

## **CHAPTER- I**

### **Introduction**

#### **1.1. Introduction:**

Women as constituting half of the population are playing a crucial role in the development of a country, region, community or a particular social group of society. But from ancient times, women's labour is solely viewed in the unpaid domestic realm and even in the era of women's participation in paid jobs. It means the primitive societies gendered their labour where men were concerned with hunting or food-gatherings and women with child-rearing. Women are still becoming the victim of those primitive kinds of patriarchal values despite the evolution of society where gender roles are flexible. The economic dependency upon men and the poor socio-economic status had restricted women's entry and participation in the workforce. The Department of Labour in the 19th century listed out that about half of the paid work available for women was in domestic services because of their work in the home. The movement of women into professions like teaching and nursing was nothing, but the extension of female domestic services by considering them as low paid and poor status occupations. Women's lack of access to higher education due to some cultural and religious constraints had excluded them from the practice of well-paid and high-status occupations.

However, the labour market process was shifted by the 20th century that expanded better-paid, longer-term careers for those women increasingly acquiring higher education. But the nature of women's participation in such employment sector remains markedly different from that of men. Even in this modern era, when women are increasingly participating in almost all the areas of employment whether it is organized or unorganized sector, the division of labour based on gender is still prevailing. The nature of division based on gender is more clearly visible in the

unorganized sector of the labour force rather than in organized one due to its ease of entry for women.

The socio-economic development of a society can always be measured by the position of its women, so, the level of economic equality is the real indicator to measure the women's status in any society. The economic status of Indian women is having a worse situation than men, i.e. far from satisfactory. It is very difficult to study the present economic situation of women without past references. Therefore, a brief historical background of Indian women about their economic status is needed and it can be started from prehistoric times when men and women leading a nomadic life. Women's role was given equal importance as men both inside and outside the home, but the custom of marriage developed the concept of family. It was the women who performed the general domestic labour like child-rearing, taking care of the household by providing men with the condition to do most of the outside works. Women, thus, restrict themselves within four walls of the house and withdraw their roles from the outside world which slowly degraded their position. As a result, men were considered as 'producers' for the economic needs of their family and women were treated as 'consumers' whose roles were confined within the household only.

But the advent of the Vedic period had brought the glorious stage for the women of India. At this period, though the father had the supreme authority on family affairs, the mother also had considerable authority in family affairs and enjoyed a high position. Women enjoyed their full freedom for development and had access to the property of their fathers and husbands. There was no discrimination before the law based on gender and women got almost equal opportunity to take part in every affair of life with men. On the whole, the position of women was fairly satisfactory in the Vedic age (Altekar, 2011). During the later Vedic period, women's position once again turned into an inferior one and they became fully dependent on men. They were deprived by the authority of their fathers, husbands and sons in the different phases of their lives as daughters, wives and mothers. All the decisions were taken by the men without informing their wives that declined women's status in society. Subsequently,

some social evils were stuck as customs, like purdah, sati, child-marriage, widowhood, polygamy, etc.

It was the establishment of Western type of educational institutions by the Britishers that enabled Indian women to realize their subordinate position, and the educated women started demanding their equal rights with men. It brought a new value system in Indian society that had given rise to a number of reform movements. These movements and other religious organizations by the leadership of social reformers, like Rajaram Mohan Roy, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Swami Vivekananda, Ishwar Chandra Vidya Sagar, etc., fought against the social evils and worked hard to upgrade the status of women. They spread education among women, encourage widow-remarriage, enforce monogamy, prevent child marriage, prohibited sati system, etc. Further, the participation of women in the national movement had brought them to another step forward in the way of their struggle towards equality after independence.

When India achieved its independence, efforts have been made to improve women's status by the provision of Article 15 of the Indian constitution which guaranteed equality of men and women. Several legislative measures were taken up to remove social evils from Indian society and to help women for their development. But most of these provisions are far from the actual reality because the traditional customs rooted in the minds of people could not easily accept such reforms.

Thus, Indian society can be considered as a male-dominated one where women's roles are confined to the home. Women don't have their own independent existence and always played as a secondary role in every sphere of life. Even in this 21st century, when women are increasingly participating in the economic field, the secondary role of the majority of women based on gender can be seen in all sectors of the labour force. In recent years, when gender equality has emerged as an increasingly important issue of attention, the labour force is also becoming a dominant one. It is because the labour force has been feminized where a sharp hierarchical order has been followed so that women can perform the least qualified works which are further

supervised by men. The women of India, like in other parts of the world, are more significantly found in the unorganized sector particularly from socially disadvantaged groups where they again remain as the most deprived and neglected segment of the labour force. Therefore, the present study is an attempt to highlight the problems of women labourers in the unorganized sector, particularly from the socially backward group.

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem:**

Problems are mainly the creation of socio-economic as well as the cultural structure of a society that affects its people. In contemporary Indian society, women labourers are facing serious problems due to the transformation of the rural economy into an industry-based unregulated market economy where they are not covered by most of the protective labour laws. The unorganized sector covering the vast majority of labourers is holding a significant place in any developing country's economy including India, but the government of India fails to provide adequate importance to the labourers of this sector. In India, the proportion of employment in the unorganized sector rises to 95% for women and 91% for men (UN, 2015). It is the main source of employment for women because this sector employed a major portion of women without any requirements of training and educational qualification. The low paid unorganized sector have also been successfully absorbing skilled women workers due to the least employment opportunities in the organized sector. The National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) estimated that about 96% of women workers in India and about 84% of women workers in Assam are engaged in the unorganized sector.

The unorganized sector has also absorbed a significant number of women workers from the Muslim community which is supposed to have low participation in any public domain due to some religious restrictions. Muslims as being the largest religious minority community of India is often found in socially deprived position. As per the Ministry of Women & Child Development (Govt. of India) report 2016, it is

about 8.31% of women workers in the unorganized sector are constituted by Muslim women. It can also be assumed that not only the religious or purdah type motivations but also the lack of education, opportunity, mobility and inability to transfer domestic responsibilities that have kept Muslim women out of the organized sector of employment. So, like the women of other social groups, the majority of women workers from the Muslim community also come under the unorganized sector and is employed in both rural and urban areas. In rural areas, they are employed as labourers only in the agriculture sector but in urban areas, women labourers are employed in household industries, construction areas, domestic errands, factories like beedi, oil, salt, etc.

Muslims which constitute 14.2% of the country's population as per the 2011 census, came to Assam in the 13th century, before Ahom invasion of the region. Further, a number of Bengali-speaking immigrants have also arrived in Assam since colonial days. Thus, Muslims in the Indian state of Assam came at different periods, from different regions, with different regional, linguistic, ancestral, social or cultural backgrounds which create a kind of strata or division within the Muslims. Though the concept of caste is opposed to Islamic ideology, Assamese Muslims can be divided into different caste-like ethnic groups. Thus, Assam as one of the important states of North-East India with its diverse cultural and ethnic groups of people has also been witnessing the concept of ethnicity within the people of the Muslim community.

In this present study, an attempt is made to analyze the problems faced by women labourers in unorganized sectors, i.e. domestic and construction labourers in the present Goalpara district of Assam. The study area has a large concentration of Muslim people and the unorganized women labour force is mainly dominated by Muslim women. Another important thing is that these Muslim women labourers belong to a particular ethnic group, known as Bhatiya in the district. This study assumes importance from the fact that Bhatiya women labourers are socio-culturally backward and neglected section of society and hence, there is a difference in the problems faced by Bhatiya women labourers. Therefore, the present study is chosen to

explore the history of Muslim ethnic groups, socio-cultural differentiation faced by unorganized women labourers, the security of women and the attitude of employers towards women labourers in Goalpara District of Assam.

This present study is an attempt to explore the problems faced by unorganized women labourers in the present Goalpara district of Assam, engaged as domestic workers and construction labourers who belong to a particular Muslim ethnic group, i.e. Bhatiya. As the unorganized sector covers heterogeneous activities and women find it easy to enter in any of such activities due to its loose kind of requirements, in this present study those domestic workers salaried on monthly basis and those construction labourers as daily wage system have been chosen. Moreover, this research study has been done by focusing on women labourers of a particular Muslim ethnic group which have shown a significant number of participations in the unorganized sector.

