



SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND WORKING
CONDITIONS OF UNORGANIZED
SACRED YELLOW THREAD MAKING WOMEN
WORKERS IN TAMIL NADU

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ABSTRACT

The division of economic actions by Indian women is nothing new. From time ancient, women have been working both at home and outside, though not in the strict sense of earning wages. Of the total female population, female work force's share in the organised sector is only 4.2 percent while the rest of the 95.8 percent are in the unorganised sector. Thus, it could be said that the unorganised sector in India is a women's sector. Women unorganised workers in India belong to a disadvantaged working sector in the country. In the southern part of India, yellow thread is tied around the neck of the bride by the groom symbolizing marriage and its holiness. It is clear that yellow has much symbolic meaning. This unorganized employment is boon to the rural handloom women workers. This is alternative work for handloom women workers. This yellow thread provides employment to more than 100 families in South Tamil Nadu villages. Thread making work is playing crucial role to increase India's national income. Hence this paper suggested that the labour sector of the government must lookout carefully the implementation of all welfare measures like providing loan, free electricity and providing medical facility to Sacred Yellow Thread making women. These welfare activities will helpful to reduce their physical, financial problems and able to earn sufficient income.

KEYWORDS: Women Workers, Unorganized sector, working conditions, sacred yellow thread.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The operation of an economy depends, to a great extent, on the employment of people, i.e., on the purchase, sale and performance of labour services. It is the work of labour which builds our towns, cities and factories, which makes the things we buy and which supplies us with services of all types. In fact, labour is the source of all wealth and backbone of the nation (Jiwitesh Kumar Singh, 1998). Thus, it is obvious that labour is the sole source of all production. Workers working in the unorganized sector even though contributing a major share to the national development are unsecured and backward socio-economically, educationally, politically and in other aspects. Women are playing a dominant role in certain aspects in the unorganised sector. Women workers in the unorganized sector consist of the most vulnerable working segments in society.

1.2 UNORGANIZED SECTOR

The backbone of Indian economy is the unorganised sector. Predominance of unorganised sector and informal employment has been the central feature of Indian economy, for the past several decades. The significance of the unorganised/informal sector in the employment front is such that since early 1980s and even before that more than 90 percent of total workforce has been engaged in the informal economy. As per the recent NCEUS estimations, out of the total 457.5 million workers in India, 422.6 million (92.4 percent) are engaged in the informal employments. Of this workforce, 393.5 million workers are engaged in the informal employment in the unorganised sector and 29.1 million workers are in informal employment in the organized sector. This national level pattern of informal workers occupying around 90 percent of the workforce is more or less similar in the case of most of the prominent states in the country.

Among the unorganized sector workers, a considerable proportion (about 65 percent) is engaged in agricultural sector, which in turn indicates the prominence of rural segment in the informal economy. According to the National Accounts Statistics, the workers in the unorganized sector contribute over 62 percent to the NDP. The sector also contributes over 50 percent of the total household savings thus dispelling the myth that poor do not save. A substantial 39.3 percent (Rs. 46 thousand crores) is the contribution of the informal sector to India's total exports (NHRC, 2006).

1.3 WOMEN IN UNORGANISED SECTORS

The sharing of economic activities by Indian women is nothing new. From time ancient, women have been working both at home and outside, though not in the strict sense of earning wages. Of the total female population, female work force's share in the organised sector is only 4.2 percent while the rest of the 95.8 percent are in the unorganised sector. Thus, it could be said that the unorganised sector in India is a women's sector. Women informal workers in India belong to a greatly disadvantaged working sector in the country. They are part of the informal economy with very minimal if not absent regulation by the government and have in most cases no protection in law. They usually come from lower caste, with very little education and are often unaware of their rights. The employment of women in the unorganized sector is divided into nine sectors: agriculture, dairy, small animal husbandry fisheries, social and agro-forestry, khadi and village industries, handlooms, handicraft and agriculture. The first five sectors are broadly classified as agriculture and allied occupations. The last four are categorized as the village and small industries sector. The

number of women in the unorganized sector is many times more than that in the organized sector because of their helplessness due to lack of employment opportunities, incomplete skills, illiteracy and controlled mobility. Labour laws do not govern the unorganized sector. Hence, it does not guarantee security of job or terminal benefit. (Poongodi, 2012). With increasing rates of labour force participation among women in most developing countries, coupled with shrinking job opportunities in agriculture, more and more women are turning to the unorganised sector for employment and survival.

