

Chapter I

Introduction

- **The Problem**
- **Objective of the Study**
- **Research Question**
- **Research Hypotheses**
- **Research Methodology, Sample Design and Data Sources**
- **Research Gap and Expected Contribution**
- **Organization of Chapters**

1.1: The problem

Service opportunities in almost all the developing countries are very limited and these are probably not improving in a substantial manner. The infrastructural facilities are insufficient, inputs and market conditions for services are also not so conducive. Under such a situation most of the developing countries are facing a serious problem in the process of urbanization which is also a big need for the development procedure. This type of problem has become a great challenge before those countries to cope with. In this context, Informal sector has a significant role to play. Informal sector is a segment of the economy and labour market which absorbs a considerable number of job finders or unemployed workers and it deals with outside of government rules and regulations. In those countries where population is growing rapidly and urbanization is taking place, a tendency is found to draw up most of the workers in the urban areas. The informality is an important coping process during the time of collapsing the formal system. When there is no feasible formal jobs, people have no option but informal jobs. Thus though informal sector was completely ignored before, now-a-days it has become a topic of study of researchers. The distinguishing feature of the enterprises in informal sector is that they are operated in a diverse business environment than the firms in the formal sector. The existence of informal sector was recognized in the early 1970s. But the image of informal sector is not so easy as to define distinctly. Various research studies were conducted from time to time by the government or individuals, organizations or many institutions which have reported different concepts of informal sector. It is not very simple to describe the informal sector with a single definition or with a few words because of its diversity or varied nature. So, we are citing here some definitions offered by different authorities and scholars.

The first person who introduced the word 'informal sector' was Keith Hart (1971). He described the informal sector as that part of the whole urban labour strength which falls outside the organized labour market. The study established a number of income and employment generating activities in the 'unenumerated' sector or urban settlements.

Then the concept of informal sector was introduced into international usage in 1972 by the ILO in the Kenya Mission Reports. There informality was defined as a "way of doing things characterized by (a) ease of entry (b) reliance of indigenous resources (c)

family ownership (d) small scale operations (e) labour intensive and adaptive technology (f) skills acquired outside of the formal sector (g) unregulated and competitive markets.

Mazumder (1975), in a World Bank paper described 'informal sector' as an easy entry, residual sector providing mainly services and crowded with secondary workers with low productivity and wages.

Tokman (1976) has defined the informal sector as a self- contained sector with well- defined and significant links with the remaining part of the economy.

Sethuraman (1976), has defined the informal sector as containing 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 contributor even though the constraints on capital , both physical and human.

Papola (1981) has defined informal sector as a suitable way of identifying a segment of economy having certain characteristics which leads to disadvantageous conditions for the growth of enterprises and activities operating in this segment.

Squire (1981). defined informal sector as a sector in which wages are determined on the basis of demand and supply forces

Natrrass (1987) defined informal sector at the interface of formal sector, reserve army and marginal pole.

According to Gibson and Kelly (1994), initially multiple production forces prevail in informal sector but competition among informal sector units ensures survival of only the most profitable methods. They have defined informal sector as a sector that uses technology of inferior quality.

According to ILO (1991), informal sector refers to activities typically at a low level of organization and technology, with the primary objective of creating employment and income.

In one hand, the informal sector jobs are low paid and there is no security of job and in contrary it creates jobs and reduces unemployment. It refers to an extensive range of economic works such as street vendors, small scale manufacturing ,small automobile

and machine repairing shops, bicycle menders, shoe making or handicraft carried out by a single arranger which do not come under the umbrella of regulations of the state or the country. It includes rickshaw peddlers, domestic workers, fishermen, fish mongers, navvy, porters, boatmen, plumbers, quacks, ragmen, scavengers, barbers, florists, green grocers, hinds, hodmen, tea shop and tea sweetmeat shop workers, share croppers, slaughterers, private tutors, masons, hawkers, carpenters, small artisans etc.

There are two types of informal sector activities as follows:

(a) Coping strategies (Survival activities): casual jobs, temporary jobs, subsistence agriculture, unpaid jobs etc.

(b) Unofficial earning strategies (illegality):

(i) Unofficial business activities: Tax evasion, evasion of tax regulation and other government regulations, no registration of the company.

(ii) Underground activities: crime, corruption-actions which are not registered by statistical offices.

The ILO/ICFTU international symposium on the informal sector in 1999 proposed that informal sector workforce can be categorized into three classes.

(i) Owner-employers of micro enterprises, employing few paid workers, with or without apprentices.

