

## Chapter-6

### Case Studies

#### 6.1 Women's Work and their Life

For majority of men their home is a place to rest and recoup their energies to work next day. All men (even poorest among poor) expect and command some comforts and care when they come home from their work. This is not the case for women. For women home is not primarily a place to rest. Whether they work out side or work at home household responsibilities are always there. These responsibilities are considered as primary responsibilities of women. To understand how their household responsibilities affect and shape their role in the labour market we will examine case studies of some women. This will enable us to understand the qualitative aspects of women's work and economic status.

##### 6.1.1 Rekha: A Home-based Worker in Food the Processing Industry

We met Rekha at her mother's place. She was rolling *papad*. We explained the purpose of our visit to her. She started talking with us in response to our questions about herself, while her hands were busy rolling *papad*. She told us that she is staying in a nearby hut with her husband Ashok. She is aged about 25 years and he is about 30 years. Both of them were educated up to SSC level. They belong to an intermediary caste, in the caste hierarchies. They are from Maharashtra but she has never visited her native village. She was born and brought up in Baroda. Her parents are settled here since two generations. Her husband is a rickshaw driver and she is a home-based worker. She is engaged in this work since the last ten years. He earns about Rs1200 per month and she earns about Rs 500 per month.

Rekha stays in the half-pucca house bought by them recently. They paid Rs12,000 for the house, which they borrowed from a relative. She wakes up early, at five o'clock in the morning and hurriedly completes her daily chores of cleaning, cooking and fetching water. They have a water tap in their house but water does not come from it because of low pressure. She goes to a common water tap and every day there is a quarrel among women for water. They do not have a latrine so she uses her mother's latrine. She cooks on a chulha since she does not have a ration card. Without ration card it is very costly to use kerosene stove. They have a common ration card with her in-laws but the in-laws do not give them kerosene because they stay separately from them. She completes her morning routine by seven o'clock and at about eight o'clock she goes to her employer's place, Paras Papad Depot.

The owner of the Paras Papad is a wholesale merchant of *papad*. He provides work of *papad* rolling to women from the area since the last twenty years. He does not give work to any women who approach him. He is very strict about the quality of work. He gives work only to those new women who are recommended by other skilled workers. Rekha started this work since last ten years. One of her neighbour who was working for Paras Papad introduced her to the employer.

He employed few women in the beginning, but about 100 women are working for him now. All of them go to his depot in the morning and collect prepared dough and oil for the day's work. So there is a queue in the morning. At times if she is lucky her turn comes in fifteen to twenty minutes and some times she has to queue for an hour or more. She comes back to her mother's place with the dough and oil. She rolls *papad* from 9 a.m. in the morning to 5 p.m. in the evening. She uses her mother's place for her work because her half-pucca house does not have a place to spread the *papads* for drying. It is necessary to spread the *papad* in sunlight for maintaining good quality.

Her mother is a widow. She is working as domestic worker for her livelihood. Rekha contributes forty rupees to her mother as rent. Her mother also helps her in spreading papad when she is free.

At about 5 p.m. in the evening she again walks back to Paras Papad which takes about fifteen minutes. She has once again to stand in queue for delivering the *papads*. The employer checks the *papads* carefully and sometimes asks them to clean extra oil or dry for more time. He enters the quantity of *papads* into a card.

After going back home, once again she performs the entire household chores. Her husband helps her some times for cutting vegetable etc. if he is 'free' and in good mood to help her. She goes to bed at about 11 p.m. at night.

She does not get work on Mondays because on Monday the merchants have staggering of electricity, and the dough cannot be prepared in the electric machine. So they have a compulsory holiday on every Monday. At the end of the month he calculates the total amount of *papad* rolled by her and pays 2.5 rupees per kilogram. He takes the card back and gives new card every month. Some of them are working since last twenty years but they have no proof of this. The employer does not provide any paid holiday or any other benefit but he does give interest free loan as an advance to the regular workers. He does not have any uniform policy for bonus but if he earns more profit he does give Rs 100 - 200 bonus to regular workers on Diwali festival according to his wish.

