CHAPTER - I

Introduction

1.1. Statement of the Problem:

Unorganised sector has a significant place in the labour market of most developing economies. Due to stagnant or shrinking employment opportunities in organised sector, a major portion of workforce is now absorbed in the unorganised sector. In case of India, almost 90 per cent of the labour force is engaged in the unorganised sector activities and nearly one-third of the country’s output is estimated to originate in this sector (Banarjee 1988).

Unorganised sector is the main source of employment for women. In most developing countries it accounts for 95 per cent of women workers in non-agriculture (UN 2000). Unorganised sector which is known as informal sector internationally provides employment to a vast mass of illiterate and unskilled women as this sector generally does not require much training or education. Even skilled women are absorbing by the low paid unorganised sector because they are allegedly discriminated against in the labour market which favours men. NSS data clarify that about 96 per cent women workers in India and about 84 per cent of women workers in Assam are absorbed in unorganized sector.

Informal sector is generally considered as a residual sector. Because of non availability of jobs in the formal sector, workers enter into the informal sector. It is commonly believed that the process of globalization and liberalization will reduce the size of this sector. But it is observed that most of the countries have experienced a decline in formal wage employment and accompanying a rise in
informal employment after liberalization as in case of India. Although liberalization has led to a job losses in the organized sector, it has created new employment opportunities in the unorganized sector. Lack of upward mobility and low skill are the important features of these newly created employment opportunities. On the other hand liberalization has brought substantial opportunities for some categories of the educated middle class such as those in Information Technology, requiring higher skills and providing higher income. It is seen that women with high educational qualification have begun to work in a large number of non-traditional areas, from television to information technology. But women from rural and poor families have fewer opportunities. Even where opportunities exist, they are less appealing (NCL 2002).

The constitution of India guarantees equal opportunity of employment to both male and female. But despite the concrete efforts of government, the economic status of women is lagging far behind their male counterparts. Women work in every sphere of life, but their contribution is not recognized. Much of women’s paid work—not just their unpaid housework—is not counted in official statistics. Once the invisible paid works of women particularly home-based remunerative works are fully counted the share of women in the workforce would increase (Chen 2001). Despite the advances women have made in many societies, women’s concerns are still given second priority almost everywhere. They face discrimination and marginalization everywhere and do not share the fruit of development equally with male. Their contribution is not given due recognition. Women workers in unorganized sector not only bear all the
hazards of this sector, but also they are exploited within this sector as they are discriminated against male in every sphere. They are made to work for long hours and wages paid to them are not according to their work. These women workers are living below the minimum accepted standard. Women workers in unorganized sector lag behind the males in terms of level and quality of employment. They are paid lower than males even for the same jobs. These women workers are generally illiterate, unskilled, socially backward and economically weak. Poverty, lack of access to education and inadequate health facilities are their major problems.

Unorganized sector women workers are overwhelmingly present in agriculture, forestry, fishing, plantation and allied activities with the highest proportion working as agricultural labourers and cultivators. They predominately concentrate in certain industries such as garments, textiles, food and electronics. These women workers are subject to various exploitative practices including attempts to depress their wages or remuneration. Though they are economically active and contribute to the national economy, they remain invisible and poor (NCL 2002). Although women’s contribution to the family as well as nation remains unrecognized, yet their services are valuable. The World Bank in its annual report 1989 observed that 35 per cent of Indian households below the poverty line were headed by women and in most cases, were dependent exclusively on female income. The report observed that women’s contribution is significant in families with low economic status. The poorest families thus depend on women’s economic productivity (Dave 2012). According to the NSS 1999-2000, the contribution of the unorganised sector to the Net Domestic Product
(NDP) and its share in the total NDP at current prices has been over 60 per cent. In case of Assam the limited data shows that the contribution of unregistered manufacturing sector to NSDP at factor cost (at current prices) has increased considerably from Rs.110530 lakh in 2004-05 to Rs.164202 lakh in 2009-10 and again increased to Rs.183624 lakh in 2012-13 (Economic Survey, Assam 2012-13).

As unorganised sector is predominantly occupied by women labour, we can comment that women unorganised labourers have much contribution to National Income (NI). But women's works are rarely recognised. Women's employment in family farms or business is rarely recognized as economically productive either by men or women. And income generated from their work is generally controlled by the men. "A majority of women unorganised workers on the rural sectors (51 per cent) works on their own land – land that belongs to their family to which the women are unlikely to have little rights. They receive no wages from this work but contribute to the family income. Marketing of productive is mostly in hands of men and rarely do women have access to the income earned. Amongst some communities and in some areas women do play an important role in marketing. Even on these cases, the income received is preempted for household expenses and the common pool, and is not available for asset building by the women or for their own needs" (Assam Human Development Report 2003).

Undoubtedly, possession of property and income determines the role and position of a person in the family as well as in the society as a whole. And
since, unorganised women workers rarely have any access to income and property; they have less decision making power in the family. Decisions are generally undertaken by their male partner. Dominated by men, these women are extremely exploited in the family as well as in the society. Women’s multi-dimensional problems are not recognised by anybody in the male dominated society of India as well as Assam. The lack of attention to the role of women is due to the widely held opinion that women’s first responsibility lies in her domestic duties and that paid jobs are only a necessary inconvenience for lower class women or a luxury for higher class women.

Realising the huge representation of women workers in unorganized sector in India as well as Assam, it would be useful to examine the different issues and concerns of these workers. We need to understand why women are over-represented in informal jobs. It is necessary to recognise the economic contribution of women’s invisible remunerative informal work empirically. The present research study is an attempt in these directions.

1.2 Review of Literature:

There have been extensive studies on women workers in the unorganized sector with different issues. The studies on informal sector women workers have been designed to document women’s participation in economic activities invisible to policy makers and to understand their living and working condition in order to provide information base necessary for policy intervention. The main issues / findings of some scholars, economists and social scientists
related to women workers engaged in the unorganised sector have been discussed here.