1.4 SACRED YELLOW THREAD (THAALI) A SYMBOL OF MARITAL STATUS

The yellow thread is called “Thirumaangalyam” or “thaali”. It is equivalent to Mangalsutra. It is worn across south India especially in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. They will tie gold along the center of the thread. The Yellow thread is tied with a small piece of gold Mangalyam (designs are different for each community groups). Some community adds more beads (gold/black) to the Sacred yellow thread after third day of the marriage. This thread is used in karadiyan Nonbu Festival is a traditional Tamil Nadu festival where in married women and young girls wear yellow ropes and pray to Hindu goddesses for long lives for their husbands. This custom of tying the yellow thread is followed in southern parts of India.

Yellow in Hinduism is the color of Lord Vishnu, the color of purity, victory, chastity and surprisingly sensuality too, since in spring in India unmarried girls wear yellow clothes. Some tribes believe that the color yellow has powers to keep evil spirits away. Holy thread is tied on the wrist of disciples by the spiritual Guru as a mark of protection. In the southern part of

India, yellow thread is tied around the neck of the bride by the groom symbolizing marriage and its sanctity. It is clear that yellow has much symbolic meaning. This yellow thread provides employment to more than 100 families in a South Tamil Nadu villages like Varadharajapuram, Murangapatti, Bellampatti, Poolavadi, Kolumamkondan, Sengattusalai, kollupalyam, Chinnaveeranpatti, Uduamalai Thanda goundan thottam , kuralkuttai, kurichikottai, Negamam, Pollachi, Tirupur and Coimbatore District in TamilNadu. Majority of the women workers were engaged in this type of unorganized work.

1.5 OBJECTIVES

The Objectives of the study are following

- ◆ To study the Socio-Economic Conditions of Sacred Yellow Thread Making Women Workers
- ◆ To know the wage structure and working conditions of Sample Women Workers
- ◆ To find out the problems faced by Sacred Yellow Thread Making Women Workers in the study area.

1.6 DATA SOURCE AND METHODOLOGY

Data was collected through personal interviews with the help of a questionnaire. Primary data for the study were collected through convenient random sample of 156 Sacred Yellow Thread Making Women Workers in Tirupur and Coimbatore District in Tamil Nadu. The areas covered from two districts were Varadharajapuram, Murangapatti, Bellampatti, Poolavadi, Kolumamkondan, Sengattusalai, kollupalyam, Chinnaveeranpatti, Uduamalai Thanda goundan thottam , kuralkuttai, kurichikitto, Negamam, Pollachi. In each place twelve samples were collected for meaningful study.

1.7 EMPIRICAL RESULTS

Table 1 shows the personal profile of the respondents

	Particulars	Workers	Percentage
Age in Years	15-30	32	20.5
	31-45	98	62.8
	46-60	26	16.7
Marital Status	Married	94	60.3
	Widowed	52	33.3
	Divorced	10	6.4
Social Status	Backward Community	112	71.8
	Most Backward Community	40	25.6
	Schedule Caste/Schedule Tribes	4	2.6
Nature of Family	Nuclear Family	122	78.3
	Joint Family	22	14.1
	Individual	12	7.6
Educational Qualification	Illiterate	61	39.1
	Primary	95	60.9
	Total	156	100.0

Majority of the respondents belonged to the age groups of 31-45 years and were married and living in nuclear families. Maximum respondent's educational qualification was primary education. Majority of the workers were Backward Community they belonged to nuclear family.

