Multiple Citizenship Identities and Agency of Women

Home Based Women Beedi Workers in Urban Sector
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Preface

Citizenship denotes a form of membership and practice. The experiences rooted in mutually different but overlapping and intersecting forms of membership based on nation-state, class, caste, gender or sectoral affiliations, determine and influence people's sense of belonging and sense of being. The diverse subjective experiences set in these specific locations and the meanings that citizens use to interpret their lives mediate the construction of their citizenship identities. This, in turn, determines their access to entitlements and capacities to exercise an independent agency.

A participatory research on Multiple Citizenship Identities of women beedi workers was carried out to explore the interplay of multiple citizenship identities of women beedi workers in Rajnandgaon in Chhattisgarh. Generally labour market positions, intra-household relations or community locality are seen as separate spheres of experience, which determine social, economic and political dynamics of oppression. But, as the study has revealed, these spheres overlap and cross over each other. The study has examined the ways the citizenship identities of women beedi workers are reproduced in the multiple structural locations they occupy viz., labour market, household and community locations by specifically focusing on the experiences and meanings they give to their particular location such as home based piecework, intra-household gender relations and community locations.

The report of this study is organized in three sections. Section I briefly describes the subject profile of beedi Industry in Rajnandgaon district in Chhattisgarh and home based women workers under contractor system of beedi production. The section II focuses on the expressions of beedi workers on their problems and priorities in interrelated contexts of livelihood, intra-household gender relations and community locations. The underlying aim is to explain the ways multiple citizenship identities of beedi workers converge to create and exacerbate their subordination and produce exclusionary citizenship status. Section III analyses the implications of women's experiences in different structural location as well as the meanings that they give they give to their particular location and experiences. The last section concludes the paper.

Colleagues at PRIA-Chhattisgarh, with their active support during the research, made this study a very challenging and enjoyable experience for us. We are grateful to them for their help and association. This participatory research could not have been possible without the active involvement of women beedi workers from Rajnandgaon district, Chhattisgarh.

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Dr. Mandakini Pant
New Delhi, March 2005
Introduction

About more than 95% of women workers are engaged in the informal sector activities. The bulk of informal sector remains un-unionised. Since inclusive citizenship stands for citizens’ active participation in matters that concern them most, a worker identity becomes the basis for all collective action for organizing and mobilizing women workers to attend to issues that concern them. Modern nation states promise women the right to participate in the economy on an equal basis with men. The large labour bureaucracy is geared towards protecting women workers through substantial array of regulatory mechanisms. The activist-mobilisers, grass roots organizations and labour institutes in the country- be they trade unions, labour cooperatives and morchas- have been organizing women labour in this sector. Researchers have been raising the issues of specific to women as workers. Yet we find that women workers in the informal sector remain largely unprotected and extremely vulnerable. They meet systemic gender discrimination in all aspects of the labour exchange in terms of access to paid work; inclusion in or exclusion from certain kinds of work; the work conditions; lack of any or equitable employment entitlements and not having the time, resources or information to enforce their rights.

A number of questions emerge. Is the positioning of women workers crucial to the understanding of their citizenship? How do different structural locations shape women’s consciousness, the meanings that they give to their positions within work, home, and locality where they reside and the possibilities for collective resistance?

The present study Multiple Citizenship Identities and Agency of Women: Home Based Women Beedi Workers in Urban Sector seeks to answer these questions by exploring the interplay of multiple citizenship identities of home-based women beedi workers in Rajnandgaon in Chhattisgarh. Home-based women bidi workers as piece rate wagemakers make substantial contribution to their households and play a critical role in the economy of poor household. The study is based on the premise that subjective and contradictory experiences of women workers rooted in the multiple structural locations as labour market, household and locality generally mediate the construction of their identities and in turn determine their entitlements and capacities to exercise independent agency.