Invisibility of women’s work is one of the most widely discussed issues found in literature. Participation of women in the labour market is low in all the developing nations. The female work participation rate all over the world is much lower than that of male. Low labourforce and workforce participation rates for female are analysed by many scholars in their writings. Women work at least 12 to 14 hours a day. But their economic activities are not fully recognized and counted (Standing 1999). Researchers have found several reasons behind this low work participation rate. Women’s works are basically invisible in every society. Women’s works, especially in agriculture and the unorganized sector, has not been counted in different population census. A lot of work they do is unrecognized leave alone rewarded with equal remuneration. Some of the factors responsible for this statistical invisibility of women works are bias of the interviewers, bias of male household / respondents, poorly framed questionnaire and cultural bias regarding women working outside home and under-reporting of it (Mehta 2000).

Bhasin (2003) relates invisibilities of women’s works to “gender or sexual division of labour”. This refers to the allocation of different roles, responsibilities, and tasks to women and men based on societal ideas of what men and women should do and are capable of doing and not necessarily according to their individual preference or capabilities. In spite of the involvement of both men and women in productive activities, the gender division of labour is prominent. Often women’s productive activities are an extension of the work they do at home.
In agriculture sector, women’s productive works is not reflected in economic accounting because it is considered an extension of their household work. Women’s reproductive activities, namely giving birth to new human beings, caring of children, cooking, feeding, washing, cleaning, nursing and other household activities are necessary for human survival, but are neither considered work, nor an economic activity and hence are invisible, unrecognized and unpaid.

The census and NSS (National Sample Survey) data indicate a declining trend in work participation rate in the 15-59 age groups. NSS data do show a fall in female work participation rate. The data exhibit a process of feminization of the work place, particularly in urban areas. This can be attributed to the growth of the informal sector. Women workers being less organized have less staying power and often accept lesser remuneration and inferior working conditions. It is found that work participation rate (WPR) by daily status has gone up. In the case of women in urban areas, it is not the per cent of casual workers but that of regular workers which shows an increase. Women in India are seen to participate much more in the age grouped 30-39 years. Further, participation in labour market is substantially higher those who belong to very poor households and are without education at all (Gaur 2002). The report of the National Commission on Labour (2002) also visualize that WPR has been falling for both male and female. However, WPR for female is much less than that of male.

Women enter the market as wage earners but occupy secondary position in the workforce. Women workers are found to concentrate as unorganized workers. Concentration of women workers in the unorganized sector
is another issue which has been dealt with by many scholars. The estimates by Women in the Informal Economy Globalising and Organising (WIEGO) suggest that informal economy accounts for over half the urban employment in Africa and Asia and a quarter in Latin America and Caribbean. In Asia and the Pacific, women in the informal sector are concentrated in small enterprises. These are often family based using simple labour intensive techniques of production which involves repeating, monotonous work. These jobs are unregulated, vulnerable and dependent on sub-contracting.

Analysing the existing data of different developing countries Chen (2001) held the view that women are over-represented in informal sector worldwide by which she firstly means that informal sector is the primary source of employment for women. Secondly, she also found that informal sector is the larger source of employment for women than for men. In most of the countries relatively more women workers are engaged in informal sector than that of men workers. Thirdly, women’s share of the total informal workforce outside of agriculture is higher than men’s share in 9 out of 21 developing countries for which data are available in her study. She opines that informal sector is even larger than official statistics suggest as much of women’s paid work- not just their unpaid housework- are not counted in official statistics. If the magnitude of women’s invisible paid work, particularly home based remunerative work, were to be fully counted, both the share of women and the share of informal workers in the workforce would increase.
Kalpana Majumdar (2011) in her analysis about women, work and poverty in “Women and Work, Barriers and Strategies” shows that for women informal employment generally represents a larger source of employment than formal employment. Again the share of women’s in informal employment is larger than men. In developing countries over 60 per cent of women workers are in informal employment outside of agriculture, far more if agriculture is included. Within the informal economy, women are concentrated in work associated with low and unstable earnings and with high risks of poverty. Outside of agriculture, women are more likely than men to be own account workers, domestic workers, unpaid contributing workers in family enterprises and industrial outworkers. She also finds that women’s hourly and monthly earnings are generally lower than men’s in all employment categories with a few exceptions among public sector employees in certain countries, such as El Salvador, and in countries like Egypt. Again women work fewer hours on average in paid work than do men since women spend long hours in unpaid household labour. However, despite the low earnings and precarious nature of much of women’s paid work, in both developed and developing countries, women’s labour force participation can help keep a family out of poverty provided there are additional sources of family income.

Micro level studies on informal sector and specific industries has shown that women’s employment has increased mainly in the unorganized and informal activities and that they are concentrated in the lower rungs of employment (Banarjee, 1985). The macro trend of women workers shows that as in other developing countries in India too, a higher proportion of women are in
informal employment compared to men and women are over represented in the informal sector. Satpathy (2004) found in his analysis on informal sector in India that women are more dependent on informal economy especially in informal agriculture than men as a primary source of employment, and the proportion of women in the informal economy is more than that of men. Jayati Ghosh (2001) looked into the macro trends of urban women workers in the 1990's and found that unemployment and underemployment and also unpaid unorganized work done at home are its salient features. C.P. Rai in his book “Working Women in India” shows that out of total working women in 1971, the unorganized sector alone employed 94 per cent which gone up to 96 per cent during 1981 census. Thus it is observed that women worker's participation in the unorganized sector have an increasing trend. The unorganized sector has broad dimension like agriculture, animal husbandry, fisheries, home based industries like handicrafts, handlooms, coir industry, agarbatti industry, bidi industry, sericulture, construction industry, and the like.

Informal sector is the main source of occupation for the women workers. Various economic and institutional factors are found responsible for the concentration of women workers in the unorganized sector by the researchers. They are engaged in informal work for a variety of reasons. For some it is a necessity, their only resort, or their best option. Others involved informal work for personal fulfillment, social obligation, or as a means to supplement primary income. Poverty, illiteracy and low level of education are some important issues
related with the unorganized sector women workers and these have been found to be the major determinants of women's participation in the unorganized sector.

Kutty (1957) in his study on women labour of cashew industries found that there were various social, psychological and economic reasons which motivated women to take up informal job. However, it is the economic factors, which motivated them mainly to join the cashew industry. The positive effect of their employment is that they earned money and raise their standard of living. In addition to this they were exposed to a complex process and learnt many new things. Their contact with different kind of people and their participation in union activities made them empowered enough. But their employment affected the health of their children as they were not able to devote much time to their worlds. The children in many cases suffered from various diseases and died.

