 Participation of Women in the Labour Market

5.1 Labour Market Information of the Sample Area:

Both labour force and workforce characteristics of the sample area has been studied according to three statuses, viz. usual principal status (PS), Usual Subsidiary Status (SS) and Usual Principal and Subsidiary Status taken together (PS+SS). In the present study data have been collected from both rural and urban areas. Although participation of workers in the labour market and unorganised sector has been analysed separately for both rural and urban area, the detailed analysis on different aspects have been done taking rural and urban area together.

5.2 Labour Force Participation Rates in the Sample Area:

Usual Principal Status (PS):

With 1093 population, the sample area has a labour force of 458 according to principal status. Consequently, the labour force participation rate is 41.90 per cent. There are 341 male and 117 female in the total labour force the of sample area. The share of male in the total labour force is 74.45 per cent and of female only 25.55 per cent. Again the labour force participation rate for male is 62.34 per cent and for female is 21.43 per cent. The magnitude of non-workers in the area is 635. That is, 58.10 per cent of the total populations of the sample area are non worker. Again the proportion of female non worker (78.57 per cent) is much larger than that of male
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(37.66 per cent). Thus, women are basically out of labour force according to principal status. Again, male-female difference is quite prominent in case of labour force participation rate (Appendix Table: 5.1).

Subsidiary Status (SS):

In subsidiary status 383 persons are found in the labour force, the number of male and female being 174 and 209 respectively. So, labour force participation rate in subsidiary status is 35.04 per cent. It is also found that female labour force participation rate (38.28 per cent) in this status is higher than that of male (31.81 per cent). So, the proportion of non worker is higher for male (68.19 per cent) than female (61.72 per cent) in this status. It is thus observed that women workers are basically concentrated in subsidiary activities in our sample households which fact is also supported by national and state level data (Appendix Table: 5.2).

Usual Status (PS+SS)

(Principal Status and Subsidiary Status taken together):

According to usual status (PS+SS), that is, principal status and subsidiary status taken together, the magnitude of total labour force stood at 697 with 422 male and 275 female. The usual status (PS+SS) labour force participation rate in the sample area is 63.77 per cent. The male labour force participation rate (77.15 per cent) is quite higher than female labour force participation rate (50.37 per cent). Total number of non-workers (not in labour force) is 396 with 125 male and 271 female. That is 36.23 per cent of the total population of the sample area is out of labour force according to usual status. The proportion of female non-worker (49.63 per cent) is
higher than the proportion of male non-workers (22.85 per cent) (Appendix Table: 5.3).

The labour force participation rate in the sample area is found higher than India and Assam. Consequently, the proportion of non worker is less in the study area than that of India and Assam (Appendix Table: 5.4).

5.3 Workforce Participation Rates (WPR):

Usual Status (PS+SS):

The labour force itself comprises two groups- the employed and the unemployed. The employed group constitutes the workforce. Out of the total labour force (PS+SS) of 697 in our sample area, 676 are employed and 21 are unemployed. It is estimated that the workforce participation rate in the area is 61.85 per cent. Unemployed has a relatively low share in the total population as well as total labour force. The unemployed has a share of 1.92 percent in total population and 3.01 percent in total labour force. It is found that 408 male workers are usually (PS+SS) employed in the sample area and the number of such female workers is 268. So, the male-female share in the total workforce is 60.36 per cent and 39.64 per cent respectively. The male workforce participation rate in the area is 74.59 per cent and for female the work participation rate is 49.08 per cent (Appendix Table: 5.3).

The rural-urban division of participation rate shows that WPR is slightly higher in rural area (62.69 per cent) than in urban area (59.75 per cent). The male WPR in rural area (75.75 per cent) is higher than that in urban area (71.43 per cent). This pattern conforms to the national and state level WPR data. But contrary to
all India and Assam the present study reveals slightly higher WPR for female in urban area (49.40 per cent) than in rural area (48.95 per cent) (Appendix Table: 5.5).

