CHAPTER - VI

NATURE AND PERCEPTION OF THE FEMALE WORKERS' WORKING CONDITIONS IN URBAN INFORMAL SECTOR
Review of the various studies, revealed that all the segments of the urban informal sector are characterized by abysmally poor working conditions. For probing into the nature and perception of the working conditions of female workers, several factors like, long and unregulated working hours, type of jobs entrusted to them, have to be looked into which on many occasions created a situation of role conflict, thus making the conditions all the more pitiable for them.

The existence of adverse working conditions for these female workers does not at all mean that they can be delinked from their traditionally ascriptive roles. It is also noticed that their male counterparts as well as male members of their families are not at all sympathetic and co-operative towards them or their work.

A. SWEEPERS:

Dalit women in the country can be described as economically marginalised which necessitates their sharing the economic burden of running their homes by doing heavy physical work like construction works. Yet, a majority of women are engaged in services like domestic works,
laundrying, washing, scavenging and sweeping, come from scheduled castes.¹ Their working conditions and lifestyle, low wages compared to the volume of work they put in, job insecurity, long and unregulated hours of work, without any benefits of sick leave, holiday and maternity leave etc. make their living conditions deplorable. The poor are found dominating the informal sector which is estimated to engage anywhere between 50 to 75 per cent of urban workers.

**MIGRATION:**

The most popular model to explain the pattern of migration and its link with informal sector is that of Todaro (1969). He suggested that migration is a two stage phenomenon. The Todaro's Model envisages informal sector employment as a transitory post for new migrants on their way to formal sectors job. It assumes two permanent sectors in the economy- one is rural sector, specializing in production of agricultural goods and the other is modern urban sector. The urban sector is divided by Todaro into two sub sectors viz. Modern sector and Traditional sector (similar to informal sectors which includes all the workers not regularly employed in the urban modern sector) i.e.
overly unemployed, the underemployed or sporadically employed and those who are employed in petty retail trades and services.\textsuperscript{2} The urbanization process in India, however, is ahead of the process of industrialisation. It is much ahead of the growth of the organised non-agricultural jobs in urban areas. The result is that the urban areas and non-agricultural activities are also characterized by the predominance of the unorganised labour. The rural poverty, in a way, has spilled over in the urban areas where it has led to the expansion of the slums and the informal sector activities and general decline in the quality of life of a majority of people even in urban areas. In the present study 36 per cent of women, were non-migrants. 41.33 per cent workers had migrated because of marriage. But if we look at these people, only a few belong to the Rohtak city. Others came from nearby villages long time back 17.33 per cent people migrated due to economic compulsions. Only 5.33 per cent workers have migrated to Rohtak due to ecological factor. These workers were those who have come from U.P., Rajasthan, Bihar and Madras. The Tamil men sell balloons and their women work as domestic workers or as sweepers. Men from U.P. are mostly in construction work.
It is seen in Rohtak that husband is engaged in construction of buildings, the wife as a domestic worker and the whole family found living in some of the premises under-construction itself. These workers come to the city with the hope that they will earn money and go back to their native places. But in urban informal sector, even after working for long hours, they are hardly able to make both ends meet.

PERIOD OF STAY IN THE OCCUPATION

It was found in the present study that 64 per cent of the sweepers were in this occupation for a period of 9 years or more. 21.33 per cent were in their occupation for the last 5 to 8 years. 9.33 per cent were working for the last 3 to 4 years and only 5.33 per cent were found working for periods extending up to two years only. If we sum up the above observations, it is found that 85.33 per cent had been working for more than 5 years thus clearly indicating the lack of occupational mobility.

WORKING HOURS:

All the women in the informal sector worked for more than eight hours. In the case of sweepers, 54.67 per
cent sweepers were found to work 6 to 9 hours a day. Bidi workers work 5-12 hours a day. Due to extremely long hours of work, they have become victims of physical and mental fatigue.