Earning income is the main reason of joining women in the informal sector jobs. By joining these jobs they earned money and raise the standard of living. It is found that informal sector women workers work contributed roughly 40 per cent of the income of the family (Shramshakti 1988). The informal women workers contribute a significant amount to family income through their engagement in informal sector activities (Tripathy and Das 1991). There is prevalence of female and child labourers in unorganized sector in order to supplement family income (Swami and others 1989). Women go to work because of the irregular nature of employment that their men are involved and the low income they make. By taking to work these women feel that it can both minimize the number of days either of them in without work and also supplement the
families' income (Gulati 1994). Sudha Deshpande (1996) found in her study that ignorance, traditional bound attitudes, illiteracy, lack of skills, seasonal nature of employment, heavy physical work of different types, long hours of work with limited payment, sex discrimination in wage structure, lack of guarantee of minimum wages/ comprehensive legislation/ minimum facilities, migration and disintegration of families, bondage and alienation etc. are some characteristics of employment of women in this sector. But these unattractive sectors still involve many women because they search these jobs for their livelihood.

Poverty is considered as one of the important reasons of concentration of women workers in the unorganized sector. It is found that nearly 70 per cent of unorganized sector women workers come from families below poverty line (Banarjee 1985). The concentration of women workers in the informal sector occupations is not due to their choice but because there is no other alternative for them and that they are working all through their lives in such jobs. Poverty is pushing a growing number of women in agricultural wage workers who were not previously in the labour force or mere self-employed as cultivator or artisans. This trend is often refers as the feminization of the agricultural labour force (David 1996). Women are motivated to work as agricultural labour due to poverty (Saxena and Srivastava 2002).

Human capital theory holds the view that lower level of human capital in the form of low education and lack of training push women to concentrate in the unorganized sector. Illiteracy and low level of education have been found to be the major determinants of women's participation in the
unorganized sector. Evenzer Ravichandran (1988) from his study on socio-economic conditions of women domestic workers in slums of Madras found that 50 per cent of the women workers were illiterate and 44 per cent had education up to primary level only. So they are unable to find job in the organized sector. Illiteracy is the main constraint for female to take part in development and to find job in modern sphere (Swami and others, 1989)

Tripathy and Das (1991) while examining the problems of informal women labour in the tribal districts of Orissa on the basis of the primary data collected through a field survey reveals that tribal women of Phulbani can not enter in organized sector because of low education and training. So they have to join the unorganized sector jobs. Kanungo (1991) who worked in home based girl workers in Orissa revealed that 16 per cent of the part-time workers were just literate, 20 per cent had formal schooling of 0-3 years.

Ramaswami (1993) also found that women in the unorganized sector work with the lowest form of technology and carry out less skilled jobs.

Anjali Widge (1995) focused on women in the domestic service sector of the informal economy especially on part time workers. She also admits illiteracy as the major cause of employment of women in the informal sector. Most of her sampled women (89 per cent) were totally illiterate. Only 11 per cent had basic education. But, important fact is that these illiterate women were educating their children especially says: 70 per cent were educating their boys and 47 per cent were educating girls.
Sri Devi (1999) in her study on women in unorganized sector in Vijayawada found that women lack necessary skills and social contacts to find employment in organized sector. Out of the sampled 107 women workers in her study, it was found that 16 were working as street vendors, 18 as coolies, 45 were domestic workers, 24 were in petty business and 4 were working in a plastic company. She found that these workers get much less remuneration and worse still was that the female earned much less than their male counterpart. Nearly 65 per cent women engaged in unorganized sector would prefer to switch over to jobs in the organized sector if they are given opportunity. NCEUS (2007) Report on Conditions of Work and Promotion of Livelihoods in the Unorganised Sector also finds that low access to education and lower level of education keep women mainly in unorganised non-agriculture and agriculture sector. Simultaneously, the report recognized the gender bias in women’s entry into the organized sector as even with higher levels of schooling women are found in regular jobs as unorganised workers and in fact the women regular unorganised workers in the organized sector have even higher mean year of schooling, 9.6 compared to 8.8 for men.

Arunachalam (1997) in her work on women in the informal sector examined the impact of new macroeconomic policies that are being implemented in India on the lives and work of women and found that these policies may lead to greater unemployment among women. Informal women will be the only option for these unemployed women.
Over and above all the factors listed above—institutional factors like gender stereotyping and patriarchal norms controlling women’s lives have been attracted the attention of a number of researchers, particularly of those who had examined the problem from the perspective of a feminist economists. Women are more likely to work in the informal sector than the formal sector as the result of their household responsibilities, particularly their responsibilities for the care of children. Some tend to argue that it is better suited to allowing women to combine household work with paid work because many informal sector activities can be undertaken from the home (Losby et al 2002). Some others (Beneria & Roldan 1987) tend to argue that women are forced into the informal sector because the formal sector fails to accommodate their household responsibilities.

Some other issues highlighted by the researchers are related with their socio-economic condition, working condition, exploitation, deprivation, wage differential and indebtedness etc.

Women workers who are in unorganised sector suffer from disabilities and exploitations by a large extent against those who are in organised sector (Banarjee 1982). Banarjee, in her report of the survey of women workers in the unorganized sector of Calcutta found that majority of them were domestic servants and rest were doing unskilled and semi-skilled jobs. About 25 per cent of them were working as piece rate workers and many of them were ready to work even in social tabooed areas. The problems of working women in the unorganised sector are problem of discrimination and differences in wages etc. This is related
to lack of marketing links especially in rural areas, lack of capital and non availability of raw materials (Gangrade and Gathia 1983).

It is found that wages paid to female labourers for different operations were lower than the males. However, the difference in wages was marginal in operations like harvesting and threshing. It is opined that the female labours are paid in commensuration with their work efficiency (Malik and Giri 1983). Shramshakti (1988), the report by the National Commission of Self-employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector based on 1.5 lakh questionnaires found that 35 per cent of respondent earned less than Rs. 3000.00 in a whole year. Evenezer Ravichhandran (1988) found that the lowest income received by women domestic workers was Rs. 20.00 per month while the highest was Rs.70.00 per month. And the average family income was found to be Rs.160.00 only. Almost 86 per cent of these workers were heavily indebted. As high as 76 per cent is suffered from body ache.