**Usual Principal Status (PS):**

A comparatively high workforce participation rate (PS+SS) in the sample area is undoubtedly a sign of hope. But the dismal feature observed in our sample area is that the work participation rate according to principal status (PS) is low which is slightly higher than national and state level rate. The work participation rate according to principal activity status in the sample area is 39.98 per cent. The work participation rate in this status for India is 36.5 per cent and for Assam is 30.82 per cent. In absolute number 437 persons of the sample households are employed in principal status in which the size of male and female workers is 327 and 110 respectively. The relative share of male and female in the total workforce is 74.83 per cent and 25.17 per cent respectively. Again the workforce participation rate of male and female in this status are 59.78 per cent and 20.15 per cent respectively. So, a high workforce participation rate according to usual status (PS+SS) in the sample area is mainly because of the people's involvement in the workforce as subsidiary status (Appendix Table: 5.1).

**Subsidiary Status (SS):**

Field survey data reveal that 383 persons are employed in subsidiary status in the area. Whereas 174 male workers are employed in this status, 209 female workers are employed in this status in the area. That is, the share of female (54.57 per cent) is higher in total subsidiary status workers than that of male (45.43 per cent).
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The overall work participation rate in subsidiary status is 35.04 per cent with 31.81 per cent male work participation rate and 38.28 per cent female work participation rate (Appendix Table: 5.2).

A comparison of the sample data with the national and state level data shows that both labour as well as workforce participation rate in the sample area is significantly higher than India and Assam in usual status (PS+SS). The labour force participation rate is 39.73 per cent in all India level and 37.78 per cent in Assam in 2009-10. In the same period the labour force participation rate is found as 63.77 per cent in the sample area. The similar trend is observed in workforce participation rate also. The overall work participation rate in the sample area is estimated as 61.85 per cent according to principal and subsidiary status taken together in 2009-10 whereas at national and state level the rates are 38.90 per cent and 35.39 per cent respectively (Appendix Table: 5.4).

Regarding unemployment scenario of the sample population it is visible that the share of unemployed in the total population is higher in the area (1.92 per cent) than the national level (0.83 per cent). The unemployment share of both male (2.56 per cent) and female (1.28 per cent) in their respective population are higher than the national level (1.12 per cent for male and 0.53 per cent for female). On the other hand, the share of unemployed in the total sample population is lesser than the share of unemployed to total population of Assam (2.39 percent). In case of male-female share it is seen that whereas the share of unemployed for male (2.56 per cent) is higher than that of Assam (2.03 per cent) but the share of unemployed in case of
female is less in the sample population (1.28 per cent) than the state level (2.78 per cent). However, the shares of unemployment in all the categories are higher in the sample area than all India level. Rani and Unni (2004) also found the similar pattern regarding unemployment. They viewed that open unemployment in India is relatively low, while the greater problem faced by the majority of the workers is that of underemployment, or employment at low levels of income. This is because most of the population is too poor to remain unemployed and is forced to undertake some economic activity to survive.

**Fig-5.1: Labour Force and Work Force Participation Rate and Share of Unemployment for the year 2009-10**

The labour force as well as the workforce participation rates in our sample area are seems to be much higher than state level and national level rate. As our study is confined to a small area, so, the process of averaging gives us a higher value. Again a higher female participation rate in the sample area compared to India.
and Assam may be partly because of better probing regarding women’s economic activities in the households in the field survey compared to the national large-scale labour force surveys and censuses. The high female participation rate among the sample households could also be to a large extent induced by relative poverty. Rani and Unni (2004), Mahadevia (2002) also observed a similar phenomenon. The inherent economic crisis in the family necessitates support from the women to bring the family above the poverty line. Again increasing availability of work that women can do also increases the participation of women in the labour market. The higher participation of women in the workforce found from field survey data in the present study compared to national and state level participation rates established the fact that official data underestimate women’s work. Much of women paid work have been remained unrecognized by the official data system. Such statistical invisibility has been recognized by many writers like Standing (1999), Mehta (2000), Chen (2001) et al. Underestimation of women in workforce in official data has been attributed mainly to the prejudices of the respondents and enumerators. Most of the economic activities are carried out by women as a part of their household chores and hence remained unrecognized by both respondents and enumerators. Generally the term ‘work’ is so understood that women’s work tends to get undercounted. ‘Work’ is often understood as something requiring a person to go out of his or her house for resulting in wage payments or monetary gains. In case of several self-employed households producing for the market, marketing and related responsibilities are undertaken by the men that take them outside home. On the other hand, women engaging in the same activity are
assigned that part of work which is carried out within the household which generally require larger hour of work. Such being the distribution of responsibility within an activity, women are likely to be seriously underestimated as workers in case of self-employed households. This explains the low proportion of cultivators or agricultural labourers among the females. Cultivators constitute self-employed category wherein underestimation is likely to be very high. The bias against female cultivators gets compounded by the deliberate under reporting by the male members of the family in an attempt to deny property right to the females (Kundu & Premi 1989).

