Chapter I
Review of Literature

In India, as in other developing countries large proportions of the economic activities are undertaken in the unorganised sector. As Visaria (1999) points out "Since the early 1980s, there has been considerable increase in the concern about proper measurement of the work participation of Indian women in the economic activity. Difficulties in proper measurement of the level of female employment arise because of the multiple roles of women in the household; as a result, the reported extent of work or participation in economic activity by women tends to vary according to the investigators or respondents. Trends in employment are mostly assessed and analysed on the basis of data from two sources: Population census and various rounds of National Sample survey (NSS-Conducted by Nation Sample Survey Organisation since 1972-73)". The following section would deal with the macro-trends in the pattern of employment, shifts and changes in the economic policies and its resultant impact especially on female employment.

For India as a whole and its major states (as well as some cities), office of the Registrar General has worked out the Worker Population Ratios (WPRs) and the distribution of workers into nine industrial categories by sex from the census of 1911-51. For comparison with the results of the 1961 census, these ratios are called crude in so far as the comparisons do not take into account the age composition of the population. Unfortunately, the earlier census tables did not distinguish between rural and urban areas; and therefore, rural-urban Worker Population Ratios (WPRs) cannot be estimated for the pre-independence period (Visaria, Pravin 1999).

Table 1.1 as Visaria explains, "summarises the available data on the reported level of economic activity or the WPRs for Indian women based on the 1911-1991 censuses and also the estimates based on the five quinquennial surveys of the NSS between 1972-73 and 1993-94. However, the difference in concepts between the two sources (see appendix I) and also among different years and rounds of the same source makes the comparative analysis difficult. Data on
women workers are found to be more sensitive to these differences, thus making the analysis of employment of women still more hazardous."

Table 1.1
Worker Population Ratio by Sex (Census and NSS Surveys), 1911-1994

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Census/ NSS survey</th>
<th>Persons</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>62.0</td>
<td>33.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>60.6</td>
<td>32.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>43.6</td>
<td>57.9</td>
<td>28.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>53.9</td>
<td>23.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>34.0</td>
<td>52.7</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972-73 NSS</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>52.7</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977-78 NSS</td>
<td>41.6</td>
<td>53.4</td>
<td>28.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>52.6</td>
<td>19.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983 NSS</td>
<td>41.8</td>
<td>53.5</td>
<td>29.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987-88 NSS</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>53.0</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993-94 NSS</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The data presented in the table indicate that the share of women in the workforce seems to have increased a little during the 1970s, with a peak during the early 1980's subsequently, it has dropped by one percentage point in the late eighties and has remained stagnant up to 1993-94. In the urban workforce, the share of women has remained stable at 20-21% during late sixties to mid-nineties. Relative to the 1961 census estimate of 15 per cent, the subsequent NSS data suggest a rise in the share of female employment in the urban workforce. According to the census data, percentage of females in the urban population of India as a whole has risen from 45.8 in 1961 to 46.8 in 1981 and 47.2 in 1991. This has been the result of a rise in the share of females among rural-urban migrants as well as a decline in the share of migrants in the urban population of India. Over all, the macro perspective seems to suggest that with the well-known slowdown of the growth of employment in the public or the organised sector of the economy, the share of the informal sector and the self-employed in total employment is likely to be rising.

From a comparison of female work participation rates yielded by the two sources, however, two points emerge clearly; one, labour force participation ratio
(LFPR) turn out to be consistently higher by NSS estimates than from census estimates; and two, the NSS estimates are relatively stable while those from the census fluctuate widely from one decennial year to another (Visaria, 1999). Thus worker-population ratio for females, for example, according to the census data was 28 per cent in 1961, was recorded to be as low as 0.4 per cent in 1971, increased to 20 per cent in 1981 and 22 per cent in 1991.

"While the figures for males also fluctuate, but within a small range between 52 and 57. The NSS estimates, however, show little fluctuations among the four rounds between 1972-73 and 1993-94, the lowest being 27.8 in 1972-73 and the highest 28.9 in 1978. Estimates from the two sources for similar periods, vary widely for example, the 1971 Census reveals a female worker-population ratio of 13.9%, while the NSS 1972-73 round indicated it to be 27.8%. Where as the male worker-population ratio was exactly the same at 52.7% from the two sources. It is often argued that the inclusion of marginal or subsidiary workers accounts for such variations, as recording of workers in this category is greatly dependent on the skills and effort of the enumerator or investigator and such workers constitute a significantly large proportion among women workers. “Invisibility” of women’s work in official statistics has, therefore, been a matter of concern both in research and policy". (Papola, T.S & A.N. Sharma, 1999)

LEVEL OF UNEMPLOYMENT

The 1993-94 NSS data suggest a decline in the level of open unemployment in the country between 1987-88 and 1993-94. A decline to the order of 1 percentage point has been in the rates of unemployment in terms of both usual and current weekly status in rural as well as urban areas and among both males and females. The data also suggest that the open unemployment rates have declined among the “educated” or the matriculates and college graduates between 1987-88 and 1993-94. This decline seems surprising in view of the slow growth of the employment opportunities in the organised sector, in which the educated seek work.
The possible explanations given by Visaria (1999) include some decline in the labour force participation rates of the ‘educated’ but it is also likely that the work seekers have compromised on their aspirations and expectations and adjusted to the labour market by accepting work of the type that is available. The proportion of regular wage salaried workers among the urban educated workers is likely to have declined, with a compensating rise in the share of the self-employed. (Casual labourers are a negligible group among the “educated”). The trend is likely to continue in the years ahead, as the rate of growth of public sector employment is held down by the fiscal crisis and the private sector seeks to raise productivity through the substitution of capital for labour or the choice of capital-intensive technology available in the developed world.

INDUSTRIAL DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS

There is considerable interest in evaluating the trends in the broad industrial distribution of workers. Because, ever since the dawn of planning in India, one of the stated goals has been to lower the pressure of population on land and agriculture. The emphasis on industrialisation has been a logical sequel, implying a goal to encourage a drop in the share of agriculture in both the national income and work force.

“...The largest proportion of main workers from both sexes according to the 1991 census is in category I (Cultivator). As regards males, the largest proportion (39.6%) is in category I, while for females the category having the largest proportion of workers (44.9%) is in category II viz. agricultural labourers. The proportion of women workers to total workers at 33% in category V (The manufacturing industry) is the next highest proportion of women workers after the agricultural labourer category. The third rank goes to cultivators (20%) and the fourth rank would then go to the category IX. viz. “other services, which has a proportion of 18.21% of women workers to total workers” (Gopalan, Sarala 1995)“

SHIFTS IN OCCUPATION

The NSS data show that after 1972-73, there has been a marked fall in the proportion of workers engaged in the agriculture or the primary sector from 76% in
1961 to 65% in 1987-88 and 1993-94. The census data also indicate a clear shift away from the primary sector. While 69.4% of the main workers were in the primary sector in 1981, their proportion came down to 67.37% in 1991. However, the proportion of workers in the secondary sector has remained more or less the same during the decade; being 12.96% in 1981 and 12.13% in 1991. Significant increase is noticed in the tertiary sector, where the proportion of main workers has gone up from 17.63% to 20.50%. (Gopalan, 1997).  

The fall in the proportion of workers in the primary sector since the early 1970s has been accompanied by a compensating gain by the tertiary sector. The secondary sector has not gained, particularly after 1987-88. Its share shows a decline of the order of 1 or 2 percentage points both in rural and urban areas and among both males and females. The NSS data suggest a fall in the share of manufacturing employment in urban areas. Albeit, even with a decline in the share of the sector in total employment, the number of workers engaged in manufacturing has increased by 3.3 million, from 36.0 to 39.3 million in the country as a whole and by 2.1 million in urban India from 17.4 to 19.5 million between 1987-88 and 1993-94.  

STATUS DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS

The term “status distribution” is used in the NSS data to highlight an important dimension of the nature and scale of employment by focusing on the relationship between workers in their enterprises. The NSS data relating to all workers – males and females taken together – show a gradual increase in the proportion of ‘casual labourers’ from 23 per cent in 1972-73 to almost 32 per cent in 1993-94. This increase was mainly at the cost of the self-employed, whose proportion fell from 61 per cent in 1977-78 to about 55 per cent in 1993-94.  

