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**WOMEN IN UNORGANISED SECTOR:
THE ISSUE OF WELFARE SCHEMES AND SOCIAL SECURITY**

Arani Sinha

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In India, almost 92 per cent of the work force is in the unorganised sector; one-third of which are women and their dependents. Though the Indian Constitution guarantees equality of opportunity related to work, equal

rights for livelihood, equal pay for equal work etc., the condition of women in the unorganised sector is deplorable. Majority of women in the unorganised sector work for low and highly unequal wages compared to their male

counterparts. The unorganised sector as it is characterized by no clear cut relationship between the employer and the employee as most of the employees are contractual, casual, migrants, home based etc. Because of this character of

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employees the safe guard of the rights of employees, social security protection, labour laws are not applicable in the unorganised sector. Thus the workers in the unorganised sector in general are outside the purview of Protective Labour Laws and Trade Union Organisations. In this context the condition of women who are exploited even in organised sector, is worse in the unorganised sectors.

If we try to examine the concept social security, we will come to the conclusion that in India, it is used for preventive, promotional as well as protective measures. This concept involves social insurance, social assistance, social protection, social safety etc. The central trade unions and many trade unions of unorganised sector workers have been raising demands for a comprehensive legislation for unorganised workers including employment protection and social security for all categories of unorganised workers. There has been demand of social-assistance-based social security system for unorganised workers considering the low income levels of these workers and their inability to contribute in long run, like organised sector workers. Trade unions have opposed insurance based or contributory social security. Trade unions also demanded for employment security, employment regulation, livelihood protection and price support system so that unorganised workers get real protection. It has been pointed out that policy of labour market flexibility would make these workers more and more insecure and they must be protected.

There are different models which can be applied in order to provide social security to the unorganised sector workers. These models are centrally funded Social Assistance Program, Social Insurance Scheme, Social Assistance through Welfare Funds of Central and State Government. Though these different social security models have been to some extent successfully implemented in many states, yet all the different models put together covers only about 10 million out of approximately 390 million unorganised sector workers.

To top this up many argue that the Unorganised Workers Social Security Bill 2007 is a gross betrayal of the expectations and genuine needs of nearly 39 crore workers of the unorganised sector of the country, at least one-third of whom are women and their dependents. It is a betray because it has failed to take into account the suggestions given by all the organisations and forums since the recommendations of the Second National Commission for Labour for social security legislation for unorganised sector workers and also the voice and movement of the unorganised sector workers specifically the women workers.

One of the biggest loopholes of this bill is that it covers only wage workers. A lot of women are unpaid workers in family farms and enterprises and are completely left out of this bill. Exclusion of unpaid workers from the purview of this bill means that extremely large sections of women workers in the country remain outside the social security web. The bill has failed to

incorporate the decent conditions of Work Protection of Women•Labour from Sexual Harassment. Further more it is being argued that the concerned bill is without any legislative policy because it leaves the critical issues of defining as well as enacting the law to the central government and not to the legislative body of the Parliament. Under the national minimum social security benefits, employment and wage guarantee, non employment allowance, health benefits pension, maternity benefit, education assistance housing are essential and must be provided. There are number of other areas in the bill, which needs a closer look and analysis. Moreover as it happens in most of the decision and policy formulating schemes, women are found excluded from participation. The same is the case regarding the administration and implementation of the labour laws. The 2007 bill does not ensure women's adequate representation or participation.

Various reasons could be assigned for the sorry state of affair of the women in the unorganised sector. The situation is deteriorating even further because of the impact of globalisation and liberalisation, relaxation of labour laws, adverse impact of technological growth on women labour, lack of organisations i.e. trade unions among the female labour force, absence of government motivation or purposeful human resource development policy. The need is for greater government intervention in this sector and an all inclusive legislation that we take into account the distinct nature of women's work and their problems in the unorganised sector.