opportunities for women’s employment.

(viii) Problem of Transport

The present transport system is far from satisfactory, generally women have to suffer the worst due to misconduct or eve-teasing by co-passengers.
Sometimes they have to wait for hours on the bus stop to board a bus. Even when the bus comes, due to it being overcrowded she is not able to catch it. Even in train the position is not good. At present there is only one ladies compartment in local trains in cities like Bombay and Delhi, and that too, is often occupied by men. At the peak hours one can hardly enter or detrain without difficulty. In some metropolitan cities there is a “ladies’ special” during busy hours. But it is unsatisfactory and limited so the authorities should provide for more than one ladies’ compartment in local trains and more ‘ladies’ special’ to solve problems of various type for the women workers.

(ix) Poor Living and Working Conditions

Despite the fact that many labour legislations have been made applicable to the unorganised industry the living and working conditions of the workers in these industry are highly unsatisfactory and welfare amenities actually available to them are just negligible. Women workers are the worst sufferers as their employment is regarded as secondary to that of male workers. Special provisions regarding the protection and welfare of women workers are either not at all enforced or they do not exist in the labour laws applicable to the industry. Work is often unskilled or low skilled and low paid. Availability of work is irregular, when work is available, they have to work for long hours. They have to work under very poor working and living conditions. Women workers have poor bargaining power that is why they cannot pressurize the employers for their rights, which leads to this exploitation. The living conditions of the workers in unorganised sector are observed to be quite unsatisfactory. It is because besides bad conditions of their quarters, these workers have also not been provided with proper facilities of drinking water, sanitation, health and education. The living arrangements for these workers can be classified to be of four types i.e., pakka quarters, kachcha quarters, huts and their own houses in near by villages. Regrettably, the quarters do not have waterproof roofs, necessary doors, windows and ventilators as well as suitable, cooking and bathing facilities.

Workers engaged in building and construction industry have invariably to handle dusty, hard or rough material like sand, cement, concrete bricks, etc. They were thus prone to injuries and health hazards. No precautions have been taken by
the employer to prevent inhalation of dust fumes etc. Women workers’ hands and feet in most of cases were found in pitiable condition having many scratches. No women worker have been provided with hand gloves or any other protective equipment for handling the building and construction material.

It is also highlighted by Second National Commission on Labour, 2002 that working and living conditions of the women in construction industry are not satisfactory. Employment in construction is usually interspersed with periods of unemployment of varying duration, mainly due to fluctuating requirements of labour force on each worksite. The nature of work is such that there are no holidays. It is established to that female workers do not in general get minimum wages. Women engaged in construction work, are the most exploited. What is worse, the contractors remove sick and injured workers from sites and pay rolls without giving them adequate compensation. The existing labour laws applicable to construction workers are based on inspection, prosecution, fines, etc. However, legal processes are so time consuming that the aggrieved worker may be out of employment or employed elsewhere by the time redressal materializes. The existing laws do not give adequate protection to worker against victimization.42

Like this, the working and living conditions of the workers engaged in handloom industry are not satisfactory. The earnings of most of the handloom workers, particularly of women workers, are very low and their working conditions are highly unsatisfactory. The women workers do not enjoy even the basic welfare amenities and the social security benefits available to them are just negligible. In the case of workers carrying on the manufacturing processes in their own houses conditions of work like working hours, weekly rest, holiday, etc., may not have much relevance, but even workers engaged in the common worksheds of handloom units do not enjoy much legislative protection. The common worksheds of the non-household units, as also the place of work of workers doing spinning, winding or weaving at their dwellings, were generally small in size and not congenial. The worksheds of most of the handloom units were over-crowded and were not well ventilated.

A study is conducted by D.P. Singh on “Women workers in unorganised sector” in 2005 as revealed that the availability of basic facilities like light, water,
kitchen arrangements, toilets and washing facilities, etc. in the brick kilns industry are not satisfactory. Although water was made available to all respondents for washing, drinking and bathing, there was no proper arrangement for it in most of the brick kilns. Besides this, there were no proper and essential devices provided to them for their safety. For instance, the women who carry the dried bricks to the trench need to be provided with hand gloves for protecting their hands and fingers from bruises and injuries. Similarly those women who work as unloaders of the trench require gas masks, goggles because they work in the extreme dust all the time.