Females are always lagging behind males in the labour market of India. The state of Assam also exhibits the same phenomenon. In the sample population also it is found that there is wide difference between male and female labour force and workforce participation rates. Both labour force and workforce participation rates for male are about three times higher than female in principal status. In this status the labour force participation rate for male is 62.34 per cent and for female is only 21.43 per cent. Again, whereas the workforce participation rate for male is 59.78 per cent, the rate for female is only 20.15 per cent. The male-female difference is quite prominent in usual status (PS+SS) also. Whereas the labour force participation rate in this status for male is 77.15 per cent, the labour force participation for female is 50.37 per cent. Again the workforce participation rate of male in the sample population is 74.59 per cent and for female is 49.08 per cent. But in subsidiary status the work participation rate for female is higher than male in the sample area. In subsidiary status, the work participation rate for male is 31.81 per cent and for the female it is
38.28 percent in the sample area. Thus, it is observed that whereas male work participation rate is about three times higher than female work participation rate in principal status, in subsidiary status female work participation rate is higher than the male work participation rate by about 6 percentage points. It shows the lower status of women workers in the sample area as the labour market is dominated by male workers. From the above analysis it is clear that the high work participation rates for both male and female according to principal and subsidiary status taken together is only for high involvement of the workers in the subsidiary status activities. Similar situation was also observed by Neetha N. (2009) in her analyses of workforce (Appendix Table: 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3).

5.4 Employment in Agriculture and Non-agriculture Sector:

One of the important features of the labour force characteristics of the sample population is that the share of employment in the non-agriculture is larger than agriculture sector. This character is seen in all activity status namely, principal (PS), subsidiary (SS) and principal and subsidiary (PS+SS) status taken together. In principal status 27.23 per cent of all workers are engaged in agriculture and 72.77 per cent in non agriculture. Again, comparatively more female workers are found in non-agriculture than male in principal status. Whereas 67.89 per cent of the male workers are engaged in non-agriculture, 87.27 per cent of all female workers are engaged in non-agriculture. That is, 32.11 per cent of male and only 12.73 per cent of all female workers are employed in agriculture sector (Appendix Table: 5.6).
In subsidiary status, 68.15 per cent of all workers are engaged in non-agriculture and 31.85 per cent in agriculture. It is found that 58.05 per cent of all male workers and 76.56 per cent of all female workers are engaged in non-agricultural activities. That is 41.95 per cent of all male and 23.44 per cent of all female workers are engaged in agriculture (Appendix Table: 5.7).

In the usual activity status (PS+SS), 28.99 per cent of all workers are engaged in agriculture and 71.01 per cent are engaged in non-agriculture. In numbers, out of the total workforce of 676, non-agricultural activities absorb 480 workers and agriculture sector gives employment to 196 workers. Out of the 408 male workers, 278 are employed in non-agriculture and 130 in agriculture. That is, 68.14 per cent of all male workers are involved in non-agriculture sector and 31.86 per cent are engaged in agriculture sector.

Again, out of 268 total women workers, non-agriculture sector includes 202 workers and agriculture sector provides employment to only 66 female workers. That is 75.37 per cent of all female workers are engaged in non-agriculture sector and only 24.63 per cent are engaged in agriculture (Appendix Table: 5.8).

Thus, it is found that non-agriculture predominates over agriculture in terms of employment in the sample area and comparatively more female are engaged in non-agriculture than male. From secondary data analysis also we have already found (in Chapter-III) that the non-agriculture is expanding in the labour market of India and Assam. Workers are increasingly moving from agriculture to non-agriculture sector for livelihood. Several interrelated factors like the pattern of
economic growth, wage rate, worker productivity, education, government programmes and socio-cultural factors have been accounted for growing share of non-agricultural employment in India (Chand and Srivastava 2014). Larger share of non-agriculture than agriculture exhibit the same pattern in our sample area.

Several factors are observed behind the larger share of non-agriculture than agriculture in our study area.

Firstly, possession of agricultural land by the households is an important requisite to engage one in agriculture sector. In our sample area, 44.09 percent households have no agricultural land. The average agricultural land holding of the household is only 0.548 hectre (4.09 bigha). As the family size increases, the family members instead of working with zero marginal productivity (i.e. disguisedly unemployed) compelled to engage themselves in the rural non-farm sector.