Discrimination in wages on the basis of sex is examined by Sharmà (1989). While examining the wage differential for women as agricultural labourers in Mathura district of Uttar Pradesh, he found that social prejudices, lack of mobility and family compulsion were some of the important reasons responsible for wage discrimination on the basis of sex. Women in every work are lower paid and their earnings are much less than those of male (Tom 1989). Singharoy and Agrawal (1989) reveal that 48 per cent of the rural work force is women and yet they are discriminated in wages and social status.
The workers in the unorganised sector work in deplorable working/employment conditions. It is more so for female labour. Chandola (1995) in his study to investigate the employment condition of women workers in the unorganised sector with a focus on ready made textile garment industry found that the open drainage, the interconnected narrow lanes and the unsanitary condition not only make mobility difficult specially during rainy seasons which ultimately affect the level of output but also act as health hazard. The adverse working conditions under which home based women workers are destined to work not only reflect the seasonal variations in their employment (both in terms of number of hours and days) but also have a combined effect on the total level wage.

Gabriel Dietrich (1995) is of the view that insecurity and lack of safety are the hallmark of the employment of women in the informal sector. Majority of women workers are classified as marginal workers because of the irregular nature of their employment. Since they are marginal workers, they are devoid of several social security benefits such as maternity benefits, pension etc. Work security is nil as even work records are mostly non-existing.

In a study on socio-economic and health conditions of women in Madras conducted by Alphonse Miranda and Mahadevan (1988) found that more than 50 per cent of the employed women were part-time domestic workers and were employed in more than two houses. Stomach ailments, menstrual problem, anemia and general weakness were the common problems reported by women domestic workers.
Sudha Kumari (1989) found that the unorganized sector provided employment to 96.33 per cent of women workers. She pointed out various reasons of rapid increase in the size of unorganized women workers and also analyse the working conditions of these workers. The organized sector has too weak employment opportunity in the context of rising levels of open unemployment. Rise of small enterprises like small retail shops, hotels and restaurant and repair shops are also some contributing factors for the growth of informal sectors. In these days of struggle for survival, the petty self employment is also rapidly growing. Agriculture still employs women to the extent of 25 per cent of the workforce though growing mechanization has reduced the number of women workers in the same occupations. But the women workers in the unorganised sector are unsecured and unprotected. They are also discriminated in wage payment. Even for the same job, they get lower wages than men. In the study about the economies of informal sector of Sambalpur town, Orissa, Dr. Samal (1990) has found that though few entrepreneurs earn comfortable income, about two-third of the informal sector participants' families are poor since their per capita income is less than the poverty line. The earnings of about one fifth of entrepreneurs, own account workers and wage labour is below the minimum wage fixed by the Government of Orissa.

While examining the problems of informal women labour in the tribal district of Orissa, Tripathy and Das(1991) had taken the sample of 25 construction labourers, 25 maid servant, 25 washer women, 25 sales women and vegetables vendor and 25 from allied groups. The study pointed out that there were
less than 50 per cent of women labour forces in the age ranges of 15-60 years, 33 per cent of the sample labours are below the age of 15 years. Hardly 8 per cent of women labourers have school education up to 8 to 9 years. Women engaged in washing activities belong to 98 per cent who are mainly belonging to khaned, goundu, panda, suda, keute castes. An important factor determining the amount of income of the informal household is the size of land holdings. From the study it was revealed that 38.4 per cent of the workers have no land, 32 per cent have a marginal, 23.3 per cent a small size of land holding and 6.4 per cent have landed property of 5 acres. The study further pointed out that maid servant had the lowest status among all categories of informal workers. Most of women belong to this category were divorcee, widows and younger girls.

From study on the home based girl workers in Orissa, Kanungo (1991) revealed that 16 per cent of the part-time workers were just literate, 20 per cent had formal schooling of 2-3 years. Average income of the workers was between Rs. 30-60 per month. There was no fixed working hours for full timers whereas part timer had to work for more than two hours. The health of most of these girls was not satisfactory due to irregularity in their meals.

Thomas Gracious (1992) worked on female domestic workers in stuna community of Indore, Madhya Pradesh. Most of his respondents were illiterate. It was found that most of the domestic workers (75 percent) belonged to the backward classes. He also found that 36 per cent respondents had 6-8 children, and 57 per cent reported that there were frequent quarrels in the family. One third of them were not aware of even the wages. They had no fixed time of work. One
fourth of the respondents belonged to rural areas and they felt that they were looked down upon with suspicion when they returned to their villages.

Agriculture, animal husbandry and dairying, social and agro-forestry, fisheries, handicrafts, Khadi and village industries, handloom weaving, construction and sericulture are the several segments of the unorganized sector where women labour generally concentrated. In rural areas, women are mainly found as self-employed and home based workers. Women in the unorganized sector work with lowest form of technology and carry out less skilled jobs. These women are associated with gainful employment with child bearing, child rearing and the performance of domestic chores (Ramaswami, 1993).

Susan Bullock (1994) wrote that the extent to which the informal sector is a ‘female’ sector varies geographically and over time. As unemployment rises, in most countries women’s possibilities for entering the formal sector remain even more limited than men’s, and the informal sector may be their only option and not simply the last resort. It has been suggested that for men the informal sector is a stop gap until they find formal employment whilst women tend to stay within it. This is not necessarily because of lack of choice; for some women, the flexibility of working arrangement and diversity of opportunities are the positive side of informal activity. In the course of the 1980s as more and more men lost their jobs, or falling wages and rising prices made their incomes inadequate, or families split up through migration or divorce, women were drawn into own account work or wage labour on whatever terms they could get. Susan views that women are especially numerous in the lowest paid and most exploited categories.
of works; in small enterprise where they may work in sweat shop conditions or as outworkers; in the simplest types of self employment with minimal capital tools and raw materials, as unpaid family worker in domestic work and in commercial sex work. The range of jobs women perform is as limited in the informal sector as it everywhere. It is not that women lack initiative or business ability, on the contrary, the way women are able to scrape income together on the basis of almost no inputs but their own labour and ingenuity inspires admiration and respect. But when the margins are too light, it is almost impossible to turn survival activities into growth.