She has never tried to find other work. She feels that her status in her family has increased because she is contributing to the family income.

Rekha is aware about union activities. They had tried to form a union a few years earlier but could not make strong unity. After that failure most of her colleagues are disheartened and feel that why should they bell the cat if others are not willing to unite.

But Rekha feels that it is necessary to form a union to get their demands. She is willing to give time for such activities.

### **6.1.2 Sudha: Self-employed with a Small Shop**

Sudha was sitting near her little shop when we approached her. When we asked her what she does, she replied that she is just a housewife. When we asked her details about her daily routine she explained that she wakes up in the morning at six o'clock. She completes her daily chores of cleaning, cooking, etc. by 10 a.m. and then looks after her the small shop adjacent to their home. From 12 p.m. to 3p.m. she takes lunch and rests and again from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. she is in the little cabin shop.

When we asked her why, if she is running the shop, did she say at first instance that she was just a housewife, she explained that in fact her husband is the shopkeeper and not she. " He is a social worker and local leader so he has to go out every now and then for some or other work. In his absence I take care of the shop." This was almost for four to six hours routinely. When we asked her, whether she expected her husband to take care of household work since she was taking responsibility of the shop, she said that, " He does help some times if he is free for cutting vegetables or arranging the house. "

She is 35 years old. Her education is up to 10th class and her husband has studied up to 8th class. She stays in a pucca house built by slum clearance board and pay Rs. 75 as an instalment for the house. They earn about one thousand rupees from the shop and get one thousand rupees rent of another shop from their tenant. She saves Rs 50 every month and uses this saving for buying small personal things. Some times if they have unexpected guests she uses her savings for the expenses towards them. She

is not aware about the total monthly expenditure of the house or investment in the shop because her husband takes care of all those money matters.

They sell electrical material in retail and also sell *Pan Padiki*. Earlier they used to sell milk and milk products. That was more risky business because milk is a perishable commodity and they had losses if they cannot sell in time. This business is better than earlier but being a small retail trader they have to face the market fluctuations much more than the wholesale or big traders. Some times they stock the goods and then the market prices goes down. In these circumstances they have to sell at lower price to the retail customers. Some times if the prices go up they get good profit.

She is aware about several government schemes for poor because her husband is a 'social worker' and helps the slum people to get loans and other benefits from the various schemes of government. But she has aversion towards such schemes. According to her such schemes extend lengthy paper work and cumbersome procedures rather than providing benefits.

### **6.1.3 Laxmi : Self-employed in the Caste based Family Business**

Laxmi belongs to Waghari community. Their traditional caste business is buying old clothes in exchange of pans, pots, buckets, etc. and sell the clothes in the weekly market. Like many other women from her caste she is also involved in this business with her husband. She is about 30 years old and her husband is about 35 years of age. She is illiterate and her husband has passed SSC. She has two children. They stay in the Waghariwas i.e. traditional residential area of their community. Their family came to Baroda fifty years earlier from the Mahesana District of North Gujarat. Every year they go to the temple at their native village to offer prayers to the mother goddess, (their community\_deity)

She stays in a pucca house. Many of her relatives also stay nearby in the same locality. They have a specific timetable and division of work between husband and wife. Both of them explained their routine of each day in the week. According to them, on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays she goes out for hawking to buy old clothes. She walks around in various localities and buys old clothes from people in exchange of various, pans, pots, buckets, etc. She walks for about ten kilometres a day with all the vessels and old clothes. On Wednesday's afternoons she washes the clothes. On Thursday her husband repairs them or modifies them to sell in the weekly market on Friday. Both husband and wife go to the weekly market on the Friday. And keep holiday on Saturday. On Sunday they go to buy the pots, pans, buckets etc. to sell next week. Some times they pay half the amount and get half on credit from the wholesale trader. They earn Rs 2000 from their joint work per month.