Only 6.67 per cent workers work for 10 to 12 hours a day and 38.67 per cent women workers worked for only 2-5 hours a day. Besides the working hours at work they spend 4 or 5 hours in their own household chores. 73.33 per cent women spent 6 to 11 hours at work daily. Long working hours were also observed i.e., 9-12 hours among Juti-making women. In the present study, total working hours were found to be in the range of 11-15 hours because they spend 3 or 4 hours daily in the morning on household chores, then go to work and again after coming back in the evening spend 2-3 hrs. to prepare meals etc. for the family. Women sweepers had no leave but it was seen that they avail leave for four or five days in a month. Thus, though they are not allowed any leave yet they just avail it. These poor women work all the day and still get low wages.

WAGES OR INCOME:

Since this is a study of sweepers in urban
informal sector, so we have included all women sweepers who were working as private sweepers. Private sweepers often get lots of benefits. In the informal sector, there is no regular income pattern. Often, it depends on the willingness of the employer to pay and the existing demand for the workers. Therefore, the workers can never be sure about their income. For the sweepers' category, there are no minimum wages fixed and the 'Minimum wages Act' does not cover them. We found that only 4 per cent of sweepers earn Rs. 150/- per month. 8 per cent women workers earned Rs. 151 to 300 monthly. 14.67 per cent had their incomes in the range of Rs. 301 to 500 per month. 66.67 per cent workers earn Rs. 501 to Rs. 1000 per month. Only 6.67 per cent workers earn Rs. 1001 to 1500. These variations show that there are no fixed incomes for the sweepers and their income depends on the whims and fancies of their employer and availability of sweepers in the region. Sweepers get more money when they work in the areas which are far from the city area.

Less wages are also observed by Loes Schenk Sandbergen in a study of Kerla. Majority of women earn Rs. 100 P.M. for working in 30 houses. Even today, seven
years after the Karlekar's survey a Jamadarni, characteristically gets less than Rs. 5 a month from each house. Most of the workers are ill paid, 60 per cent workers earn only Rs. 100-200 monthly. Majority of the respondents' earnings ranged between Rs. 1000 to 2000. In the present study, though sweepers earn more in comparison to their south Indians counterparts yet their condition was not found to be satisfactory. Majority of women, who were self employed had their income between Rs. 200 to 400 per month in Hyderabad or Secunderabad. Malvika Karlekar found that 60 per cent respondents earned Rs. 100 per month. Women said that for working in about thirty houses, they earn Rs. 50/-; In the present study the sweepers were not found getting less than Rs. 40/- per house. More the work they do, more is the income they get.

MODE OF PAYMENT:

There are different modes of payment for these sweepers. One, the salary is paid to the parents if a girl is employed. Another method is to deposit the money in the bank. However, giving the money directly to the domestic workers is very common. Most of the sweepers are paid directly. Secondly, all these women sweepers get their
payment on monthly basis. There are verbal contracts between the employers and the sweepers that for doing such works, they will be paid the agreed amount. After they complete work in a particular house, they go to the next one. These sweepers were found working in many houses. In many places in Tamil Nadu, Kerla and Karnataka respectively, they are paid on monthly basis. This practice is found to be prevalent in Haryana and particularly in Rohtak city.

PAYMENT OF OVER TIME AND OTHER BENEFITS:

There is no paid maternity leave. Around the date of delivery, they stop working for one or two months. So in the urban informal sector, no paid maternity leave was admitted by any member. They get extra income as tips from employer’s guests and relatives. For any enhanced work load, the employer pays the workers. Medical benefits were totally absent from urban informal sectors. Social security benefits had not been implemented for the welfare of scheduled castes.

Untouchability was also found to be existing in the urban informal sector. One sweeper told that she was not
allowed to go anywhere near Kitchen. Mahatma Gandhi and some other leaders activity thought of these social problems. But the changes in this direction were very slow and hence, the socio-economic conditions of these workers have remained low. 54.67 per cent sweepers were not satisfied about their jobs. Only 45.33 per cent women sweepers were satisfied. They said that they work as sweepers because no jobs in other field are available to them. This work was their way of life and they get some extra income also for their families. The sweepers who were not satisfied complained of low wages, long working hours, no security of job. No money was paid for overtime but the employers do give them used clothes, tables which were not to be consumed by employer's family etc. Advance wages are the benefits which sweepers get in lieu of the overtime. They were not given paid leave, but normally no wages were cut for availing leave i.e. 56 per cent got something in kind for extra works. 43 per cent women sweepers do not get any overtime payments. In the context of these sweepers, we have used overtime in relation to enhanced work loads as they are working on a particular quantum of work basis.
PROBLEM OF UNIONISATION:

Most of the women in the urban informal sector have never heard of unions in the true sense. They have never fought for equalities of pay or occupational justice. All the sweepers were unaware of the various welfare measures and their rights for wage equality. In the absence of strong unions, the implementation of these measures is not possible. The ignorance and the absence of such unions, keeps them in dark about many welfare measures. Therefore, loyalty to the household, passiveness and fear of male members' objection at home are their daily routine life. In the present study, we do not find any sweepers to be a member of any union.

B. CONSTRUCTION WORKERS:

MIGRATION:

Another significant group of women in the unorganised sector is that of construction workers. If a migrant is defined as the one who was not born in Rohtak city, then 88 per cent of the construction workers can be termed migrants. Only 17.33 per cent have migrated through marriage. Most of these construction workers have
migrated from Jhansi District (U.P.), Panna and Bilaspur Districts of M.P., Ajmer, Jaipur and Bikaner Districts of Rajasthan. 36 per cent of the migrants workers cited economic reasons. In the case of 25.33 per cent, ecological factors were found to be responsible. 9.33 per cent gave several other varied reasons for their migration. 12 per cent were found out of scope of this question.

So, these construction workers from all parts of India have become inhabitants of Rohtak. Why did these workers come to Rohtak City as they did? An open question to that effect was asked to these respondents. They told about drought conditions, non-availability of work, social compulsions and family quarrels. Bechelors who were already residents of Rohtak, got married and brought brides from other places. These women have thus migrated through marriage.

One of the migrant workers from U.P. said that she came from her village with others because they had no water for irrigation. Some of the migrants from U.P. said that in their native places, the contractor did not give wages to them after completion of the work. They Just used to scare them away. Hence they have come here. When they were
asked about their contractor's name, they had no idea about the name of any of them. They also do not know much about minimum wages. "We do not know whose stones we are crushing. We need not see who pays our wages nor do we see him actually as the wages are paid by our supervisor. We only know these stones - Nothing else?" 

PERIOD OF STAY IN THE OCCUPATION:

All the respondents were asked about the duration of job. "How long have you been doing this type of job?" We divided their answers in four categories. 33.33 per cent respondents had an experience of 9 to 10 years. Only 24 per cent respondents had labour experience upto 2 years, 17.33 per cent respondents had an experience of above 2 to 4 years, and 23.33 per cent respondents had 4 to 9 years experience of work. One construction worker told me that she was working for the last 20 years and knew all jobs but was still considered to be an unskilled labourer though her male counterparts have become mistry and were getting more wages. Work on any construction site can be divided into skilled and unskilled work. While skilled work requires some previous training either in a formal school or on the job, for unskilled work one's own strength and physical
stamina is required. Lack of occupational mobility was observed as 55.67 per cent workers had been working for more than 5 years or so.

**WORKING HOURS:**

Almost all workers start work at 8 O'Clock in the morning. The workers are asked to come 10 to 15 minutes before the start of work. They work till 6 O'Clock. The workers who break bricks work till 3 PM only, as this work is done on contract. These women workers come early in the morning i.e. 6.00 A.M. in summer season and 7.00 A.M. in winter seasons. In the present study, 10.66 per cent workers were of brick-breaking type. They have no fixed time. They work on contract and work in groups at one site, breaking these bricks. Money of contract is divided amongst the workers. The contract is on square feet-basis. The Contract is decided by the male members of their family and money is also collected by them. These women were generally not aware of their earnings and working hours.

Women workers who work on daily wages work for about 10 hours daily with only one hour rest (from 1.00 PM to 2.00 PM) as lunch break. The majority of workers work 9
hours daily and only 9.34 per cent work for 12 hours a day. Thus 80 per cent workers earn Rs. 3 per hour. 9.34 per cent workers who work about 9 hours were the workers who are employed by the contractor for laying down the R.C.C. (lintel). These workers take wages of 60 rupees daily and they work until lintel work is complete whatever be the time. There is no rest for these workers. They are hired for the day specially for the lintel job. But these workers do not get work continuously. In the study of Chitra Ghosh, workers work from 8.00 AM to 5 PM and get rest of one hour for lunch. In the present study, the hours of work have been found more than the study of Chitra Ghosh.