Thus, it cannot be wrong to say that in unorganised sector, working and living conditions of workers are very worse. On the other hand, in organised sector where labour laws apply, the statutory provisions are not being strictly complied with. In many cases, it has been found that protective measures such as crèches, maternity benefits, separate toilets and washing facilities etc. are not either provided or are not adequately maintained. Other safety and welfare measures are also not being provided it seems that the present penal provisions of these enactment are not deterrent to prevent the employer from making violation of these provisions.

It is said that pathetic and worse condition of women workers in unorganised and organised sector is depends upon the women workers themselves. Their ignorance and lack of awareness about their right is also responsible for the evasion of these beneficial legislations. Therefore, the need of hour is that women should get fully conscious about their rights and should get courageous enough to fight for their rights by participation in the trade union activities.

(x) Occupational hazards and Accident

There is danger of accident during the working of workers. Industrial workers are endangered by this problem. For, in most of the cases, machine is responsible. Labourers in construction sector have dangers of breakdown of building or slab collapse and other accidents. The risk involved in construction work is very high particularly for women workers, who have to climb great heights carrying heavy loads. Accidents involving simple injuries occur every day while fatal accidents are not uncommon. Falling from heights electric shock,
falling of objects and collapse of ladder, are the major reason for fatal accidents. But agricultural labourers are safe to an extent. Some labourer may get bit of snake or Capricorn and sometimes agricultural equipment may cause them some minor to medium grade injuries. The most common accident in lock industry is that of “piling cutting” in which the top most portion of the fingers are cut down or crushed while placing the plate of sheet metal on the die of power presses. Most of the workers engaged in various industries suffer from certain occupational diseases due to bad working environment and unsuitable working conditions. The most common occupational diseases are Asthma, T.B. and Silicosis. Eye problem is another occupational disease in the industrial workers. Due to these diseases working capacity of the workers reduces day by day. No compensation is provided to the workers, under the provision of workmen’s compensation Act, who contract such diseases.

(x) Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is another serious hazard faced by working women. Whether in the organised or unorganised sector, whether illiterate, low paid workers or highly educated and highly paid executives, a large number of working women face sexual harassment at the workplace.

Sexual harassment includes such unwelcome sexually determined behaviour such as physical contacts and advances, sexually coloured remarks, showing pornography and sexual demands, whether by words or actions. It includes anything from a remark to a physical advance that offends the self respect of a women. The list reads – “subtle forms which may include sexual innuendos, appropriate favour, blatant forms, leering, pinching, grabbing, hugging patting brushing against, touching and extreme behaviour amounting to attempted rape and rape.”

Sexual behaviour may be considered sexual harassment when person finds himself personally, offensive sexually. Such behaviour may be subtle or obvious, verbal or non-verbal. Its scope may cover a wide range of behaviour that runs the gamut from patting women’s bottoms, when they work down in hall or offices, to pinching, to repeated insistent arms around the shoulder, couched in friendliness,
the question about the women sex all the way to explicit proposition that require women to engage in sexual relationship.

However, sexual harassment can be done in both ways, physically and psychologically. In its refined form, it may be confined to verbal and in appropriate affectional gestures and in extreme behaviour, the sexual harassment amounted to attempted or actual rape.

The following may be considering the sexual behaviour.

1. **Verbal sexual behaviour**
   The verbal sexual behaviour includes:
   (a) Comments of a sexual nature about figure, size, shape, body weight, unwelcome remark, rough and vulgar humour/jokes.
   (b) Graphic sexual description, chatter of sexual nature.
   (c) Telephone calls with sexual tones.
   (d) Remark about the women’s breast, buttock, vagina and her overall size.

2. **Non-verbal behaviour and gestures**
   Gesture are the movement of the body, head, arms, hand, figures, face and eye that are expression of an idea, opinion, hint or emotion, following may constitute sexual harassment.
   - Licking lips or teeth, holding or eating food provocatively.
   - Sexual looks such as leering and calling with sexual tones.

3. **Visual sexual harassment**
   It includes showing pornography, nude poster, photograph and cartoon, sexually explicit picture, dropping down pant is front of womens.

