

Chapter - VI

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND SUGGESTIONS

6.1 Concluding Remarks

The informal sector employs a large section of female workforce in Cooch Behar district as domestic servants and bidi workers. The jobs in the informal sector are more or less irregular and wage rates for female workers are comparatively lower than their male counterpart with equal qualification. There exist a fair number of girl child labourers who are not able to take the facilities of growing educational opportunities. The socio-economic study of female domestic and bidi workers in Cooch Behar district discloses that limited opportunities of immobility for female workers has forced to accept them low paying jobs like domestic service and bidi making, which are exclusively suitable for women workers. As far as the higher paying jobs in the formal sector are concerned, education and training is indispensable. Since most of the female workers in the informal sector are illiterate and lack proper vocational training among them, they are under compulsion to stay in the informal sector.

The term informal sector was first used by Keith Hart (1971) in a study of urban Ghana. The concept has been further refined by a mission of International Labour Organisation, which studied the employment situation in Kenya within the framework of the World Employment Programme. Mazumdar (1975), Sethuraman (1976), Tokman (1978), Squire (1981), Papola (1981), Natrass (1987) and other researchers defined informal sector from their individual point of view. However, the fundamental characteristics of informal sector may be cited as ease of entry, tiny scale of operations, family ownership of enterprise, labour intensive and adaptive technology, lack of support and recognition from the government, competition and unregulated product market and unprotected labour market. As far as the formal-informal sector dichotomy is concerned, there exist both contrasting characteristics and linkages between the two sectors. It has been found that there is an urgent need of social security and minimum wages for the workers in the informal sector

for their survival. The women in the informal sector can be classified according to their nature of work as home based workers, self-employed workers, piece wages workers and time wages workers. There is a good number of legislation related to labour law for the workers in the informal sector. This legislation includes certain provisions for the welfare of the workers in the sector. In India, the women work participation rate in the informal sector has registered a rise from 12.3 percent in 1971 to 22.27 percent in 1991 because of the several factors such as impact of economic liberalisation and privatisation, urban and rural poverty, shrinking agricultural sector on account of deployment of modern farming method etc.

The female workforce participation in the informal sector of Cooch Behar district is on the rise. The most of the female labourers in the district are associated with agriculture pursuit as cultivators. Out of total labour force of the district one-third are involved in non-agricultural activities such as mat weaving, construction and brick kiln industry, cotton waving in handlooms, silk textiles handlooms, bamboo and cane related products and certainly in domestic service as well as bidi rolling.

It has been observed that the main concentration of female domestic workers in Cooch Behar district was in the middle age group. The survey reveals that the demand of the young adults as domestic help was on the rise among the employers. It has been found that few of the sample domestic workers immigrated from Bangladesh. The general educational level of female domestic workers was very low and a few of them had education beyond the primary level. In most of the cases, the domestic maids after getting married continue to stay in the labour market and they were married to person who also works in informal sector. The separated and widow domestic workers had been deprived of on account of either remarriage of their husband or mental torture by other family members respectively. The majority of the domestic workers preferred to work as thika maid than full time or residential workers. However, a good number of employers preferred to appoint adolescent maids on the assumption that they are easily directed and motivated for household work. It is further observed that while the thika and full time workers lived in nearby

locality, most of the residential maids migrated from different regions of North Bengal. So far as the recruitment procedures of the domestic workers are concerned, they had been appointed either through employer's own effort or through worker's own effort. The study discloses that worker's own effort and fellow worker's effort together constituted a major percentage than other mode of recruitment. There were two types of domestic maid identified from the survey. One group of workers started working for income supplementation while other group worked to earn their livelihood. Economic compulsion was the main reason behind taking the job as domestic servant. The workers were found to come from nearby village or location to commute daily to work place. Many workers had to travel on foot to reach work place. Most of the domestic maids were aware of their child education. It has been found that domestic maids did not want their children to engage in labour force and they always wanted to educate their children. It is observed that apart from the employer's sundry household tasks, maids had to do a lot of task for their own families and majorities of the household task were to be carried out by the maid herself in their own house. The study disclose that domestic maids were often tortured by their respective husband for more earning as well as irregular attention to children and other family work. It is found that some workers had to do allied jobs in the employer's house such as daily marketing, ration drawing and even childcare activities with a minimal additional cash wages. Most of the female domestic workers contributed their earning to their household and a few workers were very much concerned about the potentiality of saving.