The proportion of ‘regular employees’ varied between 13-16 per cent during the period 1972-74 (about 16-20 per cent among male workers and 5-7 per cent among female workers). There has been a decrease in the proportion of regular employees among urban male workers from 51 per cent in the early seventies to 44 per cent in the eighties and to 42 per cent in early nineties. Among
rural male workers also, the proportion of regular employees has decreased from 12 per cent to 8 per cent. But among female workers, the share of regular workers has remained stable at 3-4% in rural areas and 25-28% in urban areas.\(^8\)

The observed decrease in the proportion of "self-employed" at the overall level was because of the drop in the opportunities of self-employment in rural areas for both males and females. The rise in the share of casual workers during 1972-1994 was higher among male workers in both rural and urban areas than among female workers, although the proportion of casual labourers was higher among female workers than among the male workers. This distinction between the casual and regular workers would partly capture the widespread evidence that the potential employers opt for contracts and sub-contracts to avoid the hassles of dealing with a large "regular" or "permanent" work force.

EMPLOYMENT IN ORGANISED AND UNORGANISED SECTORS

There has been a high rate of growth of employment of women between 1971 and 1991, much higher than the rate of growth of employment for men, both in the organised and unorganised sectors of employment as shown in Table 1.2 given below.

### Table 1.2

**Employment in the Organised and Unorganised Sectors During 1971-1991**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organiised Sector</td>
<td>Unorganiised Sector</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>155.60 (10.43)</td>
<td>1336.16 (89.57)</td>
<td>1491.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>200.86 (11.0)</td>
<td>1625.75 (89.0)</td>
<td>1826.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>229.53 (10.23)</td>
<td>2014.11 (89.77)</td>
<td>2243.64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Figures in parentheses are percentages with respect to totals.*

*Source: Gopalan, Sarala 1995, p.31*
The table 1.2 shows that the employment for all persons in the organised sector in the country has been around 10% of total employment over the last three decades. The employment in the organised sector, which stood at 9.69% in 1971, has now declined to 8.51% in 1991. The proportion of employment in the organised sector for males was 10.43% in 1971 and has declined to 10.23% in 1991. As regards females, the proportion of employment in the organised sector stood at 6% in 1971 and has declined to 4% in 1991. However, women’s share in the organised sector has increased in terms of absolute numbers from 11-14%. In case of men’s share, it has actually decreased from 89% to 86% during 1971-1991. In the unorganised sector also, employment of women has nearly trebled between 1971 to 1991, registering a total increase of women in employment from 31.3 million to 89.8 million. The fact, however remains that while men share 86% of the employment in the organised sector, women share only 14%. On the contrary, their presence in the unorganised sector increased from 94% in 1971 to 96% in 1991. The proportion of women workers in the organised sector also increased from 11% to 14% during this period as against men. Thus, the point that needs to be highlighted here is, by all accounts, the participation of women in the workforce assumes significance.

The changes that are occurring in the level and structure of employment of women have been characterised by scholars in terms of concepts such as FEMINISATION of work force, increase in CASUALISATION of women’s employment and MARGINALISATION of women workers. Increase in the share of women workers in certain sectors is often seen as feminisation of work force. Such trend appears to be in process in certain sectors of the economy (Deshpande & Deshpande and Banerjee). This indicates a positive as well as negative trend so far as women’s employment is concerned. To the extent, it is a result of the employer’s preference for women workers for the reasons of their acceptance of low wages, relatively insecure and unstable jobs and poor working conditions, an increase in the number and share of women in work force can be viewed as a negative labour market phenomenon.

But the very fact of more women getting out of the household to work for wages can lead to an improvement in the status and subsequently an increase in the
bargaining power and betterment in the conditions of work (Banerjee). The feminisation that is taking place in India in both agriculture and non-agriculture sector is mostly distress-induced (Mukhopadyaya). According to Jayati Ghosh, feminisation can be taken neither as a necessary nor a sufficient condition to bring about improvements in conditions of women. It is therefore, imperative that these views are examined empirically more closely both in the short-term and long-term context, as well as from the viewpoint of women workers and the labour market as a whole.¹⁰

STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT PROGRAMME (SAP) AND WOMEN’S EMPLOYMENT

Structural adjustment in its broadest sense refers to a shift in the economy towards a market-oriented relationship. The underlying assumption is that an economy will be most efficient, healthy and productive in the long run, if market forces are allowed to operate freely. The three important principles underlying SAP, therefore, are - (foreign) trade liberalisation, deregulation of domestic markets and privatisation (Hirway, Indira 1999)¹¹. “The effect of macro-economic processes and policies on female employment patterns in most developing countries across the globe especially since 1980 has been notable for the increasing participation of women in recognised paid employment, and this trend has been further intensified since 1990”. (Ghosh, Jayati 1997)¹²

Some of the elements of these macro economic trends according to her are “an emphasis on export production in manufacturing; an increase in the share of the service sectors in aggregate national income; technological changes which have changed the nature of work in several older and most newer economic activities; and finally structural adjustment programmes and other economic policies which are designed to ensure greater labour market “flexibility”. All these have brought changes in work relations including the tendency towards feminisation.

In Asian countries (including India), where export-oriented manufacturing is prominent, the high proportion of women workers in manufacturing is evident. This is because, these countries have in the recent past been emphasising export-
oriented production for the world market, and have simultaneously been relying on
their ability to provide low-cost labour to achieve competitiveness in such
production. It has been observed that there is always a trend towards feminisation
when employment contracts and conditions in an occupation become flexible and
hence unbargainable in nature. (Martens & Mitter, 1994)\textsuperscript{13}

Thus, “the trend towards feminisation of employment in Asian countries
results from employers’ needs for cheaper and more ‘flexible’ sources of labour,
and is strongly associated with the more towards casualisation labour, shift to part­
time work or piece rate contracts, and insistence on greater freedom for hiring and
firing over the economic cycle. All these become necessary once external
competitiveness becomes the significant variable, which entrepreneurs must
consistently strive to ensure. In addition, it is well known that female employees
are seen as more tractable and subservient to managerial authority, less prone to
organise into unions, more willing to accept lower wages because of their own
reservation and aspiration of wages, and easier to dismiss using the life-cycle
criteria such as marriage and child birth”. (Ghosh, Jayati 1999)

Studies have revealed that the export-oriented industries of Asia in
particular have shown a strong preference for young unmarried women workers.
The older married women with children are typically at the bottom of the job
pyramid, with very few employment options and are usually confined to home­
based putting out production. Married women throughout South-East Asia are
openly discriminated against and excluded from the labour market because
employers want to avoid the cost of maternity leave and other benefits (Standing,
1992, Mitter and Row Botham, 1995)\textsuperscript{14}

Jockes and Weston (1994) have argued that manufacturing export
employment in Asia generally provides women with better opportunities even if
the conditions are worse than those of male workers in the same country. The real
danger however, is that of downward homogenisation of labour conditions. “With
worker competition within and between countries forcing all workers - men,
women and even children to accept these inferior conditions. Thus, it is largely
the case that the status and conditions of women workers are eroded by the process
of concentration of women in the margins of the labour market such as the informal sector and the secondary sector, which are characterised by work instability, low wages, poor working conditions, lack of legal protection, lack of organisation, and little hope of upward mobility. (Committee for Asian Women, 1995).15

The current industrialisation and restructuring process under way in Asia relies on precisely these features of female employment to ensure competitiveness and future growth. The growing emphasis on part-time work, piece rate, sub-contracting and even home-based production chains, which are heavily reliant on women workers, will only reinforce these trends (Ghosh, 1999). Studies in India on the structural adjustment programmes and female employment are broadly based on two approaches. As Hirway points out that the first approach considers the free market economic model as essentially a sound model. But it requires special efforts to make it functional for women. The second approach, however, views this model itself as not correct because it is biased against women and it reinforces women’s subordination and oppression. There is, therefore a need to discard the SAPs and look for an alternative development paradigm.

Scholars like Indira Hirway, Jayati Ghosh and Renana Jhabvala argue that the SAP package of macro policies does not challenge any existing structures including the structure of patriarchy that results in subordination of women. "Though SAPs reduce trade restrictions, remove obstacles to free domestic markets through deregulations and cut down the role of public sector to allows free development of the market forces, they do not remove structural constraints such as patriarchal values with the built in unequal gender relationships to allow men and women equal access to markets". Such constraints as it was assumed, do not wither away with the operation of free market forces as these are not just imperfections in the market but deep-rooted characteristics of the society, and are not likely to be done away with only through economic forces. Markets operate efficiently within the given structures. However, if the structures are equitous, market-led growth leads to equitous growth opportunities for all, but if the structures are lopsided and exploitative, market forces accentuate the inequalities and regional disparities. In the same way, SAPs tend to reinforce women’s
subordination and oppression along with economic growth in the economy” (Hirway, 1999). She further argues that flexible market under SAPs suits women who are in a position to take advantage of the flexibility. Also, it suits employers who prefer them, as they are docile, sincere, unorganised and cheap. Women, as cheap labours, thus carry the burden of rising industrial growth under SAPs.

