CHAPTER-I

Introduction

Informal Sector:

Workers engaged in the unorganised or informal sector constitute almost 96 percent of India’s total workforce. India’s economic progress depends on the contributions of the informal sector workers and they constitute the bedrock of India’s development in various fields. Unfortunately, despite their immense contributions, the socio-economic condition of India’s informal sector workers remains poor. This section of the workforce generally remains out of the focus of Government policies and programmes. As a result, they are deprived of legitimate benefits and are also exposed to various forms of exploitation. Unlike the organised sector workers who are entitled to various legally-sanctioned benefits, the informal sector workers in developing countries do not enjoy much legal protection and are not covered by social security schemes. The informal sector workers suffer from “low productivity and low wages” syndrome. They remain economically backward, illiterate, and poor. The informal labour comprises sections of petty cultivators, agricultural labourers, child labourers, and the self-employed.

The majority of work force today is in what is known as the unorganised or informal sector which does not require much training or education. In India the term “informal” has been used neither in the official statistics nor in
the National Accounts Statistics. The terms used in the Indian NAS are ‘‘organised’’ and ‘‘unorganised’’. Actually the term ‘‘informal’’ and ‘‘unorganised’’ sector are quite similar to each other.

**Concept of Informal Sector:**

We can divide the labour force into two categories - one is formal or organised sector and the other is informal or unorganised sector force. The ‘‘organised sector’’ covers all public sector enterprises including Government and Semi-Government organisations. The organised sector is covered or protected by various laws and acts. The organised sector covers those private sector establishments where employment per unit is ten or more persons – all those establishments coming within the purview of the Factory Act. The unorganised sector covers all the rest, mainly all the unincorporated enterprises and household industries (not covered under organised sector) which are not regulated by any legislation which do not maintain formal financial records like balance-sheet and profit and loss statement.” (Sundaram, 2000: p, 3)

The unorganised sector covers all unincorporated enterprises and household industries, which are not adequately covered by legislation. Its demand and supply are usually confined to local markets. Low level technology is used in informal sector. Here no huge amount of money is invested. The workers’ earnings are very low. They are poorly organised and do not enjoy any social security protection. The unorganised labour refers to that section of labour
force including the self employed and owners of petty business, which is organised or is in the process of being organised. Here the labour force does not enjoy the benefits and protections which are available to the organised labour force. The heterogeneous nature and composition of this informal sector has made it extremely difficult to define.

Todaro has brought some features of informal sector. The informal sector is characterised by a large number of small scale production. Here no huge amount of money is invested. Simple technology is used. The workers in this sector have little education and generally unskilled and lack capital resources. So, no high amount of wages and income can be expected in this sector. Workers in this sector do not enjoy any social security benefits like job security, pension, maternity benefits, decent working conditions, old age benefits etc. Most of the workers engaged in this sector are migrants from rural areas to the urban areas in search of works. Their main aim is to supplement their family income. 

International Labour Organisation has defined it as that set of economic activities which take place outside the framework of corporate, public and private establishment”. (Ibid. p. 4) The small size of employment, small capital, and low scale technology are the main features of informal sector. To start it, no huge amount of capital is required. The employer generally invests his own savings, sometimes he invests money supplemented by his relatives, friends, money lenders etc. As producer does not invest huge amount of money in his production process, so he does not advertise. Each producer tries to fulfil the demands of
customers. Lack of raw materials, low investment, low technology—all these create problems for the producers. But it serves both the rich and the poor. Formal sector cannot produce goods as cheaply as the informal sector. Large sections of migrant populations are engaged in the informal sector. It provides self-employment. Indirectly it contributes in reducing unemployment among the poor rural masses.

There are some features of the informal sector. The labour market in this sector is characterised by --- (a) ease of entry, (b) Unskilled labour force, (c) Illiterate labour force, (d) Absence of proper implementation of laws and legislations, (e) Presence of large section of migrants, (f) Scattered nature of work force, (g) High competition, (h) Low scale of technology, (i) Low investment, (j) Exploitation over the employees by the employers, (k) Inequalities within the sector, (l) Presence of large section of women and children, (m) Unawareness about the rights of the employees, (n) Units of production unregistered, (o) Lack of knowledge to articulate and define their needs and problems, (p) Existence of poor working condition in the work place, (q) Presence of poor, ignorant workers, (r) Absence of clear employer-employee relationship.

International Definition:

As per SNA (1993), the informal sector consists of units engaged in the production of goods or services with the primary objective of generating employment and income to the persons concerned. These units typically operate
at a low level of organisation. With little or no division between labour and capital as factors of production and on a small scale labour relations where they exist are based mostly on casual employment, kinship, or personal and social relations rather than contractual arrangements with formal guarantees. The informal sector forms parts of the household sector as household enterprises or equivalently unincorporated enterprises owned by the household.