Another important factor is that, our study area, Palashbari revenue Circle, is a severely erosion effected area. The erosion affected displaced people have no agricultural land. Instead of engaging themselves as low remunerative agriculture labour, they prefer to engage themselves as casual labour and self employed.

Growth of several new industries / manufacturing units, educational institutions particularly in the urban areas of the circle increases the demand for labour. Growth of construction sector also increases the demand for labour in the area. Brick kiln industry absorbs a large number of male and female workers in the area. Change in attitude / thinking of the young generation also stimulate them to engage themselves in non-agriculture rather than agriculture. It is observed that educated
young people prefer to engage themselves in different non-agriculture activities rather than agriculture.

Thus, in our sample area we observed what Collin Clark and A.G.B Fisher found that in every progressive economy there has been a steady shift of employment and investment from essential primary activities to secondary activities of all kinds and to a still greater extent into tertiary production (Datt and Mahajan 2013).

5.5 Composition of Non-Agriculture Workers:

The major employment groups among the non-agriculture are self-employed, regular wage/salaried employees and casual labour. Division of non-agricultural workers (PS+SS) of the sample households in terms of these categories shows that 60 per cent of the workers are self-employed, 21.04 per cent are regular wage/salaried employees and 11.67 per cent are casual labour. The share of casual labour without paid domestic workers is 8.75 per cent in non-agriculture. Paid domestic workers have 2.92 per cent share in total non-agricultural workers. The share of ‘any other workers’ in the total non-agricultural workers is 7.29 per cent. So self-employed is the largest group in the area as in case India and Assam (Appendix Table: 5.8).

The gender distribution of employment in non-agriculture shows that relatively more female workers are concentrated in self employment than that of male. It is found that 70.79 per cent of all female non-agricultural workers are self-employed and 52.16 per cent of all male workers in non-agriculture are self
employed. On the contrary, in case of regular wage/salaried employees and casual workers the share of male is greater than the share of female. It is visible that 25.54 per cent of male non-agriculture workers are worked as regular wage/salaried employees and 14.85 per cent of all female workers in non-agriculture are regular wage/salaried employees. It is also observed that 12.95 per cent of all male non-agricultural workers are casual labour (without paid domestic workers) and only 2.97 per cent of such female are casual workers. In the category of paid domestic workers the share for male is 0.72 per cent whereas for female the share is 5.94 per cent. If we include paid domestic workers in casual labour then the share of male casual labour in total male non-agricultural workers becomes 13.67 per cent and the share of female casual labour becomes 8.91 per cent (Appendix Table: 5.8).

It is found that self-employed is the major employment group in the sample area as in the labour market of India and Assam. Self-employed are classified as own account workers, employer and work as helper in household enterprise or unpaid family workers. Own account workers occupy the largest share among the self-employed.

In the sample area own account workers accounts for 91.67 per cent of self-employed. Comparatively more female are found as own account workers than male. In case of female self-employed own account workers accounts for 93.01 per cent and in male self-employed the share of own account workers is 90.34 per cent.

In the sample area, 6.25 per cent of all self-employed are unpaid family workers. For the male, the proportion of unpaid family worker is 6.21 per cent and for
the female the share is 6.29 per cent. Employers have a very little share in self-employed. Only 2.08 per cent of self-employed person are found as employer. Whereas 3.45 percent of male self-employed are employer, only 0.70 percent of all female self-employed are employer.

In the category of own account workers, we have found in our survey from low category / qualified unskilled jobs to highly qualified skilled jobs. The type of jobs ranges from small artisans to highly qualified IT workers. The different occupations hold by the own account workers are like petty fish trader, weaving, spinning, sewing and tailoring, vegetable vendors, small & large shopkeeper, beauticians (specially girls), financial services, private tutor, computer workers etc.

5.6 Size of Unorganised Workers * in Usual Status (PS+SS) in the Sample Area:

Informalisation of labour market is one of the main features of labour market of all developing nations. NSS data exhibit that Indian workforce is dominated by unorganized/informal workers. This pattern is visible in our sample area also. Out of the total workforce of 676 in our sample area, the total numbers of unorganized workers are 635 and only 41 are organized. The male-female division shows that out of 408 male workers 374 are unorganized and 34 are organized and out of 268 female workers 261 are unorganized and only 7 are organized (Appendix Table: 5.9).

