

Research Abstract

The need to be Organised: A Case Study on Unorganised Workers

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Last year, I did a brief study on the four types of cooperatives in Kolkata to understand whether the cooperatives played a crucial role to secure the socio-economic condition of the migrant labours or not. This year, I want to extend my research to a larger context and planned to study the socio-economic condition of the unorganised labours and the role of organisation to improve their socio-economic condition.

International Labour Organisation's Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (1998) identified four categories of rights that should be ensured to every worker. These are; a) freedom of association and effective association of the right to collective bargaining, b) elimination of forced and compulsory labour, c) abolition of child labour and d) elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.¹ India did not accept this declaration. However, "The Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act 2008 had been passed by the Government of India to secure the life of the unorganised workers. The act announced several social welfare provisions (e.g., life and disability cover, health and maternity benefits, old age protection provident fund, employment and injury benefits etc.).² According to a survey on the condition of the unorganised workers in small industrial sectors pointed out that a few of the small factories implemented the social security measures mentioned in the act. The survey also pointed out the fact that that most of the small industries do not follow the labour laws. The wages of the labours are much less than the minimum wage defined by the Indian government. The report said that most of the cases the payment of the workers based on the duration of their work hours. Sometimes they have been harassed by the factory owners. The report concluded with the indication that the situation could be slightly improve if they tried to be organised.³ There are no registered organisation to secure their rights. Very recently political parties understand the problem and attempted to build an organisation with the unorganised women workers. The first convention happened on 12 January this year.⁴ The resolution of the convention only discussed about the enhancement of the salary of the women workers from the unorganised sector. But the convention does not say a single word about other social security measures mention in the 2008 act.

The struggle for minimum wages for domestic workers all over India also is a part of the struggle for basic fundamental rights. Recent studies on domestic women workers prove that they are not only ill-paid, but also one of the most harassed communities among working women. The article also mentioned that although considered one of the major workforces they

¹ International Labour Organisation. ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its Follow-up (Geneva: ILO, 1998), 8-10.

² The Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act 2008 (Act No. 33, 2008), 30 December 2008.

³ Nagarik Mancha. *Paschimbanger Asangathito Shramik* (A Report on Unorganised Labour in West Bengal) (Kolkata: Nagarik Mancha, 2008).

⁴ The Convention was organised by Confederation of Indian Trade Unions (henceforth CITU) on 12 January 2023 in Kolkata.

do not get any support from the formal labour unions.⁵ Apart from few NGOs and independent labour initiatives, none of them expressed the concern towards the unionisation of the domestic workers.

My current research will argue the role of the organisation as one of the solutions to reduce the exploitation of the informal workers. To prove this argument, I have planned to study the informal workers in the small factories (mostly bag and garment making factories) in the surrounding areas of Kolkata. I have planned to do an extensive (at least one month) field on each of the sectors. I have also planned to do a field work in the slum areas adjacent to the Dum Dum Railway Station to study the life of the domestic workers. I will interview the NGOs, labour union leaders and government officials of the labour department and some of the small factory owners (if possible) regarding their view on the unionisation. I will also want to do a survey among the small factory worker and domestic workers regarding their view on making a workers cooperative which may help them to economically strengthen their positions in the society.

⁵ Aditi Natarajan and Malavika Rangarajan, "Bound to Labour: The Cyclical Burden of Wages and Time Poverty on Female Domestic Workers." *Economic and Political Weekly LVII* (no. 53), 2022, 39-45.