**Definition use in India:**

The First Indian National Commission on Labour (1966-69) defined “unorganised sector workforce” as “those workers who have not been able to organise themselves in pursuit of their common interest due to certain constraints like casual nature of employment, ignorance and illiteracy, small and scattered size of establishments.” The National Sample Survey Organisation conducted survey in 1999-2000 and “all non-agricultural enterprises, excluding those covered under the ASI with type of ownership as either proprietary or partnership were treated as informal non-agricultural enterprises for the purpose of the survey.”

The National Commission on Self Employed Women set up in 1987. It had published a Report on the unorganised sector. This report characterised the unorganised sector as one in which women “do arduous work as wage earners, piece rate workers, casual labour and paid and unpaid family labour. The
economic and social conditions of these women are dismal.” The report also observed that the “unorganised sector” is characterised by a high incidence of casual labour mostly doing intermitted jobs at extremely low wages or doing their own account work at very uneconomical returns. There is a total lack of job security and social security benefits. The areas of exploitation are high, resulting in long hours, unsatisfactory work conditions and occupational health hazards” (Report of National Commission Self–Employed Women, 1987).

The National Commission on Rural Labour, set up in 1987 defined rural labour as “a person who is living and working in rural areas and engaged in agricultural and/or non-agricultural activities requiring manual labour, getting wage or remuneration partially or wholly in case or in kind or both during the year, or such own account workers who are not usually hiring labourers but are part of the petty production system in rural areas”. According to this definition, rural labour comprised 150 million persons or roughly 60% of the total rural work force in the country during 1986-87. The Commission pointed out that (a) the number of rural labour both in agricultural and non-agricultural operations was increasing at a faster rate than the rate of growth of the rural population and (b) a number of factors like the uneven and declining labour absorption in agriculture, declining land base and scarcity of non-farm employment opportunities had led to large scale migration and canalisation of rural labour. (Report of the National Commission on Labour).
Table 1.1: Distribution of informal and formal sector workers by sector and sex wise between 1999-2000 and 2004 – 2005 (in millions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Informal Sector</th>
<th>Formal Sector</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1999-00</td>
<td>2004-05</td>
<td>1999-00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>178.50</td>
<td>197.87</td>
<td>18.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>98.63</td>
<td>117.21</td>
<td>5.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Persons</td>
<td>277.13</td>
<td>315.08</td>
<td>23.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>51.62</td>
<td>61.94</td>
<td>25.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>13.89</td>
<td>17.88</td>
<td>5.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Persons</td>
<td>65.51</td>
<td>79.82</td>
<td>30.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>230.12</td>
<td>259.81</td>
<td>43.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>112.51</td>
<td>135.09</td>
<td>10.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Persons</td>
<td>342.64</td>
<td>394.9</td>
<td>54.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: From NSSO 55th (1999-2000) and 61st (2004-05) Round Survey on

This table 1.1 shows the distribution of informal and formal sector workers by sector and sex between 1999-2000 and 2004-2005. In 2004-05 the share of female workers is more than male workers (90.34 percent). In 1999—00 the situation was same for the rural areas. In urban areas 70 percent of workers worked in the informal sector.
Table 1.2:


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry Group</th>
<th>Estimated Number of Informal Sector worker (in millions)</th>
<th>Share of informal Sector workers to Total in Percent</th>
<th>Growth Rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1999-00</td>
<td>2004-05</td>
<td>1999-00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>232.21</td>
<td>252.83</td>
<td>97.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>40.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>30.92</td>
<td>39.71</td>
<td>70.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>8.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>12.92</td>
<td>19.66</td>
<td>73.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade</td>
<td>34.29</td>
<td>41.43</td>
<td>93.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotels</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>5.29</td>
<td>88.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>10.44</td>
<td>14.02</td>
<td>71.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>21.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real estate</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>75.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>7.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>27.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>42.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>8.47</td>
<td>7.40</td>
<td>86.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household &amp; Extra</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>81.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>342.64</td>
<td>394.90</td>
<td>86.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


This table reveals the data regarding the number of informal sector workers and share of informal sector workers by industry group. In 1999-00, 60 percent of workers were engaged in agriculture field but it declined to 57 percent in 2004-05. In service sector, 19 percent of informal sector workers were engaged in 1999-2000 but it increased to 21 percent in 2004-05. In manufacturing, this share was 70.19 in 1999-00 and 71.20 percent in 2004-05.

**Home Based Workers:**

"Home Based Workers“ refer to two types of workers who carry out remunerative work within their homes (a) independent own-account producers, (b) dependent subcontract workers. The ILO Convention No. 177 of 1996 (Convention Concerning Home Work) clarifies that “many International Labour Conventions and Recommendations laying down standards of general application concerning conditions are applicable to home workers”. It says further “it is desirable to improve the application of those Conventions and Recommendations
to home workers and to supplement them by standards which take into account the special characteristics of home work”.