Research Objectives

The study broadly aimed to examine the ways the citizenship identities of home-based women bidi workers are reproduced through the multiple structural locations they occupy viz., labour market, household and locality by focusing on the experiences and meanings that they give to the particular location. Specifically the study aimed to analyse their perceptions on the following themes:
• Problems & priorities;
• Definition of well-being;
• Role of institutions in their lives; and
• Gender relations within household

Research Questions
The following exploratory questions guided the analysis:

• How women experience their multiple citizenship identities viz., housewives, home-based workers & slum dwellers vis-a-vis urban informal labour market?
• How do they define their agendas of rights and entitlements?
• How do they perceive security, vulnerability, exclusion and conflict?
• What are their coping strategies?
• What institutions are important in their lives? How do they assess these institutions?
• What are the gender relations within household?

Research Methodology

Site Selection
The case of home-based beedi workers from Chhattisgarh has been purposively chosen on the basis of following considerations.

• PRIA-Chhattisgarh is working towards strengthening the leadership of home-based beedi workers in Rajnandgaon district for their active engagement in governance. It is taking positive steps towards building the capacities of women beedi workers.

• In the year 2002 PRIA Chhattisgarh had initiated a study on Beedi industry in Rajnandgaon District in order to understand the issue of women workers and to generate awareness among them and the civil society about their rights. The present study goes beyond this study to analyse the ways boundaries of multiple citizenship identities of women beedi workers unfold through institutional, discursive and every day practices; and determines their access to rights and entitlements. It is assumed that the study findings would provide valuable insights to PRIA Chhattisgarh’s intervention in building citizen leadership of poor women as well as in urban governance.

Sample Size
This study is an in-depth 'purposive case-study' research. It focused on three towns of Rajnandgaon district viz Rajnandgaon, Dongargarh, and Dongargarh. Total 50 women workers from Ram nagar Ward no5 & Shankarpura ward no7 in
Rajnandgaon, Danteshwari para, ward no2 in Dongargarh and Shewata para, ward no7 in Dongargaon participated in this study. It was easier to enter the community of women workers because the locations chosen for the study were the intervention areas of PRIA Chhattisgarh.

**Tools of Analysis**

The study, with the perspective of Participatory Research (PR)- an actor-centered and bottom-up approach-, explored the issues from the vantage point of women workers. A combination of participatory open-ended methods was used to uncover & understand the perspectives of women workers viz. small group discussion, listing, and cause-impact analysis. Such methods enabled them to express and analyse their realities. Being asked to describe their lives, being heard and engaged in discussion elicited interest in the workers. Workers preferred talking while they were rolling beedis. Hence, instead of organising a structured small group discussion in a prearranged location, informal group meeting was organised in the afternoon between 12PM to 5 PM in the localities where they lived. Usually all through afternoon, after attending the household chores, women roll beedis together in a group in the lane outside their homes.

**Structure of the Report**

Section I briefly describes the profile of beedi Industry in Rajnandgaon district in Chhattisgarh and characteristics of home based women workers working under contractor system of beedi production. The second section focuses on the expressions of beedi workers on their problems and priorities in interrelated contexts of livelihood, intra-household gender relations and locality. The underlying aim is to explain the ways multiple citizenship identities of beedi workers converge to create and exacerbate their subordination and produce exclusionary citizenship status. In the third section the implications of the links between structural and discursive dimensions to the citizenship status of home-based beedi women workers are analysed. The last section concludes the paper.
Section 1

Subject Profile: Beedi Industry in Rajnandgaon District in Chhattisgarh

Beedi manufacturing is an unorganised agro-forest based and highly labour-intensive industry. It involves three major categories of workers viz.; forest based tribal workers who collect tendu/kendu leaves; tobacco growing farmers; and beedi rollers. About 90 per cent of women workers are engaged in beedi rolling, leading it to be termed as female sector. The beedi industry provides employment to over 4 million beedi rollers, all over the country.