"It is not an easy work," she said, "We have to walk a long way with weight on our head... When our children were young I had to carry them as well... People do not trust us... Police harass us... what can we do, we are not educated so we cannot do some other business... In our caste we have to learn this business from our parents' home... If we do not learn our parents find difficulties in arranging our marriage in the good family... In our community, people respect those women who are successful in this business... This kind of business require work from both husband and wife... only men can not cope with the business."

They expressed open anger for police. They have to pay bribe to the police for selling cloths in the weekly market. "Some times the police take bribes and also harass us. Before two years a young boy of our community was severely beaten by police. He had serious injuries. The whole community was enraged and got united on the issue. We also invited people and leaders of our community from other cities and town. A massive

demonstration was organised About 4000 people, men, women and children participated in the demonstration "

They informed us that they had several demands including getting an identity card for each person involved in this business so that police do not harass them. They could not sustain the organisation Recently they are facing problem for market place Traditionally their market place was outside the walled city. Now the city has spread several kilometres out side the walled city. Their market place is in the centre of the city now. There are plans to shift this market. But they are not willing to shift since many of their customers come from nearby villages. If they go far away from the city centre, which is near to the rural bus stop, they may lose many customers. Traditionally only village people were their customers but now fashion changes very soon so some rich people discard their good clothes frequently so they get customers from the city's middle class.

They face more competition in their business nowadays from people from other communities. They explained, "These new people buy old clothes in bulk from big cities like Bombay or some times foreign countries. They remake new dress from the old dresses so their clothes are more attractive than ours. Our business is adversely affected because of this new kind of competition."

She thinks that there should be a union of women like her. She prefers a caste-based organisation.

#### **6.1.4 Champa: A Domestic Worker**

Champa's main job is to work as a domestic servant Her husband is a casual labourer. She is about 25 years of age and her husband is about 30 years She is illiterate and her husband has studied up to 6th class.

When we went to their home she and her husband were separating brass particles from the heap of iron dust. They have started this work since last three days to supplement their income. They get Rs15 when they separate brass from one kilogram of the iron dust. Middlemen collect iron dust from the factory and give them this work at their home. They said that this is a tedious and low paying work. "We may not continue this work in the future if it is not convenient."

They are from the scheduled caste. Their family belongs to Bamanigam in the Kheda District. They had no land in the village and work was not available regularly so the elder brother of her husband migrated to Baroda forty years ago Her husband followed him and she came to stay here after marriage. They go to their village once or twice a year to attend marriage ceremony or on the occasion of death of some relatives.

Now she stays with her husband and six years old son in a rented house in Jashoda colony. They pay Rs300 as rent.

She wakes up at six o'clock in the morning prepares food for her husband and then leaves for her work. The work place is far, about an hour's walking distance. She cleans utensils, mops the floor and washes clothes in the houses of her employers. She gets Rs80 per work. She earns rupees Rs300 per month. She works up to 1 o'clock in the noon and then walks back to her home carrying her son. She started this work as domestic servant six months previously. One of her cousins was working in those houses. Her pregnancy was in advanced stage so she referred these works to her. Champa was also looking for some work because her husband's income was very irregular. On an average he is able to earn about Rs600 per month.

Since she is staying in the Jashoda colony near the largest industrial estate we asked her that why she is not trying for a job in the factory. Her answer was, "I cannot do factory work; I have never tried to search one because who will take care of my son if I

go to factory? In present work I can take him along with me. They allow one or two day's leave with pay in a month but if I don't go to work without informing them they cut my wages They also give advance; sometimes I have taken loan of Rs2000 from them for consumption expenditure. They also give leftover food, old clothes and occasionally medicine for me or my son in case of illness "

She feels that given her constraints this is good work for her but at the same time she has complains as well. " Sometime the employer women give heaps of clothes or vessels for cleaning...I get tired... I have chronic pain in my legs and hands... I am looking for a better work but could not find one."