Besides, it has been found that the main concentration of female bidi workers was also in middle age group. There were to some extent child labour in bidi making. The old female bidi workers did not take participation in bidi rolling because of their eyesight problems. As far as the general education level is concerned, it is interestingly noted that young adults had more educational status than the other women. The majority of child workers were school goers too. The study reveals that among the workers, presence of maiden, widow and separated women was relatively low. Most of the female bidi workers hailed from the families having more than three members. It has

been identified that principal employer or contractor recruited bidi workers. However, the demand for contract employment was on the rise because of limited opportunity to work as factory labour. It is further observed that economic compulsion was the main reason of the workers behind taking up bidi rolling as their livelihood. A few workers, however, entered the informal labour force for passing out idle time. Most of the child labourers engaged as bidi roller for meeting their educational expenses. It is found that female bidi workers had been suffering from health diseases like tuberculosis, asthma and eyesight problem. The workers had to manage simultaneously their own household task. They had to combine bidi rolling with their domestic responsibility. Apart from the large bulk of sundry task, some workers had to help their husband in agricultural activities too. The workers contributed a portion of their earning to the family. In most of the cases the status of the female bidi workers was similar as that of their husbands. The factory workers had to save compulsory to provident fund and some workers saved certain amount of money at their home. No worker in the study was found who had savings account in post office or bank.

The comparative study of female domestic and bidi workers shows that earnings and mean weekly hours of work of bidi workers is more than the domestic workers. There was statistically significant difference between the mean hourly wage rates of female domestic and bidi workers. It is found that mean hourly wages rate for bidi workers was almost twice than the mean hourly wage rate for the domestic workers. Moreover, the difference between the highest and lowest hourly wage rates was largest in case of bidi workers.

6.2 Suggestions

The female domestic workers are subject to variety of exploitations starting from low wages to maltreatment and sexual harassment by the employer. Besides, the bidi workers are deprived of the minimum wages and the benefits of welfare provisions in the existing legislation. However, it is observed that female domestic and bidi workers in Cooch Behar district have been joining the workforce mainly because of economic compulsion. They can

never earn enough to become financially independent due to their minimum cash wages. With a view to improving the working conditions of female domestic and bidi workers the following suggestions are recommended.

[A] Recommendations for Female Domestic Workers

- Firstly*, fixing wages to keep pace with other paid work in the informal sector.
- Secondly*, providing support service like day meal to all domestic workers irrespective of their nature of work.
- Thirdly*, providing the workers some degree of flexibility in working hours.
- Fourthly*, minimising degree of command over the workers by the employers and imposing acceptable workload on the workers.
- Fifthly*, building up proper understanding between workers and employers over worker's failure to attend at work.
- Sixthly*, setting up formal domestic workers unions, which can look after their interests.
- Seventhly*, providing equitable extra wages for extra workload due to arrival of employer's guests on holidays and festivals.
- Eighthly*, providing annual incremental benefit to all workers.
- Ninthly*, providing minimum leave facilities to the workers.
- Lastly*, passing out legislations for the welfare of the workers.

[B] Recommendations for Female Bidi Workers

- Firstly*, imparting proper health education among the workers.
- Secondly*, providing minimum wages as fixed by the government.
- Thirdly*, providing standardised raw material and sufficient quantity not falling short of actual requirement by the employers.
- Fourthly*, implementing statutory social security schemes like Provident Fund and Insurance for all workers.
- Fifthly*, prohibiting rejection of bidis within normal limit.
- Sixthly*, imparting vocational education for child bidi labour.
- Seventhly*, minimising gulf gap of wage rate between direct workers and contract workers.

Eighthly, making aware of different bidi welfare schemes and location of health dispensaries at far-off places among the workers.

Ninthly, relaxing welfare provisions in the existing legislation for workers to avail full access to the benefits of schemes.

Lastly, encouraging saving potentialities amongst the workers.