A National Consultation with the Labour Secretaries, Labour Commissioners of the State Governments, representatives of Central Ministers and Departments, research and academic institutions and NGOs/ representatives of home based workers was held in 2000 in New Delhi. Its discussion paper was presented by the Ministry of Labour. The paper says “home based workers are those who are otherwise unemployed, intending to, but not absorbed by the unorganised sector, with skills limited to certain jobs which have economic value. The issues and problems of such workers are complicated, because of there being no direct employer–employee relationship between the home workers and the person or organisation for whom he works—the relationship being of loose, contractual and tenuous nature. The home worker has thus economic dependency on the person for whom he works, but the latter carries no responsibility for him. The relationship being ambiguous and indefinite, he is also subjected to exploitation in various forms. The home worker is thus a self-employed person conducting his economic activity for a person or an organisation. The mode of payment or price can be on piece rate or time rate basis depending on the economic activity. (Report of Ministry of Labour, 2000).

The absence of specific data pertaining to home based workers in official statistics in India is a reflection of lack of recognition of their legitimacy as workers and also of a refusal to acknowledge their economic contribution. It is
argued that home based workers “subsidize capitalist growth by providing space, tools, and equipments and by working for below minimum wages.” “Their contribution to national income in quantifiable terms is yet hazy but is estimated to be substantial, partly because of this lack of recognition. Home based workers particularly women workers, have borne the consequence of the inequality in economic structures (formal vs. Informal) and policies, in all forms of production and access to resources including social security. In fact, there would be a strong case for granting a formal status to home based workers by accepting the validity of home based work.” (Report of Ministry of Labour, 2000).

The beedi workers are included in the home based production process. In 1985, a Conference on home based production was held. Some of the recommendations of this Asian Regional Conference on Women and Home based Production (1985) are given below--------

(1) Home based producers need protection by labour laws and protection bills, special welfare fund unionization, alternative employment and alternative technology.

(2) There was a suggestion to set up an Expert Committee on home based workers at national as well as international levels.

(3) More case studies on the conditions of the home based workers and especially on employees are needed.

(4) Laws for factory workers should be applied to home based workers.
(5) There should be an employment guarantee scheme for home based workers.

(6) International agencies should be made aware of the need to look into the question of home workers and discuss the possibility of setting up an international instrument.

(7) There is a need to involve more people with legal knowledge at national and international levels to look for legal options for home workers.

(8) Research on the impact of varieties of powerful roles other than just economic (political, social) etc. of middlemen on the work and living conditions of home based workers is required.

(9) Studies on women’s individual strategies when dealing with middlemen and how to transform such strategies into effective strategies. (Prasad and Prasad, 1985:p, 81)

**Women and Informal Sector:**

Now informal sector has occupied an important place in the economy of India. Formulation of various kinds of policies is the main reasons of the growth of informal sector in India. The process of globalised export oriented industrialisation and relocation of industries from the developed to the developing countries also contribute for the growth of informal sector.
An important feature of India’s mixed economy is the presence of unorganised sectors such as: agriculture, domestic, traditional industries of small scale and non-formal service sectors. Economic status plays an important role in determining the social status of women. “The position and status of women varies from urban to rural, educated to uneducated, employed to unemployed, free and privileged class to unprivileged class and the upper economic strata to lower economic strata of women. These also vary among women pursuing different profession” (Sultania, 1994: p, 8). Expansion of education facilities and the rise of democratic concepts like freedom, equality, and liberty have drawn women out from the seclusion of home. Klein said, “The new industrial organisation made woman an important part of its manpower resource” (Devi, 1982: p, 10). From the primitive period till today the women are found to stand shoulder to shoulder with men in all occupations. During the Vedic period the women had enjoyed a high position and were considered as partners in economic activity. They had played an active role in the decision making process in the family. In the feudal period women were considered as cattle, the plaything of men. But now due to the educational value the women have been enjoying a better position in the society.

So far as women workers are concerned, we can divide them into two broad categories via—the organised and unorganised sector workers. Though women are employed in both sectors, the vast majority of them are in the informal sector. They belong to economically weaker sections of the society.
Moreover, they are involved in the most hazardous and arduous occupations such as agriculture, construction work, domestic work etc. They do not get equal and just wages and at times receive humiliating treatment. Sometimes, in informal sector, workers are forced to work without pay. Due to their lack of education and deprivation of some basic rights, women workers in the informal sector do not have access to opportunities to acquire new skills. The patriarchal norms have imposed prohibitions in the path of development of women and their access to power, privilege, and prestige is severely limited. Women workers in the informal sector remain socially, economically, and politically disadvantaged.