1.8 WORKING CONDITIONS AND PROBLEMS OF SACRED YELLOW THREAD MAKING WOMEN WORKERS

Working conditions is an important determinant and it refers to overall working place situation including nature of work undertaken, working hours, experience, monthly earnings, factors that have compelled the women workers to undertake the job. The sample sacred thread workers got work on piece rate basis. They had to complete their work in a given time. As almost all of them work in their houses, their working hours depends on how much work they get and within what time that work has to be completed. Generally they work in their own house therefore; they work with

their convenient. Working hours also depend upon the availability of raw material. The raw materials get from waste thread of power loom. They will remove tangled and used as a raw material for sacred thread making work. They do not get work on regular basis so their hours of work are not fixed, 90 samples worked up to 8 hours and remaining workers worked up to 10 to 12 hours. It was observed that some of the workers usually work for more than ten to eleven hours per day but they are getting very meager amount as a wage. They sit for long hours to put a knot of individual thread (make pav) and have to walk long hours from one point (starting point) to another (ending or joint) point. Thread is twisted through wheel and they will get white sacred thread. After finishing all the work, white thread will dip into yellow die; this thread called as yellow sacred thread.

The sample workers wage determined on the basis of piece rate. One bundle of thread they will get 20 rupees they may finish maximum 30 bundle and minimum 25 bundle per day. Hence, totally they can earn Rs. 500 to

600. Two workers or three workers are needed to complete the work. One gets half of the amount from the total earnings. The owner get total earnings, but one who are working as a wage labour they will get only Rs.100 to 150 as daily wage. The remaining amount goes to owner. The labour will affect very seriously. The problems of the women workers are in fact multifarious and multidimensional in nature. These problems are basically of three types; environmental, social and psychological. The socio-psycho-environmental problems faced by the working women on two fronts i.e. at home and at work place. Nearly 20 percent of the respondents reported that did not like their job because of too much workload, low wages, job insecurity. The toil and trouble of many women workers in India is more than that of their men but frequently not properly estimated counted and recognized. Their domestic services are not included into the national income computations. While their work for wages and salaries outside their own home are recognized as directly productive. In most countries, women work approximately twice the unpaid time men do (UNDP, 2001).

The sample sacred thread workers work place is their homes. It was observed that their houses had poor environmental conditions their houses were dingy, ill ventilated, ill lighted places, mostly one room houses. Except for a few respondents all sampled workers houses had poor lighting and inadequate workplace. These sampled women workers brought the raw material to be make at home. This means that their home is their work place too. So it is the home environment, which affects them. They work at home as it is very convenient for them because they can manage both their home and work. Sample respondents can only make thread during the day because of the absence of adequate light at night. Most of them have electricity connections but power cut and low voltages creates a problem.

For this work 7 feet width and 50 feet length is required for workplace. Those who are having this facility they continue their work in her home itself. Still adequate space is not available in some of the households. One negative point of this work is that machine (wheels) makes a lot of noise.42 percent of the sample workers have their own machines; some have borrowed it from owner. One is operated through hand and other by machine. Machines require regular cleaning and oiling. Most of the women workers know how to handle their wheel machines at home through their work experience. The sample women workers were affected by their work. The workers were frequently getting leg pain, back pain, hand and shoulder pain. Workers did not get any medical aids from both the Government and their owners.

1.9 CONCLUSION

This unorganized employment is boon to the rural handloom women workers. This is alternative work for handloom women workers. Due to modernization the married women are not tying yellow thread instead of this they are using gold chain. When the married women followed the traditional women, it will helpful to yellow sacred thread making women, because of this production of the thread will be increased. This thread is exporting to foreign countries where Indian's are living and having Indian temple like Malaysia, Singapore etc. This thread will be provided in temple at the time of festival in foreign countries. Thread making work is playing crucial role to increase the India's national income. It is suggested that the labour sector of the government must lookout carefully the implementation of welfare measures like providing loan, free electricity and providing medical facilities to Sacred Yellow Thread making women. These welfare activities will helpful to reduce their physical, financial problems and able to earn sufficient income.

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