Beedi is a cheap cigarette made with coarse tobacco. Tobacco is rolled in a tendu leaf, which is tied with a cotton thread. The tools used in beedi rolling are: a pair of simple scissors to cut the tendu leaves to a desired size, almost rectangular (trapezoid form) mantle cut out to give the beedi leaves a desired shape and size, a reel of thread, and also a simple wooden fork for folding the two ends of rolled beedies. Raw materials-tendu leaves and tobacco is supplied to the workers either directly by the factory owner or the contractor. The leaves are moistened by soaking them overnight in water and are then used for wrapping tobacco. The rollers cut wrapper leaves and then roll into each leaf a pinch of tobacco, push in the ends, with the help of a simple wooden fork and tie the tapered end with thread to keep the leaf in place. Bundles of twenty-five rolled beedies are handed over to the beedi manufacturer or contractor. Bundles are placed in racks and heated in an oven for twenty-four hours at controlled temperatures. On removal from the oven the bundles of beedi are wrapped in thin tissue paper, labelled, and dispatched to retail units at the end of the days work.

In the unorganised sector, beedi industry is among the few trades, which is regulated by law. The Beedi and Cigar Workers Act and Beedi Workers Welfare Fund Act (BWWF). General labour laws such as Minimum Wages Act and the Provident Funds Act also regulate the beedi industry. It is also one of the few industries in the unorganised sector where the trade union movement took its roots as early as 1930s. The five major Central Trade Unions (viz. BMS, INTUC, CITU, HMS and AITUC) and other independent local small trade unions and organizations in many states have been organizing beedi workers for many years. Despite the welfare policies, the degree of organization of beedi industry has generally been weak.

Rajnandgaon District is situated in the west part of Chhattisgarh state. Beedi rolling is one of the major activities in the district and has given employment to more than 15000 persons. While the government does not have authenticated data on beedi workers, local trade unions such as Kshetriya Beedi Majdoor Sangh, Dongargarh & Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha have put the number of beedi workers to nearly 25000 and about 90% are women that live under the poverty line. (PRIA: 2003)
There are three main systems of employment in beedi industry: factory system, outwork passbook system and contract system. Workers obtain raw materials tendu leaves and tobacco from the beedi manufacturers or contractors, roll beedis and deliver the finished goods to the employers or contractors. The shift from factory based production to home based beedi rolling under contract system started in a large way after the beedi workers laws came into being. Beedi factories in Rajnandgaon district viz., Gola beedi, Tusi beedi and Chetna beedi lessened work in the factories and opted for agent/contract system in order to evade and circumvent the responsibilities as mandated in the Acts. They reduced the amount of factory production and extended it to the subcontracting system. The baking and packing of beedis, which entails the highest investment continues to be done on factory premises. Majority of women work at home on piece-rate basis under contract system.

Home based Beedi work is organized along the putting out system. The trader does not directly employ the workers. Instead the work is sub-contracted to contractors on commission basis. The workers generally collect the work from the contractor and are paid on piece rate basis. The contractors are very powerful. The beedi factory owners, on the one hand, depend on them for the required quantum of beedis, and home based women workers, on the other, are dependent on them to get uninterrupted work and supply of raw materials.

The contractor gets Rs 2-3 as commission from factory owner apart from wages (Which is Rs 25 per 1000 Beedis). Every contractor collects 30000 to 65000 beedis per day, thus, earning from commission ranging between Rs 60 to 100 per day. He also earns around Rs. 3000 per month by exploiting beedi workers in form of rejecting beedis and giving them low wages.

**Characteristics of Home-Based Beedi Workers**

- Beedi workers come from lower socio economic strata. Majority of the workers are from Mahar and Ravidas community. These communities are socially and economically backward.

- The beedi workers are generally uneducated.

- Most of the women workers are housewives. Widows, divorcées and separated women depend solely on beedi work for their subsistence.

- Main household occupation is employment in petty informal trades. Men belonging to Ravidas Samaj are mostly shoemakers. Some of them are cycle rickshaw drivers, construction workers, painters or daily wageworkers in casual labour.

- Household income is irregular and inadequate. The average household income of the beedi worker is between Rs.300-1000 per month. Beedi workers contribute substantially to the household subsistence.

- Workers roll beedi whenever they get free time. Often they are pressed to work longer hours to complete the work in time. They have no leisure time. They rolled beedis more than 9 hours everyday.
Women workers are working throughout the day without adequate rest. They work for long hours not only for beedi rolling but also in other household chores like cooking, cleaning, looking after the children.