In the present study the labourers from Rajasthan and M.P. (from Panna and Bilaspur districts) were found living in hutments in the University campus and in tents on the canal side. They take four to five off-days in a month for washing clothes, market visits and other works. Many of them have no belongings in their native places — no land, no houses etc. They also go back home for marriages.

Construction being, largely, an open air activity, does not offer the same employment opportunities throughout
the year. Construction activity during the Monsoons virtually come to a halt. Then there are other wet days during the course of a year when there can be no work. If it is raining early in the morning they are sent back and if it rains before lunch, they get paid for just half a day. During the six months extending from December to May, construction activity is usually in full swing except when some material shortage, particularly of cement, occurs which virtually brings all the works to a halt. Workers, in the organised sector worked for about 45 to 48 hours per week in factories and around 40 hours in offices. Any worker who works 42 hours per week could be considered fully employed. In the present study, not even a single worker in the entire sample worked for less than 56 hours a week. They usually work seven days a week. There were several instances when a worker worked for as long as 12 hours a day without any weekly holiday. It may thus be said that there was no scope for these workers to increase their earnings by increasing the quantum of work duration or working days.

All the workers have come through Thekedar. Only 3
female workers were found working on daily wages basis, directly with the house-owner. These women, who are working along with their husbands, do not know much about their wages as the wages are collected by their husbands.

**WAGES OR INCOMES:**

The picture of the conditions of the respondents will be more clear if we take into account their wages. The majority of respondents, 60 per cent, earn Rs. 1001 to Rs. 1500 per month. The daily wages in this city vary as 27, 30, 35, 40, 45 rupees per day. The commission of Rs. 2 to 5 is deducted by contractor. Wages are higher for the workers who work for laying lintel. The lintel worker takes no rest day. 17.33 per cent workers earn Rs. 700/- and 16 per cent earn 800 and above. Only 6.67 per cent workers in the present study, were found to earn below Rs. 500 per month. Income in this study is higher than comparing to a Delhi study which was between Rs. 200/- to Rs. 300/-, for the Bihar study income ranged from Rs. 194 to Rs. 334. In Ahmadabad the average income of the worker was only Rs. 195. The daily wages according to Sharamshakti was only Rs. 11, in Allahabad, woman Rs. 12/- and man Rs. 15/- in Kulu (H.P.) and Holewar Barpukhuru in
Assam get Rs. 12/- per day\(^\dagger\). So in the present study we find higher wages and workers are found to earn more as compared to other places. It is attributed to the good economic condition of Haryana, which is the second most prosperous state of India.

Low income was also observed by Maria Mies in the study of Lace Makers of Narsapur and Nirmala Banerjee's women in unorganised sector. In unorganised sector, low income was also observed by Joshi and Joshi. The requirements of a family of four, male earner plus wife and two children in Bombay, were calculated to be Rs. 240.88 in 1968. But we can not compare our income here in Rohtak city due to non availability of data of unorganised Sector. Wage differences on sex basis was significantly marked. If women get Rs. 35, then men found to get Rs. 40 for the same work. This difference has been found in almost all the construction sites of the city. Wage discrimination in Kulu was Rs. 3 and Rs. 2 in Allahabad. In Rohtak city also on some sites difference was Rs. 2 and on some other sites difference was upto Rs. 5.

Though the contractors reported that there was no discrimination in wages and that they are giving equal
wages to men and women but when inquired, these workers separately, they denied this claim. There were no women Thkedar,20 (contractor) or even Mistry. Women were found as workers only in this occupation, working mostly as load lifters and all the workers were temporary.

**MODE OF PAYMENT:**

It is found that mode of payment in construction labour was not fixed. 45.33 per cent workers take their wages weekly and 16 per cent workers take their wages daily. Different practices were observed on different sites. Women workers have to clean and wash all working equipments like Tin, Shovels, Basins, spades, and others which are used by the Mistry and other workers and put them away in a safe place. Usually women stand aside in a group, separate from men, to collect their wages from the contractors. No one gets the payment monthly yet they leave some money with the contractor, to save something for their dependents living else-where. They are not asked to append their signatures when receiving their payments. Some workers were economically so poor that they could not manage even for a day without receiving their wages. It was necessary to pay them every day, in the evenings. They
take advances also from their contractors when needed. The contractors are found to deduct Rs. 2 to Rs. 5 per worker as commission, on the pretext of providing them employment.