### **1.3. Review of Literature:**

The review of the related literature has been divided into different themes for the study. The issues related to women and their economic activities are the crucial area of study for social scientists and scholars. Therefore, various studies have been done from different disciplines towards the study of various aspects of women's labour. These studies mainly deal with women's lives, their participation in the labour market, women in the unorganized sector, particularly in construction and domestic works, their living and working conditions, Muslim women in the labour market, etc. However, those studies related to the present study have been reviewed in the following heads-

#### **Studies related to Women:**

**Singh, (1979)** in his study of "Status of women and population growth in India" explores the factors that are responsible for population growth and assumed that

the higher status of women leads to a lower fertility rate. He believes that the lower status of Indian women is related to the cause of population growth.

**Desai & Thakkar, (2001)** on “Women in Indian Society” have studied the changing perceptions of the status and role of women in the realm of politico-economic background. The study clearly depicts the picture of Indian women’s journey towards gender equality from the perspective of women in the context of values that legitimize inequality.

**Dominelli, (2006)** on “Women and Community Action” studied that women have been the prominent supporter and heavily involved in community actions in a globalizing world. The researcher explores the development in a community or collective action and the reasons for the low living standards of living of women themselves. The study reveals the differential position of men and women in community action which is primarily based on gender relations. However, this study has tried to analyze women’s contribution and importance in community work from the feminist point of view.

**Kumari, (2012)** in her book on “Women and Family Welfare” provides an in-depth understanding of various dimensions relating to women’s role, recognition of their work and family welfare. The book mainly deals with the meaning of work for women, reproductive rights, gender inequality, economic empowerment of women, family welfare policies, etc. However, the book reveals that if we wish the evolution of truly human society and culture, recognition should be given to the value of maternal care and family role with all other public roles of women.

**Dutta & Jha, (2014)** in the book on “Women and Culture” have tried to bring into light the role of women in the culture of Indian societies particularly. It discussed about the changing role of women from involving in the domestic task only to seeking employment due to economic necessities and facing enormous challenges in family, workplace and society as a whole. However, the book depicts various critical issues in the context of women’s role in culture and society.

**Dutta & Jha, (2014)** in their book on “Crime and Violence Against Women” provides a detailed analysis of crime and violence prevailing in our society against women. The book broadly explains about the manifestations of violence like physical, psychological, control over speech and actions, and death at an extreme point. It reveals that crime and violence against women take place because of gender relations which assumes men to be superior and most of such violence is considered as normal.

The studies related to women mainly focused on the relation between women’s lower status and the growth of population in the country; changing perceptions of the status and role of women in the realm of politico-economic background; the differential position of men and women in community actions; the importance of women’s role in the welfare of a family; critical issues in the context of women’s role in culture and society; and prevalence of violence against women for the assumption that men are at the superior position and such violence are considered as normal. So, the above-reviewed kinds of literature are mainly related to replicating the situation or role of general women, i.e. without focusing on a particular group of women, in society.

#### **Studies related to Women and Work:**

**Kapur, (1974)** on “The Changing Status of Working Women in India” finds out the reasons for women’s participation in the workforce. Her study explains that women work not because of the economic needs but because of the economic independence, individual status and identity or intellectual realization for some of their sociological needs.

**Gulati, (1975)** on “Female Work Participation: A study of Inter-state differences” observed that economic and demographic factors are related to women’s participation in the workforce. The study tries to provide a detailed description at the district level without discussing all the economic and demographic factors related to female work participation as the scenario at the district or village level is completely different across the region or within the region. The study reveals that in the villages



of Bihar and Gujarat, women's participation in economic affairs outside the home is negatively activated with their responsibility within the home.

**Andiappan, (1980)** studied on "Women and Work" that provides a comparative analysis of sex discrimination in the employment sector of India and U.S.A. The book deals with sex discrimination in private and government employment sectors including participation, occupational and pay discrimination, and develops a comparative analysis. Further, it also discusses about various remedial measures for sex discrimination in India and U.S.A.

**Agarwal, (1985)** on "Work Participation of Rural Women in Third World: Some Data and Conceptual Biases" have found out that the problems of unemployment, poverty and destitution are many ways based on gender, therefore, to prevent such situation there is a need to focus on poor women. The national-level statistics on which developmental programmes are based usually neglected women as workers. This study clearly reveals the nature and sources of biases based on gender and provide some measures to remove such biases.

**Mehta, (1989)** on "Education, Employment and Earnings of the Extent of Disadvantages against Women" studied the extent of differences in employment and earning opportunities among similarly educated men and women. The study revealed that there exist a clear kind of inequalities in employment opportunities and earnings among men and women though they have similar levels of education.

**Cain, (1993)** studied about "Patriarchal Structure and Demographic Change" which observed that status of women is related to their rights over property, patriarchal control over their lives and their ability to work outside the home. The study also found that control over women's mobility and market work is imposed through norms of post-marital residence, control over women's sexuality through purdah, the extent of social tolerance for divorce and widow remarriage. Thus, the study has tried to explain that the work participation of women, literacy and fertility rates are defined by these patriarchal norms.

**Chowdhry, (1993)** on “High Participation, Low Evaluation: Women and Work in Rural Haryana” has tried to place the Haryanvi women in the new economy of independent India with all their regional, class and caste distinctions. This study has correlated the distinct aspects and level of the region’s economy with the extent and nature of women’s work in two major areas i.e., agriculture as well as agricultural processing and animal husbandry. The study reveals the increased and extensive use of female labour in both of the important sectors of the rural economy in the state. The study also highlights the socio-cultural and ideological elements that have increased the participation rate of Haryanvi women, but this participation exists to be culturally devalued as inferior or secondary to that of men. Even the consequences of the Green Revolution and White Revolution have only reinforced this devaluation.

**Kiran, (1994)** studied on “Women Labour Force and National Product” which emphasizes the need to establish the conceptual correspondence between the measurement of the workforce and national product that reviewed the problem of under-remuneration of women workers. The study reveals that women behave as rational producers who allocate their energy and time to various activities like unpaid work, home-based and domestic work to maximize returns. The book provides an alternative approach and framework to study the labour supply behaviour of rural women.

**Kothari, (1997)** on “Women’s Paid Domestic Work and Rural Transformation: A Study in South Gujarat” has articulated class and caste along with gender differences in the organization of domestic labour. It reveals the caste-based alliances of Halpati women as workers and Patidar caste as employers for the organization of paid domestic labour. This study examines the paid domestic labour of lower-class women from landless households which are undergoing rapid transformation in the context of the rural society of South Gujarat. The transformation is not usual like from rural to urban societies, but within the rural society itself because of the desires for higher status among the Patidars. The Halpati women from landless households are engaged in domestic labour to raise the status of their employers’

households, but their access to paid domestic work is closely related to the employment of their male household members in the same landed household as a daily agricultural labourer.

**Bhatnagar, (2011)** in his book on “Women, Employment and Empowerment” explores the relationship between the women’s nature of works and their empowerment. This book exclusively brings into light the empowerment of women through employment and participation of women in the labour force. It discussed about the trends in female work participation, the invisibility of their work, identification of women’s hidden contribution, constitutional provisions, institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, etc.

**Singh & Mishra, (2013)** have studied on “Women Work Participation in Rural Uttar Pradesh: A Regional Analysis” with the objective of understanding the process of growth of women’s participation in various gainful activities at the state and district level. The study found that the work participation of females based on their educational level, in general, is lower as compared to males. The work participation rate for women is also associated with caste structures such as Hindu SC/ST and Muslim OBC women, but the quality of employment is bad because most of them are working as casual labour. The study also found that the growth of the rural non-farm sector has not benefitted women as much as men and only one-third of women are doing wage work in the informal sector.

**Chakraborty & Mukherjee, (2014)** have studied on “Gender Wage Gap in the Indian Labour Market: Evidence from the NSS 66th Round Data” which found that during two stages, i.e. at the time of entry in the labour market and at the time of disbursement of wages, women workers have to face discrimination. This paper reveals the fact that female education will bring an increase in women’s wages and a strong implication for reducing the male-female wage difference.