She feels that her status has increased because she took up paid work. She explained," *Ame pahela sher lavi ne sher khata hata. Ketalivar kam na male to bhukya sui jata hata* (Our condition was such that we were buying half a kilo grains and other provisions every day, we had to sleep hungry on the day my husband do not get work)". Now they can stock provisions at least for a week.

They jointly take all the decisions about work and finance. She thinks that if her husband gets a good job she will leave this work. She is searching for a better work and feels that the government should do some thing for providing suitable work to women.

#### **6.1.5 Manjula: A Construction Worker**

Manjula is a construction worker and her husband is also a casual worker. She is 23 years old and her husband is about 25 years. Both of them are illiterate. They are from the scheduled caste. His work consists of loading and unloading trucks They live in the Jashoda colony in a half pucca house.

Every morning she wakes up at six, prepares lunch box for both of them At about eight o'clock she goes to Baliyapura. Bhaliyapura is a *chakala* place ( a place where all

the casual labourers wait for the contractor to hire them as worker) She waits there from eight to ten and if she is lucky some contractor or *mukadam* employs her for the construction work. She started this work 8 years back when she was 15 years old.

She carries bricks, mixes cement and carries the raw material. She does all kinds of unskilled work necessary in construction. Some of the male workers also do the unskilled work but many of them do digging of land, plastering, scaffolding, centring, steel binding, etc.

She has to negotiate wages every day because every day a different contractor or *mukadam* employs her. The wages range between Rs30-60 per day. Some contractors pay equal wages to male and female unskilled workers and some pay less to women. Their working hours are not fixed and depend on the kind of work. Some times they work for eight hours and some time for twelve hours also. They are paid a day's wages irrespective of the hours they spend. She does not get work every day. For about fifteen days in a month she is unable to get work. On an average she earns about Rs900 per month and her husband earns Rs1200. They save Rs300 every month with Sahara Bank.

She feels that her status has not increased in her family as a result of paid work undertaken by her. She was not aware about any organisation or union activity and did not talk about the kind of difficulties or harassment she faces at her work place.

#### **6.1.6 Lata: A Factory Worker**

Lata is a factory worker. She was at home when we went to her home because it was Monday. She was reading the newspaper when we entered her home. She said, "I am SSC fail but I like to read newspaper. My daughter is in the 9<sup>th</sup> standard. I want her to

study more That is why I take all this trouble.” She is working in a factory, which manufactures tin boxes

She is from Maharashtra. She came to the city after marriage. Her in-laws have some land but they do not get any income from the land. Her mother sends some grains from her parental land. Her husband is a rickshaw driver but hardly gives any money. He is a drunkard and uses all his income on liquor. Some times he gives some money but the next day he asks to give it back by some or other pretext for example for rickshaw repair expenses, bribe to police,

Before taking up this job she was doing sewing work on piece rate basis. They were staying in a different area at that time She used to earn Rs300 per month from that work But they had to change their home so her work was also discontinued. Now they are staying in the Jaypraksh nagar. This place is opposite to the Sardar Estate so she found this factory work in the Sardar Estate.

She wakes up at 5 a.m. in the morning and completes her domestic work by seven o'clock. Her daughter helps her in the housework. She has a son as well. He also helps sometimes.

She has been working in this tin box factory since the last four years. She works there for eleven hours every day. Her monthly wage is Rs750. There are 40 workers in her factory, 30 men and 10 women. All the women are helpers. Men are permanent workers. There are some men helpers as well but after some years of experience they have a chance to get promoted as permanent, skilled worker But women are always helpers. The employer does not promote them.

She has an identity card and also an ESI card (Employees State Insurance)but no other benefit as permanent workers. Permanent workers get casual leave and sick leave but she does not have even a paid weekly off

There is possibility of injury in her work. Some workers cut their fingers also. If they are permanent workers they get insurance money. Temporary workers do not get anything. Their factory owner does not keep provision of even a bandage in the factory. She gets irritation on skin because the Fevicol they use in the manufacturing process spreads in the air.