The broad trends based on the NSS data on the impact primarily of the macro-economic stabilisation policies adopted during 1991-93 suggest that (i) employment growth during 1991-94 has been significantly higher than say, earlier three-year period. (ii) Greater dependence on agriculture in rural areas and further casualisation of work in urban areas, besides, large proportion of employment growth subsidiary work category are the major trends. Employment prospects for women are also found to be associated with flexibility – an essential phenomenon accompanying economic restructuring. Flexibility at the level of enterprises implies decentralisation of production, sub-contracting and flexible specialisation facilitated by new technologies. It may facilitate employment without necessarily attending a formal work site on a regular basis and under a formal organisational structure. On the other hand, labour market flexibility implies freedom to the employers to vary work force, wage rates and modes of payment, and to change the employment status of workers. The former type of flexibility may open up more opportunities for women without subjecting them to the discipline of a structured organisation, which is often found difficult by them. The latter may also increase employment but reduce employment security. The net effect of these processes on women’s employment, income and well being are difficult to generalise, and would need to be watched and studied in specific situations. (Papola & Sharma, 1999)

DEFINITIONS OF INFORMAL / UNORGANISED SECTOR

The term ‘informal sector’ was introduced by Hart in 1971, who described it as that part of the urban labour force, which falls outside the organised labour market. It was later adopted by the ILO in its studies on employment situation across the world, and has become popular in referring to the urban economies of Third world countries. The formal sector implies (a) a set number of inter-related
jobs which are part of a composite, internally well-organised labour structure (b) work situations which are officially registered in economic statistics and (c) working conditions which are protected by law. Any other activity, which does not fulfil these criteria, is put together under the term ‘informal Sector.’ (Breman, 1994)\textsuperscript{16}

Robert Mac Namara, former president of the World Bank said, “in the cities of developing countries, two sectors co-exist side by side. One is the organised, modern, formal sector characterised by capital-intensive technology, relatively high wages, large-scale operations and corporate or government organisations. The other is the unorganised, traditional, informal sector economic units with reverse characteristics-labour intensive, small-scale operation using traditional methods and providing lower earnings to the individual. This implies two classes of people very differently placed. The lucky minority working in the protected modern sector, and the majority outside it. There is a debate about dualism in which, the organised sector employers and permanent workers are privileged at the expense of the industrial unorganised sector. They are not just better off, but are privileged, whereas unorganised workers are used as a reserve army of cheap labour.\textsuperscript{17}

Papola (1980)\textsuperscript{18} has given a very simple definition: “The informal sector is a convenient way of designating a segment of the economy having certain characteristics which lead to unfavourable conditions for the growth of enterprises and activities operating in the segment”. According to him, the characteristics of the informal sector are small size of operations, and family ownership, non-modern technology, lack of access to government favours, competitive and protected product market and unprotected labour market.

S.V. Sethuraman (1981)\textsuperscript{19} defines informal sector as follows, “It consists of small scale units engaged in the production and distribution of goods and services with the primary objective of generating employment and income to their participants, not withstanding on capital both physical and human, and know-how”. 
ILO-UNDP Employment Mission to Kenya (1972)\textsuperscript{20} mentioned the following characteristics of the informal sector: ease of entry of new enterprises, family ownership, small size operation, unregulated and competitive market, labour intensive technology, informally acquired skills of workers through on the job training, no state support, and deplorable working conditions and low wages. It is the 'enterprises' and not the 'individuals' that are classified into formal and informal sectors. According to Deepak Mazumdar (1973)\textsuperscript{21}, employment in the organised sector is stable and protected while unorganised labourers are exposed to the uncertainty and whims of employers. The 'organised sector' consists of government service as well as companies employing more than ten persons full time and utilising electricity for the production process, or more than twenty persons, without utilising electricity. This is the official definition used by the government. These production units comply with several regulations associated with labour laws regarding wages, working hours, dismissal, labour conditions etc. All other smaller units and activities together constitute the 'unorganised sector'. Although certain legislations with respect to this sector exist, observance is not checked or enforced. (Tom, Irene, 1989)\textsuperscript{22}

Director General of Employment and Training (DGET) defines organised sector as "all public sector establishments which include all government services at the central, state and local level, all public sector undertakings in the field of agriculture, industry, credit financing, public utilities service etc., all non-agricultural private establishments which employ ten or more persons. By deduction, the employment outside the defined organised sector is employment in the unorganised informal sector (Gopalan Sarala, 1995).

**CHARACTERISTICS OF THE UNORGANISED SECTOR**

The employer's solution to legal obligations like protective labour legislation with regard to working conditions, insurance, paid leave, maternity benefit and health and safety measures at work often ends up with increasing 'put-out' of work to household, through contractors. This facilitates the employer to enjoy tremendous advantages from a home-based, piece rate system; no over head cost or need to invest in tools or machinery, investment in having a factory as such
is reduced and there is no trade union to contend with. As a result, factory exists side by side with the putting out system, which links the housewife in her home to the world market. Sub-contracting is major mechanism through which women get entry into the labour market. Thus, this sector is characterised by unprotected, low paid, lacking security and has less bargaining power and state privileges (Mies, 1982).

The work opportunities for women in this sector are largely determined by the larger socio-economic structure. Work conditions in this sector are often appalling and fall below labour standards. (Shram Shakthi, 1988; Ghosh, 999; Zarina, 1981; Mukhopadyaya, 1999). The workers in this sector have poor working and living conditions in terms of exhaustive work load, very long and arduous hours of work and inaccessibility to the basic minimum facilities of life. (Report of the Task force 1988; Rao, 1987; Kalpagam, 1994). Being in the unorganised sector means little bargaining power to demand medical or other benefits. Further any demand for benefits is met with the threat of unemployment and this leads to increased vulnerability (Ojha & Singh, 1995).

Committee for Asian women, 1995, has described that the work instability, low wages, poor working conditions, lack of legal protection, lack of organisation, and little hope of upward mobility as the characteristics of the informal sector.

**Role of Women in the Unorganised Sector in India**

Working women in the self-employed and informal sector are an important segment of the labour force. The use of female labour has been established in a number of industries (apart from agriculture) such as beedi making, food processing, lace making, garment making, papad rolling, agarbati making, zari work, match stick work, sub assembling of electrical or electronic items, packaging and labelling of some industrial goods, handloom - spinning and weaving, hand embroidery etc. (Singh, Andrea Menefee 1987).

Workers in the unorganised sector can be broadly categorised into two. In the case of piece-rate home-based workers working for some other employer, where in the employer provides raw materials and pays them on a piece-rate basis.
for the amount produced. Own account small entrepreneurs or small artisans are those who buy all the raw materials themselves and earn by selling their finished goods. By and large, beedi workers, agarbati workers, handloom workers (spinning and weaving), readymade garment workers and the like would come under the first category, while hawkers, vendors, rag pickers and artisans fall in the second category. (Sudan and Gupta, 1995).

Menefee Singh (1987) points out that Home-based production forms an important segment of unorganised sector employing a large section of women in it. It is remarkable that women devote sizeable portion of their time to production activities, by squeezing time from their household duties and leisure. However, this remains invisible in economic statistics covered by Census or other official documents. (This would be discussed in detail in the following section on Theory of Invisibility)

"It is well recognised that whatever be the criterion or the mix of criteria chosen to characterise the 'informal sector', an overwhelming majority of women and men in India would be found working within its boundaries" (Mukopadhyay, 1999). As mentioned earlier, women’s presence in this sector is not only enormous but also has been steadily increasing over the years. Their participation is reported to be as high as 96% of the total female labour force. However, women’s presence in the organised sector is as low as 4.21%. This suggests that the organised sector sticks to highly rigid standardised norms which restrict women’s access to it (Rao, Nitya, 1995).

A number of recent studies suggest that increasing informalisation of women’s work and increasing feminisation of a number of economic activities are the likely characteristics of the new employment situation (Papola T.S. Sharma, A.N. 1999). Studies by Swaminathan and Jeyaranjan, 1999; Varghese, 1999 do establish the increasing presence of women in a number of manufacturing units that largely remain unorganised.