**PAYMENT OF OVERTIME AND OTHER BENEFITS:**

As required under regulation 3(i) of the contract labour regulations, "When" an adult worker is made to work for more than nine hours on any day or for more than forty eight hours, in any week, he shall, in respect of overtime work, be paid wages double the ordinary rate of wages. Majority of respondents (92 per cent) did not get payment of overtime. They did not know as to how many hours of overtime work was actually done by them in the month and how much of money they were entitled to on this account.

Only 8 per cent respondents are found to get payment of overtime. But for those workers who work till late in the night, the contractor does not cut any wages if they were late some times or they want short leave of one or two hours. But there is generally no provision of overtime payments. Our findings were similar to Kishor Samal of Sambalpur where only 11.59 per cent of wage workers were having facility of overtime payment.
PROBLEMS OF UNIONISATION:

These women workers being in informal sector were not organised. In the present study not even a single worker was member of any union or any political party. They have been completely ignored by all the political parties. Social neglect of these women workers is evident from the fact that not even a single women's organization had ever shown any interest in them as workers nor had they ever heard of the possible benefits of such activities from any leader, who could inspire their confidence of doing work. These women have just heard of the existence of unions in other trades or elsewhere.

The non-existence of the unions can be easily understood to be the result of their migrant nature, economic deprivation and the unfavourable bias towards them vis-a-vis the demand and supply position in the labour market. In addition to the discrimination shown against women in the urban informal sector, all the workers in the informal sector or unorganized sector, as such, are not capable of building up a bargaining strength to question their employers' continued exploitation and hence continue to work and live in deplorable conditions.
When we asked the women construction workers "would they work with the same employer or somewhere else?" Majority of them, 88 per cent, preferred to work with the same employer. These women workers work with the social security. If their husbands work with them, then they have no problem of harassment. Wages, working hours, terms and conditions are all decided by their husbands. These women do not know anything about overtime, mode of payment etc. Only two respondents are unmarried who were working with their parents. Only 8 per cent women work without their husbands. Their husbands were working elsewhere. These workers were those who were found engaged in breaking of bricks. Their husbands, who were working on the same construction site, took the brick breaking job on contract. The work is actually done by their women. These labourers lived in huts, did not send their children to school, being away from city and having no money for education and to buy them dresses etc.

A sizeable proportion of women in urban informal sector is engaged in construction work in Rohtak City. The condition of women workers is pitiable. They face instability, insecurity of employment and low wages.
It is found that there is non-observation of labour laws, bondage to the middleman who employ them, non-provision of the facilities bestowed by legislation, they have to keep migrating from one site to another. The average wages for women construction workers are generally lower than their male counterparts. They are almost unskilled. The situation of migrated labour is more serious because they live in tents, hutments and in houses where the construction work is going on. These were the women who along with their husbands have left their villages. Not a single child was found going to school in migrated families. Their children are playing or roaming around the site. They are not aware of cleanliness. There were no creches or schools, no maternity leave or job security, no medical aid. These worker are thus leading a very hard life.

C. MAID SERVANTS:

Domestic work involves multitude of jobs like sweeping, washing clothes and dishes, shopping, child care etc. It covers all the household chores that are part of a woman's role in a patriarchal society. Recently with the increase in the number of young unmarried girls taking up
this work as daughters of domestic servants. This occupation has become hereditary, generally reproducing their skill. Educational disadvantages prevent them from moving out to other occupations.

In the present study, the maid servants work in different houses according to their capacity to work. They do sweeping, washing, cooking, serves food and coffee etc. Different houses gave different works to them.

More women were working in domestic service than men because women were more obedient, knew about household work and can take care of old and children easily. Survey by a voluntary organisation in Delhi found that among domestic servants, only 20 per cent were males. According to school of social sciences and catholic Bishop conference of India, in domestic works, male were found to be only 10 per cent in Bombay, 13 per cent in Karnatka and 10 per cent in Tamil Nadu.