In terms of percentage share, it is found that 93.93 per cent of all workers are unorganised and only 6.07 per cent are organized which are about the same with all India level. In 2009-10 the share of organized and unorganized sector in the total workforce of India are 6.08 per cent and 93.92 per cent respectively. But our
sample area has larger share of unorganized workers and lower share of organized workers as compared to Assam. It is seen that 89.77 per cent of all workers in Assam are unorganized and 10.23 per cent are organized. The larger share of unorganized workers in our sample households reveals that more workers are facing insecurities compared to Assam (Appendix Table: 5.10).

Informalisation of women's work is clearly visible in the sample area. Comparatively more female are engaged in unorganised work than male. It is found that 91.67 per cent of all male workers and 97.39 per cent of all female workers are unorganized in the sample area. Thus, 8.33 per cent male and only 2.61 per cent female workers are organized in the area. So, it is clear that women in the sample area are mostly concentrated in the unorganized work. Again in the total unorganized workers the shares of male and female are 58.90 percent and 41.10 per cent respectively. In the organized workers the share of male and female are 82.93 per cent and 17.07 per cent respectively. This clearly reflects the disadvantaged position of women in the labour market (Appendix Table: 5.9).

The rural-urban division of unorganized workers in the sample area shows that the share of unorganised workers in the rural area is much higher than in urban area. Whereas 96.52 per cent of total workforce in the rural area is unorganised, 87.17 per cent in urban area is unorganised. All the female workers (100 per cent) in the rural area are unorganised and 91.46 per cent of female workers in urban areas are unorganised. For male also rural-urban division is clear. It is found that whereas 94.39
per cent of all male workers in the study area are unorganised in rural areas, 83.81 per cent of such workers in urban areas are unorganised (Appendix Table: 5.11).

About equal proportion of male workers are found in unorganized sector in Assam and in sample area but the proportion of male unorganized sector workers is higher in India than the sample area in 2009-10. The proportions of male workers in the unorganised sector in India, Assam and sample area are 93.32 per cent, 91.37 and 91.67 per cent respectively. Regarding female workers it is found that proportion of female unorganized workers in total female workers is higher in sample area than national and state level. The proportion of female workers in the unorganised sector in India and Assam are 95.49 per cent and 83.59 per cent respectively. In the sample area 97.39 per cent of all female workers are employed in informal employment.

5.7 Size of Unorganised Workers: Principal Status (PS):

There are 437 principal status (PS) workers in the sample households of which 396 are unorganized and only 41 are organized. That is 90.62 per cent of all worker in principal status are unorganized and only 9.38 per cent are organized.

The male-female division in this status (PS) shows that out of 327 male workers, 293 are unorganized and 34 are organized. Again, out of 110 female workers, 103 are unorganized and only 7 are organized. That is, the percentage share of male and female unorganised workers are 89.60 per cent and 93.64 per cent respectively. Again whereas 10.40 per cent male workers are organized only 6.36 per cent female are organized in principal status. The share of male and female in total
unorganized workforce are 73.99 per cent and 26.01 per cent respectively in this status. So, in principal status also comparatively more female are found as unorganized workers than male (Appendix Table: 5.12).

5.8 Size of Unorganised Workers: Subsidiary Status (SS):

All the subsidiary status workers are observed as unorganised workers. So, all the 383 subsidiary status workers with 174 male and 209 female are unorganized. In this status, the shares of male and female in the total unorganized workforce are 45.43 per cent and 54.57 per cent respectively. So, it is found that whereas in principal status (PS) and in principal and subsidiary status taken together (PS+SS) the share female workers are far lower than male workers, in subsidiary status the share of female is higher than male workers (Appendix Table: 5.13).

5.9 Composition of Unorganised Workers:

Distribution of unorganised workers into two broad sectors, namely agriculture and non-agriculture shows that the non-agriculture sector occupies larger share. In the sample area 69.13 per cent of all unorganised workers (PS+SS) are engaged in non-agriculture and 30.87 per cent are engaged in agriculture.