Ghosh (1997) argues that more women have been entering the labour force, but quantitative increase in employment have not necessarily been matched by qualitative improvements or better working conditions. Indeed, it is usually the
case that women are preferred by employers in additional employment generation precisely because they are willing to accept lower wages, inferior working conditions and less security of contract than men, for performing similar work. "Structural adjustment, economic reform, the transition from centrally planned to market economies and globalisation have tended to exacerbate women's vulnerability, and increased their overall economic marginalisation even as the overt employment of women in productive activities has increased.

Ojha and Singh (1995) in their study point out the main problems of women working in the unorganised sector, which are as follows (1) Non-representation of women in planning; women in this sector are excluded from census counting. (2) Low-earning: this maybe due to lack of training opportunities (for example, in agriculture, training for improved methods are imparted mainly to men while women do most of the work), the presence of middle men who exploit them, non-implementation of minimum wages act, sense of insecurity, making them accept low wages, and piece-rate work or contract rate work such as in beedi-making, papad-rolling etc. (3) Health problems- these may be the result of long hours of work rendering them physically worn out, contact with hazardous material such as chemicals in dyeing cloths or embroidering and lack of basic facilities, like medical aid and often drinking water at the work sites. (4) Motherhood and childcare: there is no provision for child care and maternity benefits. Even where, such provisions are made compulsory by law, they are often not implemented. (5) Sexual harassment is done in a very systematic manner by contractor and his men. If the girls refuse, the result is dismissal or/and sexual discrimination in payments. (6) Lack of access to resources: banking and other credit institutions do not give women loans without the signature of men. (7) Problem of choice of techniques: The majority of women work with backward technologies or solely with the aid of their muscle power. (8) Non-co-operation by men in terms of not taking up family responsibilities and not helping in household work. (9) Triple burden of work: Along with wage work, they look after household chores and rearing of children"
DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO WOMEN'S WORK

Women’s participation in the labour force includes a range of economic activities from self-employment to wage labour. These activities which are spread across the agricultural, industrial and service sectors, represent women’s paid labour. Women are placed at the centre of household, wherein they also do work, which is not directly linked to the market. This complex of women’s work within and outside the household has been the subject of many debates and analyses.

Theory of Invisibility

This theory argues that for various reasons, women for long have remained invisible in economic statistics and government accounts. Although women work for longer hours and contribute substantially to family income, they are not perceived as workers by either the woman themselves or by the data collecting agencies and the government, as none of them recognise the multi-dimensional functions of women, which include their productive and reproductive labour. One reason for this is the elusive definition of work given by economists and Census commissioners, which does not take women in the unorganised sector into account. Another reason is that a large proportion of these women workers carry out their work in the home along with their unpaid domestic tasks that tend to get under valued and classified as subsidiary activity, or even get dismissed as having no value at all. It is generally seen as a hobby. (Singh, Andrea-Menefee 1987; Gopalan, 1995; Visaria, 1999)

Visaria (1999) states “Since the early 1980s, there has been considerable increase in the concern about proper measurement of the extent of participation in economic activity by Indian women. Difficulties in proper measurement of the level of female employment arise because of the multiple roles of women in the household: as a result, the reported extent of work or participation in economic activity by women tends to vary according to the investigators or respondents. Often the respondents do not clearly understand which of the women's activities constitute work. There is no doubt that almost all the women, including those classified as ‘working’ in a survey or a census as “not working” spend a major
portion of their time in activities that would be considered work, if they were performed by a person unrelated to the householders or a hired helper. For an adult male, the role of a worker or an earner is the standard stereotype and there is hardly any reservation about reporting him as a worker even when he works on the family farm or in the family enterprise. Also, there is no gain in status by not reporting a male member as non-worker, but with respect to females, their not being required to “work” outside the home has in some societies and groups been considered a sign of higher status, if not affluence”. (Visaria, 1999)

Thus, invisibility results from several sources; use of concepts of capturing women’s work and inadequate efforts on the part of enumerators and investigators to probingly elicit information about it, being the two major ones. In either case, a bias against recognition of women’s work and contribution plays its own role. Recognising this fact, several attempts have been made to improve coverage of women’s work by refinement of concept, development and use of appropriate instruments for data collection and training of statistical workers. A higher female worker – population ratio revealed by NSS than from the census reflects the results of these exercises. Inclusion of some probing questions in 1991 census was another attempt in this direction.

In spite of these efforts, however, under estimation of women’s work persists in the existing data systems. (Suryanarayanan, 1999). He argues in his paper that the situation could be remedied, to a large extent, by adopting more comprehensive and appropriate concepts. For example, “economic activities” may be so defined as to include not only production for market, on-account production for self-consumption, collection of material and goods used for production i.e., market or own-account and self consumption (as was done in the 50th NSS round) and own-account production of fixed assets, but also processing of primary products for market or own consumption (as in UN system of accounts). Adjustment carried out on this basis, utilising the data available from NSS suggests that the FWPR could in reality be significantly higher than observed in the simple estimation in different categories. The estimates could be firmed up and validated by collecting more direct and detailed information on the “Worker” on “non-worker” women. He further states, “data collection, however, has a cost. Censuses
and large-scale surveys can become both unwieldy and expensive, if loaded with search for detailed qualitative information. They should aim at deriving broad trends and developing hypotheses, which could then be supplemented and tested on the basis of small-scale surveys and micro-case studies.\(^28\)

Analysis and policy making in employment involve complex issues in India because of the variegated nature of work situations and modes of employment. It is particularly so in the case of women, where the concepts and categories used in statistics and in policy do not always capture the nature and extent of their work. The numbers revealed by surveys like person hours, days, months or years have little meaning without corresponding information on such qualitative characteristics of work as earnings, productivity, regularity, security and physical conditions of work. These aspects become particularly important in the case of women as an overwhelming majority of them are engaged in the informal sector which scores very low in terms of these characteristics. As a result, it has become a matter of concern of many scholars as to whether to regard a quantitative increase in female work participation as such as a positive development. (Papola T.S 1999, Gopalan, 1997; Jhabvala, 1997)

The fact remains that the enormity of household level activities in creating and maintaining a society is not recognised. “Women not only bear the major share in biologically reproducing the next generation but also in the nurture and care of children in the family. Besides these, there are the other household maintenance tasks such as cooking, cleaning, stocking, preserving and processing work. For all these takes within the household that women do, that goes by the name of unpaid labour, neither society nor official statistics gives recognition or value (Hartman 1981, Kuhn and wolpe, 1978, Young Wolkowitz & McCullagh, 1988).\(^29\) “Invisibility” of women work in official statistics has, therefore, been a matter of concern both in research and policy.

**Labour Market Discrimination Theory**

Data on various aspects of employment easily support the hypothesis of widespread discrimination against women at various level; non-employment of
women and their low participation rates, small proportion of women in better paid and more secure jobs their employment in low paid peripheral jobs with little scope for upwards mobility and payment of lower ways than men for similar work. Employment situation India revealed by the analysis of available data suggests, the presence of discrimination against women at all levels. Labour force participation rates are lower for women than for men. Disparity is particularly very high in urban areas. For example, in Mumbai LFPR for women was 10.7% as against 53.75 for men in 1991 (Deshpande and Deshpande). Women constitute a small portion of total workforce, particularly in the non-agricultural sector and in Urban areas. Within the force, women are mostly found working in low paid occupations.

The wage-differentials between men and women and the inequality of access to both privileged working position and job promotion are widespread not only in India but through out Asia. (Ghosh, 1999) Men are often employed as regular workers with job security and benefits in managerial or technical jobs, while women are confined to the production line as operators and are hired as contract workers with low pay, longer working hours and poor working conditions (Committee for Asian Women, 1995). In agriculture, the pattern of wage differential for men and women is remarkable, where women receiving between 60-80% of the male wages for similar activities, and also dominating certain chores like weeding which traditionally commanded lower wages. In the industrial Zones, there are often no explicit wage differences between men and women doing the same job, but they trend to be allocated different jobs with different pay scales. The discrimination between women workers in terms of age and material status is particularly prevalent in the manufacturing sector.

According to Papola, technological, organisational and structural changes in production process are not always gender-neutral in their employment. The extent to which the male and female employment would get differently affected depends on the degree of gender -based division of labour and occupational segregation and the production processes that undergo technical changes. He further argues, “...the roles of the societal and labour market discrimination, their mutual causation and reinforcement in the final labour market outcomes have not received adequate attention in research and analysis on the subject. For example,
the vicious circle set in motion by parents perception about low returns on investment in education of girls resulting in low levels of education among women workers, on the one hand, and the employers not employing them particularly in better paid jobs for the reasons of lack of education and training, on the other round has hardly been examined”.