MIGRATION:

A person who crosses the boundary of a state or leaves his birth place in search of work for one reason or the other and who is coming from a different culture is
known as a "migrant." Every year about 5 lakhs of domestic servants from different states come to Delhi. The surplus of these workers go to nearby places. Rohtak is also near to Delhi. These domestic workers are variously, known as (Kamwali), (Safaiwali), (Mehri) etc. This study is confined to maid servants only. It is these workers' perennial struggle for survival which forces women to move in search of work either with their families or in some cases on their own. In the present study, 40 per cent respondents were non-migrants and 20 per cent respondents had migrated through marriage because girls who marry a boy settled in Rohtak have migrated to the city due to marriage. So 60 per cent maid servants had not migrated in the true sense. 18.67 per cent of the respondents had migrated due to economic reasons. Main reasons for migration is economic—due to flood and drought etc. Some of them migrate due to social reasons too like family disputes. These workers come with the hope that they will earn more money and go back to their native places. Only 21.33 per cent came to Rohtak city due to ecological factor like less water in Rajasthan, and less heat here in Rohtak. All these women work in the urban informal sectors.
PERIOD OF STAY IN THE OCCUPATION:

After knowing about the migration, we would like to know for how much time these workers were working as maid servants. Majority of respondents, (56 per cent) had been working for 10 and more years, 24 per cent respondents were working for the last 9 years and 12 per cent workers were working for 3-9 years. Only 8 per cent workers had started working during the last three years. In this occupation also, we observe a lack of occupational mobility.

WORKING HOURS:

Enquiries about working hours and the period of work per day, reveal that the working hours are not fixed in the houses for maid servants. For a full time maid servant the average working hours range 7 A.M. to 12 Noon and from 3 PM to 7 PM in the evening. Still there is found a lot of variation in the working times. They have long breaks, short breaks or no break at all. Women who work nine, ten or 11 hrs. a day, do not go home in the afternoon. For a domestic worker who went from house to house to do the required work had no break at all. There
was every reason for her to rush through her work because her wages are not based on the time she spent but on the work contents. In the case of time rate, non-domestic workers’ employer had no reason to permit idleness during working hours. Majority of workers, 73.33 per cent, work for 10-12 hours a day. But Kishor Samal found that more than half of the wage workers work for more than 8 hours. Breman also found that working hours in informal sectors were more than eight hours. 16 per cent respondents work 9 hours in a day. Only 10.67 per cent worked for less than eight hours a day.

We have also found that in the informal sectors, working hours are not fixed. Majority of women workers worked for 5 to 13 hours a day. 4.76 per cent work for more than 12 hours a day.

WAGES OR INCOMES:

Different occupations offered a worker not only different wage rates but also varying possibilities of total income. If they were engaged for a contract work such as maid servants, their daily work and total income consisted of various such contracts with total amount being different.
for each worker. In the present study, 40 per cent of the respondents had their income below Rs. 500 per month. The majority i.e. 60 per cent, had their income in the range of Rs. 501 to Rs. 1000 per month. Out of this category of Rs. 501 to Rs. 1000, 32 per cent earned Rs. 800 to Rs. 900 per month. This is similar to the findings of Niti Tandon and Neeraj Kumar, 1994. The wages of these workers vary from Rs. 250 to Rs. 1000. So what if they work part time in many houses, they get Rs. 50 to Rs. 150 from each house and earn about Rs. 750/- per month. The persons who were engaged in informal sector, 47.62 per cent were domestic maid servants and 66.6 per cent earn Rs. 800-1000 monthly. No one earns more than Rs. 1000 per month from domestic work. In our findings, income was high in comparison of other studies. In Nirmala Bannerjee's study, the income of maid servants is Rs. 200/-. Average monthly wages of hired workers is Rs. 315.61. So the wages of labourers are below the legal minimum limit. The findings of Bombay show that large proportion of unorganized sector earnings are below need-based minimum level. Low wages were also observed by the commission of self employed women in Madras. For a whole day work, it was Rs. 85 in Banglore city, and Rs. 30 per month in Punjab for cleaning vessels in one place.
After the wages, we would like to explain about the mode of payments. In the present study we found the mode of payments was on monthly basis. There were contract of work as washing clothes, cleaning utensils, sweeping the house and other work. But some times, these maid-servants take these wages partly in advance which are cut from their monthly earnings. All employers did not give advance payments. Only those employers who has cordial relations or rich houses helped them in distress. So mode of payment was mostly done on monthly basis in the informal sector of Rohtak city. All domestic servants of Delhi also get wages on monthly basis.