The Indian Constitution guarantees certain rights and privileges to women through Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of State Policy. Article 14 ensures right to equality to all men and women. Article 15 prohibits any discrimination against any citizen on the grounds of religion, race, caste and sex. Article 15(3) contains an enabling provision for the state to make affirmative discrimination in favour of women. Article 39(e) ensures equal pay for equal work and Article 42 directs the state to make provisions for ensuring just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief. Most of the women in rural India are employed in small informal sectors. They are dependent on contractors or middlemen for their employment. The women never get due recognition and regard for their work.
Significance of the study:

This study focuses on the women employed in the beedi and brick industries. The significance of this study is that it helps to understand the real causes of women’s work, their deprivation in the work place, their role in their family etc. The absence of any reliable information regarding the socio economic condition of the women workers in the brick and beedi industries prompted me to undertake research in this field. From my childhood I have been seen many workers who are engaged in the brick industries. I want to do a detail study on the socio economic condition of the workers of informal sectors. A majority of workers come from the category of landless agricultural labour, who involve in these two industries to supplement their earnings. Unemployment and poverty have compelled them to engage in these industries. A sample of women workers alone is not truly representative of all the workers in the informal sector, but as the women are considered to be the most exploited group of workers, their position is inferior compared to the male workers, their experience is considered to be inferior to the conditions of all workers in this sector. In this study an attempt is made to examine women’s experience in the employment and its impact on their status at home as well as in society. This study also provides information about the living conditions of the women workers and their families. In this study, a few interviews are taken on the migrants to Goalpara district from the rural areas. A section of women has come to the district after marriage. Another group of women coming singly to the district from nearby
areas. Especially in the brick industries the workers are temporary. Most of them are seasonal visitors living in temporary dwellings. Sometimes the employees take the opportunity of her urban unfamiliarity.

There are four beedi factories and more than ten brick industries in Goalpara district. The brick industry is completely seasonal industry as during the rainy season it remains closed. At that period the workers do agricultural activities or engaged themselves in the construction work, or some of them make money by driving rickshaw or thela. They cannot run their family with their limited earnings. So, a big gap always remains between their income and essential consumption.

Review of Literature:

Status is a very important factor in understanding the social differentiation and stratification of human society. In every society, the status of differentiation and stratification, hierarchy of status are the significant features of every type of human society. It is a necessary component of each society. The social and economic status of women in a society is guided by the social, economic, cultural structure of a society. Education also plays a very important role in determining the status of women. Raka Sharan (1989) holds that in India there has always been a great discrepancy between the idealised notion of the status of women and the real life situations of women. During the British period, attempts were made to preserve the traditional social structure and institutions. Gradually with the
help of modern science and technology, the structure of Indian society began to change. Effort was made to improve the conditions of women by social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Dayananda Saraswati, Vivekananda, Ranade, etc. During the time of nationalist movement the participation of all castes became indispensable. Mahatma Gandhi drew a large section of women of all castes and classes in the main stream of nationalist movement.

Since the independence, some changes are visible in the status of women. The Indian constitution has recognised the status of sexes. Many legal measures have been taken to uplift the status of women. Despite these measures Indian women continued to be educationally backward. In all aspects women continued to be exploited in the hands of males. In case of wages, discrimination is practiced in the form of fixing lower wage rates for women as compared to those given to the male workers.

Dr. Samal (1990) has studied the economics of Sambalpur town. In his findings he has mentioned that majority of the families are poor since their per capita income is below the poverty line. Tendency of exploitations is higher in the unregulated and unorganised sectors.

Tripathy in his paper “Women Labour in Construction Sector” has examined the socio economic condition of the women construction workers in Ganjam district of Orissa. He has found that lack of skill, lack of education, lack of job security; long hours of work, ill treatment are some of the features of the construction workers.
Rekha Pande (1996) in her study “Child Labour in Beedi Industry of Andhra Pradesh” reported that beedi making process was dominated by the girls. She reported that after coming back from the schools, children rolled 100-250 beedis per day.

S.M. Lipset and H.L. Zetterberg in their book: *A Theory of Social Mobility* have observed that women workers normally receive lower remuneration or wages than their male counterparts for the same work and are thus discriminated against. Their dual responsibilities as earners and as housewives and mothers leave them little or no freedom of thought and action that their male counterparts enjoy in Indian society.

Padmini Sengupta in her article has mentioned the construction women workers as “women of the dust”. These women work for the contractors in building projects, river projects, road making, stone quarries, and other such temporary work. Their work is completely temporary. They do not get any good working condition and amenities of living condition. Most of them are unskilled labourers drawn from the rural poor and their earnings constitute the major share of the family’s income. They enjoy a low social status in their society as well as in their family.