(ii) Own-account workers, working alone or with the help of voluntary workers, generally family members and apprentices and

(iii) Dependent workers, paid or unpaid together with wage workers in micro enterprises, unpaid family workers, contract labour, paid domestic workers.

The basic characteristics of informal sector are as follows:

(a) Ease of entry: Who wants to enter into the city life leaving their village in the hope of higher income than their poor agricultural income, they enter into the city mainly through the informal sector. So this sector has mobility of its labour.

- (b) Independence and flexibility: Independence, flexibility and freedom are some crucial characters of informal sector. Some workers of developed countries like to be engaged in informal sector because of freedom of work where they can use their creativity.
- (c) Small Scale operation: The small scale indicates small size of employment, less capital strength and rate of return on capital employed is small compared to formal sector firms.
- (d) Family ownership of enterprise: In this sector the family labour is widely used. As it is small sized sector, it can be operated without a structural division of labour and most of the managerial or directorial functions are to be performed by the owner himself.
- (e) Labour Intensive and adaptive Technology: Firms of this sector are labour intensive and adopt low productivity techniques of production
- (f) Lack of recognition from the government: The activities in informal sector generally do not get any government support. Bank finance, imported raw materials, foreign skill, protection from foreign competition etc. are not found in the informal sector firms.
- (g) Unprotected labour market: The 'informal' sector labour market is not regulated and it is competitive owing to total freedom to entry and goes out from this sector.
- (h) Tax Evasion: In 'informal' sector there is no record of economic operations and so the income is not reported for taxation.
- (i) Legal or Illegal: The informal sector activities may be legal or may be illegal

The importance of informal sector is countless and the expansion of this sector is quite remarkable in terms of employment generation, addition to percapita income and reducing poverty. Table 1.1 clearly shows employment generation through informal sector during 1983, 1988, 1994, 1999 and 2004.

Table-1.1: Total number of estimated population, labour force, employment, unemployment, informal employment and formal employment in India (in millions)

	1983	1988	1994	1999- 2000	2004-05
Estimated Population	718.21	790.00	895.05	1004.10	1092.83
Labour Force	308.64	334.49	391.94	406.05	-
Employed	302.75	324.29	374.45	396.76	457.46
Un employed	5.89	9.2	7.49	9.74	-
Formally Employed	24.01	25.71	27.37	35.02	34.85
Informally Employed	278.74	298.58	347.08	361.74	422.61

Source: Various rounds of employment-unemployment survey of NSSO, Expert Committee of population projection, DGE & T and National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector (NCEUS, 2008).

It is clear from this table that informal employment is rising fast along with the estimated population and labour force and the formal employment decreases in recent days.

Women in informal sector

Now a days in most of the countries women are entering into most of the professions which could not be thought of in the long past and which jobs were mostly occupied by men folk in the early periods. There are some reasons behind it. They work mostly for economic independence, for economic wants. Some enough qualified women work only for feelings of achievement, for evaluating their talent and to contribute some service to the society. But most of the Indian working women are engaged in productive work for their economic obligations. Human development report, 2000 transpired that women carry out more hours of work than men in almost all the countries. They obtain 53 percent of total burden of work in developing countries and 51 percent of that in developed countries are performed by women. According to ILO

women carry out approximately 60 percent of total working hours but they are paid 10 percent of the world's income and possess less than 1 percent of total property. It is Informal sector which absorbs most of the women work force. In the different parts of this sector like agriculture, construction, home based works women play a dominant role. As they are engaged in home based work and in the job which are difficult to count, their contribution to this sector is not estimated properly. The actual size of women involved in informal Sector is under- recorded. Actually, they are a crucial part of the informal sector and the proportion of women workers exceeds that of men in most of the countries. More than 60 percent women workforce is engaged informally (outside agriculture) in developing countries though in Asia percentage of women and men is more or less same in informal sector (ILO 2002). In India and in Indonesia, nine out of every ten women working outside agriculture are in informal sector. In ten Latin American and four East Asian countries, over 50 percent of female non- agricultural workers are working in the informal sector .Out of twenty one developing countries ,in nine countries women's share of the total workforce of non-agricultural work exceeds the men's share. But in Honduras, Syria and in four North African countries, the proportion of men in informal sector is higher than that of women i.e. in many countries most of the economically active women are employed in informal sector. In many developed countries, though women labour force is smaller than men, women constitute a major portion of part time workers. In case of part time work, women's share was 98 percent in Sweden, 80 percent in United Kingdom and 68 percent in both Japan and United States in the year 1998 (ILO, 2002). In India, 118 million women workers are engaged in the unorganized sector. This is about 97 percent of the total workers in India (Report of the Export Group on Informal Sector, 2006).