**Hazarika & Hazarika, (2019)** have studied on “Female Labour Force Participation in Assam: A District Level Analysis” that provides us with a critical

analysis of the female labour force participation rate in different districts of Assam. The study evaluates various factors affecting the district wise different rate of women's participation including age-specific, society specific like rural and urban societies, etc.

The studies related to women and work have focused on reasons of women's participation in the workforce; how economic and demographic factors are related to the women's workforce participation; discrimination of women in the employment sectors on the basis of sex; sources of biases based on gender and neglected women as workers; differences in employment and earning opportunities among similarly educated men and women; patriarchal norms in defining the work participation of women, literacy and fertility rates; devaluing the work participation of women as secondary; the labour supply behaviour of rural women through unpaid works; explores the relationship between the women's nature of works and their empowerment; gender wage gap in the labour market which could be reduced by educating women; and different rates of female labour force participation in different districts of Assam. So, the reviewed literature on this theme is mainly revealing the nature of the relationship between women and work, and women's inferior position in the workforce.

#### **Studies related to Ethnicity, Muslims and Muslim Women:**

**Bhatty, (1987)** studied on "Economic Contribution of Women to the Household Budget: A Case Study of the Beedi Industry" which tend to explain that Muslim women are excluding from the labour force and leading to the restricted home-based work due to the belief in purdah or some 'Islamic' norms. This micro-study of beedi makers in Allahabad also revealed the lower levels of employment among Muslim women in comparison to the other non-Muslim women.

**Narayanan, (1989)** studied on "Ethnicity in Urban Context" which provides an understanding of the patterns of interethnic interactions and various factors influencing them. The book mainly focuses on life patterns of adaptation of the

Gujaratis as an ethnic group in Madras. The study reveals that even in an age of rapid communication ethnic boundaries divide groups and the patterns of adjustment are very complex depending on a number of factors.

**Lateef, (1990)** in her book on “Muslim Women in India: Political and Private Realities 1890s-1980s” found that purdah is not the external garment worn as the burqa, hijab or chadar, but a ‘mentality’ that control women’s lives in a complex way. The study demonstrates that Muslim women have been active in various socio-political activities including voting, seeking employment, etc. and pointed out that poverty and unemployment may be responsible for the continuation of purdah. The study revealed that it was purely region and socio-economic status, not ‘some arbitrary Muslim position’ that was responsible for the so-called ‘backwardness’ of Muslim women.

**Rahman, (1990)** studied “Muslim Women in Assam: A Sociological Study” which provide us with a detailed description of Assamese Muslim women as it is. The study reveals the picture of Muslim women’s life and their desirable position within family and society due to marriage customs and the law of inheritance. This is the first attempt to study systematically Assamese Muslim Women’s life and reveals the better status of Muslim women than the women of other communities.

**Dabla, (1991)** on “Working Women in Kashmir” studied the changing attitudes, patterns and social conditions of working women in Kashmir. The study reveals that religious traditions, i.e. Islam do not restrict women in participating in new occupations and acceptance of such new working roles is not only limited to the upper class but also spreads towards the lower-income groups in the valley. But the problems are with the family setting, changing structure, child-bearing and child-rearing for the working mothers which break the traditional joint family structures.

**Desai and Jain, (1994)** studied on “Maternal Employment and Changes in Family Dynamics: The Social Context of Women’s Work in Rural South India” which observed that it is very difficult to separate the cultural norms from structural effects,

but often the two are mutually reinforcing. The study found that Muslim women are unwilling to work in the public domain but poverty compels them to enter into the labour market. It also found that women alter their requirements according to the new opportunities in the labour market due to the constraints that they face. Thus, the study reveals that it is not only cultural values but also the macro-level inequality, which provides lower opportunities to women.

**Abu-Habib, (1998)** has studied on “The Use and Abuse of Female Domestic Workers from Sri Lanka in Lebanon” with the objective of asking why the NGOs do not seem to be concerned about the plights of female domestic workers and suggest some measures to address the issue. This study examines the inadequate support for Sri Lankan domestic workers from human rights organizations in Lebanon, despite their vulnerability is being clearly visible. The study explains about various forms of gender, ethnic or class discrimination to which female domestic workers are invariably subjugated.

**Mohamed Yasin, (2010)** studied the “Muslim Women and Work: An economic study of unorganized workers in Tirunelveli district” with the objective of studying the nature and significance of the work of Muslim women in unorganized sectors like Beedi and Mat Activities in Tirunelveli district of Tamilnadu. The findings of the study reveal poor socio-economic conditions, their contribution towards family income, wage discrimination because of gender and attitude of Muslim women workers towards their work and workplace.

**Ali, (2016)** studied on “Socio-economic Status of Deshi Muslims: A Case Study of Matia Community Development Block of Goalpara District, Assam, India” with the objective of studying socio-economic indicators for the development and status of Deshi Muslims. The study found that the three essential socio-economic indicators i.e., education, health and income of the sample households are at a very low level even far below the average of the state as well as the national level. The study also reveals that the lack of required basic infrastructure like roads, electricity, health centres, etc., in the area affected their basic amenities of life. Thus, the study

found that this section of people has a very low quality of life in comparison to their counterparts.

**Khandakar, (2016)** have studied “Social Exclusion of Inhabitants of Chars: A Study of Dhubri District in Assam” and found that Muslim daily wage manual labourers are the main victim of social exclusion than the economically well-being sections of the society. The study reveals the extent of multi-dimensional forms of social exclusion of the char inhabitants that are exposed in the field of economy, education, health, etc. and emphasizes that various forms of such exclusion emanate from their status as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.

The studies related to ethnicity and Muslim women mainly focused on complex patterns of adjustment for an ethnic group even in an era of rapid communication; Muslim women’s labour are restricted to home-based work due to the belief in purdah or some ‘Islamic’ norms; purdah is not the external garment worn as the burqa, hijab or chadar, but a ‘mentality’ that control women’s life in a complex way; Assamese Muslim Women’s life that reveals a better status of Muslim women than the women of other community; changing attitudes, patterns and social conditions of working women in Kashmir due to their participation in works outside the home; how culturally Muslim women are unwilling to work in public domain, but structural effect like poverty compels them to enter in labour market; the inadequate support for Sri Lankan domestic workers ; nature and significance of work of Muslim women in unorganized sectors like Beedi and Mat Activities in Tamilnadu; the lower socio-economic status of Deshi Muslims in Goalpara district; and Muslim daily wage manual labourers as the main victim of social exclusion that emanates from their status as illegal immigrant from Bangladesh. Thus, under this theme of the reviewed literature, different categories of Muslims and the work participation of Muslim women with some restrictions are mainly discussed.

**Studies related to Unorganized Women Labourers:**

**ILO, (1972)** on “Employment, Incomes and Equality: A Strategy for Increasing Productive Employment in Kenya” observed the health status of women construction workers and sums up the situation of women workers. Despite their principal role in the construction industry, employers treat them only as helpers and give them fewer wages than male workers. Women workers faced discrimination not only at wage levels but also faced physical hardships, especially pregnant women and lactating mothers as carrying heavy loads can cause miscarriages, no provisions of maternity benefits and crèche facilities for women construction workers. Sexual harassment of women in this sector is also widespread.

**Ghosh, (1985)** in her study on “Construction Workers” brings out the wage inequality between men and women labourers in the construction industry. Due to economic compulsion, illiteracy, poor employment opportunities women participate in unorganized sectors along with men unorganized workers. But despite their principal role in the construction industry, they are paid less as compared to male workers.

**Prasad, (1988)** on “Tribal Women Labourers – Aspects of Economic and Physical Exploitation” studied about various social, economic and psychological aspects which encourage the tribal women to participate in unorganized sectors of employment in Ranchi district of Bihar, where tribal women labourers are locally known as REJAS. In the constructional areas like Bihar, Orissa or Madhya Pradesh, tribal women are lifted on trucks from the villages by contractors, and the tribal women enjoyed their daily outings to urban areas and for getting ready cash. But it is found that the contractors often try to exploit them both economically and sexually.