There are three general approaches that seek to explain the causal relationship behind the disadvantageous position of women in the labour market viz., Neo- Classical Economic Theories, Power and Domination theory and gender or feminist theories. While Neo-Classical theory explains sex inequalities in terms of differences in human capital, the Power & Domination theory relates sex differences in the labour market to the structure of the labour market (capitalist mode of production). The feminist theories on the other hand, present a historical approach and explain the subordinate position of women in the labour market in terms of cultural factors relating to the status and role of women in society.

**Neo – Classical Economic Theory**

This assumes that in competitive conditions, workers are paid according to their productivity. Productivity per unit of time paid for, resulting from differences in skill and human capital endowment of workers and intensity of their work effort. It follows from this assumption that observed male-female differential in earning are either due to lower productivity of women, or due to market imperfections. “This approach also assumes that women have lower levels of education, training and job experience than men, because families tend to allocate household resources to the education of male family members while expecting the females as they grow up, to spend their time in house work and child care for which training is not required. So, Neo-Classical theory explains gender differences in employment in terms of differences in human capital where women are disadvantaged because of their family responsibilities, physical strength, education, training, hours of work, absenteeism and turn over. It is, therefore, not very meaningful to continue the analysis of sex-discrimination only to the demand side, (Labour Market), it is necessary to see it in conjunction with the supply side discrimination practiced by the households, the society and the institutional arrangement for imparting...
education and training” (Papola, 1999). However, it has been shown empirically that these variables can explain only a part of the wage gap between men and women. Thus, the Neo-Classical theory explains the earning differential between two sexes as production-related difference between men and women (Chandola, L.M, 1987; Papola T.S, 1999).

**Power and Domination Theory**

Marxist economists’ approach relates the discriminatory mechanism of labour to the Power and Domination theory. This is essentially a historical approach, which explains the phenomena as resulting from the capitalistic mode of production. It emphasises the role of women as producers in partnership with men on equitable and non-exploitative basis during the pre-capitalist from of production. In the process, the labour market gets segmented into two relatively separate markets for men and women, restricting occupational choice for women. Women thus get crowded into those occupations with low income, and insecure and less stable jobs, along with other disadvantaged groups. According to the over crowding approach, women have to compete with each other for the limited “women specific” jobs in the overcrowd segments of the labour market, which depresses their wages. On the other hand, women have no competitions with men in a large number of “male specific jobs“ which helps in maintaining higher levels of wages for men. (Chandola, L.M. 1987)

**Feminist Theories**

This explains the subordinate position of women in the labour market in terms of cultural factors such as the status and role of women in society. For centuries women have been discriminated in every walk of life. The same is the case with women’s position in the labour market. The wide range of activities carried out by women at home though productive is often being neglected or rather, is invisible to society. Women suffer from two sets of discrimination in the labour market 1) Pre-market discrimination is generally the results of gender discrimination. Right from birth, women by being a female are deprived of many privileges, which her male counterpart enjoys, merely by the virtue of being a
male. Examples are lack of access to education and training. In fact, girls drop out early from school and join the labour or the household work, while the mother is engaged in wage work. 2) Post-market discrimination is related to the differential wages for a similar quantum of human capital. Women are relegated to the low earning, low skilled and low technology sector with low productivity. In the unorganised sector, lowest paid occupations have a significant high proportion of women. Wages are stagnant, but the supply of labour is continuously on the increase (Chandola, L.M. 1987)³²

"In the schematic development of the theories and ideas of the women's movement, the main contribution were made by Liberal feminists, Radical feminists, Marxist feminists and the Social feminists. The Liberal feminists did not identify gender inequality in terms of the hierarchical structure of society and henceforth did not challenge them. Instead, they focused on equal rights and opportunities for women as it was for men, in education and employment. They believed that women were disadvantaged because of the nexus of ideas and attitudes that were sexist and prejudiced against women, portraying them as inferior beings. This discrimination against women was perpetuated by a system of socialisation that trained women to accept and adapt to limited social roles (Fee, 1975). Radical feminists explained gender inequality in terms of oppression of women by men. While they identified men as oppressors, the patriarchal family and the psychic and cultural structures it created were focussed as the chief oppressive agents of society. (Fee 1975, Walby, 1990)

According to Marxist feminists, gender inequality derives from capitalist social relation, where women are given lower wages than men for the same work within the labour force. Their domestic labour is devalued and often unrecognised. Capital benefits from women's domestic labour and the reproduction of the next generation within the family. The family thus becomes one site of oppression. As capitalism develops and women are increasingly drawn into the workforce, there is an undermining of the structure of the patriarchal family. As more and more of women's labour gets shifted outside the home, it provides the material basis for the future abolition of the distinctions between women's and men's work (Tong 1989, Walby, 1990)
According to the socialist feminists, while capitalism controls the labour of women, patriarchal relations dictate norms of sexuality for men and women. Their contention remains that the central problems of analysis should be the social relations of gender. The socialist feminists try to locate inequality in gender relation or the asymmetrical relation between men and women in the domestic sphere, kinship relationships within the households are hierarchically organised. In this women’s position is lower down in the hierarchy for variety of reasons. Women’s access is restricted to the market, and hence to resources and goods. They have to be dependent on men. Their confinement labour within household makes them isolated. The intra-household relations have to be analysed in the context of the inequality prevailing in society, which serves as an impetus for economic activity to get divided on the basis of gender. The sexual division of labour that evolves within the household extends itself to the wage labour market with women tending to be segmented into certain sectors and jobs within it, these being typically lower paid, less skilled, and with poorer conditions of work.” (Amsden 1980, Elson Pearson 1981)33

### Dual Labour Market Theory

Doeringer and Piore (1971) presented the dual market theory. “They categorised jobs into ‘Primary and Secondary Sectors’. Primary sector jobs are characterised as relativity “good” in terms of remuneration, stability and opportunities for promotion. Secondary sector jobs are characterised with low pay, less security and little scope for advancement. Since men are perceived as more stable, they are likely to be employed in the primary sector and women are more likely to be relegated to the secondary sector jobs. (Chandola, L.M, 1987)

### Review of Available Studies

In this section, we have attempted to review some important findings of the studies conducted on various themes related to labour gender and health. These studies are analysed in three sections. The first section deals with the factors influencing the work opportunities of women workers, with a special focus on women workers employed in a number of unorganised industrial units, such as
lace-making, garment manufacturing, weaving, beedi rolling, food processing etc. In the second section, studies exploring the conditions of work and life of women workers in this sector are analysed. And the third section deals with a set of studies, which have explored the inter-play of these factors (socio-economic, working and living conditions) that shape the health of women workers. Studies in the 80s focussed mostly on the invisibility of women workers in the official statistics. These studies by Bhatt, Ela 1987; Singh, Andrea-menefee 1987; Mies, Maria 1982; Gulati, Leela 1981; Papola, T.S 1987 and Gopalan, Sarala 1985 have reviewed the existing definitions of women’s work and pointed out the lacunae/inadequacies inherent in the measurement of women’s work. They not only emphasised the need for recognition of women’s paid and unpaid labour, but also suggested ways for better enumeration in national accounts.

Studies especially in 90s focussed more on the broad trends emerging in the labour market. the sectoral shifts in employment, the growing informalisation and casualisation of work force and plight of workers in the unorganised sector. (Arulraj and Samuel Raja, 1995; Kalpagam, 1994, Sudan & Gupta, 1995; Samal Kishore, 1998). Of late, labour studies are focussing more on the export-oriented industrialisation and its impact on the employment pattern. The studies by Vijaybaskar, 1999; Ghosh Jayathi 1997; Swaminathan, Padmini & Jeyaranjan, 1997; Verghese, Sheela 2000; Neetha, N. 2001; Babu. P. Ramesh 2001; Sen. Samita 2001 have examined the flexibility in the organisation of production and its resultant impact on the gender composition of labour and employment relations. The increasing informalisation, feminisation and disorganisation of the workforce are some of the issues that have received much attention.