Self-employed is the main activity group among the unorganised workers. Out of all unorganised agricultural workers 77.55 per cent are self-employed and 22.45 per cent are agricultural labour. Among the non-agriculture also self-employed has the highest share (65.60 per cent) followed by regular wage and salaried employees (13.67 per cent) and casual labour in work other than public works
(12.76 per cent). If we exclude paid domestic workers from casual labour, the share of casual labour becomes 9.57 per cent. Paid domestic workers occupy 1.96 percent share in total unorganised workers.

Among the self-employed own account workers have 91.67 per cent share. Employers have share of only 2.08 percent and unpaid family members have 6.25 per cent share (Appendix Table: 5.14, 5.15 and 5.16).

Distribution of principal status unorganised workers (PS) in the sample area shows that 30.05 per cent are engaged in agriculture and 69.95 per cent in non-agriculture. In agriculture the share of self-employed and agricultural labour are 80.67 per cent and 19.33 per cent respectively. Among the non-agriculture, self-employed has highest share (54.87 per cent) followed by regular wage / salaried employees (21.66 per cent), casual labour (15.88 per cent) and any other (7.58 per cent) (Appendix Table: 5.17).

In the sample area 31.85 per cent of all subsidiary status (SS) unorganised workers are engaged in agriculture and 68.15 per cent in non-agriculture. In agriculture, 87.70 per cent are found as self-employed and 12.30 per cent as agricultural labour. Among the subsidiary status non-agriculture unorganised workers, 85.82 per cent work as self-employed and only 0.77 per cent work as regular wage/salaried employees. The share of casual labour in non-agriculture in this status is 7.66 per cent and of any other worker is 5.75 per cent (Appendix Table: 5.18).
5.10 Participation of Women in the Unorganised Sector:

While the declining sex ratio is a major issue all over the world, the sex ratio in our sample population is quite high. Sex ratio in this area is 998 (in 2009-10) whereas the ratio is 958 in Assam and 940 in India (as per 2011 Census). But, a high sex ratio will be meaningful if it is associated with a high labour force as well as high workforce participation rate. Participation of women in the workforce not only enhances their economic status both in family and society but it also develops the standard of living of the households. The female work participation rate in the sample area (49.08 per cent) is quite high as compared with India (22.29 percent) and Assam (14.89 percent) in 2009-10. This is a sign of hope. But, the actual economic situation of the female workers depends on the quality of jobs in which they have been working (Appendix Table: 5.4).

Women workers in our sample area are largely employed in the unorganised sector. Out of the 268 female (PS+SS) workers of the sample population it is estimated that 261 are unorganized and only 7 female workers are organized. That is, 97.39 per cent of all female workers are unorganised and only 2.61 per cent are organized (Appendix Table: 5.8). It is to be noted that unorganised sector provides employment to 83.52 percent of all female workers in Assam and in all India 95.49 percent female workers are engaged in unorganised sector activities in 2009-10. Thus, informalisation process is more in sample area than in India and Assam.

Comparatively less women workers are found as unorganised workers in principal status (PS) than principal and subsidiary status taken together. The
proportion of unorganised and organized women workers in principal status (PS) are 93.64 per cent and 6.36 per cent respectively. All the subsidiary status workers in the sample area are unorganised.

Unorganised female workers are the most vulnerable section of the society in every respect. So, a large magnitude of unorganised women workers does not signify high economic development. To have an idea about their true economic position it is necessary to have an idea about the nature of jobs performed by the unorganised women workers.

5.11 Distribution of Unorganised Women Workers by Different Activity Status:

Traditionally, agriculture is the main occupation of female in Assam as well as India. Breaking this tradition our survey in sample area exhibits that female workers are mostly operating in non-agriculture sector as their male counterpart. Besides unorganized sector, a large number of female workers are also working in organized sector as unorganized workers. Here, unorganized workers indicate both unorganized workers in the unorganized sector as well as unorganized workers in the organized sector.

It estimated that 97.39 per cent of all female workers (PS+SS) in the sample area are engaged as unorganized workers. These unorganised women workers include all these women labourers who work in unorganised sector as well as unorganised women workers in the organised sector. These are the workers who are not provided with any employment security and social security by their employers.
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The broad division of women workers into agriculture and non-agriculture shows that out of 261 unorganised female workers 66 are engaged in agriculture and 195 are involved in non-agriculture. That is, 74.71 per cent of all female workers are engaged in non-agriculture and only 25.29 per cent are employed in agriculture. For several reasons unorganised women workers shift their choice from agriculture to non-agriculture. Low growth of agriculture compared to industry, high wage rate in non-agriculture compared to agriculture, improvement in education, inter-sectoral differences in worker productivity, government programmes and socio-cultural factor are found responsible for shifting women workers from agriculture to non-agriculture in rural India (Chand and Srivastava 2014) (Appendix Table: 5.14).