Beedi workers live in self-owned kuchcha houses with limited access to clean air and clear light. Absence of basic infrastructure, lack of safe drinking water and sanitation make their locality a precarious place. The wards of the beedi workers such as Motipur, Shankarpur, and Ramnagar in Rajnandgaon are the most backward wards of the municipality.

Notwithstanding the fact that these women were contributing substantially to household, mother-wife role overwhelms their role as provider of the household.
As I spoke to women workers about their day-to-day problems within the context of labour market relations and intra-household gender relations, and the impact it had on their lives; various forms of exclusion, perhaps interlinked, emerged. I provide here some examples of beedi workers’ experiences of exclusion.

I. Labour market Relations

The home-based workers, who participated in small group discussion to identify their pressing problems and concerns, referred livelihood as a critical concern. Livelihood was central to their perception of well-being.

Mahar women have been rolling beedi ever since beedi manufacturing became an industry. They still continue to roll beedi, as they do not have any other alternative.

Mahars are originally from Maharashtra. Tobacco producers from Gujarat taught them beedi rolling. They distributed tobacco and tendu leaves personally to Mahar women and persuaded them to roll beedis. Since the task was easier to perform and there was money in hand to meet the subsistence needs, women took up this profession. As the traders expanded their trade to neighboring states like Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh (erstwhile Madhya Pradesh), they brought along with them the Mahar families. That is why there is preponderance of Mahars in beedi rolling in the state. Beedi and Cigar Workers Act and Beedi and Cigar Workers Welfare Fund Act 1966 led the trend towards contractor system where traders lessened the production system and subcontracted the work to the commission agent who was previously a beedi worker himself. While men shifted to other avenues of work with the closure of factory production system, women, however, continued rolling beedis at home for lack of any suitable alternatives of livelihood.

(Interview: Roop Chand Phule, a leader of beedi workers’ union- Kshetriya Beedi Mazdoor Sangh Dongargarh)

Lack of education; absence of job alternatives and class/caste bias has led women from Ravidas Samaj to beedi rolling as it was easier to learn. One can learn beedi rolling within 20 days...said a worker from Shankarpura ward in Rajnandgaon.

Daughters generally help their mothers in rolling beedis. When daughters help, women workers tend to get more tobacco and tendu leaves in their desperate need to earn extra cash. They even accept work from more than one contractor. Question of choice: whether or not to roll beedis- doesn’t arise for them.
My daughter wants to study. She does not want to roll beedis. What do I do... I have to make 1500 beedis by end of the day I have no choice...

(A beedi worker from Ramnagar ward in Rajnandgaon in one of the small group discussion: 2003).

Home-based beedi workers get low wages. They are a fragmented work force with no bargaining power and no effective legal protection. The contractors take advantage of this fragmented labour force. Whenever any worker demand higher wages for rolling beedis, they unhesitantly give the work to any other needy worker. There is no formalized system of labour control; yet contractor controls their labour through cuts and rejection. Contractors systematically short-change them in raw materials as this enables them to reduce the workers payment afterwards. Despite the minimum wage rate, they set their own wage rate when giving work to women. The raw materials are under-weighed. Women workers get less tobacco and tendu leaves. They get 250gm tobacco and 700gm tendu leaves for making 1000 beedi whereas to roll thousand beedis one needs approximately 250-260 grams of tobacco and 750-800 grams of tendu leaves. Poor women have to pay extra from their pocket for making up the shortage. Deductions are made from the wages for the shortfalls in production. Workers are paid by piece rate per thousand beedis with deductions made when the expected number of beedis is not delivered. Apart from this, there is a standard cash deduction, deduction for thread supplied and rejection of beedis as defectively rolled. Workers are not paid for faulty work. The contractor takes these beedis, but the payment is withheld. What the women finally end up earning is about half their entitlement. In Ramnagar and Shankarpur mohallas (colony) in Rajnandgaon city, the beedi rollers are paid Rs 1.5 for 1000 beedis which is very less than the government approved rate of Rs 36 per 1000 Beedis, but they end up getting paid about Rs. 12 after rejection of beedis. As per the Beedi and Cigar Employees regulation & conditions Act 1966, out of 1000 beedi the employer can reject maximum 50 beedi but the contractor rejects more than 100 beedi per 1000 beedi on an average. The exploitation is not only in the form of manipulation i.e. giving falsely weighed raw materials but also in form of denying them the minimum wages and rejecting beedis more than the what Act mandates. Beedi manufacturers on the other hand save overhead costs, investments in tools and machinery, on social security and the need to deal with trade unions. (PRIA: 2003) Women workers are aware of the exploitation but do not challenge it openly.