Lal A.K(1989) holds that the status of women in a society is determined by a number of factors. Women’s status will be the lowest in a society characterised by firm differentiation between men’s work and women’s work.
Pitchard (1965) holds that position of women is lower compared to the men especially in case of marriage. The working class is exploited by the managerial class. Women’s position is placed lower in the hierarchy of stratified societies. Women in large numbers are employed in the unorganised or informal sectors, both in urban and rural areas, but they remain the most vulnerable section in society.

Emmanuel Romatat (1991) has made a distinction between the informal and formal sectors. He has surveyed some slum industries in Calcutta. In the formal sector, the labourers are given wage rates and other benefits. However in the informal sector, the workers are given very low wages. Productivity does not play any role in determining wages.

Papola (1980) mentioned that the informal sector is a convenient way of designating a segment of society having certain characteristics which lead to unfavourable conditions for the growth of enterprises and activities operating to this segment (Joshi, 1995:p,24).

Aline Wong feels that though women are engaged in the workforce, the majority of them are engaged in low prestige occupations. He also feels that rather than bringing about economic independence, employment in certain fields leads to the exploitation of women labour. Most of the women workers are uneducated and unskilled and are participating in manual occupations.
D.T. Lakadawalla (1963) reported that in Bombay employment was limited to a few occupations which did not need much skill and training. Occupations were very important for the women. But in the occupational structure status, women were placed in a lower grade. They were exploited in terms of wages. A similar pattern was revealed by Sen S.N in his book *The City of Calcutta: A Socio Economic Survey*. He found that most of the women were engaged in unskilled manual work. Their position was low and their economic position was also very poor.

O.P. Sharma in his article “*Occupational Structure of Urban Working Women*” in Economic Times mentioned that 75 percent of all urban working women were concentrated in only 19 occupations. He found that 20 percent from clerks, teachers and nurses from the urban female work force were literate. The remaining 80 percent did not have education. Twenty-five percent were unskilled labourers or domestic servants. Women had taken the occupation of domestic servants, construction workers and other petty traders.

Benerjee (1985) had mentioned that majority of women were domestic servants and the rest were distributed in various unskilled and semi skilled occupations. She had surveyed 400 women workers. 25 percent were employed as piece rate workers. The women worked in low paid jobs. They were always subordinated in the hands of male persons. According to her “the middle man increased his percentage cut for giving the job to a particular worker when there were more candidates for the job. Two women engaged in beedi making had to
accept a wage cut from rupees two per thousand beedis to rupees one and one half per thousand beedis and one of them had been doing this work since 1956. This obviously meant a fall in their net earnings.” (Banerjee, 1985: p, 25)

L. Kastury (1979) mentioned that many South Indian women migrated to Delhi in the hope of getting employment. They took the job of domestic servants and construction workers. In their villages the decreasing importance of the handloom industry brought the women to the cities. Their main aim was to look for any kind of employment and not necessarily to look for better jobs.

DeSouza (1979) found that majority of adult women had worked prior to the migration. Majority of them migrated to the cities. They had little opportunity in their own towns or villages for earning money. Most of the women were unskilled and semi skilled. Most of them had taken the job of domestic servants. Interestingly, occupations which involved traditional skills such as home based production and agriculture were replaced by unskilled domestic or other kinds of manual services.

Studies sponsored by the National Building Organisation (1977-1978) to study the living conditions of both male and female workers in Delhi, Ahmadabad, Poona, Madras, found that 96 percent in Delhi, 69 percent in Ahmadabad, 78 percent in Poona, 70 percent in Madras were migrants from rural to urban areas.

Thippiah. P (1989) found that women migrated to the cities in search of jobs. Because in their own towns due to drought situations, unemployment and
other problems they could find no jobs. So they migrated to cities. Here he has divided the women workers into two groups like the self employed and the wage employed. The wage employed is mostly skilled, semi skilled, unskilled and casual workers. The self employed workers are engaged in the papad making, beedi rolling, agarbathi making, embroidery work, zari work, masala making etc. Moreover he has found that most of the women workers are engaged on piece rate basis. They worked there for low wages. 87 percent of the women were domestic workers who migrated to Delhi. Among the occupational categories they form 84 percent of the total labour force. The type of jobs of the women was of the lowest status and pay. Participation of migrant women in the labour force is much higher as compared to the resident women. Trippiah in his study found that women labourers were suffering from poverty, unemployment, insecure employment, exploitation, harassment etc. He had done a survey in Bangalore on the informal sector.

Vinay D. Lal (1989) presents some findings based on an exploratory study of 1180 economic units in the unorganised sector of Delhi. In making plans for regional development, the government does not give much importance on the development of informal sector.