**Das, (1991)** studied “Rural Wage Labourers in Assam: A Case Study of Barpeta District” which examines the problems of the rural labour force in the district and suggest remedial measures to improve socio-economic conditions. The study reveals that rural labourers are the distinct economic class in the lowest economic



strata only with a tiny plot of land for residential purposes. The study also reveals that this section of labourers is still unorganized with unsatisfactory economic conditions due to the lack of regular employment, low rate of wages, backward social ethos, etc.

**Verma, (1995)** studied on “Socio-economic study of construction workers in Baroda” which aims to study the living and health conditions of female workers and compared them with earlier conditions at their native place. Though women’s engagement with this sector increases their family income, most of these women suffered from illness due to the polluted atmosphere of their workplace. However, the study reveals the poor living and working conditions of women and hindrances like sexual harassment, health hazards, social and family restrictions.

**Tripathy, (1996)** studied on “Women labour in construction sector: A case study in Orissa” with the objective to analyze the history, organization, nature, working of the construction sector and socio-economic condition of women labourers, especially in Orissa. This study reveals that women labourers do not get basic facilities like toilets, water, medical care where simple injuries occur every day, even they don’t get any maternity benefits.

**Tripathy and Patnaik, (1996)** on “Socio-Economic Profile of Fisherwomen Community of Krushnaprasad Block (Orissa)” found that most of the women workers in the unorganized sector are with low wages and poor living standards. Though women workers are putting more effort and hours to work, their roles are recognized as second class and kept them outside the realm of the decision-making process. Despite that the study found an increased participation of women in the unorganized sector due to economic compulsion, low employment opportunities, increasing cost of living etc.

**Mevawala, (2001)** on “Live and Problems of Women Construction Labours: A study of women construction labourers from Baroda city” conducted a study on the life and problems of women construction labourers which studied the health hazards faced by the female worker, economic problems, working conditions and its effect on

family life. Women participate in the construction industry due to low literacy and large families. The study found that the problems faced by female workers are the problems of sanitation and bathroom facilities, health problems and problems of sexual harassment.

**Choudhury, (2002)** have studied “Women Workers in Informal Sector and Their Qualitative Contribution in Human Capital: A Micro Study on Greater Guwahati” and observed that the informal sector which was deeply attached to the rural economy has now become an integral part of urban economy and the fastest growing city of Guwahati has provided scope for the growth of the informal sector. The study particularly focuses on women’s work and their qualitative contribution to the development of society and providing women with a position as they are covering half of the population.

**Balakrisnan, (2005)** studied on “Rural Landless Women Labourers: Problems and Prospects” which aims at studying the most vulnerable section of women in a patriarchal society, i.e. landless women workers. The study analyzes the worst victims of female labourers, their problems, working and living conditions at home and in their workplace. It also revealed the awareness level of female workers related to labour laws and various developmental programs.

**Singh, (2008)** has studied on “Women Workers in Unorganized Sector” which try to explore the socio-economic character of women in Brick Kiln Industries. The study describes about family life, living conditions, working conditions, working relationships of women. It also investigates the issues relating to health, welfare, social security and existing labour laws, and try to understand the role of various organizations in improving their quality of life.

**Rajalingam & Mookiah, (2009)** have studied “Female Workers in Beedi Industry” which deals with the working and living conditions of the labourers in the beedi factories. The study reveals that the major workforce in the beedi industry is dominated by women and discrimination is found in fixing wages among men, women

and children. The study also reveals the fact that these workers require the proper organization to maintain their basic rights.

**Rahman, (2011)** studied on “Agricultural Labourers in the Char Areas of Assam: A Socio-Economic Analysis” that provide us with a micro-level analysis on socio-economic situations of agricultural labourers in char (riverine) areas of Assam. The study reveals that agricultural labourers have a very poor living standard, have the least access to infrastructure, are least equipped to respond to health threats, and the consumption of food and nutritional status also reveals an un-favourable picture. Further, the value of the absolute amount of productive and unproductive assets is found decreasing in each yearly flood which increases the incidences of debt among the agricultural labour households.

**Chanchu and Cresida, (2012)** in their study on “An Evaluation of Women Construction Workers” have focused on the problems of women construction workers by throwing light to its various socio-economic dimensions. The study reveals that socio-economic factors like religion, caste, type or income of the family, age or level of education have a major role in determining women’s participation in construction works. The study also reveals the employment-related problems in detail such as the number of working days in a month; hours of work in a day; reasons like poverty, to supplement the family income, etc., for taking such job; workplace-related problems like long working hours, lack of basic facilities, delay in payment, harassment at work, poor safety measures and low wages; at home like no time for home management, no co-operation from family members, no time for children etc.

**Rai and Sarkar, (2012)** have studied on “Workplace Culture & Status of Women Construction Labourers: A Case Study in Kolkata, West Bengal” with the objective of identifying issues related to working culture, health and safety issues in the workplace, the status of women and security provided to women construction labourers. The study found that rural poor womenfolk are employed as casual labourers at construction sites where the hard and rough working environment compels them to age early. Despite some primary employment-related safety and

health hazards for all construction workers, the prevalence of anti-women attitudes and discrimination based on sex at the workplace adversely affecting women's ability to work. The study also reveals the degrading working environment of women that restricted them from access to basic facilities.

**Devi and Kiran, (2013)** have studied on "Status of Female Workers in Construction Industry in India: A Review" which observed that the construction industry provides opportunities to a large number of skilled and unskilled labourers. The study found that workers in the construction industry are facing several problems related to health, job stress, injuries at the workplace, etc. Further, the study reveals that females who are mostly unskilled workers have to face several other difficulties on the basis of gender like sexual harassment, gender bias ness, wage discrimination, etc.

**Das, (2014)** studied "Women Labour in the Unorganised Sector: A Study in Palashbari Revenue Circle of Kamrup District, Assam" which attempt to quantify women's work. The study has found higher participation of women in the workforce in the sample areas compared to national and state-level participation rates which reveal that official data under-estimate women's work. The study also reveals that comparatively more females are engaged in the unorganized sector than males, and their multiple exploitation and discrimination is observed more in the unorganized sector than in the organized sector.

**Deka, (2014)** have studied "Informal Sector Among Slum Inhabitants of Guwahati City" that covers activities like manufacturing, repairing-cum-services, trade and commerce, construction, street foods, fruits and vegetables, grocery and stationery, daily wage labourers, etc. The study observed that most of such informal activities are assessable by the narrow roadside of rail track and the time of working are different for different activities. The study also reveals that the informal sector in Guwahati city is covered by women along with girl child and the education, socio-economic conditions of those women are found below the status of men.

**Devi, (2015)** have studied “Socio-Economic Status of Women Workers in Informal Sector: A Case Study in Goalpara District” that provide a clear picture of the condition of women workers, particularly in the Beedi and Brick industries. The study reveals that women workers in the informal sector constitute an economically productive and numerically large, but socio-economically marginalized section of the population. They work in a very poor working condition, even during the illness and advanced stages of pregnancy due to the fear of losing their work.

**Das, (2016)** in the paper “A Comparative Study on the Female Domestic Workers and their Children in Kamrup Districts of Assam” have made a comparative study of domestic workers in Kamrup metro and Kamrup rural. The study reveals a significant comparison of the overall condition of domestic workers in rural and urban areas of Assam. It also reveals that illiteracy, the uncertain income of other family members, preference for part-time domestic work, higher numbers of children with low income were the main reason for the increasing number of women’s participation in domestic works. The study found that children of such workers are benefitted from the developed educational facilities in Kamrup metro than in rural areas.

**Rustagi, (2016)** in his paper on “Demand and Supply of Domestic Workers in Delhi: Need for Recognition and Workers’ Rights” have mentioned that domestic work is a highly feminized informal sector activity which is a reflection of demand and supply factors. But the negative aspect of this paid domestic work is the invisibilisation of workers, non-recognition of workers’ rights and non-provision of any social protection measures. The study reveals the need to recognize this activity as a legitimate labour market activity and provide for workers’ rights and social protection.

**Maneesh and Jashna, (2017)** have studied on “Socio-economic Condition of Women Construction Workers in Kannur district, Kerala” with the objectives of working conditions and problems faced by women workers in the family and society. The study found that most of the women are facing financial problems along with the

problems of sanitary, drinking water, health hazards like muscle pain, allergy, cough, etc. and their wages are not paid on the basis of age and years of experience.