Number of informal sector workers (sex wise, rural – urban wise) has been shown in table 1.2 below:

Table-1.2: Estimated number of workers in informal sector (In Million), 2006

Sector	Male	Female	Total
Rural	196.74	104.02	300.76
Urban	77.05	18.96	96.01
Total	273.79	122.98	396.77

Source: Redefining of unorganized sector in India, Report of the Expert Group on Informal sector, May 2006.

According to 1991 census, out of the total women workforce of 87.77 million only 4.2 percent women were engaged in formal sector and the rest i.e.95.8 percent were in the informal sector. Therefore, the unorganized sector in India is the Women's sector (Satyasundaram, 1996). As most of the women are less qualified and less skilled they could not access into formal sector which is regulated and random entry is impossible here. So unregulated, unorganized, unprotected informal sector where entry is more or less easy is the last resort for those women to earn their living. But a large segment of the women workers (i.e. home based workers and street vendors) fall in the invisible group. They serve up significantly to the world business but they are not getting their due credit. As their work is difficult to account, the number of women and their economic role to this sector are underestimated till this time. Domestic helps are such type of workers who are invisible to the general people in most of the places.

Women as domestic help

The word 'domestic help' is being descended from time immemorial and till date it has no reliable or any official records to support as to how and when this system i.e. selling of labour came into being. The labour that they individually put into managing our housekeeping when is considered to be a compliment to the housekeeper's or menial's skill and also when most of us individually feel that their help is regarded as indispensable yet their contribution to our family still goes unrecognized and unheeded of the concerned Labour Department.

Domestic workers constitute a significant portion of Informal sector and majority of the domestic workers are women. Domestic workers are those who work in the other

houses for pay, performing many of the domestic services such as sweeping, swabbing, cooking, washing, dressing up vegetables, caring for children or the elderly, sick and disabled, pest ling spices, doing up rooms, shopping mopping etc. Most of the domestic works, especially by women, is informal in nature i.e. it is performed outside the area of labour rules and social protections.

They receive much lower wages than the working women in other jobs and the wages are lower for the women domestic workers than the men domestic workers. Women domestic workers work long hours for scanty wages and usually have no maternity leave, pension provision and health care facilities. Though they are essential, they are exploited and undervalued. In middle class families or in well off families almost all the women are educated now. They generally create a sense of obligations to earn money for meeting up their economic expenditure. Whether qualified or not so, everybody is running after earning money to ease their financial crisis. But their so called primary duty at home does not leave them. So to manage their duties properly inside and outside their houses they feel the need of domestic helps who can provide them an easier life style. So in India or in other countries keeping one or more domestic helps have become a requisite for the nuclear working families. Besides the working women, other house wives are also dependent on domestic helps. They cannot tackle their household jobs properly alone and they are engaged in some different types of works such as looking after their childrens' education, their own education, hobby etc. So the demands for domestic workers are growing rapidly. But their wages are not increasing so much belying the demand law as the domestic workers are available.

Generally domestic workers are of three kinds-part time domestic workers, full time domestic workers and live-in domestic workers. Part time domestic helps normally perform their works in one or more employers for a specified number of hours per day and carry out some specific tasks. They divide their work time according to their housemasters. When they are recruited in their jobs, they fix their time and chores with the respective housemasters (generally with house mistresses.). Every day after finishing their own domestic jobs they set out for one of the households. They have to adjust themselves with that housemaster's family environment during this time schedule. When they go to other houses, again they become harmonic with those other families. From seven a.m. to nine a.m is the pick hour for the household jobs because most of

the families want domestic helps at this time to come as during this period everyone wants washed utensils , swiped and swabbed rooms.

Full time domestic helps are those who work for a single employer for a specified number of hours (generally full day) and come back home every day after finishing her work at master's house. In the case of full time domestic helps ,house mistress expects much work to be done by them. The workers are provided one or two time food and also more wages compared to a part time domestic help.

Live-in workers are those who work full time for a particular employer and also stay at the premises of the employer and does not return back to her home every day after finishing her work. They receive room and board as part of their salaries. They start their work from morning with the housemistress. From preparing tea, pest ling spices, dressing vegetables, doing up bed, cooking and what not they have to do. They are expected to attend their master or mistress at every time. Besides these three types of domestic workers, another type of domestic worker is there named casual domestic workers. When any occasion takes place in any household, this type of domestic help is hired for performing some domestic jobs in lieu of wages. As for example when marriage ceremony ,blessed food taking ceremony ,last offices rites, house warming ceremony , birth day party and such types of occasions take place in any household, they need some extra hands to do extra work related to that occasion. So in these cases casual domestic helps are engaged in contract basis. They may be engaged there for one day, two days or for fifteen days or may be for one month depending upon the requirement of the household.