“If we raise our voices then we shall not even get the amount that we are getting right now... Poor cannot complain... otherwise what we will eat...”

(Small group discussions with workers: 2003)

The work organization is such that there is no clear-cut demarcation between housework and beedi work. Workers roll beedis whenever they get free time. Often they are pressed to work longer hours to complete the work in time. They have no leisure time. When I asked the home based women workers about the time they actually devoted to beedi rolling they were unable to give accurate
estimation of time devoted to only beedi rolling. Yet when they sat together to calculate time devoted to all the activities undertaken by them on daily basis; they realized that they rolled beedis more than 9 hours everyday. Labour time of home-based worker does not appear as cost factor for traders/contractors. They manipulate it according to the exigencies of the situation. They have unlimited supply of cheap labour of women workers, which they tap without any risks. Women workers typically undervalue their work because they are not used to attaching monetary value to time.

Health problems arise due to repetition of same movement, sitting and working in one position for several hours everyday for several years, working long hours with no rest & leisure, exposure to tobacco and tobacco fumes and dust. Frequent health problems as reported by women workers are respiratory problems such as tuberculosis, asthma, allergies, bronchitis and continuous cold; digestive problems as stomachache, gas trouble; Postural problems resulting in backaches, aches in joints and shoulder; eye problems such as burning and redness of eyes, conjunctivitis and gynecological problems frequent miscarriages. Beedi women workers due to their poor economic status are unable to access health services. Since most of the beedi workers have little education, they have no or negligible access to government welfare measures for health of beedi workers.

II. Intra-Household Relations

Women's responsibility as breadwinner has not led to any radical renegotiation of gender roles in housework, which included tasks, related to the sustenance of household such as fetching water, cooking, cleaning, washing and laundering. Women workers share their domestic work with other female members of the household such as daughters, daughter in law, sister, sister-in-law, mother, and mother-in-law. Men are spared all domestic tasks. They owe no responsibility towards the household. No change in household responsibilities is particularly precarious for poor women workers. They are exposed to both physical and mental strain.

Presence of very young children restricts their remunerative work. Many young women workers, when asked to identify important source of happiness in their lives, reported to be able to have more time for remunerative work and earn more as crucial to their happiness. I am looking towards that day when my children will grow up and be able to look after themselves. Then I'll be able to earn more... a workers' poignant statement lays bare the stress and strains that young mothers undergo in their struggle to make their both ends meet. Women still adhere to cultural ideal of sacrificing mother while work is urgent to sustain the household.

Economic hardships and male unemployment has pushed women workers to work harder to supplement substantially household budgets. Closure of Bengal Nagpur Cotton Mills in Rajnandgaon has rendered many men unemployed. Increased economic responsibilities, however, has not given them more power
and autonomy in the household.

Alcoholism and drug addiction of spouses plus the insecurity of income have led to increase in the incidences of domestic violence. Arguments over contribution of money invariably lead to wife battering.

*My husband spends all his money in drinking. He beats me now and then ... says you earn but don't spend... how much one can earn from beedi rolling...*

(A beedi worker in one of the small group meetings, 2003)

III. Community Locations

Women workers are disadvantaged by the places where they live. They experience problems with potable water, precarious shelter, scarcity of electricity and poor sanitation. Their living places are typically neglected and lack basic infrastructure and services.

Women workers in Ramnagar ward emphasized in small group discussions that politics surrounding the provision of infrastructure and public services reinforced inequities.