4. **Physical sexual harassment**
   It includes actual physical attempt for kissing, embracing, patting, squeezing breast and check and other physical attempt.

5. **Psychological sexual harassment**
   Thus includes calling every day for work and retain her for excessive hours, and staring on her face, breast, neck, eye and other part of the body; repeated unwanted invitation for dinner, drinks and movies, proposal for physical intimacy beginning with subtle hints which may lead to overt request for dates or
sexual intercourse, sexual favour, requiring to wear sexiest and revealing or suggestive saree, saif, dress and to adopt suggestive hair style, lipstick etc.

In the present situation, all the working women, regardless of their age, social status, physical appearance, post and economic status, may encounter sexual harassment. The only difference between the higher level working women and lower level working women is that the women working at the bottom of economic level are subjected to the mere gross expression of sexual harassment.

On the other hand, women as professionals, executives and management cadre, receive more subtle treatment. Instead of the outright physical abuse, they are subjected to psychological intimidation. They receive offer for after work drinks expensive lunches and dinner, extra perks, trips and hours with implicit message that sexual favours are expected.45

Women are harassed by all sections of society, viz., professors, lawyers, doctors, police authorities, etc. working women are considered as public property. Sexual harassment to women at work place is a world wide phenomenon. What to talk about an ordinary employer, U.S. President Bill Clinton was also sued for sexual harassment of a women, who was employed by State of Arkansas when he was the Governor there. She claimed that he demanded sex, in what she says was a crude and gross abuse of power when he was her boss.46

In India there are so many examples of sexual harassment of women e.g., Rupam Deol, who was an I.A.S. Officer, was publicly harassed by state police chief K.P.S. Gill.47 A lady patient, Rani was sexually harassed by a doctor at Maulana Azad Medical College, Delhi, who came for routine test.48 Jessica Lal who was model by profession and was working in a pub at Delhi was first sexually victimized and then was killed by the boys in full public view.49 Even educational institutions are not behind in this type of crime. Allegations of sexual harassment leveled by four women employees against Principal of Delhi Public School, Faridabad.50 An employee of Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar leveled sexual harassment charge against a senior professor of same faculty.51 Three lady lecturers of Shri Lakshmi Narain Ayurvedic College, Amritsar alleged against Principal of the same college for their sexual harassment.52 Such type of cases are on increase in the year 1997 total 5796 cases of sexual harassment were reported.
all over India, in 1998 it increased to 8054 and in 1999 number of these cases went up to 8858.\textsuperscript{53}

Women’s groups all over India have led numerous campaigns against sexual harassment, eventually bringing the issue to the attention of the Supreme Court in 1997.\textsuperscript{54} In 1997 the Supreme Court recognized sexual harassment at the workplace as a violation of human rights. The Supreme Court in \textit{Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan}\textsuperscript{55} issued guidelines and norms for due observance at all workplaces or other institutions to avoid sexual harassment of the women. Such efforts notwithstanding, the attitudes that promote sexual harassment remain prevalent. No laws specifically punishing sexual harassment exist, and even the Supreme Court’s legally binding guidelines for employers have hardly been implemented in practice.

Unlike some of the developed countries of the world like Australia, Canada, U.K. and U.S.A. there is no central or State legislation to curb the evil of sexual harassment in India. However, in view of the judicial approach as manifested in \textit{Vishaka’s case} and followed in \textit{Apparel Export Promotion Council’s case} the National Commission for Women Statutory body constituted under Act, 1990 has become quite active in highlighting the issue of sexual harassment and creating awareness among the general public. In 1998, the Commission formulated a code of conduct for workplace in simple terms understood by the common people and the same has been circulated to all Ministries of the Central and State Governments, State commissions, NGOs and Apex Bodies of the Corporate Sector and to the media. Likewise the National Human Rights Commission is competent to inquire suo motu or on a petition presented to it by a victim or any person on his or her behalf into the complaint of violation of human rights or abetment thereof. The Apex court made it categorically clear in Vishaka’s case that the guidelines will not prejudice any rights available under the protection of Human Rights Act, 1993.