She also shared her experience of harassment by fellow workers. "They make filthy comments and if you laugh and tolerate such behaviour they are happy. But I do not encourage them so they pass on heavy work to me. Once I complained about it to the employer but he did not take any steps. He cannot control workers."

She is not satisfied with the work. We are paid Rs twenty-five when we work for Rs fifty. Government should do strict checking about the wages. They should see that we get proper wages." The only good thing about this work she said was that they could get advance. She is aware about union activities. "In big companies they have unions but in our company there is no union."

#### **6.1.7 Sunita: A Young Housewife Looking for a Job**

Sunita is a young woman aged about 21 years and educated up to higher secondary. She is recently married and stays in a joint family with her in-laws. They are from barber caste. Her father-in-law has a hair-cutting saloon. Her husband and three brothers-in-laws work with him in this saloon.

Sunita does not have earning work but the housework takes all her time. Housework is divided between her and her mother-in-law. She does all the cooking, cleaning and washing and her mother-in-law goes to buy vegetables and other household provisions. She also goes to ration shop to queue for sugar, kerosene, etc. and sometimes helps in cutting vegetable or cooking.

They have a pucca house owned by them. They also have TV, steel cupboard, fan and a cot. They are slightly better off compare to many of our respondents.

She wakes up at six o'clock in the morning. They do not have water tap so they go to fetch water at common water tap. Her whole morning is spent on cleaning, washing and cooking for the family of six people. She remains in the kitchen till three o'clock because all the male members come for lunch one by one. At three in the afternoon, she is free from all the cooking and cleaning work. Then she does other housework. Again at seven in the evening she start cooking the evening meal. She is free from all the household work at about 12 o'clock in the night.

Her father-in-law is the head of the house and he takes all the decisions in the house.

Sunita is looking for a job. She had applied in the J.C.T. electronic company located at Kandari village near Baroda. It is a well-established big electronics company and pays Rs1500-2000 to their workers. They also provide transport facility from Baroda to Kandari. They wanted to recruit ten young women. Hundred girls were invited for interview at a luxury hotel in Baroda city. Sunita was one of them. The interview procedure was divided into four stages. At the end of each stage they screen out few girls. They asked several questions and also asked them to do soldering work to check their speed during first three phases. Sunita passed through all of them. At the end of the third round twelve girls could pass through. They wanted to select only ten. In the fourth round they asked Sunita about her family background and family responsibilities. She said that she is staying in a joint family and her mother-in-law will help her in household work. The last question was that if your mother-in-law becomes ill who will do the housework? Will you ask for leave in such circumstances? Sunita had no option but to answer, "Yes." And she was rejected in this last round.

## 6.2 Analysis

Household was a unit of production, consumption and reproduction before the introduction of the factory system. With the introduction of the factory system it was assumed that the household would remain as unit for consumption and reproduction only. Production was to take place outside the home. This logic was taken forward to consider every thing taking place in the home as non-productive activities. This became the ideological base for the undervaluation of the productive activities carried out in the home.

The case of Rekha explodes several myths about homebased women workers and nature of their work. It is assumed that housewives are generally free in the afternoon and they can use this "free time" to earn some supplementary income. Women prefer home based work because they can combine their domestic responsibilities with earning activities.

It is clear from Rekha's example that she is not doing this work as a leisure time activity, but to supplement family income. Her working hours are not less than the full working hours in a factory shift but her wages are much below minimum wages. Her income constitutes 30% of the total family income, which is not a small proportion. If we consider the total time she spends in her paid work and unpaid household work she works for almost double the hours put in by her husband. Both of them are working in the informal sector but even within the informal sector her work is less paid and considered to be a kind of work undertaken by women as part of their domestic work; hence it is considered to be unskilled work. In reality this is not unskilled work. Papad rolling requires considerable skill as well as tenacity. As this kind of skill is learnt by women from other women in the family or neighbourhood, learning this skill is not considered as

building human capital. The recruitment procedure clearly shows that the employer also understands that this is skilled work. He does not have to incur any extra cost to utilise this skill since several women are willing to work.