Women domestic workers face many problems in their work place some of which are listed below.

1. They are not satisfied with their present wages.
2. The workers have to do extra work while gusts come .The extra money for that additiona work is not sufficient. Even in many cases the employer does not pay anything.
3. The employers do not grant any kind of leave in their favour when in need.

4. Often they fall victim to the sexual desire of the male employers.
5. The real wage in the form of food, cloth etc. is not sufficient for them.
6. In most of the cases the volume of work rises day by day in the employer's house. The employer does not offer any extra wages for this increasing work load.
7. Some employers have a tendency to deduct wage for absence of work.
8. A few domestic workers enjoy the benefit of annual increment.

Besides these, the women domestic workers face different troubles in their own house. Though in the past much had been said in a series of meetings and also when much had been written in almost all the news papers things stand till date as it was before and nothing fruitful could be achieved for their overall wellbeing or betterment.

According to the 61st round of the NSSO survey, 2004-2005, there are 4.75 million Domestic workers in India. Probably it does not reflect the true picture, as there is no organized study to count such workforce in this country. "Around five million people in India keep more than two or three domestic workers as help", says Harish Rowat, Ministry of state for Labour and Employment. According to ILO estimate, 2010, domestic workers represent four to ten percent of the total workforce in developing countries and 1 to 2.5 percent of the total workforce in developed countries (ILO, 2010). In Latin America there are an estimated 7.6 million domestic workers who represent 5.5 percent of the urban work force (Tokman, 2010).

1.2: Objective of the study

This Study is conducted with a view to investigating the lives of only the women labour class who are vital in our society and working in the informal sector with special reference to domestic helps in Cooch Behar district. In India the number of working women are increasing rapidly. Among these women, most are engaged in the informal sector where the workers often are of low paid work force. Most of the women are performing the informal sector jobs in India as employment scopes for them in the formal sector have become limited. Though there is a vast demand for the informal sector workers, their wages are not so high at all and they have to face many problems in their work places as well as in their own houses. Among all the informal sector

works, domestic work remains an invisible one. It occurs behind the private doors where the hands of the law cannot reach. Actually it is considered neither a formal nor an informal sector occupation. Though Domestic helps are the most important workforce in our daily family life, they are very much neglected by the society. Any recognition yet has not been given to them. Thus, in this study an attempt has been made to bring into light (i) the socio- economic profile of women workers in informal sector,(ii) the living conditions of the women workers ,(iii)the education of them and their thought about their childrens' education. (iv)their rate of wages and exploitation towards them,(v) the common and unheard problems of working women at their work place and at home. and (vi) the relation between the domestic workers and their masters or mistresses.

All these critical issues relating to domestic helps have been analysed in respect of women domestic helps.

In a nutshell, the purpose of this analysis is to examine the situation of women domestic workers in Cooch Behar district and to examine how these women manage their time and combine their professional work with domestic responsibilities as wife, mother, daughter and as an economic provider.

1.3: Research questions

In this research investigation we would like to deal with the following research questions.

1. Are the domestic helps ill-paid compared to other informal sector workers?
2. Have they any security in their place of work?
3. How is the relation between the domestic helps and their masters?
4. Are they sexually harassed in their place of work?
5. Are their dignity of labour always received due respect?
6. What kind of treatment that they get in their own families from the side of their own husband i.e. from their respective housemasters and how should we define it?

1.4 Research Hypotheses

Based on the questions just mentioned we have framed and tested the following set of hypotheses specifically relevant for our purpose.

1. The women as domestic helps are exploited in terms of wage they receive.
2. Often they fall victim to the sexual desire of the male members in the masters' family.
3. They want to educate their children but environment is not conducive to educate them.
4. Very few workers are concerned about the potentiality of savings.
5. The women domestic helps are tortured by their male members both mentally and physically in their own house
6. In most of the cases the family members of domestic helps are dependent upon them.
7. As a result of poor income, lack of nutrition and physical pressure, female workers are developing a large number of diseases.

1.5: Research methodology, sample design and data sources

Research Methodology is a process to solve the research problem systematically.

The present study of informal sector and women as domestic help is an empirical study i.e. the conclusion drawn are based upon the prevailing system as gathered from the real life observation .From the view point of objectives this research can be said as descriptive research as it aims to describe a situation, problem and it provides some information etc. It is based on survey research technique. Many informations like own income , consolidated family income, education, childrens' education ,the problem at the work place and at their own house etc. of 200 domestic workers have been gathered from extensive survey.