**Chandramouli and Kodandarama, (2018)** have studied “Women Domestic Workers in India: An Analysis” by keeping in view the increasing number of women domestic workers in India in recent times. This study mainly focused on the analysis of working conditions, living conditions, poor bargaining power and social insecurity of domestic workers. The study reveals that domestic workers are subjected to a series of injustices, deprivations, multi-faced abuses due to the ineffective national and international legal provisions.

However, the various studies related to the unorganized women labourers have focused on the health status of women construction workers in India; the wage inequality between men and women labourers in construction industry; conditions of women workers in the unorganized sector to explore the impact of structural changes of Indian economy on occupational choices; various social, economic and psychological aspects which encourage the tribal women to participate in unorganized sectors; unorganized economic activities mainly done by female labourers often suffered oppression, exploitation, discrimination etc.; the problems of rural labour force who are still unorganized with unsatisfactory economic conditions; the living and health conditions of female workers at a polluted working atmosphere; the history, organization, nature, working of construction sector and socio-economic condition of women labourers especially in Orissa; the increased participation of women workers in unorganized sector with low wages and poor living standards; the life and problems of women construction labourers; women’s work and their qualitative contribution for the development of society through informal economy; the most vulnerable section of women in a patriarchal society i.e., landless women workers by focusing on their problems with living and working conditions; socio-economic character of women in Brick Kiln Industries; the working and living conditions of the female labourers in the beedi factories; socio-economic situations of agricultural labourers in char (riverine) areas of Assam; status of female construction workers which have to face several other

difficulties on the basis of gender; higher participation of women in unorganized sector than men, and their multiple exploitation and discrimination in Kamrup; how informal sector in Guwahati city are mainly covered by women along with girls child; the condition of women workers particularly in Beedi and Brick industries of Goalpara district; the condition of female domestic workers in Kamrup metro and Kamrup rural; how domestic work is highly feminized informal activity which is a reflection of demand and supply factors; working conditions and problems faced by women construction workers in the family and society of Kerala; and the increase number of women domestic workers, and their working and living condition with poor bargaining power and social insecurity. Hence, the literature reviewed under this theme is mainly related to the women labourers engaged in the unorganized sector and their condition in this sector.

Thus, the review of literature has been dividing into four related areas of the study as studies related to Women which mainly replicate the situation or role of women in society, studies related to Women and Work which reveal the nature of women's relationship with the workforce, studies related to Ethnicity, Muslims and Muslim Women which mainly reflected the restricted work participation by Muslim women, and studies related to Unorganized Women Labourers which mainly related to the condition of women as unorganized labourers.

#### **1.4. Defining the Concepts of Labour and Labourer:**

The term 'labour' is being used in different meanings. It can be any work i.e., manual or mental, for the sake of monetary gain. So, the terms such as 'worker', 'employee', 'workman' and 'labourer' are interchangeably used with the term 'labour'. Usually, the term 'labour' is used for 'worker', but conceptually, labour and labourer (worker) is two different things. Labour is a broad concept that means an ability to work including both physical and mental labour. It is a primary factor of production that indicates human resources. But the term 'labourer' means worker i.e.,

the person who engaged in some work or labour. Thus, the term 'labourer' is closely related to the term 'labour' which means an ability to work and labourer means a person who owns labour.

Karl Marx used the term labour as the power of producing capital and it becomes a component of capital which under capitalism functions as working capital. He introduces the concept in his first volume of "Capital" as- "By labour-power or capacity for labour is to be understood the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in a human being, which he exercises whenever he produces a use-value of any description." He further added that "Labour-power, however, becomes a reality only by its exercise; it sets itself in action only by working. But thereby a definite quantity of human muscle, nerve and brain is wasted, and these require to be restored."

As labour is a living thing, it is absolutely different from other means of production and hence, it has some unique characteristics. The following are some of the main characteristics of labour:

- a. Labour is a living thing because it is inspired by the personality of the labourer. It is not a commodity which can be used as things.
- b. Labour is inseparable from the labourer. To Marshall, "the worker sells his work but he himself remains his own property" (Kulshrestha, 1999).
- c. Labour is a perishable commodity. It cannot be stored up like other goods i.e., if labour is not used for a particular period, it will never recover its lost hours. It means the labourers cannot store their labour for future employment.
- d. Labour is not so much mobile as the capital because of several factors like family, lifestyle, environments, languages, customs, etc. But capital can be stored and converted into currency.
- e. Labour is a mean as well as an end of production. It denotes that labour is a means of production in the factory, but the worker may be



the user of that commodity outside the factory and hence, it is an end of the user of that product.

- f. One of the most important characteristics of labour is that it is the only active and human factor of production. Therefore, moral and social considerations should also be taken into account with the economy in the discussion of any problem relating to labour.
- g. Most of the thinkers opine that labour as the main factor of the production process is the main source of wealth. In the words of Frederick Engels, “Labour is the source of all wealth, the political, economists assert, it is this next to nature, which supplies it with the material that it converts into wealth. But it is even infinitely more than this. It is the prime basic condition for all human existence, and this to such an extent that, in a sense, we have to say that labour created men himself.” Karl Marx recommends that the surplus value should be disturbed among the labourer (Misra, 2016).

In this way, the concepts of labour and labourer are related to each other, where one is the mode of production and the other one is the live driving force of that mode of production. As the terms ‘labour’ and ‘labourer’ are interchangeably used with the terms ‘work’ and ‘worker’, the definition of the census and National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) regarding work and worker can be considered in the present study. The census of India defines work as participation in any economically productive activity, irrespective of whether the participation is physical or mental in nature. The worker refers to all those persons engaged in ‘work’ as defined above. According to this definition, the entire population is classified into three main categories: Main workers i.e., who were engaged in economic activity for six months or more during a year, Marginal workers i.e., those who worked for less than six months and Non-workers are those who have not worked any time at all in the year.

However, the NSSO has provided a broader meaning of work that refers to any activity resulting in the production of goods and services which increase the value of

the national product is regarded as an economic activity. Such activities include the production of all goods and services for the market including those of government services and the production of primary commodities for own consumption and own account production of fixed assets (NSS 66th Round). Persons who are engaged in any economic activity or who, despite their attachment to economic activity, abstain from work for reasons of illness, injury or other physical illness, bad weather, festivals and other reasons necessitating temporary absence from work, constitute 'workers'.

### **1.5. Concept and Definition of Unorganized Sector:**

The term 'informal sector' was first used by International Labour Organization in 1972, in order to define a wide range of unregistered economic activities. But in India, the official statistics or the National Accounts Statistics have never used the term "informal", in spite of that the NAS is using the terms "organized" and "unorganized". But the term "informal" and "unorganized" are quite similar to each other and hence, both the terms are simultaneously used.

The labour force of any country of the world can be divided into two categories, i.e. organized or formal sector and unorganized or informal sector. The "organized sector" includes all those public sector enterprises covering Government and Semi-Government organizations. The whole organized sector is covered by various laws and acts, and the rights or security of its labour force is protected by such laws. The "unorganized sector" covers all the rest, mainly those unincorporated enterprises and household industries which do not come under public enterprises and are not regulated by any legislation or maintaining any formal kind of financial records.

The labour force of any developing country is absorbed by the unorganized sector than the organized sector and is playing a significant role in the economic development with varieties of people including literate or illiterate, skilled or

unskilled, rural or urban, etc. A comparison between the two sectors of employment is mentioned by their characteristics in the Table 1.1.