The Sociological Composition of Workforce in the Unorganised Sector

There is enough evidence to show that there is an overwhelming presence of women in the unorganised sector. And with the slow growth of organised sector, there is an increasing absorption of women in the unorganised, which is ever expanding. Various studies have examined the influence of caste, class (economic status) of the household, marital status and age factors in accessing the work opportunities. And they have found that not only women form
large part of the unorganised workforce, but also that women of lower caste and lower class get crowded in the low paid/less skilled occupations and remain at the bottom of the hierarchy. Some studies have even attempted to analyse the inequalities existing in the industry and concluded that they are the reflection of societal inequalities. In other words, the Social stratification gets reflected in the industrial arena too, where in the structural factors to a great extent, influence the placement of workers in the industrial hierarchy. (Holmstrom, 1985; Qadeer & Roy, 1989).

Several studies have focussed on specific industries like beedi, lace-making, coir, food processing, garment manufacturing etc., which provide us insights into the sociology of the working class, working and living conditions of the workers. The study of the lace-makers of Narsapur by Maria Mies (1982) provides interesting insights into the sociology of women employed in the informal sector. Lace-making did not start in Narsapur (which was around 1860) with the intention of producing for exchange value. The Christian missionaries who had converted the untouchable castes “Malas and Madigas” who were formally agricultural labourers, taught lace-making craft to the women among the converts, in order to overcome the social boycott they faced. At the turn of the century, lace export began on a regular commercial basis. Women of the fishermen caste, the “Agnikulakshatriya” who had always worked outside the house, selling fish, were engaged in lace work along with Christians. With the passage of time, due to agricultural pauperisation, women of agricultural caste “Kapu” also joined the workforce. With the decreasing opportunity for women in agriculture, women from poorer households took to lace making to generate income into the household.

Kalpana Bardhan (1985) identifies several contributing factors as the reasons why urban women workers in India are concentrated in the informal occupations. The formal sector- Government, large-scale industry and business cannot absorb India’s increasing supply of labour. Women’s already small share of factory employment continues to decline because of retrenchment, informalisation and tendency of factories to exclude women as new hires. With few opportunities for formal sector jobs, uneducated urban women swell the ranks of informal sector workers. They are joined by the displaced rural poor who migrate to the cities in
search of work. Finally, women are disadvantaged workers; they lack skills and education, they are burdened by responsibilities for housework and children, and they are restricted from certain types of workers with cultural factors and protective legislations.

Molly Mathew\textsuperscript{35} in her study on food processing industry in Kerala has found that women workers are under-employed and the industry is seasonal in nature. The demand for female labour was found to be age specific and majority of the unmarried women were asked to resign after marriage. Kalpagam.U in her study on garment industries in Madras carried out in 1981, revealed that the bulk of women workforce in the industry is young, uneducated, below twenty-six years of age and constitute first generation workers in the family. And in a significant section, it was found that the male heads, either father or husband had some form of industrial employment.\textsuperscript{36}

Mitra ct al. (1980) point out the export industries rely ultimately on the unresisting, disorganised, atomised labour, all along the line from free port zone, the metropolis, down to the village. “Another factor that encourages the use of home–based labour is technological developments which make it possible to decentralise productions process”.\textsuperscript{37}

Padmini Swaminathan (1997)\textsuperscript{38} while examining the nature of female employment in Tamil Nadu presents the data, which corroborates the all India phenomenon of the feminisation of work. To quote her “As a general rule, the ‘Southern States’ have a more visible presence as far as female employment outside the home is concerned. The distribution of workers by industrial categories and broad age groups reveals that, proportionately, the percentage of females workers in the age group 0-14 years out number the males in the same age group in each of the industrial categories. In another study of hers (1999)\textsuperscript{39} she has found an overwhelming presence of young adolescent girls in the garment manufacturing and pharmaceutical units of Chengalpattu district, Tamil Nadu.

A high labour force participation rate among women is often a result of poverty–everybody in the family is required to work and earn to ensure a minimum level of income (Papola, T.S 1999, Meena, Gopal 1999). An important finding of
Samita Sen's (2001) study is that in India, "women enter the labour market largely in response to the male members' employment situation especially when the conditions of labour market are the most unfavourable and tend to withdraw as the situation improves for the "male bread winner". In this regard the Indian pattern of women's employment is different to what prevails in South East Asian Countries. Quantum of women's work is determined not so much by the demand for it by the employers, as it is the need of the household. Thus paradoxically, women are flexible workers more for the family than for the employment. She further argues that no project for the further emancipation and empowerment of women worker can be successful without taking into account the persistent structural features of patriarchal system.

A recent study on export units of Tiruppur by Neetha N (2001) has found that age, education status, occupation of the household head, marital status, and number of children are all important variables as far as women's employment is considered. The major findings of this study are 1) The participation of female workers in the labour market was found to have a strong relation to the age of the workers. About 60% of the total women workers were found in the age group of 15-25. Of this a major proportion belonged to the adolescent age category of 15-20. She attributes the increased number of their presence to two factors (1) less domestic responsibilities as compared to married women and 2) preference of employers.

The same study has also found that, with the growth of the industry and with the coming of migrants, the caste composition of workers has changed. At present scheduled castes, which were traditionally, agricultural labourers were seen joining the industry in large numbers though it is still dominated by the backward caste. A large proportion of women workers was found to be migrants from the nearby districts that are agriculturally backward. Though the migrants were seen in all operations, they were found mainly in printing, dying and bleaching units. Young female workers were not allowed to work in all units but are restricted to places where some male members of the family are also employed.
CONDITIONS OF WORK AND LIFE

There is a great deal of variation in some of the terms and conditions of women’s informal sector employment such as in methods of recruitment, ease of entry, regularity of work, hours of work, method of payment as to whether piece rate or daily or weekly wages, extent and nature of supervision, etc. The income is low, there are no benefits and the workers are seldom organised (Kalpagam, U (1994).

The beedi industry of Allahabad studied by Zarina Bhatti, (1981)42 shows that it is essentially a household industry employing women of all ages. Women are given necessary raw materials, they take the work home, process it and then return the finished goods to their employer. They are paid according to the number, weight or size produced. This industry is expanding as western export markets are being established. But the workers largely remain at the mercy of contractors and obtain less than the minimum wage. Though the contract system is formally abolished, it still exists in beedi industry. Some of the major findings of the study included 1) In household with total annual income not exceeding RS 500, 86% of the income is contributed by women and with RS 500-750, 95% of the income is borne by women’s contribution. 2) Women were found to spend about 11 – 14 hours a day for wage work. 3) About 70% of the mothers wanted their daughters to continue making beedis for the reasons that it will serve as a source of additional income.

Rukmini Rao and Sabha Hussain’s study (1987)43 on garment industries in Delhi described how work relations are increasingly informalised by subcontracting, which means imposition of intermediaries between employer and worker which has implications on wages, safety measures, welfare inputs, work hours. In other words, employment in these industries was marked for low wages and piece rates, long and erratic working hours, irregular nature of work in terms of availability of work, delay in payment and isolation and absence of bargaining powers, which ultimately make the worker continue in poor conditions.
While analysing the three sectors – handloom, powerloom and the mill sectors in Coimbatore; Baud (1983) explains that the handloom sector has a greater proportion of family labour than the other two sectors. The task division in the labour process is based on age, gender and family relationship and is unfavourable to an equal division of labour between men and women and to women’s social autonomy. The other two sectors with their greater reliance on wage labour appeared more favourable, though in the mill sector there was increasing job segregation and declining proportion of women workers.

Irene Tom’s study (1989) on Silk Industry in South India brings out the following insights, “1) In all different types of production units, activities are divided into sub-tasks which are unequally allocated between the sexes. Apart from trading, handloom weaving involves several different activities namely warping, winding, weaving, fabric painting, designing the patterns and edging the fabrics. Winding the weft is usually women’s work and in most weaver families, it is done by the women who do not work on the loom. If women weave plain fabric, they hardly occupy themselves with setting up of warp, drawing patterns and pattern weaving. 2) Within home industries, it was found that many women work as part of family labour and jobs done by women are relatively less paid”.

Kalpagam (1994) points out the existence of a variety of ways in which the production process is organised. In beedi, cashew, coir, garments, textile, electronics and other industries, production units range from factories (regulated) to workshops and householders (unregulated). The use of intermediaries to recruit and manage women workers is a common pattern found in construction and household production. A trend towards informalisation can be seen in manufacturing where labour intensive operations are sub-contracted to small workshops and households. In some cases women’s organisations and other types of voluntary associations have started to act as intermediaries between private/public sector industry and women in workshop or household production.