Ali (1997) classified unorganized sector workers into three categories namely, home based workers, wage workers and self-employed. He viewed that these workers do not have any protection in matters pertaining to wage and working conditions, job security, health care, maternity benefits, provident fund, retirement benefits. He analyses the applicability of variety of labour legislations relating to child labour, women labours, migrant labours and contract labour on this sector and finds these laws have failed to improve the overall situation of the workers in unorganized sector.

Mandal (1997) identified some problems associated with the women workers in the unorganized sector with special reference to Bihar. He found that illiteracy, low social back ground and poverty are the special features of women workers in the unorganised sector. They are paid lower wages than male workers. The legislative measures like Factory Act, Minimum Wage Act and Maternity Benefit Act, etc do not cover all categories of the women workers in unorganized
sector. Even most of the women workers are unaware about these schemes. While suggesting the strategies for empowering women in the unorganised sector he gave importance on having accurate insight of the policy makers on the women workers. He also gave importance on making the women aware of their legal and social rights. Effective implementation of existing legislatures and even introductions of new legislation is necessary for the betterment of the women workers.

J.D. Paul Choudhury (2002) in her research work “Women Workers in Informal Sectors and Their Qualitative Contribution in Human Capital-A Micro Study on Greater Guwahati” finds that the monthly average income of workers in the unorganized sector is inadequate to meet the cost of living of urban cities. In her study the analysis of sample data reveals that in lower ladder of employment people suffer from population explosion, poverty and more specially women are victims of discrimination where both male and female work together.

There are glaring differences in average earnings per worker in the organized and unorganized sector. Madhuri Nath (2005) in her secondary data base work “Rural Women Workforce in India” found that the per capita earnings of women workers in organized sector in 1981 was Rs.11,555 (963 per month) as against Rs. 2,720 (227 per month) for workers in unorganized sector.

The plight of the women in the unorganized sector is miserable as they work at extremely low wages with total lack of job security and unprotected by any government labour legislature. Social and religious tradition and illiteracy is considered the main factor responsible for the low female work participation.
So, there is an urgent need to promote new social attitude toward working women (Pandey, 2002).

Singh (2001) from his field study on women domestic workers pointed out that unlike the workers of the organized sector the women domestic workers did not enjoy better conditions of work and working conditions, neither did they get satisfactory wages. Singh found out that 41.33 per cent of these workers were in the age group of 31 to 40 years and 48 per cent were less than 30 years. 40.67 per cent of these workers were from backward castes while 21.22 per cent were from lower castes. 25.33 per cent workers possessed ‘kuchcha’ houses and 20 per cent had pucca houses. 65.33 per cent houses had no electricity while 14.67 per cent had no toilet. 64 per cent of the domestic workers were under debt.

Gaur and Rachita Rana (2002) found that majority of women work in unorganized sector for low wages. Several factors like low level of skill, very high level of exploitation, illiteracy, ignorance and surplus labour were found responsible for low wages. They pointed out following reasons for prevalence of women workers in the unorganized sector - (i) Women workers accept lower wages as compared to their male counterparts, (ii) There is insufficient income of the family, (iii) They may be very poor, (iv) There may be bad addiction in the family, (v) There may be death in the family and women is put in the labour for earning livelihood, (vi) There may have been some natural calamity which might have led to migration. Even children of such families are compelled to work. (vii) Some women have to work to redeem family debt or debt taken by them.
Parul Saxena (2002) studied about the women ‘chikan’ workers in Lucknow city. In her study she finds that there is no upper or lower age limit to work in the ‘chikan’ (hand-woven embroidery) industries. There is a wide distribution of age ranging from below 15 years to 60 years and above. The majority of them are between 21-30 years i.e. 43.33 per cent. Old women work participation is comparatively less i.e. 16.66 per cent. Most of the women workers are illiterate; their education level is very low i.e. 43.33 per cent women were not educated. Mostly they are married i.e. 53.3 per cent women are engaged due to financial problem in their married life. She also finds that contribution of the women to the family income is crucial for the survival of the family. In many families male head is unemployed. There are many female headed households in this sector. The major part of their income is spent on food and other essential items of daily need. Most of the women workers are indebted. Debts are incurred for multifarious causes and the most important reasons for taking loans are sickness and marriage. Their debts generally remain unpaid, so getting credit is a big problem for them. It is observed in the study that 78.3 per cent women have taken loans and 12.1 per cent do the saving from their income. It is seen that women earned as much as their husbands but they did not enjoy equality of status within the family. In most of the cases decisions are taken by their husbands or by the parent in-law. Male member does management of funds and 8.66 per cent women hand over their earnings to their husbands.

Nilay Kumar and Amita Sribastava (2002) find that women working in the unorganized sector are forced to continue working despite the appalling
conditions because they have no other choice. Many of them are sole-earners in the family and this very dependence on their wages makes them vulnerable to accept miserably low wages and bad working conditions.

Monica Saxena and B. B. L Srivastava (2002) studied about the socio-economic condition of working women in agricultural sector with 150 randomly selected respondents of the two villages-Mahespur and Kotwa of Kachi Vidyapeeth Block of Varanashi district. It is found from their study that the majority of women labourers belonged to lower castes viz. backward castes, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. It is revealed that most of the women in agricultural sector are motivated due to poverty and non-availability of work and familial occupations. It is found that low wages, lack of security and sexual harassment are the problems faced by women workers. They work in such a situation which is not bearable but they are forced to do their jobs for the better lifestyle. Unfortunately they are illiterate and reluctant to protest against the misconduct or prevailing situations at the work place. So, they suggested rethink of development strategies with a view to securing more direct intervention in the agricultural sector.

D.P. Singh (2005) in his work on women workers in unorganized sector has an in-depth study of women workers employed in brick kiln industry. The study found that the women workers in brick kilns on the whole, have poorer socio-economic backgrounds. Almost all of them are either of schedule castes or backward castes earning meager amount, which is not always enough to support their families. They are drastically deprived of good living as well as working
conditions. The facilities at their dwellings are very poor both in terms of quality as well as quantity. The availability of space in them is extremely inadequate. This space is used for all purposes like stores, bedroom and even kitchen. The provisions of ventilation, drainage, sanitation and lighting are totally absent. There are no facilities relating to canteen or a crèches in the work place. Their continuous exposure to heat, dust and unhygienic living conditions increases the possibility of contracting diseases of the eyes, skin, joints and bronchial and respiratory problems like asthma and cough. In this industry the women workers are recruited through the intermediaries who had no certificate of registration as is required under the Inter-State Migration Act, 1976 and the Contract Labour Act, 1970. The system is so faulty that it not only leads to economic exploitation of these women but also their sexual exploitation on one pretext or the other. Again although advance in cash or kind is rendered illegal under the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976, even then majority of the workers in this industry were found having taken huge amounts of money as advance. And this is one of the reasons that give rise to many unfair labour practices, both on the part of the owner as well as the trade union activities. He underlines the need of intervention by the NGO’s and social activities towards improving the socio-economic status of this marginalized lot. The issues which require immediate attention are their poverty, illiteracy, exploitation, deprivation and indebtedness.