We have conducted our survey within the Cooch Behar Municipal area of the district of Cooch Behar. Under Cooch Behar Municipality there are 20 wards out of which we have selected four wards for our detailed study. Pilot survey was conducted to select the municipal wards of Cooch Behar municipality. Selected four wards are taken from almost four sides of Cooch Behar town from which we can

get a total overview of the whole municipality. From each ward, we have interviewed 50 samples of domestic workers families which were randomly chosen and collected all the informations. So, as a whole, the number of our study is 200. Interviews were conducted at the dusk and sometimes in the afternoon as in the morning or in the evening they remain away from their house for their professional work. The necessary information has been gathered from extensive field investigation and collection of primary data. We set some open ended and closed ended questions for the face to face interview and then from the responses against the questions we get all the informations related to our study. We also have taken the help of case study of some workers to know about the daily life which exist in reality. The data collected through various secondary sources have also been utilized to develop our research understanding

Simple statistical techniques such as average, percentage, standard deviation, regression are used to analyse the data collected.

1.6: Research gap and expected contribution

Very few researches have been conducted about the women domestic helps and about their common and unheard problems in West Bengal out of which a little has been worked out in Cooch Behar district. Sidhartha Sarker's study gives an exposition of women engaged in informal sector activities in Dinhata subdivision of Cooch Behar.

In the township area gradually the demand for domestic workers are going high. Yet the wage rates of them are very poor as their works are valued hardly. The cause is that their work in the home is actually unpaid which is done by the wives or mothers. And these household works have been continuing undervalued. As a result, their wages are so poor.

They are sexually abused and in some cases haunted and also they are oppressed in their own house in different ways. As some of the house masters consider them of easy virtue, they dare to harass them sexually. Yet the domestic helps have no voice against their ill motivation.

The problems cited above somehow or other were not taken into serious consideration by the previous writers.

Literacy rate of domestic workers is very low. But their thinking about their childrens' education is very much positive and so most of the children of them are literate. Women domestic helps always try to meet up the expenditure of childrens' education at any cost. This type of thinking of women domestic workers was also overlooked.

Though they are one of the main earners of the family, they are oppressed in their own house by their respective husbands and in-laws. This is a contradictory phenomenon of normal life. They work hard in their own house as well as in their masters' houses. After returning home from their place of work they become totally exhausted but any sympathy does not wait for them in their own houses .They receive immense pressure of work along with the psychological pressure which is created from the stress to finish their routine jobs in quick sequences. Almost 50 percent of the domestic workers are not BPL card holders though this should have been. Therefore they always remain under the spell of psychological pressure besides their extreme poverty. These types of problems are discussed in this work

Almost all the problems, the financial and mental status of women domestic helps in Cooch Behar district of West Bengal are highlighted in the present study. It will reflect the status of women domestic workers in West Bengal as a whole .Thus, the study,we think, will immensely benefit the community in question.By knowing the situation of women workers in informal sector the Government and the Fs can forward to take some effective and fruitful steps for the overall development of the trodden and neglected society.

1.7: Organization of chapters

To represent the problem of women domestic workers in an orderly way the whole details of the study are divided into eight chapters. In all the chapters we have tried to discuss different aspects in a rather critical way .Chapter II represents the core of some literature about the position of women in Informal sector which were written by some renowned authors of different parts of the world. Chapter III is devoted to show up the informal sector workers with reference to women domestic helps. It gives a detailed description of informal sector, its several definitions, social security measures for the informal sector workers etc. Chapter IV provides a brief profile of the study area. Our study area is Cooch Behar municipality of the district Cooch Behar .So in this

chapter, the history of Cooch Behar, its economy, its population, geographical importance, description of Cooch Behar Municipality, description of related wards are detailed. In Chapter V, we have tested the hypotheses stated in the introductory chapter along with the survey results and the information which we get from our survey. In Chapter VI, we have compared women domestic helps with the women construction workers in respect of their socio-economic status in Cooch Behar district. Chapter VII represents some detailed description and daily life of some women domestic workers as case studies. Chapter VIII gives a short summary of the whole study, the conclusions and recommendations. In brief, the following is the organization of the whole study.

Chapter I: The Introduction

Chapter II: Review of Literature

Chapter III: Informal sector workers with reference to domestic help

Chapter IV: Profile of the study area

Chapter V: Testing hypotheses on the Basis of data collected

Chapter VI: Comparing socio-economic status of domestic helps with other female workers engaged in other activities.

Chapter VII: Some interesting case studies

Chapter VIII: Short summary, conclusions and recommendations.