*Municipal councillor got fixed a hand pump in our ward but it is not functioning. There is no water. We have an electrical pole but there is no light. A road to our ward has been left uncompleted. Areas surrounding our ward is full of filth and stench causing all types of disease particularly malaria. Rain intensifies our misery.*

(Women workers in small group discussion; 2003)

Women workers in Shankarpur ward said that their ward, besides the missing basic infrastructure, is also stigmatised because of a country liquor bar within their ward. In the struggle for livelihood, poor community locations deepen their deprivations.

IV. Institutional Relations

Women workers were asked to list the institutions in order of its importance in their lives. The context of various social, economic and political institutions critical to women workers represents the critical sites of conflict. The conflict does not merely arise out of struggles over scarce resources as employment or access to services but is centered around the construction of groups and their interests, a process that involves creation of particular meanings and relationship among gender (intra-household gender relations), class (labour market relations) and community locations. I provide here beedi workers' perceptions of institutions.

*Household* ranked first in their list. Workers looked themselves as housewives. They not only accepted male dominance but also perpetuated the myth of male supremacy. For instance, notwithstanding the fact that women workers were providers of their household, most of them identified husband's happiness and
children welfare as the source of their contentment.

**Contractor** is second in their list of importance. Relation between the trader and the worker is invisible. They are linked to market through contractor. Despite the fact that he often cheats them, takes advantage of their vulnerability, they are dependent on him for their survival.

Women workers are dependent on **Informal Credit System** to make their both ends meet. Moneylender is an important institution for them. He charges ten percent interest every time when they take money on loan yet they count on the speedy flexibility of the service that the moneylenders provide. Informal rotating credit group (chit fund) plays a very important role in their lives. They call it *Beesi*. Almost women workers are members of *beesi*. They decide collectively the amount they will contribute monthly. Usually it is Rs 20/ (perhaps that is why rotating credit group is called a *beesi*). Each member in a group gets in rotation the collection every month. Women workers become member of *beesi* to meet their essential requirements. Local shop owners are also highly valued because they lend food, clothes & other items and often cash on credit. They provide timely and meaningful support. They repay the loan at the end of every week.

**Health institutions** are important for them. The state government does provide a weekly mobile health check up facility to *beedi* workers, but it is inadequate. In the case of medical emergencies, most of the *beedi* workers find themselves in deep trouble. Their preference for a private doctor for treatment points to the insensitivity of government hospitals towards them.

*Beedi* workers understand the significance of the **institutions of governance** but are sceptical of its intentions. Women workers do not find local elected representatives to their needs and priorities. They disparage them for turning their backs to deliver much needed services in their wards. Women workers from Shankarpura ward in Rajnandgaon had complained frequently to district collector and even to councillor for the removal of country liquor bar from their ward but despite the assurance given to them no concrete step has been taken.

**Educational institutions** are important to all women workers. Their children go to school. Daughters are, however, under severe strain as they go to school, work at home as well as roll *beedis*.

**Informal community based organizations** are crucial in workers' life. *Beesi* is one such support network.. Women workers depend on this support network to meet the crisis of day-to-day living. Besides the transfer of collected money, women workers also depend on fellow members for labour and services. For instance, women workers with very young children were able to roll more *beedis* with the help received in childcare. **Formal community based organizations** such as self-help groups are not yet fully accepted by the workers. Although, Chhattisgarh government has launched ‘Swarna Jayanti Sahari Rozgar Yojana’ for providing soft loans to *beedi* workers and has encouraged formation of self-help groups, procedural delays, lack of clarity of the scheme, and rivalry amongst the workers have adversely affected the popularity of the scheme.
Non-governmental organizations have not yet addressed their needs. PRIA Chhattisgarh has of late started working with them. Women workers' deeply appreciate PRIA's presence amongst them. No one came to us before... PRIA gave us recognition. We will cooperate. (A women worker in one of the small group meetings: 2003)

Women workers do not trust trade unions. They feel trade unions work only for women workers under outwork passbook system. Trade unions have not been able to lobby for them for identity card, which is a crucial document to access the entitlements provided to beedi workers. Trade unions generally see workers as a distinct political constituency. As a consequence their priority is to organize those who could play a critical role in their agenda. Home based workers do not meet their specifications. Putting out system has put the Beedi Workers Unions in great dilemma: whether to give priority to the fight for the protection of beedi industry for saving the employment of the workers or focus on the struggle against beedi mafia who ruthlessly exploits home based beedi workers by escaping enforcement of legislations.