Vandana Upadhyay (2007) in her study about the employment and earnings in urban informal sector in Arunachal Pradesh found that the socio-economic condition of the workers in the informal sector is much below the
normal standard. It is empirically found that around 22.4 per cent of the hired workers were indebted to their employers. There was extreme form of vulnerability and food insecurity in the category of construction workers and rickshaw pullers. As regard to housing facilities the workers were found to be living in unhygienic make-shift houses. With regard to drinking water facilities it was found that more than 70 per cent of the workers carried water from a tap outside their home and 17.7 per cent from nearby streams. Further, as far as security and freedom from violence was concerned, it was found that physical attacks had become a part of the working life of many of the informal sector occupations.

The problem of women workers of unorganized sector cannot be limited to the economic level only. But they also suffer from sexual assault, violence and their health is affected in specific ways partly due to their role as child bearer and partly due to their social oppression as women. They have to work for 11 o 15 hours if domestic tasks are included. The problem relating to health, safety and education in the unorganised sector are the derivatives of poverty and exploitation in this sector. Sexual exploitation and violence in the unorganised sector in the form of rape, beating and murder largely by local goondas, land lords, rich farmers and other men of our community (Omvedt, 1992). Workers in the unorganised sector irrespective of their sex are exploited but woman suffer more because of their gender. Development process has pushed women at the brink of survival (Everett and Savara, 1994).
Women in urban unorganized sector can be broadly grouped into the self-employed and the wage employed. Among the self-employed there are those engaged in papad making, masala making, embroidery work, zari-work, envelop making, bidi rolling, agarbathi making, match splints making, retail trading, waste-paper collection, and so on (Thippaiah, 1989).

Recent years have brought a great change in the life of women all over the world influencing their attitudes, values, inspirations and acting for effective participation in all walks of life. One of the main enduring consequences of the recent evolution for women has been their emancipation from their traditional bounds ethics by the virtue of various acts and status. It may be stated that urbanization, education and employment have provided women with new avenues to express and assert themselves. Today, by and large, it is admissible even for married women to take up an employment, by doing so; women to their old roles of mother and wife have now added the new modern role of a wage earner (Singh et al).

From the above review of literature on women workers we can claim that women have a specific position in the labour market. They have significant contribution to the family as well as national income. Yet they are the most deprived section of the society. Along with family responsibilities, they bear all hazards of informal employment. So, the issues, which require immediate attention regarding women workers in the unorganized sector, are their invisibility, poverty, illiteracy, exploitation, deprivation and indebtedness etc.
1.3. Objective of the Study:

The present study is done with the following main objectives:

1. To assess the rate of participation of women labourer in the unorganised sector.
2. To find out the rate of participation of women workers in different types of work within the unorganized sector and to find out the occupational segregation of women within that sector.
3. To estimate the contribution of women workers in the unorganized sector to household income and their contribution as compared to men and also of women in the organized sector.
4. To investigate the factors leading to higher participation of women in the unorganized sector.
5. To ascertain the socio-economic situation and working conditions like method of payment, extent of social security provisions, job contract, location of workplace etc of women workers in the unorganized sector along with a comparative study with male workers in the sector.

1.4. Research Questions:

In relation to the objectives of this research study the following research questions are attempted to solve.

1. Do official data provide a true estimate of women’s work?
2. Is illiteracy a determining factor in women’s participation in the unorganized sector?
1.5. Rationale of the Study:

To understand the situation of women and their contribution to the economy it is essential to understand the situation of the women in the unorganized sector, for they constitute about 96 per cent working women in India. In Assam, there is very little opportunity for women to have employment in organized sector. So, it is the unorganized sector which can provide employment opportunity to large number women in Assam where 76 out of per 1000 women are unemployed (Economic Survey, Assam 2012-13). As such a study of the women in the unorganized sector will provide a picture of the situation of women which in turn will enable the policy maker to move in the right direction. In spite of large number of literature on women workers in the unorganized sector there are very few literatures on this subject in the context of Assam. So the present study has been taken up.

1.6. Study Area:

Palashbari Revenue Circle of Kamrup district of Assam has been selected for a case study in the present study. This revenue circle is made up of both rural and urban areas.

According to 2001 census, the circle has 175 villages, one Municipal Board (MB) with 10 wards and one Census Town (CT) with one ward. The circle has 49963 households with total population 266926 (Male - 137833, Female - 129093, and Sex Ratio - 937). The rural segment is considerably larger than the urban segment. Total number of rural households is 46292 and of urban is 3671 with total rural population 247623 (Male - 127653, Female-119970, Sex
Ratio - 940) and urban population 19303 (Male - 10180, Female - 9123, Sex Ratio - 896).

The total number of households in the circle increased to 50418 in 2011 census. But the total population of the circle decreased to 239026 (Male - 121926, Female - 117100, Sex Ratio - 960). The rural and urban population of the circle in 2011 becomes 182428 (Male - 93104, Female-89324, Sex Ratio - 959) and 56598 (Male - 28822, Female - 27776, Sex Ratio - 964) respectively. Total population of the circle decreased by 27,900 in 2011 census compared to 2001 census. During this period, the rural population of the circle decreased by 65,195 but urban population increased by 37,295.

According to 2001 census, the literacy rate of the people of the circle is 65.16 per cent. The literacy rate in rural area (64.3 per cent) is lower than the urban area (76.10 per cent). In the circle female literacy rate is much lower than the male literacy rate in all the categories. Whereas male literacy rate in rural and urban area taken together is 71.93 per cent, the female literacy rate is only 57.93 per cent. In the rural area the male literacy rate is 71.31 per cent and of female is 56.86 per cent. In the urban areas however, the female literacy is quite high (72.07 per cent) although it is lower than male literacy rate (79.72 per cent).