**Table - 1.1**  
**Characteristics of Formal and Informal Sectors**

Sl No.	Informal Sector	Formal Sector
1.	Entry by new enterprises is comparatively easy (Kenya)	Entry by new enterprises is difficult
2.	Enterprises rely on indigenous resources (Kenya)	Enterprises frequently depend on overseas resources
3.	Enterprises are family owned (Kenya)	Enterprises are corporately-owned
4.	Operate on small scale in unregulated and competitive markets	Operate in large scale and in protected markets
5.	Use labour-intensive and adapted technology (Kenya)	Use capital intensive and often imported technology
6.	Workers have skills acquired outside the formal school system (Kenya)	Workers have formally acquired skills and are often expatriates
7.	Sharp distinction between the supplier of capital and supplier of labour is absent (Latin America)	Clear distinction between 'owners', 'managers' and 'labour'
8.	Producers are in competitive markets, and not in a position to fix prices or make exceptional profits (Latin America)	Producers are in sellers' markets and can fix prices
9.	Higher rate of female employment and also of younger and older workers (Latin America)	Predominance of male, middle-aged workers
10.	Relatively higher rate of heads of families employed in this sector (Latin America)	Proportion of heads of families is lower

11.	High proportion of least educated or illiterate workers	Most of workers have had a minimum of formal schooling
12.	Mainly made up of immigrant from impoverished rural areas	Proportion of urban-born workers is larger
13.	No access to credit specially in institutional credit or if there is access, it is at exorbitant rates and stringent condition (Latin America)	Institutional fiancé and credit is more easily available, even with government subsidies.

Source: Souza and Tokman, 1976.

The comparison mentioned in the Table 1.1 reveals that the informal sector, i.e. unorganized sector is covering all those areas which take place outside the framework of the organized sector and having opposite criteria of the formal or organized sector. However, the informal or unorganized sector can be more specifically identified by the ILO Employment Mission Report on Kenya, 1993 which have been showing the following criteria:

- a. Easy entry for the new enterprises,
- b. Reliance on indigenous resources,
- c. Family ownership of the enterprises,
- d. Small scale operation,
- e. Labour intensive and adopted technology,
- f. Informally acquired skills of workers and
- g. Unregulated and competitive markets.

The Indian Ministry of Labour has categorized the unorganized sector into four groups, i.e. in terms of occupation, nature of employment, especially distressed and service categories. The first category includes all those small and marginal farmers, landless agricultural labourers, sharecroppers, fishermen, those engaged in animal husbandry, beedi rolling, labelling and packing, building and construction workers, leather workers, weavers, artisans, salt workers, workers in brick kilns and stone

quarries, workers in sawmills, oil mills, etc. Attached agricultural labourers, bonded labourers, migrant workers, contract and casual labourers come under the second category. The third, i.e. especially distressed category includes toddy tappers, scavengers, carriers of head loads, drivers of animal-driven vehicles, loaders and unloaders, while the midwives, domestic workers, fishermen and women, barbers, vegetable and fruit vendors, newspaper vendors, etc. belong to the fourth category.

The four broad categories have revealed that the labour market of unorganized sector is characterized by- ease of entry, illiterate and unskilled labour force, high rate of female workers, presence of poor workers, low investment and high competition, inadequate labour laws for the unorganized sector, lack of proper implementation of legislative provisions, lack of knowledge regarding the rights of employees, scattered and fragmented nature of the workforce, absence of formal (employee-employer) relationship, poor working condition, exploitation of unorganized workers, discrimination on the basis of sex, inability to define their needs and problems, etc.

As per the System of National Accounts (SNA), 1993 ‘the informal sector consists of units engaged in the production of goods or services with the primary objective of generating employment and income to the persons engaged in the activity. These units form part of the household sector as unincorporated enterprises owned by households.’

The first official definition of the unorganized sector in India was given by the Central Statistical Organization (CSO) in 1980. The CSO states that the unorganized sector refers to all those unincorporated enterprises or household industries whose activity is not regulated under any statutory act or legal provision and which do not maintain any regular or annual accounts. The First Indian National Commission on Labour (1966-69) defined the unorganized sector as that part of the workforce “who have not been able to organize in pursuit of a common objective because of constraints such as casual nature of employment, ignorance and illiteracy, the small size of establishments with low capital investment per person employed, scattered nature of

establishments and superior strength of the employer operating singly or in combination”.

The National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector (NCEUS) in addressing the issue of employment in the informal sector has mentioned that “employment in India can be meaningfully grouped into four categories to reflect the quality and its sectoral association. These are (a) formal employment in the formal or organized sector, (b) informal employment in the formal sector, (c) formal employment in the informal sector, and (d) informal employment in the informal sector. We find that the Indian economy is dominated by (d) constantly around 86% of employment as of 2004-05.” The reports of NCEUS, 2008 have defined that “The unorganized sector consists of all unincorporated private enterprises owned by individuals or households engaged in the sale and production of goods and services operated on a proprietary or partnership basis and with less than ten total workers”.

The National Commission on Self-Employed Women under the chairpersonship of Smt. Ela R. Bhatt set up in 1987, in its report characterized the unorganized sector as one in which women “do arduous work as wage earners, piece-rate workers, casual labour and paid and unpaid family labour. The economic and social conditions of these women are dismal.” The report also observed that “the unorganized sector is characterized by a high incidence of casual labour mostly doing intermittent jobs at extremely low wages or doing their own account work at very uneconomical returns. There is a total lack of job security and social security benefits. The areas of exploitation are high, resulting in long hours, unsatisfactory work conditions, and occupational health hazards.”

## **1.6. Unorganized Sector and Women:**

The unorganized sector which is also known as the informal sector is successfully giving the shadow of its umbrella to a large portion of the labour force

without any special requirement of training and education. One of the significant characteristics of the unorganized sector is that women constitute an important section of the labour force in this sector with its increasing participation. Due to the expansion of education, women of present societies are equally participating in every sphere of life with men including economic activities or maybe in more numbers than men like in the case of the unorganized sector. As per the NSSO 66th round (2009-10), the estimated women work participation (95.49%) in the unorganized sector is higher than the male work participation (93.32%).

We can also divide women into organized and unorganized workers as the two categories of the employment sector. But most of the women are found in the unorganized or informal sector of employment than in organized one due to its ease of entry. Even the estimated number of unorganized workers in 2009-10 was 436.98 million in India contributing 94% of total workers, whereas only 5.84 million workers, i.e. 4.51% are in the organized sector. Table 1.2 depicts the distribution of workers in the unorganized and organized sector based on sex from 1999-2000 to 2009-10.

**Table - 1.2**

**Distribution of Workers in Unorganized and Organized Sector by Sex- 1999-2000, 2004-05 and 2009-10 (millions)**

Sex	Unorganized sector			Organized sector			Total		
	1999-00	2004-05	2009-10	1999-00	2004-05	2009-10	1999-00	2004-05	2009-10
Male	230.12	259.81	313.33	43.66	49.63	22.45	273.78	309.44	335.78
Female	112.51	135.09	123.65	10.46	12.94	5.85	122.98	148.03	129.49
Persons	342.64	394.90	436.98	54.12	62.57	28.29	396.76	457.46	465.27

Source: NSSO 55<sup>th</sup> (1999-2000), 61<sup>st</sup> (2004-05) and 66<sup>th</sup> (2009-19) Round Survey on Employment and Unemployment

The share of organized employment in the economy has declined by one percent in 2009-10 over 1999-2000 and the share of unorganized employment has increased from 93% in 1999-2000 to about 94% in 2009-10. On the other hand, the

distribution of sex in this regard shows comparatively higher rates of females in the unorganized sector than males as shown in the Table 1.3. Thus, Indian women have a significant role to play in the economic development of the country due to the increasing participation in the unorganized employment sector. By crossing the hierarchical boundaries of caste, class, religion, wealth, power, and most importantly the traditional responsibility of daily household chores, Indian women are involving in the unorganized sector than in organized ones.

**Table - 1.3**  
**Percentage Distribution of Male-Female and Total Workers in Organized and Unorganized Sector**

Year	Male		Female		Persons	
	Organized	Unorganized	Organized	Unorganized	Organized	Unorganized
1999-00	8.35	91.65	4	96	7	93
2004-05	6.94	93.6	3.37	96.63	5.78	94.22
2009-10	6.68	93.32	4.51	95.49	6.08	93.92

Source: NSSO 55th (1999-2000), 61st (2004-05) and 66th (2009-10) Round  
Survey on Employment and Unemployment

But the life of unorganized workers, particularly women, is filled with lots of difficulties especially in a society like India where the unorganized sector is not regulated by proper legislative provisions. Women labourers who are mostly unskilled work in the unorganized sector with low wages in an indecent work environment. The income level can hardly be improved in this sector because unskilled women are engaged in unskilled occupations and do traditional work as domestic servants.