PAYMENT OF OVERTIME AND OTHER BENEFITS:

Now we would like to know whether these workers get payment for overtime. Majority of workers (68 per cent) were not getting any payment of over time. Only 32 per cent respondents received overtime payments that in the sense of making payments for any enhanced quantums of work. Actually for the work which is contractual, the employer were not giving them extra payments. Sometimes the employer give them extra money on a festival or on some child's birth day. Some times, used clothes and some times
some other commodity is also given so they do not demand extra money for extra works. Servants were found to be happy to do the work of a working lady than a housewife because housewives find more mistakes in their work. No facility of over time was found to be existing in Orissa.

PROBLEM OF UNIONISATION:

From the review of various studies on different segments of the informal sector, we had observed the non-existence of unions or any other organisation with aims to work for the betterment of the workers. A similar finding has been made in the study of maid servants in Rohtak city. No union whatsoever, was found to exist. Majority of them were even not aware of the role which unions can play for their uplift.

CONTRACTOR'S ROLE IN FEMALE WORKERS EMPLOYMENT:

Contractor or middleman is also important in women's employment in urban informal sector. These contractors act as touts and they are the one who exploit the female both sexually as well as economically. They take their commission from female labourers in lieu of providing them job as construction workers. Their
situation can be compared with the role of job suppliers who were found to be engaged in the supply of labour in textile mills. The role of sub-contractor or middle men has also been analysed in case of supplying labour during the colonial period in plantation areas. Such contractors have not lost their importance even in contemporary times. However, in our case such contractors were found to be operating only in case of the construction workers and not in other category of workers i.e. sweepers and maid servants.

These contractors are variously known as chowdhary, mukaddam sardar or Jamadar etc.

The barriers of language class, and caste inhibit direct communication between the employer and the workers. Thus the entry into job does not remain direct or straight. The employers also want to avoid direct dealing with the workers. Hence the so called middlemen or contractors come into picture. These jobers or contractors better understand the problems faced by workers as they can communicate to them in their language and hence earn their confidence. When a group of workers comes to a new set up, they consider these jobers as their custodians. Thus
these middlemen are able to reap a significant part of the benefits from the workers that should actually go to them. They help them find jobs and in return take commission from their earnings.

Though there are a number of progressive labour laws in our country to help, they are more in the books than in practice. One of the reason to arrange migrant labour on contract is to depress the local wage rates. Women construction workers are paid less by the contractors the main reason being the extreme elasticity of supply of female labourers.

The contractors also abuse them physically and economically. They were economically harassed as they seldom get their wages on time. Payment remains unsettled even when they leave a particular work site. 20 per cent of them were economically harassed even for work at low wages and insecurity looming large over their heads. 13 per cent women workers get physical harassment in the sense of shifting nature of their work, to hardship of great physical labour in all types of weather. No medical benefits are being provided to them.
In the course of present study, informal interviews were conducted to elicit information from such contractors. They claimed that they were providing medical benefits, equal wages and all facilities to these workers.

However these claims of the contractors were not agreed to by the workmen when separately questioned. None of the workmen confirmed of any such relief.
Notes and References:


6. Private sweepers: Those sweepers who are engaged in private households for cleaning toilet sweeping of compound and drive ways, picking and throwing of Garbage.


16. Leela Gulati, 1982, *Profiles of Female Poverty*  
Hindustan Publishing House, New Delhi.


20. 'Thekedar'; The Middle Man who mediates between the workers and the employer.


23. Kamwali, Various names by which the domestic maid servants are commonly referred to.

24. Safaiwali: -do-

25. Mahri: -do-

26. Loes Schenk, Sand Bergan, 1988, *Poverty and survival*  
Manak Publication, New Delhi.
27. Indian Express, 1994, September, 18.


******