Mishra.L (1995) holds that the main cause for the poor plight of the informal sector is due to the government policies. The Nehruvian model focuses on heavy industry and capitalistic development by ignoring the rural indigenous industries. Thus it destroys the rural industries. There was no clear policy to help
the unorganised sector. Thus the unorganised labour “is a direct outcome of the
plans, policies and programmes of the government and many of them are victims
of generations of disaffection, discrimination and deprivation. The unorganised
labour is adversely affected by the evolution of a faulty legal system, formulations
of plans and programmes which are largely supply oriented than demand driven
and their slow implementation”. (Mishra, L, 1995).

Gonsalves (1995) holds that in industrial democracy the voice of the
organised sector is heard but unfortunately the voice of the informal sector is not
heard. The labour laws never made any difference between the organised and
unorganised sector. Consequently, the unorganised sector is neglected and
unattended. “The Indian labour laws are considered to be the most advanced
covering ‘contract labour, women, bonded labour, migrant labour, security guards
and every conceivable section of Indian labour. However, only a small portion of
the labour force, the organised labour, benefits from the legal provisions”.
(Gonsalves, 1995: p, 5).

A study made by the Ministry of Labour, Government of India, New Delhi
on the socio economic conditions of women labourers in building and construction
industry revealed that women labourers engaged in the unorganised sector suffer
from disabilities and exploitation.

In Brahme’s study it was found that 75 percent coolie women in Poona
city were engaged in the transportation of goods from railway wagons to
godowns and from godowns to shops and as well as to the customers' residence.
They were responsible for sorting, weighting and arranging goods. Most of them were migrants. Construction and agricultural sectors involved a large number of unskilled labourers. The construction sector is considered an important sector in the informal sector.

R.N. Mathur in his book *Quality of Working Life of Women Construction Workers* says that the construction workers’ socio economic status was very poor, with constant problems of instability and insecurity. The study found that women labourers in the building and construction industry suffered from disabilities and exploitation. The National Committee on Labour in its two studies in Patna and Delhi found that women were employed mostly as unskilled workers and were recruited directly by middlemen. Most of them were rural poor migrants. The Delhi group consisted of workers from Rajasthan, mostly belonging to scheduled castes and tribes, and below 35 years of age. Their workplaces lacked welfare facilities. Trippiah in his study revealed that workers in the informal sectors faced exploitation, harassment, and insecurity. They lived in slums and shanty towns and were deprived of basic facilities. These informal sector labourers were paid low wages and had to work for 10-12 hours a day.

Altekar and Pannikar have tried to survey the position of women in the Hindu civilisation from the prehistoric to the modern times. Different scholars have focussed on the changing status of the women in different historical periods. Among them the studies of Altekar, Pannikar, N. Desai, Hate, Baig, Thomas P, Sengupta and D. Jain are remarkable. N. Desai has studied the status of women
in Indian society and found the inferior position of the Hindu women. D. Jain has attempted to provide a broad perspective on Indian women. Heer has found that working women in the middle class family occupy an important role in taking part in the decision making process of their families. Tripathy and Das (1991) have examined the problem of informal women labour in the tribal district of Orissa. The study has brought to light the fact though the tribal women of Phulbani town do not find employment in the formal sector due to the low educational status; they contribute to the total family income through their participation in the informal sector activities.

Domestic servants have existed since time immemorial. With the rapid industrialisation and urbanisation, there is an increase in the demand for domestic servants. They remain helpless as they are poor. Alcohol abuse and domestic violence were common in the workers’ families. They were ill-fed and poor. E Ravichandran (1979) mentions that in Madras the socioeconomic conditions of the domestic servants were very poor. Sixty percent of women workers belonged to the scheduled castes and the remaining belonged to the backward castes. Most of them were illiterate. Their income was very low and they were heavily indebted. These women were the sole breadwinners. In most cases their husbands were unemployed or underemployed. Most of them revealed that they were powerless and their social life was marked by frequent quarrels. They suffered from anaemia and malnutrition. Karlekar M. (1982) attempts to present a socioeconomic profile of married working women from an underprivileged
community in an urban context. She has studied the socioeconomic condition of the domesticservants, sweepers and washerwomen. She has studied the contribution of these women workers towards their family and has observed that “a large percentage of poor women in India do not have to fear unemployment, but rather continued low prestige employment”. In fact they face a further loss in status in relation to their husbands who move into better jobs” (Karlekar, 1982: p, 21).