Sarala Gopalan (1997) in her study explains that “women’s work is heavily concentrated in a few industry group; a review of the tasks done by women shows that they are most often employed in low skill, manual work and display little
mobility” she further states that women always prefer a job that leaves them enough time and energy to cope with household work. In terms of workforce participation, what this means is that many women are not counted as “Workers”, because they work for less than the accepted measure of being employed i.e., working at least 183 days in the year.

The issue of home-based work by women in putting-out arrangement, is a complex one. Such work is preferred by both employer and employee alike for the reasons of employer not wanting to maintain a formal organisational structure and thereby eluding the legal obligations of safeguarding the workers welfare on the other, women workers desire such work because it allows them to add income generating activities to household work without physically leaving the home, which means that other duties such as looking after children can be simultaneously performed. This provides greater flexibility, in terms of time, does not force women workers into long and unpleasant commuting and so on. But the problem is that such work also lends itself to the greatest possibilities of exploitation, since the individual woman working at home has virtually no bargaining power and the scope for worker protection is extremely limited. The high concentration of women in household industries rather than factory-based production affects their status as workers with no control on their labour and earnings. (Bardhan 1987; Shah and Gandhi, 1992, Hirway & Unni, 1995; Gopal, 1997)

Labour Bureau’s Survey on working and living conditions of workers in the beedi Industry in India (1995) has found, “About 90% of the total work force in the beedi industry is estimated to consist of home workers”. In spite of the provisions under the Beedi and Cigar workers Act, that all workers have to be given an identification card. In practice, the situation is quite different. The high incidence of home-based workers makes the tasks of organisation difficult. The survey found a number of ways in which workers were exploited in the industry. Instances of sub-standard and inadequate raw material supplies and unfair and adhoc rejection process were many. Since an overwhelming percentage of home-based beedi rollers are women, this underscores the vulnerability of women workers in the industry.
Jhabvala Renana (1999) has found the two types of fluctuations in the earnings of workers in the unorganised sector. First, in the same period different types of work yield different earnings. Secondly, over time the same types of work also fluctuates in earnings if looked at in constant prices. She further states, "unlike the formal sector workers, these workers are protected neither from market fluctuations nor from inflation. In the formal sector the market risks are absorbed by the employers and the entrepreneurs; however in the informal sector, the risks are passed on to the workers. Similarly, formal sector workers are protected from inflation by linking of their wages with dearness allowance, which is not available to informal sector workers".

In her study on the textile factories of South India, Baud Isha (1987) has found that women are relegated to the finishing department. Weaving, which is better paid, is usually done by men while spinning, which is low paid, is usually done by women. This asserts the widely prevalent view of discrimination that women not only get unequal pay for equal work but many jobs that women do are categorised as low skilled jobs for which lower wages are paid.

A recent study of Neetha on the Tiruppur Knit Wear industry (2001) throws light on some interesting areas. She has found that about 90% of total workers surveyed were employed casually and 70% of the total women workers were in the seasonal workers category engaged for 3–6 months. ii) The employment of women was higher in the lower rung of the chain, where uncertainty in production is higher. Female workers were mostly employed in labour intensive process such as checking and folding. iii) Since the size of labour force was considerably large, and due to the seasonal nature of the industry, majority of the workers were found to remain unemployed for considerably long periods of time. iv) Workers were hired either through personal contacts or were mobilised through agents. Around 95% of the workers were found to have heard about the employment through relatives or neighbours or through other community contacts. v) Work loads and wages were found to vary much among units and also between peak and slack seasons. The study further points out that large scale uncertainty in employment, due to seasonality in demand and wide variations in duration of work periods, forced workers to accept low wages. Employers were found mostly to prefer piece rate
systems, as there is no supervision cost involved. Almost 95% workers received
weekly wages and horizontal mobility was the common phenomenon through
which workers ensured job security due to the seasonal nature of the industry.

**Women’s Work Status and Autonomy**

Maria Mies examines how the notions of female dependency and inferiority
are carried over to areas, where, in fact, men have to rely on their wives skills for
survivals. She says “In Narsapur (Andhra Pradesh), where women make fine lace,
the menfolk took the produce to distant areas to sell. Women spoke of their
dependence on men, but did not point out that without their skills, husbands may
well be unemployed if not destitute. They were characteristically modest about
their role in productive labour. Though women workers were aware that their work
was quite distinct from housework and was by no means a leisure time activity,
they did not attach much importance to their economic roles.

Padmini Swaminathan (1997) argues against the assumption that income-
generating employment outside home, could contribute to greater sexual and
reproductive autonomy. This is hardly applicable to the work that most girls and
women do in the third world countries. In the Indian context of both economic
stratification and social hierarchy, “the question whether work is the prime mover
of women’s status (and therefore, their ability to exercise reproductive choice for
example) is pregnant with multiple qualifications and diverse outcomes not only
between regions but also between different communities and sections of population
within a region. She further quotes Kalpana Bardhan, 1985, “the rate of workforce
participation may have a role in determining women’s status, but the role is
qualified by questions of work quality, the class variation in the double burden, and
whether productive labour is a sufficient condition for autonomy and voice,
whether it is even a necessary condition in a class and hierarchy ridden society”.

A study of Bangladesh women working as sewing machine operators in
garment-exporting factories (Kibria, 1995) found that the women exercise control
over the their wages and tended to review their employment in positive terms, as
enhancing their sense of self-esteem and worth in the household, even though the
employment did not pose a significant challenge to patriarchal family relations otherwise. Hayzer (1998)\textsuperscript{47} has found that for most women workers in Asia, industrialised work, whether it be home-based through a weaving co-operative, the outwork or assembly line system or highly skilled technical activities, is no longer a transient and supplementary job, but work that provided a sense of independence, self-confidence and improvement in status”.

Neetha (2001) has found in her study that, “in about 80% of the households, father in case of unmarried workers or the husband in case of married workers controlled the income of the workers. And married women workers had comparatively higher autonomy in income control than that of unmarried girls”. It was also found in her study that though women made heavier contribution to productive labour, the domestic responsibility remained with them only.

Ghosh in her paper (1999) argues that “certainly, the ability to earn income from outside and to engage in activities other than household-oriented ones is important for women and can lead to substantial social change eventually. However, the other side of the matter is that such employment need not improve the social and material conditions of women workers, if it occurs in the context of declining aggregate household real incomes (because falling real wages and unemployment of other household members). This simply creates a double burden of paid and unpaid work with outside employment occurring under inferior conditions. That is why the focus should not be on the sheer quantity of women’s employment but on the quality, recognition and remuneration of such work, as well as the conditions facilitating it such as alternative social arrangements for household work and child care”.

Linkages between Socio-Economic Conditions, Conditions of Work and Women’s Health

The socio-economic factors like caste, class, income, education, and the working conditions have a definite impact on the health status of people. Qadeer and Roy (1989)\textsuperscript{48} explain how differentiation in labour generally parallels the
differentiation within the production process and thus differential exposure to health hazards. The study points out that, while the skilled and semi-skilled workers came largely from middle and upper caste families, a large proportion of casual and contract labourers belonged to tribals, Harijans and other lower castes. Among the tribals, the economically better-off tribes were better represented in the unskilled work force of coal mines where wages are relatively good, the other tribes mostly worked as coolies, construction workers, earth-movers and casual labourers in other industries. The study further says, “None of the permanent workers were required to handle the dicey jobs, where as all such operations were done by manual labourers hired under contractors, without any protection devices like boots, cloths, goggles, masks, gloves and what so ever”. Thus, the contract labourers were directly exposed to the greatest hazards. In this social hierarchy, as the study mentions, yet another group that needs to be specially mentioned is women and children, who maintain a lower status in work just as they do at home.

Links with land, patterns of migration, education, and skill determine which level of labour one enters, and at which level one is placed. According to the same study, the implications of stratification for health are that, given the scarcity of facilities, those who are privileged control resources and also control the facilities. The classes at the bottom that have no control or access over these facilities and are deprived of even the basic minimum facilities of life. This is true whether it is health, housing, sanitation, educational facilities or employment as shown by Banerji, 1985; Zurbrigg, 1984; Djurfeldt & Lindberg, 1980; and Qadeer, 1989.

As Qadeer argues, the social inequality has serious implications for their health not only at work place but also at home. This is because, as we have seen skills and education and hence job qualifications of the workers depend on the socio-economic background they come from. The more depressed their origins, the more likely they are to take unskilled jobs that no one else takes because of the associated hazards. This becomes self-perpetuating because the less their ability to resist these jobs, the more disadvantaged they will become by constant exposure to health hazards and ensuing illness and injuries. Their place in the social hierarchy also determines their access to basic amenities for life like housing, drinking water,
medial facilities, education, etc., which as we know are inaccessible to those at the bottom.