The literacy rate in the circle increased considerably in 2011 compared to 2001. But, still there is glaring difference in literacy rates in between rural and urban areas and in between male and female. The literacy rate of the circle is 71.19 per cent in 2011 census with rural and urban literacy rates at 68.87 per cent and 78.65 per cent respectively. The circle has experienced 76.19 per cent
male and 65.98 per cent female literacy rate. In the rural area the male-female literacy rates are 74.04 per cent and 63.48 per cent respectively. In the urban area, the literacy rate for male is 83.13 per cent and for female is 74.01 per cent respectively.

The circle has observed low work participation rate which is only 30.98 per cent. Work participation rate is slightly higher in urban area (31.30 per cent) than in rural area (30.96 per cent). There is high difference in male-female participation rates in workforce. Whereas male work participation rate is 40.09 per cent, the female work participation rate in the circle is only 12.72 per cent. In the rural area the male-female participation rates in workforce are 47.87 per cent and 12.97 per cent respectively. Female work participation rate in urban area is very low, which is only 9.45 per cent whereas male work participation rate in the urban area is 50.87 per cent.

The work participation rate in the circle has been increasing considerably during the period 2001 and 2011. In 2011 census, the overall work participation rate stood at 42.01 per cent. That is participation rate increased by about 11 percentage point during this ten year period. In the rural area the participation rate becomes 43.56 per cent (increased by about 13 percentage points) and in urban area it becomes 37.01 per cent (increased by about 6 percentage points). Both male and female work participation rates have shown magnificent improvement during this period. The male work participation rate in 2011 in the circle is 57.49 per cent (increased by about 18 percentage points) and the female work participation rate is 25.88 per cent (increased by about 13
percentage points). In the rural area of the circle the male work participation rate in 2011 becomes 57.49 per cent (increased by about 10 percentage points compared to 2001 census) and the female work participation rate becomes 28.70 per cent (increased by about 16 percentage points). In the urban areas the male participation rate has been increased by 6 percentage points and female participation in the workforce has been increased by about 7 percentage points in 2011 compared to 2001 census. That is, male and female work participation rate in urban areas of the circle are 56.45 per cent and 16.84 per cent respectively in 2011 census.

At one time Palashbari Revenue Circle was famous for the saw mills, but due to the Supreme Court ban on logging, the people working in those mills faced unemployed. The circle has been facing the problems of both erosion and flood. Livelihood options have shrunk due to heavy erosion. Although a few manufacturing industries are growing in the area, they are not sufficient to absorb the existing labour force. The circle is about 30 km away from Guwahati city. Communication facilities are quite good in the area. People can move to city for livelihood without facing much transportation problem.

Similar situation could be seen in many other places in Assam. Hence, this area had been selected for a case study on the issue.

1.7. Research Methodology and Data Sources:

Both descriptive and analytical methods are used in the study. The study is based on both primary and secondary data.
1.7.1 Data Sources and Methods of Data Collection:

Major sources of secondary data are various reports from Labour Ministry, Census of India, National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO), Directorate General of Employment and Training (DGE&T), Directorate of Economics and Statistics (Assam), Human Development Reports, Various Books, Journals, Paper Clippings, Web Sites, Seminar Papers, Some Published / Unpublished Research Papers (Ph.D. thesis), Articles etc.

Both quantitative and qualitative research methods have been used to collect data. Primary data are collected through household survey, focused group discussion and in-depth interview. Survey schedule is constructed using NSS household survey schedule. The survey has been conducted in the year 2010.

1.7.2 Sample Frame:

The survey design includes 220 sample households. Primary data have been collected with the help of the technique of multi-stage random sampling. Tippet’s Random Number Table has been used to select sample units in every stage.

In the first stage Palashbari Revenue Circle has been selected purposively for a case study. In the second stage 15 villages have been selected for household survey. The selected villages are-

1) Kalapani No.1  2) Banshor  3) Kandulimari
4) Ziakur No.1  5) Satpakhaali  6) Dighalkuchi
7) Dole Gaon  8) Maliata  9) Majkuchi
10) Batabari N.C.  11) Gimiri Gaon  12) Gatuwa
13) Nalgaon  14) Murphuli  15) Rangapara
Again seven wards have been selected randomly from Palashbari Municipal Board (MB) which is the only municipal board the circle. The lone ward of census town Mirza has also been selected for the field survey.

In the third and final stage households have been choosen from the selected villages and wards. Ten (10) households from each of the 15 villages have been selected for data collection. Thus a total of 150 households are selected from the rural area of the circle.

From each of the selected wards of Palashbari MB five households are selected for household survey. Thus, 35 households have been selected from the Board. Another 35 households have been selected from the Census Town Mirza. Finally, from the urban area 70 households are chosen for the study.

1.7.3 Data Analysis:

Basic statistical and econometric tools are used to analyse the quantitative data.

For evaluating the degree of occupational segregation across gender groups in the sample area the Duncan Index\(^1\) is calculated with the formula:

\[
Duncan \text{ Index (D)} = \frac{1}{2} \sum_{j=1}^{N} \text{ABS} (F_j - M_j)
\]

Where, \(N = \text{Total Number of occupations}\)

\(F_j = \text{Proportion of all females in occupation } j\)

\(M_j = \text{Proportion of all males in occupation } j\)
An index equal to 1 corresponds to the extreme situation of complete segregation. (No men or women work in the same occupation). An index equal to zero means that women and men have identical employment distributions across occupations. Another way to interpret $D$ is as the percentage of women (or men) that would have to change occupations in order to eliminate the difference in occupational distributions.

Correlation and regression analysis are used to analyse the different factors responsible for higher participation of women in the unorganized sector and to interpret the contribution of unorganized women workers to household income.

1.8. Terms and Concepts used in the Study:

Work and Workers:

Both census and National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) definition of work and workers are considered in the present study. The census of India defines work as participation in any economically productive activity, irrespective of whether the participation is physical or mental. Activities like cultivation for “self-consumption” and part time help or unpaid works for family farm, family enterprises were also included in the definition of works. All persons engaged in ‘work’ as defined above are workers. Persons who are engaged in cultivation or milk production even solely for domestic consumption are also treated as workers.