This kind of work is an example of severe exploitation because the employer does not have any legal obligation toward workers. Though he is profiting from the labour of more than 100 women, no labour laws including the Minimum Wages Act does applies to him as an employer. Since the workers are working from their own home he do not have to bear any overhead costs like building of the workplace, electricity or even time for supervision of the work. This does not mean that workers do not have any supervision. He is not paying the workers by hours of work but on the quantity of work. In this situation workers themselves control their time. He can exert his control by controlling quality of work.

This work require only simple tools like *Belan* and *Chakla* (rolling pin and rolling stool) so it is assumed that anyone who has skill can do this work. In reality the work is not cost free for workers. In our example Rekha could not have undertaken this work if her mother did not have a pucca house or she would not have allowed her to use her house. The use of electricity and other facilities are also cost items for the women. Thus though it is true that many women prefer homebased work because they can combine their dual role of domestic work and earning work it is also more profitable for the employers and gives them opportunity to exploit women's labour without giving them any benefit as worker.

Though there is a tendency to consider homebased worker as housewives involved in earning some supplementary income, it is clear from Rekha's case that her own consciousness is of a worker and not a housewife. This consciousness can be the result of many women from the same neighbourhood doing same work instead of

isolated individuals doing work in their home. The other reason is that many of them are from the same caste background and also have some sort of saving activity (chit fund) in common.

Sudha is an example of how women have internalised the dominant ideology that men are the breadwinners and women are the homemakers. It also shows how women's work remains invisible in the economy and economic data.

Sudha gives equal proportion of time in the business but she is not an equal partner in any way in the business. She is not involved in making any decision. She is not aware about financial matters of the business and does not know about the expenditure of the household either.

Hers is a classic case of how men get benefit from the command over women's labour. As mentioned by Moser<sup>1</sup>, the wife undertakes certain aspects of their husband's work not as partners in the family enterprise but rather as part of their conjugal duties. Sudha work in the shop but still remain a housewife and do not become a co-owner. The husband's command over the wife's labour deprives her not only the ownership of property but even from the information and knowledge about financial matters.

The control over women's labour operates very differently in case of Laxmi. In her case the control over her labour, force her to work outside. According to her caste norm she is expected to take more than equal burden of their caste based business but domestic work is still her responsibility like any other woman. The division of labour in the business is also very clear. She will do all the arduous work. She will go to buy clothes and she will wash it. The husband will do more "skilled" work. He will repair them on machine and iron them. Both of them will go to sell clothes. The control over income and

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<sup>1</sup> Moser, C. (1981) p.28.

decision making is less unequal in their case but the division of work in family as well as in economic activity is still unfavourable to women.

She is not working for any employer so does not face direct exploitation but they have to move around in the streets alone and unescorted. They face constant harassment, contempt for their work and doubts on their trustworthiness by people. These affect their self-respect. The nature of harassment is at times similar for men and women but some times gender specific towards women. The kinds of abuses directed toward women are mainly related to their sexuality. Their dependence on the public place for selling clothes makes them more vulnerable in the hands of police and municipal authorities. They have learnt to face such situations by fighting back and as a result their caste name "Waghari" has become an abuse in Gujarati language, meaning dirty and quarrelsome.

The modernisation process affects their traditional business in two contradictory ways. Because of increasing consumerism they get good quality old clothes as buyer and as a result also gets more customers as sellers. On the other hand because of increase in transportation and defused boundaries between old clothes markets in various cities and countries this business is no more restricted to their caste. Their business is adversely affected by the competition from more mobile and more educated businessmen from other castes.