5.12 Distribution of Unorganised Women Workers in Different Non-agricultural Activities:

Self employment is the major activity status where majority of women unorganised workers (PS+SS) are concentrated followed by casual labour and regular wage and salaried employees. It is visible that 73.33 per cent of all non-agricultural unorganised female workers are self-employed. Amongst the self-employed own account workers have occupied 93.01 per cent share. Employers have a share of only 0.70 per cent. The unpaid family workers who are focused as the poorest section in different empirical studies have a share of 6.29 per cent in self-employed in our study. In the total non-agricultural women workers the share of own account workers is
68.21 per cent. Employers have only 0.51 per cent in total non-agricultural female workers whereas unpaid family workers have 4.62 per cent in it. Self-employed is the main activity status for female unorganised sector workers in India and Assam as visualized by the NSS data. But the proportion of self-employed women workers is higher in the sample area than in all India level.

The percentage share of regular wage / salaried employees in the total unorganized non-agricultural female workers is 11.80 per cent and casual labourers have the share of 3.08 per cent. However, if we combine paid domestic workers with the casual labourers, the share of casual labourers in the total non-agricultural unorganised female workers becomes 9.23 per cent. It is estimated that 6.15 per cent unorganized female workers in non-agriculture are paid domestic workers. The percentage of ‘any other’ worker on unorganised female worker is 5.64 percent. The proportion of female regular wage/salaried employees and casual labourers are lower in the sample area than India (Appendix Table: 5.15, 5.16).
Fig:-5.2: Distribution of Unorganised Workers among Non-Agriculture

Self-employed and casual labourers together constitute 82.56 per cent of total unorganized non-agricultural female workforce in the sample area. These two categories of workers face different kinds of vulnerabilities or risks. So, they are considered as the weaker sections of the society. They suffer from two types of vulnerabilities- job insecurity or social insecurity or both (Rani and Unni 2004). So, high magnitudes of unorganized women workers in these two statuses signify their poor socio-economic condition. Regular workers in the unorganized sector work for
others and they get salary or wages in return on a regular basis. They enjoy job security. But these workers also suffer from social insecurity due to sickness or injury or old age and are not entitled to any social security against these vulnerabilities. In our sample population only 11.80 per cent female are such regular workers (Appendix Table: 5.15).

A comparison of the distribution of the female unorganised workers with that of male shows that relatively more female (73.33 per cent) are self-employed than that of male (59.43 per cent). Within the self-employed, whereas the relative share of female as own account worker is 93.01 percent that of male is 90.34 per cent. Employers have a very small share in self-employed. But gender difference is quite visible in this category also. Whereas 3.45 per cent male self-employed are employer only 0.70 per cent female self employed are engaged as employer. The share of unpaid family workers in total self employed is about the same for both male and female (6.21 per cent for male and 6.29 per cent for female).

The gender difference is also distinct if we consider the share of own account worker, employer and unpaid family worker in total non-agricultural employment. It is estimated that 60.13 per cent of all non-agricultural workers in the sample area are own account workers. Whereas 68.20 per cent of all female non-agricultural workers are own account workers, 53.69 per cent of such male workers are own account workers. Employers have a share of only 1.37 per cent in the total non-agricultural employment. Out of all non-agricultural male workers, 2.05 per cent are engaged as employer and out of all non-agricultural female workers only 0.51 per
cent are engaged as employer in the sample area. At all India level also 0.1 per cent of non-agricultural women workers in the rural area and 0.7 per cent of non-agricultural women workers in the urban areas are employers (Appendix Table: 5.15).

In the sample area 4.10 percent of all unorganised non-agricultural workers are unpaid family workers. In case of unpaid family workers, the share of female is relatively higher (4.62 per cent) than that of male (3.69 per cent). However the share of unpaid family workers for both male and female in the sample area is much lower than all India level. In India, the share of unpaid family workers for female in non-agriculture is 35.1 per cent in rural area and 23.7 per cent in urban areas (Table: 3.5 of Chapter-III).