Labour Welfare department stands last in their list of important institutions. Workers want the wage rate as per the government rate. They want to work under factory system to avail all the benefits entitled to factory workers. Workers point to the apathy of government officials towards their needs. They have not done anything to check their exploitation under contractor system.
Section III

Implications on Citizenship of Women Workers

Certain implications can be drawn from women's experiences in different structural location as well as through the meanings that they give they give to their particular location and experiences. These might help broaden the understanding of the conceptual and practical issues of rights and citizenship of marginalized people.

- The socio-economic marginality of women workers influences their bargaining power in the labour market. They have urgent need to work but have no formal qualifications, working capital, and influential patron. Consequently they have no option but to work in low paid jobs in informal sector.

- Informal home-based work supports an overwhelming number of domesticated women. This is because home-based sector is not regulated and restricted on account of various requirements as age, education. Married women find its flexible condition convenient. Divorcees, separated and widows depend on it for survival. The income, however, low is vital for household subsistence without which a number of households would plunge further into the abyss of poverty.

- Home-based production involves family labour of women and girls. Given the invisibility of piece rated work, daughters' labour is generally in the nature of unpaid labour.

- While occupational pursuits by women workers have acquired de facto legitimacy but there is little change in the ideological structure of the society. This situation is particularly precarious for poor women workers. They suffer from severe strain. They must confirm to the traditional domestic role yet at the same time toil for household subsistence. Demands of incompatible roles narrow down their choice of occupations. They are driven to informal sector for employment. Since they combine their remunerative work with domestic work their labour force participation is only intermittent. They become part of floating labour pool, which is purchased at minimal costs.

- Socially structured practices within households keep the women workers atomised and invisible. As women workers place more value to the roles within household, their wage work goes unnoticed. It is considered a leisure time activity. Contractors take advantage of their invisibility and deliberately manipulate and exploit the so-called individualized leisure time activities of housewives to their advantage and deny them fair wages for their labour.
- Subcontracting of work and organization of production along the lines of putting out system make them occupationally dependent in matters relating to raw materials and wages. They are dependent on contractors for raw materials and wages. Such dependence makes them susceptible to various forms of exploitation. Traders control the price as well as the quality and quantity of the product. Through putting out system and subcontracting, they extract and monopolize the labour of the workers. Traders acquire and accumulate profit created by the workers. They deliberately tap the needy workers because they are willing to work for a pittance.

- Poor women workers are generally dependent on informal support networks to meet the crisis of living. Support takes many forms such as transfers of money, help in household work and even recruitment to remunerative beedi work. The informal method of recruitment acts to the advantage of employers. They deliberately tap the informal channels to recruit the desperate needy workers at a fairly low wage. While the workers have the satisfaction of getting a suitable employment, the traders and contractors minimise the recruitment and wage costs.

- Women workers in order to increase their security enter into dependency relationships, in doing so accept a wide range of contractual and semi contractual commitments. Dependence on contractors ensures their survival as workers. Informal sources of credit such as moneylenders, shop owners operate in such a way that debtor’s gratitude for providing credit is ensured. Dependence on informal women networks reveals the unwritten rule that support is essentially reciprocal.

- Poverty of women workers encompasses not just the material want but also their powerlessness and marginalization. Lack of income, poor access to basic services, poor environment, lack of education and gender role constraints excludes them socially, economically and politically.
Women workers' diverse subjective experiences set in specific locations of market, household and community locations have mediated the construction of their marginalized citizenship identities as well as their entitlements and capacities to exercise independent agency. Beedi manufacturers bypass law by outsourcing. Trade Union failed to protect workers' interest. Law is inadequate to safeguard workers' rights. Workers' adversity is further compounded by lower social/community positioning, intra household exploitative gender relations, illiteracy and ill-health, long arduous working hours, exploitative market conditions, lack of organization and awareness. Poor construction of citizenship identity adversely impacts workers' ability to negotiate fair entitlements and draws them into vicious circle of exploitation and poverty.
Section IV

References