Champa's life is an example of combination of various strategies in her struggle for survival. It also shows that most poor people do not have individual strategies for survival. Most of the time it is a joint strategy for household survival. This strategy leads them do multiple work jointly and separately but complementary to each others work. In the absence of regular work on the part of her husband, Champa undertook the most

easily available work, which does not pay much monetary income but give some non-monetary benefits as well.

The most important reason for taking up this particular work was to combine her role as mother and wage earner. This work allows her to take her son to her workplace. Though most of the decisions about work and other economic matters are taken jointly by husband and wife the child care remains sole responsibility of her. This forces her to choose a kind of work, which is much more like an extension of the domestic work she undertakes in her home. The domestic work at home is unpaid and the similar work outside is underpaid. Looking at the time and drudgery of her work her wages are not in the proportion to the work.

It is interesting to note how wages are determined in case of domestic workers. Generally the wages are decided on the basis of hours spent on the particular work or on the quantity of work. In case of domestic work it is decided lump sum on a priori bases. The quantity of clothes to be washed or utensils to be cleaned may vary but the monthly wages are fixed. The non-monetary benefits show the personalised nature of such type of wage labour. Non-monetary benefits depend on the willingness and nature of the employer. It is not the workers right to demand such benefits.

Manjula is an example of a typical casual labourer who sells her labour on daily basis in the *chakala* (casual labour market). As described by Punalekar (1990)<sup>2</sup> "In this market, labour becomes a casual commodity at a total dispensation of the buyers of that commodity. Thus the casual labour market epitomised the extreme form of workers' subordination and dependency... In sum, casual labourers occupy the lowest position in a class of the wage earners."

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<sup>2</sup> Punalekar, S.P. and Patel, A. (1990) p.1.

Though their daily wages are comparatively higher than other homebased or piecerate workers, the availability of work is extremely irregular. They have to negotiate everyday with different contractors and work at different locations.

Though women workers in this type of work are clearly defined as workers and their role as housewife or mother is not given any consideration (like in case of homebased workers) in the labour market the work is distributed along the gender lines at the workplace. The distribution of work is not just different but valued less when assigned to women on the pretext of her inferior physical strength and/or less skill required to do certain types of work which is inevitably allotted to women workers.

As explained by Loop (1994)<sup>3</sup> the casual labour market in construction work is fragmented and some labourers are much worse off than others who superficially seem very similar to them. His explanation of the situation of the construction workers in South India is very similar to Manjula and many such women in the casual labour market. " A construction worker who has once entered the sector, there are certain well-defined paths of occupational mobility for each fragment, with very little movement between the fragments. Female helpers are the worst off in this respect; they hardly ever reach the status of skilled workers.

Lata was one of the formal sector workers in our study. We have categorised her as the formal sector worker because she enjoys benefits of having Identity card, ESI card, bonus and advance. But we can see that apart from these benefits her working conditions and wages are not significantly different from the other informal sector workers.

Her company is registered under the Factories Act, and does implement labour laws for a section of workers i.e. permanent workers but behaves totally differently in

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<sup>3</sup> Loop, T.H.M. (1994) p.433.

case of temporary workers. All the skilled workers are permanent and operate machines and the unskilled workers are all temporary and work as helpers to the skilled workers. In reality the distinction between temporary and permanent workers is artificial because the temporary workers are regularly and permanently required in the production. The so-called skilled work is not so difficult and many unskilled men labourers are promoted as skilled workers after some years. But women are always temporary helpers.

There is no rational logic behind preventing women from learning the skill. The only function it has is that the employer has a permanent temporary group of workers for whom he need not implement any labour laws. The employer strategically uses the gender division to keep women temporary and also to satisfy the ego of the permanent male workers by allowing them to use their superiority over women workers. Women workers do understand the absurdity behind the division of labour but cannot speak out because they need the jobs. Thus they are specifically exploited by employer as women workers as well as by the permanent male workers if they resist their sexual abuses and remarks.