The women labourers in the urban unorganized sector are basically involved in activities such as domestic work, construction work, small trade like brick making, basket weaving, etc., but in the rural unorganized sector, women are mainly engaged in agricultural activities. The economic pressure of households has compelled women to take the burden of adjustment and play the direct economic role as wage earners in



construction sites, homes, factories, and farms. Women are the most exploited in this sector and they are employed as cheap substitute manual labour.

**Table - 1.4**

**Percentage Distribution of Workers in the Unorganized Non-Agricultural Sector (PS+SS) by Employment Status, 2009-10**

Employment Status	Rural			Urban		
	Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female	Persons
Own Account Worker	44.7	42.3	44.1	42.8	40.5	42.4
Employers	0.8	0.1	0.6	3.2	0.7	2.8
Family Workers	8.1	35.1	15.1	9.2	23.7	11.6
Self-Employed	53.6	77.5	59.8	55.2	64.9	56.8
Regular Wage/Salaried	11.4	4.9	9.7	27.3	20.4	26.2
Casual Workers	35.0	17.6	30.5	17.5	14.7	17.0
All	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: NSS 66<sup>th</sup> Round, Report No. 539

The labour force of this sector is out of the reach of any Protective Labour Laws and Trade Union Organizations. But the Indian constitution has provided certain rights and privileges to women through Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of State Policy which are applicable in all spheres of society as a whole. These are- Article 14 guarantees the right to equality to all men and women; Article 15 prohibits discrimination based on religion, race, caste, and sex; Article 15(3) contains an enabling provision for the state to make affirmative discrimination in favour of women; Article 39(e) ensures equal pay for equal work and Article 42 directs the state to make provisions for ensuring just and humane condition of work and maternity relief.

### **1.7. Concept of Ethnicity and Defining Ethnic Group:**

The term 'ethnicity' is derived from the Greek word 'ethnos' or 'ethnie' in the plural, which means a nation conceived as the unity of persons with common ancestry. The concept of ethnicity in the political discussion of Greek nationalism has been around for longer than in the social sciences. The most relevant legacy in this regard from Greek lineage was the distinction and often conflation of the 'ethnos' with the 'demos'. The former means ethnic polity and the latter one is a polity made of one or more ethnic groups.

However, the concept of ethnicity for social sciences is a social phenomenon produced and reproduced over time with purely social meaning. "Ethnicity is a concept that describes the real or imagined features of group membership, typically in terms of one or other combination of language, collective memory, culture, ritual, dress, and religion, amongst other features" (Meer, 2014). In sociological terms, ethnicity simply means a concept of shared culture and way of life reflecting in language, religion or material culture like clothing. It can be said that "ethnicity refers to the cultural practices and outlooks of a given community of people which sets them apart from others" (Giddens, 2010). Members of ethnic groups conceive themselves as distinct from other social groups and also conceived by other groups as different. By the process of socialization, young minds assimilate the lifestyles or beliefs of ethnic groups.

Though the terms ethnicity and ethnic groups are used symmetrically, they are two separate concepts. While the ethnic group is a social group based on ancestry, culture or national origin, ethnicity is the identification or affiliation with an ethnic group. According to Yang, ethnicity has both subjective and objective perceptions i.e. it is the product of human sentiment or a sense of belonging to a particular ethnic group and it has some objective characteristics because it is constructed by social forces.

There is no single definition regarding the concept of an ethnic group as scholars have not reached an agreement on defining this concept. Therefore, two definitions as narrow and broad are often used. According to the narrow definition, an ethnic group is “a group socially distinguished, by others or by itself, on the basis of its unique culture or national origin” (Yang, 2000). This definition is based on two conditions, one is unique cultural characteristics i.e., language, religion or customs and the other one is the national origin.

The broad definition of defining an ethnic group is that it is “a group socially distinguished, by others or by itself, on the basis of its unique culture, national origin, or racial characteristics” (Yang, 2000). The only difference between the broad and narrow definition is that the broad definition is based on racial or physical characteristics along with unique culture and national origin in defining ethnic groups. So, the broad definition has three conditions (culture, national origin, or race), but an ethnic group can be identified as long as it is met one of the conditions i.e., not all the three conditions are required to meet to be an ethnic group.

According to Max Weber, “ethnic groups are human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent- because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization or migration- in such a way that this belief is important for the continuation of the non-kinship communal relationships” (Yang, 2000). Therefore, Weber states that ethnicity has three things, i.e. (a) it referred to the fact that common descent is less important than a belief in common descent; (b) the bases of this belief in common descent are multiple, varying from physical appearance to shared cultural practices to shared historical experiences and so on; and (c) an ethnic group exists wherever this distinctive connection i.e., belief in common descent, is part of a foundation of community (Meer, 2014).

## **1.8. Conceptualizing Women's Labour:**

The problems of labourers, recognition of women's labour can be related to the various theoretical perspectives. Although all theories have different perceptions regarding the origin of invisibility, one major issue on which all theories focused, that is, men have occupied the public domain in terms of politics, economy and culture, but women are exclusively confined with reproduction, child-bearing and household work. It is true that women are being included in the labour class from very early times, but their disassociation from domestic work have prevented them from gaining the necessary space in public activities. However, in order to understand the various problems of women labourers in the unorganized sector, the present study is based on the theoretical concept that would help in examining the facts.

In this regard, Marxist feminism essentially pointed out the ways in which women labourers are exploited in the private or unorganized sector. The condition of work in the unorganized sector is reflected by its nature of unregulated labour force and exploitation as mentioned by Karl Marx in his writings of capitalism and class struggle. The unorganized sector which plays a vital role in economic development has employed workers at a very cheap rate. Marx believed that there is a hierarchical order in the labour market process which divides the labour among workers. The development of technology introduces the concept of the technical division of labour and arises two groups of workers as skilled and unskilled. Thus, modern technology uses unskilled labour as a substitute for skilled labour and likewise, substitute female labourers for males.

Women are paid lower wages than men because they are used as secondary workers and unskilled substitutes for skilled males. Another reason for paying less to the women is due to the socio-cultural assumption that women are looking after by their husbands and partly dependent on the husband's income. Therefore, there is always a tendency to pay women lower wages than the value of their labour-power.

The dual role of women, that is, one in the labour market and another in the home are traditionally determining their economic status. According to Marx and Engels, “Factory production and the introduction of machinery draw women into production and this substitute female labour for male labour. This substitution has effects on the family. Machinery provides the capitalist greater control over the labour process and by drawing all members of the family irrespective of sex and age; it depreciates the value of male labour-power. By transferring the expenditure of more and more motive power to the machines, transforms the work itself and brings about changes both in the labour used and in wages. Capitalists could now employ labourers with slight muscular strength. Consequently, the labour of women and children was used.” According to Marxian theory, the growing organic composition of capital continuously leads to freeing a greater number of labours than is required for the expansion of capital into the reserve. Thus, the increase of capital decreases the demand for labour and continuously labourers are being freed either by losing their jobs or by not including into the field of the labour market.

The cheap rate that is always paid to women labourers not only ensures the discounted rate of women’s labour but also recreates forms of dependence within the family. ‘Women are oppressed in both domestic and public affairs, and women’s wages are treated as expendable income for the family, unlike the men. So women are a ‘reserve’ army of labour as their income is not valued, but they feed into the continuation of capitalism’ (Sen, 2012). The different values of women’s labour-power from that of men and their distinctive position in the labour market are to be explained in terms of the family and women’s role within it, and the patriarchal ideology.

### **1.9. Significance of the Study:**

It is estimated that more than 90% of the total labour force has been mainly engaged in the informal economy and its contribution to GDP is about 50% as per the

National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector, 2008. Women, particularly, are confined to the unorganized sector, with 96% of all female workers being in this sector (Sarma, 2015). Thus, on the basis of its predominance in the Indian economy, the present study is chosen to identify the problems faced by unorganized labourers, particularly women engaged in domestic and construction works. The role of women in any society is crucial though their contributions are not properly recognized and hence, it is an urgent need to identify the problems and provide a solution to those problems faced by women labourers. Further, this study is being undertaken in the Goalpara district of Assam to explore the various socio-cultural differentiation faced by women labourers of a particular Muslim ethnic group, i.e. Bhatiya. They are regarded as a backward Muslim ethnic group in the district who are increasingly found in the unorganized sector and it is considered that women from backward social/ethnic groups are found more in the unorganized sector than from other social groups.