Workers are classified as main workers, marginal workers and non workers in census. A main worker is defined as the persons whose main activity is
participation in any economically productive work by his/her physical or mental activities and who had work for 183 days or more (i.e. 6 months or more) in a year. A non worker is defined as person who had not done any work at any time in the reference year. A marginal worker is a person who worked for less than 183 days.

However, the NSSO has a broader definition of work. Any activity resulting in production of goods and services that add value to national product is considered as an economic activity. Such activities include production of all goods and services for market (i.e. for pay or profit) including those of government services, and, the production of primary commodities for own consumption and own account production of fixed assets (NSS 66th round). While both market and non-market activities for the agricultural sector are included in the definition of work, only market activities are included for the non-agricultural sector. The production of food grains or any other crops for self consumption has also been regarded as 'gainful activity'.

Person, who is engaged in any economic activity or who, despite their attachment to economic activity, abstained from work for reason of illness, injury or other physical disability, bad weather, festivals, social or religious function or other contingencies necessitating temporary absence from work, constituted workers.

Self-Employed: Persons who operated their own farm or non-farm enterprises or engaged independently in a profession or trade on own account or with one or a few partners are treated as self-employed in household enterprises.
Own Account Worker: The self-employed persons, who operated their enterprises on their own account or with one or a few partners and who, during the reference period, by and large, ran their enterprise without hiring any labour. They could, however, have had unpaid helpers to assist them in the activity of the enterprise.

Employers: Employers are those self-employed persons who worked on their own account or with one or a few partners and who, by and large, ran their enterprises by hiring labour; and

Helpers in Household Enterprise (HHE) or Unpaid Family Worker: These are the persons who are engaged in their household enterprises, working full or part time and do not receive any regular salary or wages in return for work performed.

Regular Wage / Salaried Employees: These are the persons who work in others’ farm or non-farm enterprises (both household and non-household) and in return, receive salary or wage on a regular basis. This category includes not only persons getting time wage but also persons receiving piece wage or salary and paid apprentices, both full time and part time.

Casual Wage Labour: A person, who is casually engaged in others’ farm or non-farm enterprises (both household and non-household) and, in return, receives wages according to the terms of the daily or periodic work contract, is a casual wage labour.
Usual Principal Activity Status (PS): The activity status on which a person spent relatively long time (i.e., major time criterion) during the 365 days preceding the date of survey is considered as the usual principal activity status of the person.

Usual Subsidiary Economic Activity Status (SS): A person whose principal status was determined on the basis of the major time criterion could have pursued some economic activity for a shorter time throughout the reference year of 365 days preceding the date of survey or for a minor period, which is not less than 30 days, during the reference year. The status in which such economic activity was pursued was the subsidiary economic activity status of that person.

Usual Principal and Subsidiary Status Taken Together (PS+SS): The persons who perform some work activity either in the usual principal status or in subsidiary are known as workers according to usual principal and subsidiary status taken together (PS+SS).

Unorganised Sector Workers: “The unorganised sector consists of all unincorporated private enterprises owned by individual or households engaged in the sale and production of goods and services operated on a proprietary or partnership basis and with less than ten total workers” (NCEUS 2007). The workers in these enterprises are unorganised sector workers.

Unorganised Workers: “Unorganised workers consist of those working in the unorganised enterprises or households, excluding regular workers with social security benefits, and the workers in the formal sector without any employment / social security benefits provided by the employers” (NCEUS 2007).
**Home Based Workers:** Home based workers refer to that general category of workers who carry out remunerative work within their homes or in the surrounding grounds. These workers carry out market work at home or in adjacent grounds or premises whether as self-employed or as paid workers (ILO, 2002).

**Home Workers:** Home workers are those home based workers who carry out paid work for firms/business or their intermediaries, typically on a piece rate basis.

**Women Workers in the Field Survey:** Unorganised women workers are often termed women workers in the analysis of field survey data.

**1.9. Line of Analysis:**

To represent the different issues related with unorganised women workers in a systematic way the whole details of the study are divided into eight chapters.

**Chapter-I:** This is the introductory chapter which contains a brief accounts of the problem, objectives of the study, research questions, rational of the study, methodology and data sources, sample frame, study area and a review of literature on the related topics.

**Chapter-II:** This chapter deals with conceptual issues and definition of unorganised sector.

**Chapter-III:** The chapter gives an account of the size, composition and growth of unorganised sector in India and Assam.

**Chapter-IV:** This chapter is related with women workers. The chapter has conceptualized women unorganised sector workers. The chapter also highlights the
size and composition of women workers in the unorganized sector in India and Assam.

Chapter-V, VI and VII are associated with presentation and analysis of field survey data.

**Chapter-V:** This chapter gives labour market information of sample area. Various characteristics of women workers and particularly unorganized women workers are analysed in this chapter.

**Chapter-VI:** Factors responsible for higher participation of women workers in the unorganized sector and their contribution to household income are explained in this chapter.

**Chapter-VII:** This chapter highlighted the socio-economic situation and working condition of women workers in the sample area.

**Chapter-VIII:** This is the final chapter which includes concluding note and suggestions providing brief summary of the major findings and recommendations.

1.10. **Limitations of the Study:**

Study about women workers particularly unorganized women workers is a difficult task as they are related with heterogeneous activities. Different issues surround this most vulnerable section of the society. All these issues are not covered in the study. Lack of adequate secondary data about unorganized women workers is the main problem confronted in the study.

Household level data collection is a major problem for every individual researcher. Collecting data from invisible women workers is another important difficulty faced in this research study. The roads and lanes of many sample
villages are not adequate. The survey has been conducted in rainy season (in the month of July) to capture the agricultural activities of the workers, so transportation became a major problem during the field survey. Several times the researcher has to cross miles of distance on foot.

Within these limitations, attempt is made to study about different issues of unorganized women workers in the study area.

1.11: Notes and References:

Note: 1. Duncan Index: This statistic was developed by two Sociologists Otis Dudley Duncan and Beverly Duncan in 1950s. The statistic is used most frequently to compare distribution of workers. The Duncan Index (D) is commonly referred to as a measure of dissimilarity since it indicates how similar (or dissimilar) the distribution of two groups is across occupations.


Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Assam.


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