Sunita's experience with the Electronics Company shows the kind of women's labour these kind of companies wants to employ. This company represents the process described as "march of global assembly line"<sup>4</sup> on which mainly young women from the third world are employed. Various multinational companies have reallocated their production process into the various countries of the third world during the 80's. They prefer flexible, docile and cheap labour. The young women brought up in the patriarchal culture from the third world become ideal labour force for them. This has resulted in the feminisation of the labour force all over in the third world countries

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<sup>4</sup> Banerjee, N. (1991) p. 11.

In India this process has not become very prominent because of several reasons. One of the reason as pointed out by Banerjee(1991)<sup>5</sup> is 'early universal marriage tend to keep out young girls who are generally preferred in this labour market.'

Sunita is a clear example of such young women who are eligible these jobs but are kept out because of domestic responsibilities. These export-oriented companies thrive on the availability of the cheap labour available in abundance. They prefer only such labour, which is completely available for exploitation and is not attached with any other responsibility other than their work. They want to exploit their labour completely but do not provide any provision for their regeneration. They want to use the traditional skills of the young women like docile nature, dexterity etc. but do not want workers with traditional responsibilities like child-care or domestic work.

### **6.2.1 Common Issues from Varied Experiences**

We can derive some common points from the seemingly diverse experiences of women involved in the various types of work. The most important is the nature of social and sectoral division of labour. The life and work of all the women covered in our case studies are shaped by both these kinds of division of labour. The social division of labour is very clear in case of each and every woman. Though the amount of time spent and the nature of work is different in each household some basic tasks to maintain the family are done by women. Rekha might have spent more time in fetching water than Sudha who has a water tap in her house and Champa's son who is young, demand more time than the grown up children of Lata, but basically cooking, cleaning, caring for children are considered to be their responsibility. These responsibilities shape their participation in the labour market. Champa is forced to take up domestic work because she has to

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, N. (1991) p. 14.

care for her children and Lata is taking up factory work to educate her daughter because her husband is not giving her money. Sudha thinks that her work is part of her duty to perform domestic work. Sunita does not get job because of her domestic responsibilities.

Thus the social division of labour at household level has affected their entry into the labour market and also the type of work they can get in the labour market.

The nature of the social division of labour and sectoral division of labour at the household level is determined by various factors like caste norms and economic conditions of the family. Rekha is trapped in the homebased work because her caste norm does not permit to work outside and Laxmi is forced by her caste's norms to wander around in the streets. Economic necessity pushed Manjula into the casual labour market and the less acute economic need allowed Sunita to wait for a better job opportunity.

We can also see how the same caste and economic background operates differently on men and women in the labour market also. In case of Rekha both the husband and wife have equal education and both of them are working in the informal sector but the working hours and wages are different and clearly in the favour of her husband. The survival strategies of Champa and her husband allow her husband to continue in the more irregular but high daily wage sector while she is trapped in domestic work with low pay but more non-monetary benefits. Both Manjula and her husband are in casual work but the kind of casual work he is doing, though on daily basis, gives much more regular work opportunities than her work.

Lata, working in the formal sector, faces similar kind of working conditions and wages as other women working in the informal sector

The division of labour operates in the workplace also. Papad rolling and domestic work are women's work. In case of Laxmi, involved in the family business, there is also a

clear division of work on the basis of gender. The casual labour market provides very specific kinds of work to women construction workers compare to male construction workers. The same is true for Lata in the factory work. The possibility of upward mobility does not exist for both of them, which is available to other male workers of similar background.

Thus we can conclude that the labour market is highly segmented with very thin possibilities of mobility form one segment to other segment. The segments are defined by division of labour at both the household levels as well as at the work place. It is not only shaped by factors like caste and income but also by gender. The interaction of all these factors results in confining women to low pay work with less upward mobility. The segmentation is not just a result of market imperfection as analysed by the neo-classical theories or lack of skills and education as predicted by human capital theorist. We need to change the structures of social and sectoral division of labour as shaped by the gender of the worker as well.