Therefore, looking into the gravity of the issue several attempts have been made by the Central Government to comply with the directions and guidelines laid down by the judiciary by proposing Bills on sexual harassment right from the year 2000. Various attempts have been made in the form of the sexual harassment of
women at their workplace (Prevention Bill), 2000, the *Prevention of Sexual Abuse of Women at Workplace Bill, 2001*.

*Prevention of Sexual Abuse and Harassment of Women and Girls at Workspace Bill, 2002, The Sexual Harassment to their Workplace (Prevention) Bill, 2003 and The Sexual Harassment of Women at the workplace (Prevention and Redressal) Bill, 2004* drafted by the National Commission for Women at the instance of the Central Government showing its seriousness in getting a law enacted on the subject.

The *Protection against Sexual Harassment of Women Bill, 2005, Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Bill, 2006* prepared by the Ministry of Women and Child Development reveals certain loopholes. So these Bill could not take final shape. After this, the draft Bill “Protection of Women against Sexual Harassment at Workplace Bill, 2007” readied by the Ministry of Women and Child Development. It is based upon the earlier Bill of 2006 with some changes in the head note and other provisions. The Bill provides for prevention and Redressal of sexual harassment of women at workplace which includes not only any department, establishment, institution, office, branch or unit which is established controlled or wholly or substantially financed by funds provided directly or indirectly by the appropriate Government or the local authority or a Government Company or a corporation or a co-operative society, but also any private sector organization or a private venture, a house or dwelling place or unorganised sector.

More recently, *Protection of Women against Sexual Harassment at Workplace Bill, 2010*, has been prepared, The Bill mandates that women subjected to sexual advances - verbal or physical – are within their rights to complain against colleagues. A person found guilty of sexual harassment is likely to face financial penalties besides loss of employment and, in the case of a graver offence, a police complaint. Officials argued that domestic workers were left out in view of administrative difficulties in proving sexual harassment due to lack of witnesses and the effectiveness of the local Committee in the accused home.

Activists, however, slammed maids being left out of the Bill’s loop. The Bill is extremely limited in its scope and it is very condemnable that the government has not taken this marginalised section on board.
Sexual harassment at the workplace affects the well being and economic livelihood of the woman employee, while also affecting the moral productivity and integrity of the workplace.\textsuperscript{57} To control the sexual harassment of women, directions and guidelines issued by Supreme Court should be observed strictly and women should be aware about their rights. The law at present are not adequate. The loopholes in the laws can be plugged by changing the law, according to urgency and need of the time.\textsuperscript{58} In this regard the National Commission on Labour, 2002 observes, “Approximately half of the population of our Country and therefore, of the potential workforce is of the female gender. Any social, economic or industrial system that ignores the potentials, talents and special attitudes of this half will be flawed on many counts. It is, therefore, necessary to ensure equal opportunities and protection from indignities.\textsuperscript{59} The role of employers, trade unions, and state instrumentalities, non-governmental organizations and as well as of media in creating a healthy environment for the dignity of workers is of vital importance in preventing and combating sexual harassment at workplace.

It is submitted that sexual harassment of women at the workplace is not a purely legal problem. It is a socio-legal problem and therefore, a purely legal solution will not help. Social awareness of the existence of sexual harassment at the workplace should be raised and debates on such issues should not be considered taboo-to be discussed in hushed tones behind closed doors. Women should be encouraged to come out with the problems that they face at the workplace but at the same time care should be taken to ensure that the plea of sexual harassment is not taken to settle personal scores.

After going through all these details, it is observed that problems and difficulties of working women are multidimensional. Women workers at workplace face the problems of low and discriminatory wage, exploitative working conditions, lack of secured employment, sexual harassment. They are to operate in a vicious circle of deprivation, denigration and subsistence struggle. Women workers have to face instability and insecurity of employment, non-observance of labour regulations enjoined by enactments. Lack of awareness is one of the fundamental causes behind the powerlessness, bias and exploitation that women face at their work. Women workers need to be made aware about their
interests, various legislative provisions and authorities for protection against
discrimination, sexual harassment and strategies for grievance redressal. They
should be motivated to utilize the government programmes for their socio-
conomic development. NGOs, particularly those engaged in the activities of
women’s welfare, have an important role to play in being on the forefront in
awareness generation and empowering women to solve their problems.
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