While pointing out the relationship between participation of women in economic activity and poverty, Papola and Gopal explain that often poverty forces women to enter the workforce and their participation, particularly in cash-earning activities tends to improve the short and long term poverty-reducing conditions in the household such as nutrition and children’s education. It is also observed that employment of women has often greater positive impact on poverty and related characteristics of a household than the employment of men. Women tend to utilise their earning more on basic needs of household. This is found to lead a positive impact on such qualitative aspects apart from education and health of children, fertility and gender equality, as a working woman has greater concern and awareness about the future of the children, limiting the family size and, indeed her own role and status in the family and the society (Gopalan, 1997, Papola, 1999).

As Ravindran, 1995 explains, “economic power is one of the determining factors of health. Wage determines a person’s purchasing power. Higher the purchasing power, the better would his or her nutritional status, which in effect keeps him in good health. Poverty increases a person’s risk of disease due to chronic malnutrition, unhealthy living conditions, strenuous work and so on. It often makes people less able to take care of themselves or seek professional help in case of illness, because of lack of time and money. Thus the same factors that make some section of population more vulnerable to disease through denial of basic resources also impede their ability to deal with disease effectively”.

World Bank, 1989 reports, “women’s economic productivity is a critical factor, as the dependence of the family on their contribution to the household resources, increases with the poverty status of the family. This is further underscored by the fact that a) women’s earning increase the aggregate income levels of these poor households; and b) women contribute much larger share of their earning to basic family maintenance. Consequently increase in women’s income translate more directly into better child health and nutrition status”. On the other hand investment in women workers is less than their male counter parts as
evident from many studies. Women are less endowed with productive resource in terms of education, health and economic assets. (Gopalan, 1997)

The relation between women's (paid) work and levels of welfare is closely related to unpaid work burdens. In the absence of adequate investment in drinking water, sanitation, appropriate aforestation etc, women's work burdens on account of fetching water and care of livestock will remain high. As an illustration, an NCAER Survey found that only 18% of all days spent in work by women fall in the category of "Paid labour force" for rural Haryana as a whole. At the same time, activities such as collection of water, fuel and fodder accounted for 14% of women's workdays for the same (rural Haryana as a whole, NCAER 1995). In such situations, increase in paid work without reductions in unpaid work is not better in terms of welfare. (Gopalan, 1997)

"Women's position in the household is further influence by the placement of household in the social hierarchy. Despite the household being the place, where they reap the rewards of much of their labour such as physical succour, emotional support and social status, there is inequality in the distribution of consumption resources, and tremendous discrepancies in the energy input in activities, that men and women do and the devolution of responsibility amongst them. (Agarwal 1990; Jain Banerjee, 1985)"50

It is estimated that 16 hours or nearly two thirds of a woman's day is spent in working. According to the estimates of Srilatha Battiwala (1982)51, the respective energy contribution of men women and children per day are 31%, 53%, and 16% respectively. Hence, women are working for longer hours and harder than men are. However, according to the same study, food distribution within the family is very disproportionate - 2 units for a man, 1.5 unit for a woman and 1.0 unit for a child (of cooked cereal ragi). Hence, there is a deficit of nearly 100 calories per day, and this is felt more acutely during pregnancy and lactation when an additional 500-600 calories are required. The study found that women spend about 700 calories or 1/3 of their energy on the domestic tasks of cooking and fire wood collection and water fetching.
According to Ravindran (1995), differentials in health status across groups, households & individuals, and variations in socio-economic characteristics are usually the result of the disadvantages resulting from inequitable distribution of access to resources. In societies where gender based discrimination limits women's access to resources, one may expect to find gender differentials both in susceptibility to illness and in access to health care. Thus, the health status of women from poor communities has the compounded disadvantages of being poor and female.

She further observes, "the inter-play between poverty and gender discrimination seems to be the lynchpin in any explanation of women's health problems. Growing up in landless families, eking out a hand to mouth existence, children especially, girls dropout early from school and join the labour force or manage the household while mother engages in work. Girls are married early and are under tremendous social pressure to bear children immediately, a typical solution of a high mortality social group where fertility is highly valued. Inadequate nutrition together with heavy manual labour on land and at low age cause high pregnancy wastage, and in turn extend the period of child bearing to the women's entire reproductive span. It is worth noting that in a poverty group such as this, participation in labour force increases the risk of morbidity and is not an indicator of better status but of greater deprivation. While explaining the relationship between work participation and mortality, Ravindran observes that female mortality has an inverse correlation with female labour force participation, and that this is because girls and women, who are potential or current wage earners, are better valued and consequently cared for.

Sheila Zurbrigg (1984) while analysing ill health, takes into consideration the socio-economic factors that decide the health behaviour of people, particularly women and children. The case report she presents, besides giving a vivid illustration of the women's inaccessibility to health care delivery system, depicts the problems she (Rakku in that case study) encounters in getting treatment. It gives the wider perspective of how economic factors like compulsion to work, and risk of loss of wage which in effect means inability to feed her family, force her to ignore health. It talks of the whole issue of how women's health is been given the
least priority. She doesn't bother about her personal care, in fact she doesn't find
time to take care of herself when working for a long time. The same economic
factors also compel her to ignore her daughter's illness. Rather, her being too
optimistic that nothing will happen to her child who suffers from diarrhoea, leads
to delayed treatment and subsequently to the death of the child.

Studies have also pointed out that women's health is influenced by certain
cultural factors. For example, it is customary for Indian women to first serve food
to the family and then eat whatever is left. In the survey conducted by the
Committee on the Status of Women, 48.53% of persons stated that males eat first
in their families. This custom is common for most classes, but in poor families this
results in malnutrition for women and girls. As Ravindran describes, girls and
women often have less access to food and health care than boys and men, where
society places a lower value on the female than on the male. Females are often
given less or poorer quality of food and health care than men. Many women also
deny themselves food and health care in preference to their children. She further
explains about the triple workload shouldered by women. Most women in India
face the multiple demands of productive work, household maintenance, and
childbearing and rearing. This triple burden together with the common practice of
women being given less food of poorer quality, often leaves many poor women
with persistent fatigue or chronic pain, and may result in significant nutritional
deficiency especially iron deficiency anaemia.

The other cultural norms that particularly affect women's health as
presented by Ravindran are attitudes towards marriage, age of marriage, value
attached to fertility and sex of the child, the pattern of family organisation and the
ideal role demanded of women by social conventions. They determine her place
within the family, the degree of her access to medical care, education, nutrition and
other accessories to health, which in turn lead to excessive deprivation and
hardships for women.

There are some research studies that deal with the occupational diseases
and health related problems of workers in the unorganised sector. Irene Tom
(1989) found that the Silk industry has always been associated with skin and lung
ailments. Tuberculosis is found to be the most common disease among the silk labourers. He explains dust particles released during production process, impair the workers’ lungs. The combinations of hot damp air, bad ventilation and dust make working conditions unattractive. The Indian Council of Medical Research in its review of occupational diseases reports the prevalence of Byssinosis in textile workers. “The changing pattern of industrial production and expanding workforce have their own implications for the health of the workers. For example, industries like textile, jute, mining have mechanical and dust hazards and their intrinsic dangers are combined with the unsanitary in which workers are forced to live.”

Therefore, as pointed out by Sarada Moni, 1985; Kalpagam 1994 any analysis on women’s work can not abstract itself from the factors that cause and develop poverty, such as the concentration of economic power, the development of productive forces, the state policy and ruling ideology. Studies focussing on the household firmly stress the various inter linkages. For example, having earning or owning property or having education alone will not generate women, equality and power, but it is only a special mix of structural and cultural factors in each situation, coupled with opportunities available that determine the precise outcome (Krishna Raj and Chanana, 1989).

Hence, a comprehensive understanding of women’s health demands an understanding of all these factors.
ENDNOTES


2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.


8 Ibid.


13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.


19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Tom, Irene, Women in Unorganised Sector: Technology, work organisation and change in the Silk industry in South India, 1989, Usha Pub., New Delhi


31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.


36 Ibid


47 Ibid.


49 Sundari Ravindran, T.K., Women’s Health in a Rural Poor Population in Tamil Nadu in Das Gupta, Monica & et al (Ed), Women’s Health in India- Risk and Vulnerability, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1995.