### **1.10. Objective of the Study:**

- a. To study the historical background of Muslim ethnic groups in Goalpara district.
- b. To identify the extent of security at the workplace as women labourers including their working conditions.
- c. To examine the socio-cultural stigmatization faced by women labourers due to ethnicity.
- d. To analyze the employers' attitude towards female labourers.

### **1.11. Research Questions:**

- a. In what historical background Muslim ethnic groups in Goalpara are developed?

- b. To what extent women labourers are secure at the workplace and in what conditions do they work?
- c. What are the socio-cultural differentiation and problems faced by Muslim women labourers?
- d. What type of attitude hold by employers towards female labourers?

### **1.12. Research Methodology:**

**Universe of the Study-** In research design, the first thing to do is clearly defining the set of objects to be studied, i.e. the universe of the study. Hence, the universe of the present study is women labourers belonging to one particular ethnic group of the Muslim community. The field of the present study is the municipal areas of the Goalpara district of Assam. The reason for choosing Goalpara district as the area of this present study is that the district has the majority of Muslim population with 57.52% (Census, 2011) and women labourers are basically residing or working in municipal areas of the district. Further, the study has specified to a particular ethnic group known as 'Bhatiya' because the Muslim women engaged as labourers mainly belong to that particular ethnic group.

**Methodology-** The methodological approach for the present study is explorative and descriptive mainly based on a qualitative study in nature.

**Methods-** The data are collected from both primary and secondary sources, where primary data are obtained through interviews using Interview Schedule both in a structured and unstructured manner. While the secondary data have been drawn from census reports, books, journals, and any other printed materials available related to the study. The application of observation technique in the entire period of study is also being used.

**Tools of Data Collection-** The tools of data collection used for the present study are the Interview Schedule which is prepared by keeping in view the objectives and research questions of the study, Audio Recorder and Camera.

**Sample Frame-** Muslim women labourers of the 20-50 age group are the sample for the study in the Goalpara district, which is quite vast to cover. Therefore, the study is being conducted using stratified and purposive sampling, and further, some case studies have been conducted to support the factual findings. The study consists of 60 respondents who have been taken as the sample size for the study from municipality areas of the district because the present study is mainly based on a qualitative approach. The reason for using the stratified sampling method is that the respondents are further divided into different categories i.e., domestic and construction labourers, to facilitate the research work for better analysis. And the purposive sampling method is used because the sample is being purposively chosen from those municipal areas of the district where Muslim women labourers are either working or residing. Moreover, it used a snowball sampling method in order to study some hidden facts and to keep the study free from any bias and to ensure a fair, representative and balanced sample.

**Data Collection-** The data for the present study is collected from Goalpara municipal areas by purposively selecting six municipal wards depending on the concentration of those women labourers. The snowball sampling method was applied in order to recognize the houses of domestic and construction labourers, and also to find out some hidden facts about them. After that data were collected through an interview schedule and observation method during interviews from ten women respondents of each selected municipal ward by visiting their houses i.e., five domestic and five construction labourers. Further, the workplaces of those women labourers were visited and observed as much as possible, particularly of those in construction works.

**Data Analysis-** Since the study is mainly based on a qualitative approach, after the data collection the focus of attention is given to analysis for interpretation. The



advantages of applying qualitative methods are that they can explore and assess matters that cannot be summarized numerically. Researchers cannot limit themselves only to those aspects which can be reduced or simplified to numerical representation as quantitative research does. Thus, the analysis is based on a qualitative approach.

Only the data related to the basic information about the women labourers are shown in the simple percentile method by tabulation. And for the rest of the data, the emphasis is given on transcribing the responses of women labourers into different related themes for the study. The methods of transcribed verbatim based on necessity and mainly the edited, i.e. summarized version of the transcript, have been used for the study. In order to analyze the transcribed interviews, notes of potential codes from each transcript is made by following each interview, and then the codes are combined and arranged into initial themes by grouping similar sets of codes together. Further, the anonymity of the data has been maintained for ethical consideration in the study.

### **1.13. Operational Definitions:**

**Women labourers-** For the present study, the term labourer is being used to define an individual who engaged in economic activity by doing mainly physical labour. By women labourer, means the women who work with their hands or engaged in manual labour. And women in the unorganized sector mainly the women construction labourers and women domestic workers are often referred to as women labourers in the study.

**Security-** Security in a simple way means freedom from danger or any kind of harm caused by others. But security for the study means identifying the existing social security measures for women labourers and its extent or presence at their workplace.

**Stigmatization-** Stigmatization is an act of labelling but for the study, stigmatization refers to the differentiation or prejudices faced by women labourers due

to their ethnic group i.e., the different way of behaviour or treatment they are experiencing for being a member of a particular ethnic group.

**Attitude-** Attitude is a settled way of expressing thoughts, feelings or opinions that evaluates something or a particular matter which may be positive or negative. But the attitude in the study means determining the point of view of women labourers regarding the way of behavioural expression of employers towards them.

#### **1.14. Delimitation of the Study:**

- a. The study is delimited to only municipal areas of the Goalpara district of Assam.
- b. The study is delimited to only those women engaged as domestic and construction labourers aged between 20-50 years.
- c. The study is delimited to only women labourers belonging to a particular Muslim ethnic group of the district.

#### **1.15. Justification of the Study:**

This present study focuses on women labourers of Goalpara district working or residing in municipal areas of the district. The data is collected from those women unorganized labourers who are engaged in domestic and construction works based on the fact of the monthly and the daily wage system. The municipal areas of the district are selected for the collection of data because non-agricultural activities of the unorganized sector are more visible in urban areas than in rural areas. Moreover, the women labourers belonging to the 'Bhatiya' ethnic group are selected for the study because the unorganized sector is mainly dominated by the women from this particular group in the district.

### **1.16. Limitations of the Study:**

The first major difficulty in the study is not getting any proper statistical data about the unorganized women labourers as they are mostly unregistered labourers. Collecting data from those women labourers who are mostly illiterate and convincing them about the importance of the study was another difficult task. In some areas, they are residing in such a scattered manner that identification of households was another major problem.

However, the attempt is made to study about various problems of women labourers, within such limitations, by focusing on a particular ethnic group in the study area.

### **1.17. Organization of the Thesis:**

The study has been presented in five chapters and the chapters are organized as the following heads:

#### **Chapter- I Introduction**

The introductory chapter contains the statement of the problem, review of literature dividing into four sub-sections as studies related to women, studies related to women and work, studies related to ethnicity, Muslims and Muslim women and studies related to unorganized women labourers. The chapter, further, deals with defining the concepts of labour and labourer, concept and definition of the unorganized sector, unorganized sector and women, concept of ethnicity and defining ethnic group, significance of the study, conceptualizing women's labour, the objective of the study, research questions, research methodology, operational definitions, delimitation of the study, justification and limitations of the study. This chapter also consists of a brief description of chapters in the form of 'Organization of the Chapters'.

**Chapter- II The Study Area and Historical Background**

This chapter accounts for a detailed description of the study area, i.e. Goalpara district covering the historical background and its origin, administration, economy and occupations of its people, human development index and literacy. The chapter is also provided with the historical background of people in the district, particularly about the Muslims and their different ethnic groups.

**Chapter- III Socio-Economic Problems of Unorganized Women Labourers**

This chapter gives prime importance to the socio-economic problems faced by women as unorganized labourers that include the socio-economic background of the women labourers, their participation as domestic and construction labourers, working condition and the double burden of the women along with the identification of the extent of the social security measures.

**Chapter- IV Aspects of Ethnic Differentiation**

This chapter mainly highlights the various aspects of differentiation based on ethnicity due to their socio-economic situation. The chapter deals with the backwardness of the ethnic group in general, socio-cultural stigmas faced by women labourers in particular, and the attitude of the employers. The chapter is also given some case studies which highlighted the findings of the study.

**Chapter- V Summary and Conclusion**

This chapter concludes the study by summarizing the findings of the study and drawing a conclusion with some suggestions.

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