From the studies it is clear that participation in unorganised sector employment is high in the urban areas. The workers migrate to the cities due to poverty and get absorbed in any kind of job according to availability. Singh has mentioned that village economy is agrarian. However agriculture provides employment only for a short period of time. So women migrate to the urban areas in search of jobs. In the urban areas the women are overrepresented in unorganised sector. The Committee on the Status of Women in India found that a large number of women seek employment in irrigation, road and other construction works. In most of the studies, it was found that household activities were the main responsibility of the wife whether she was employed or not. It was found that child rearing and housework were the main activities of the women and were regarded as the wife’s duties. This was also the most common factor of marital discord. Most of the women in the informal sector were illiterate.

While there is a fairly large amount of literature on the socio-economic conditions of workers in the formal sector including the women workers, only a
few studies have been found on women workers in the informal sector. This present study is an attempt to investigate the various problems of the informal sectors women workers in Goalpara district.

The present study:

Though workers in the unorganised sector constitute the vast majority of labourers in India, they are also the most neglected sector of labour in India. The Government has failed to give adequate importance for the upliftment of workers in the informal sector. The trade unions have also failed to mobilise the unorganised labour in India. In the rural areas the informal sector workers are scattered and unskilled. The workers are uneducated and politically less conscious. In the urban areas they are comparatively more organised. There is a huge scope and urgent need for the improvement of the informal sector workers. This study tries to gather data on the types of informal labour with focus on the problems of women workers in this sector.

The informal sector workers face major problems. At every stage of production the employers exploit the workers: whether it is at the time of appointment, of distribution of raw materials, of taking of the finished products, or of wage distribution. The workers cannot protest against such exploitation of the employers because the informal sector is very competitive in the sense that if they protest against such exploitation then they may be replaced by other workers. While some organisations exist which try to help unorganised labour to
get justice, the main difficulty is that many of the office bearers of the organisations appeared to have very little understanding of the government policies. Moreover, most of the workers are illiterate. They do not have sufficient education to understand the meaning and importance of different laws brought by the government. They are ignorant of their rights. They do not have the courage to protest against the exploitations done over them by their employers. Most of the workers do not have sufficient income. With their little income they are not in a position to run their family properly.

The aim of this study is to highlight the socio economic and working conditions of the beedi and brick sector workers. This study is limited to Goalpara district only. Since the majority of the beedi workers in Goalpara district are home based workers and majority of them are based in the rural areas, so this study focuses on home based workers.

The concept used in this study excludes workers from the registered factory sector and from all public and semi public agencies, workers in education department, employees in the central and state government department, workers engaged in the health and other professions, workers in shops and commercial institutions, and workers in transport etc. The other workers engaged in the construction sector, domestic workers, hawking, and other petty workers are excluded from the scope of the enquiry. In this study the various aspects of women’s employment in the beedi industry and brick industries are examined.
**Theoretical Approach:**

In order to understand the socio economic status of the women workers in the informal sector we have to depend on atheoretical approach which would enable us to scrutinise facts logically. Conditions of work in the informal sector today closely resemble the unregulated labour relations and exploitation witnessed by Karl Marx, which led him to formulate his writings on capitalism and class struggle. While working conditions in the organised or formal sector have improved significantly since the days of early capitalism, those in the informal sector in the developing world remained poor and exploitative. The informal sector plays an important role in the economic system and is a functional part of capitalism, where workers are engaged as unpaid family workers. They are proletarians who are exploited: having no access to the benefits enjoyed in the formal sectors such as social security and minimum wages, these workers constitute a cheap source of labour for capitalist markets. Marx assumed that industrialisation would draw workers into factory labour. He argued that capitalism generated surplus of unwanted labour. He also says that competition among the workers have undermined their union. So in the informal sector there is no collective power among the workers. Marx emphasised three kinds of surplus population first, a “floating population” which subsisted around centre of industry, rising and falling with economic health of industry and following it as it become established in new areas, second, “latent population” of agricultural labourers which was “continually on the move in course of
transference to join the manufacturing proletariat, third, a “stagnant population” with irregular employment, the conditions of which fall below the average conditions of the working class. These poor workers have nothing to sell except their own labour. The owners of the industries exploit the workers as much as possible, and lower their wages as much as possible to generate profit quickly to maximise their rate of profit.

Women have increased their participation in the labour force. However, women tend to earn less than men do and their economic contribution is under-recorded by official statistics. Many women have lost their jobs in the private formal sector during economic recessions. Women face more problems in getting jobs in the formal sector, which puts pressure to drive them into informal activities. Women’s occupation in the informal sector faces a double exploitation. On the one hand they belong to ‘a marginal mass” of workers not having any kind of social security or labour guarantees. On the other hand, they are exploited as a subordinated sex. For this reason they are always paid less compared to the male labourers. Women face discrimination both inside and outside the family. Besides engaging in the informal sector they have to contribute their time in their own home. The burden of reproduction, child bearing, and breast-feeding create extra burden on the women.
Objectives:

1. To know about the socio-economic status and working conditions of the women workers in beedi and brick industries.

2. To analyse the educational and family background of women workers engaged in these two industries. The objective is to examine women’s experience in employment and its impact on their status at home as well as in society.