The condition of regular wage / salaried employees considered to be better than the other category workers in the unorganised sector. Here also the position of women is far behind the men. It is observed that 15.16 per cent of all male non-agriculture unorganised workers are regular wage / salaried employees. The proportion of female in this category is 11.80 per cent. Similar picture is seen in case of casual labour also. Whereas the share of male casual labour is 14.75 per cent, the share for female is only 3.08 per cent. The share of casual labour combined with paid domestic workers for male is 15.57 per cent and for female is 9.23 per cent. In the category of paid domestic workers, which is generally considered as female work, the relative share of female (6.15 per cent) is larger than that of male (0.82 per cent) (Appendix Table: 5.15).
To capture the women workers in the unorganised sector better, data has been collected for some activities which are generally considered as women related activities. Sewing, tailoring, spinning and weaving for others are some such activities in the sample area which are found to be dominated by female workers. All these activities are clubbed in own account worker (OAW). However, the detailed analysis shows that the activity status which employs largest number of unorganised women workers is spinning for others: out of 261 unorganised women workers (PS+SS), 64 are engaged in spinning for others. That is, 24.52 per cent of all unorganised female workers are engaged in this activity status. On the other hand out of 374 male unorganised workers only 3 are engaged in this category. That is only 0.80 per cent of all male unorganised workers are engaged in this category. This particular activity is dominated by female as 95.52 per cent of all unorganised workers engaged in spinning are female and only 4.48 per cent are male. Another women dominated activity is ‘weaving for others’. In this category, it is observed that 11.11 per cent of all unorganised female workers are employed whereas only 1.07 per cent of all male unorganised workers are engaged in weaving. Again out of the all unorganised workers engaged in ‘weaving for others’ the proportion of female workers is 87.88 per cent and of male is 12.12 per cent. In sewing and tailoring for others, 1.53 per cent of all unorganised female workers are found to work and 1.34 per cent of all unorganised male workers are engaged in this status. The female –male share in this status are 55.56 per cent and 44.44 per cent respectively. Paid domestic workers are another female dominated activity in the sample area where female and
male shares are respectively 85.71 per cent and 14.29 per cent. Paid domestic workers are the most exploited section of the unorganized workers. It is estimated that 4.60 per cent of all unorganized women workers in the sample area are engaged as paid domestic workers whereas the proportion of male in this category is 0.53 per cent (Appendix Table: 5.9).

Other than sewing, tailoring, spinning and weaving, there are a number of heterogeneous activities in the category of own account workers. The activities found in the survey in this category are ranges from low income activities to high income activities. We have found a number of own account workers like small artisans (who made handicraft products), vegetable vendors, fish vendors, persons engaged with production and selling of local wine, small shopkeepers, beauticians, IT workers, private tutor, grocers, person engaged with financial market, contractor etc. The earning of these workers is varying from person to person.

The activities which are considered as better paid are dominated by male workers. For example, in the category of employer in the household industry the share of male workers is 83.33 per cent and of female only 16.67 per cent. In regular wage / salaried employees, the share of male is 70.30 per cent and of female is 29.70 per cent. In the casual labour (without paid domestic worker) where the share of male is 85.71 per cent, the share of female is only 14.29 per cent. In the category ‘self-employed in agriculture’ the share of male is 69.74 per cent and of female is 30.26 per cent. Again in case of agricultural labour the male-female shares are 54.55 per cent and 45.45 per cent respectively. Thus, occupational segregation is quite visible in the
area. Women have been found to occupy the low paid jobs and the male in comparatively high paid jobs. To measure the occupational segregation Duncan Index is calculated. The value of the index is found as 0.4032 which suggests that 40 percent women (or men) would have to change occupations in order to eliminate the difference in occupational distribution (Appendix Table: 5.19, 5.20).

From the above data base analysis it is clear that horizontal and vertical segregation is present in the labour market of the sample area. It is found that women workers are concentrated as unorganized workers than male which can also be treated as informalisation of women’s work as often researchers have been mentioned. Within the unorganized sector women are concentrated in a relatively narrow range of labour-intensive light industries like weaving and spinning. In agriculture also, more women are concentrated as agricultural labour rather than self-employed in agriculture. This signifies that sexual division of labour is also clearly visible in the informal sector of the sample area.

5.13 Notes and References:

Note : * NCEUS definition of Unorganised workers has been followed in the study.


Collin, Clark (1940), “The Conditions of Economic Progress”.

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