3. To find out if the women workers are facing any kind of exploitation and discrimination in these two industries, and if so, to locate their causes.

4. To examine the various aspects of women’s employment especially poor women’s employment. Regarding the beedi and brick industries the study will provide information about the type of occupations, wages and working conditions of these women workers.

Hypothesis:

1. Lower social status leads to lower self esteem of the women workers.

2. Lack of education contributes towards the exploitation both within and outside the family.

3. Women workers in particular lack the opportunity of upward mobility from unskilled to skilled workers.
Methodology:

This study aims to study socio-economic status of the women workers in informal sectors. As it is not possible to discuss all the units included in the informal sectors, in this study I have chosen the brick and beedi industries situated in Goalpara district. The methodology has to be adequate to bring out the reality. For this, various methodological techniques have been used such as sampling, interview, observation and participant observation, administration of questionnaires, and study of existing literature relating to the topic. The interview schedule is more applicable to that universe which contains illiterate masses. Both quantative and qualitative questions have been applied. For the interview, structured schedule was made to capture the background of the women workers. The method of simple random sampling was followed to interview the women workers. Besides the primary data, important publications including books, journals, and Government reports are reviewed. Thus the study is based on both primary and secondary data. The targeted population consisted of the women workers engaged in beedi and brick industries situated in Goalpara district.

In this study, I have collected description of behaviours through observation and interview. As far as observation is concerned, women workers were observed at their workplace. Simple interviews were conducted to ask them some basic questions. Though the schedule was prepared in English, the questions were put to respondents in the local languages, and as far as possible, efforts were made to make them understand the questions. Data on their socio-economic
background and their locality, their reasons for opting for employment, their working conditions and wages, and their present status and future plans were collected through interview, observation and questionnaires.

This study is based on primary data collected through field surveys covering four beedi industries and five brick industries situated in Goalpara district. A simple and systematic sample was selected. From each beedi and brick industry, 100 women workers were selected at random. The schedules and questionnaire contained items like age, education, marital status, size of the family, income, wage payments, working hours, nature of job, behaviour of the employer, social awareness, habits of the workers, assistance of the family members, attitude of the husbands, and number of children of the respondent. After selecting the list of respondents, they were contacted in their workplace or in their house for conducting interviews confidentially. The data was collected through questionnaire, observation, interviews and field-notes by making several visits to their workplace and their houses. The collected field data have been arranged in tabular form, followed by analysis and interpretation. APA (American Psychological Association) has been followed.

**Data Collection:**

The actual data collection took three months extending from the last week of September to December 2011. At the end the survey schedules were checked individually for all details and incomplete ones were filled up before the final
analysis took place. All the data were typed very carefully and detailed scrutiny were done and consistency checks were made to ensure that the data had been correctly entered. Thereafter, the data were used for the final analysis.

**Selection of the villages:**

The selection of the villages was made on the basis of the information gathered from one of my uncle who was familiar among the brick sector workers. My uncle possessed one brick industry at the Balbola area of Goalpara district. Therefore with his help I gathered data and required information of the beedi and brick industries situated in Goalpara district. At first, the beedi workers did not extend so much cooperation with us and started questioning about the objectives of the survey. But after making them clear about the motto of our survey they extended full cooperation with us. Brick sector workers were well known to my uncle. Thereafter, the brick workers happily cooperated with us. In the survey, approximately 150 beedi workers were found. The areas selected for beedi industries were Karbala, 1 No Colony, Forest Gate, and J.N Road. The villages selected for the brick industries were Rangjuli, Dhupdhara, Krishnai, Balbola, Agiya, Dhudnoi, Amjonga.

**Chapterisation:**

This study is presented in five chapters.

**The First Chapter** (the present one) deals with the concept of Informal Sector and the issues concerning Informal Labour, the Objectives, Methodology and
Hypotheses of the study, Significance of the study, Data Collections, Review of Literature, Theoretical Perspective.

**The Second Chapter** presents the Socio-Economic Profile of the study area i.e. *Goalpara* District.

**The Third Chapter** deals with the ‘Women Workers in Informal Sector with Special Reference to Beedi and Brick Industries.

**The Fourth Chapter** deals with the Socio –Economic Status of Women Workers in Beedi and Brick Industries of Goalpara District.

Here their education level, family background and marital status, social and political consciousness, economic condition, literacy position, and their knowledge about family planning are discussed. This chapter explores the employment relations and conditions of the work in the beedi industries and brick industries. This section examines three inter-related themes in detail namely the production process, wages and working condition of the women workers in the beedi industry.

A summary of findings and emerging Conclusions is presented in the **fifth chapter**.