



Issues and concerns of labourers in unorganized sector in India-An analysis

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Abstract

The focus of this research is to have an in-depth study of the problems of labourers in the unorganized sector as a whole and to understand the agony of their living conditions. The labourers in the unorganized sector are the driving force of the Indian economy. Though the country has witnessed the contribution of the unorganized sector by 50 percent with 90 percent of the total workforce, the labourers in the unorganized sector are still being exploited and their working and living conditions are deplorable. Besides, the dismay of unorganized labourers, the Covid-19 pandemic had impacted so heavily and erupted as a nightmare which had caused the labourers to struggle for survival and their rights need protection more than ever. But the acuteness of their plight today is a result of the fact that India ignored them during normal times. The study explicates emphasizing the issues and concerns of the labourers in the unorganized sector, such as exploitation of labour by employers/contractors, miserable working and living conditions, unregulated employment terms, denial of welfare benefits and social security measures of the government, low literacy and lack of training, poor family background, poverty and indebtedness, lack of knowledge and awareness. The implications of the study highlight that the exploitation of labour from the employers/contractors needs to be stopped and government intervention is deemed necessary on a priority to regulate the service conditions of unorganized labourers and initiate corrective actions to make effective use of legislative policies to unorganized labourers also. Further, voluntary organizations and NGO's should come forward to educate and bring awareness among unorganized labourers to know their rights and improve literacy and knowledge to gain recognition in the society. In addition, government, voluntary organizations, and NGO's should come forward and extend support in view of the agony of labourers caused by Covid-19 endemic. To claim India as a superpower country, it is deemed necessary for the government to create a social identity for the vast majority of unorganized labourers and uplift them on par with others in society.

Keywords: unorganized sector, Covid-19, employers/contractors, economic development gross domestic product (GDP), social identity, NGO'S- jo1

Introduction

The efficiency of labour is the crux of the economic growth of a country. While the labour is not only an important human aspect, but also a prime factor for all economic activities such as consumption, production, exchanges, and distribution as well (David Ricardo and Karl Marx, 1956). The various research studies indicate that the efficiency of labour in India is comparatively low as compared to that of developed countries like the U.S.A., U.K., Canada, Japan, and Germany for various reasons such as climatic conditions, lack of education and training, poverty, exploitation of labour, low wages, inadequate working and living conditions, lack of labour welfare measures, and so on.

Despite the vast density of population in India, various factors such as low literacy level of labours, below the poverty line, and inadequate earnings for livelihood in the home town, the labourers tend to become more restless and pushed to frequent migration in search of work for survival and basic needs. The labours have no other alternative but to join an unorganized sector for employment and cannot comfortably settle down in one place because of poor wages and miserable conditions of employment. Nevertheless, the country has witnessed a substantial increase in the number of workers in the unorganized sector in the post-independence era. They constitute more than 90 percent of the total labour workforce and contribute 50 percent to GDP according to the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector (NCEUS).

Rationale for the Study

As the structure of the unorganized sector is very vast and highly fragmented, it needs special attention in the study. Though vast research is available it pertains to either a specific segment or particular district highlighting the distress of the unorganized labours. The research studies emphasizing the problems and concerns of the workers in the unorganized sector as a whole is limited. The focus of this research is to have an in-depth study of the problems of the labourers in the unorganized sector and to understand the agony of their living conditions. The study explicates suitable ways for the improvement of working conditions of labours in the unorganized sector.

Objectives

1. To analyze the areas of research carried out in connection with the problems of workers in the unorganized sector.
2. To make an in-depth study on issues and concerns of labourers in the unorganized sector.
3. To highlight some of the legislations available in the country to protect labours in the unorganized sector.
4. To suggest suitable ways for the improvement of working and living conditions of labours in the unorganized sector.

Methodology

The methodology of this research is exploratory and based on analytical reviews sourced from secondary data of various research papers published in management journals, newspapers, and census survey reports include online sources.

Unorganized Sector-An Overview

According to the NCEUS of Government of India, the concept of the unorganized sector is the term which “consists of all unincorporated private enterprises owned by individuals or households engaged in the sale or production of goods and services operated on a proprietary or partnership basis and with less than ten total workers” (Surbhi Kapur, and Prasana Kumar Sethy, 2014)^[18]. Consequently, the various units or segments in the unorganized sector are either small or medium and mostly unregistered enterprises/units managed by the owner or proprietor or through contractors / sub-contractors. While the organized sector is governed by rules and regulations of the government and follows stipulated employment terms for engaging employees, the unorganized sector has no fixed terms of employment and does not follow or ignore the guidelines of the government. Nevertheless, the unorganized sector faced problems related to the scarcity of capital, availability of raw material, assured electric supply, lack of research, and training facilities which becomes a hurdle in making the product market-oriented and competitive. The unorganized sector also referred to as the informal sector or residual sector is highly diversified and pervasive which generates employment and livelihood for a majority of the workforce. The goods and services of the unorganized sector contribute to the life and living of society and are easily accessible at an affordable price. The people employed in the unorganized sector are called unorganized labourers or unorganized workers.

Unorganized labour is heterogeneous. The Ministry of Labour in its report of the year 2008 classified unorganized labour into four categories such as by occupation, nature of employment, especially distressed categories, and service categories. The unorganized occupational groups include small and marginal farmers, landless agricultural labourers, sharecroppers, fishermen, those engaged in animal husbandry, beedi rolling, labeling and packing, building and construction workers, leather workers, weavers, artisans, salt workers, workers in brick kilns and stone quarries, workers in sawmills, and workers in oil mills. The unorganized labour based on the nature of employment includes attached agricultural labourers, bonded labourers, migrant workers, contract, and casual labourers. The especially distressed unorganized sector includes toddy tappers, scavengers, carriers of head loads, drivers of animal-driven vehicles, loaders and un-loaders. The unorganized service category workers such as midwives, domestic workers, barbers, vegetable and fruit vendors, newspaper vendors, pavement vendors, hand cart operators, and the unorganized retail.

The employee-employer relations in the jobs above are generally contractual or casual basis with no job security, and have lower protection against employers indulging in unfair labour practices. The labours engaged in these type of jobs are mostly migrated from rural areas seemingly characterized by low skill and education deficit, easy entry, and exit, no fixed regulation of working hours or payment, lack of social security benefits, and ignorance of the owner/contractor on government regulations and schemes applicable to unorganized workers (Shahana Chattaraj, 2016)^[19].

It is observed from research studies that India’s socio-economic condition is significantly unorganized or informal which has age-old tradition and experience. For most of the Indians, it is a way of life, just like agriculture and animal husbandry covering various aspects of life. It is multi-dimensional and perennial. The high growth rate of Indian economy is the result of increasing in-formalization. The element of informality is ingrained into the large scale economic entities including state-owned entities and there exists a linkage between formal and informal units. It is a fact that the number of formal enterprises are seeking assistance from the unorganized or household sector of the economy.

Thus, the unorganized sector or informal sector is pivotal for the Indian economy which contributes about 50 percent of GDP and covers around 93 percent of the national labour force of which around 60 percent of the labour is engaged in agriculture i.e., seasonal employment. (Ravindra Tripathi, 2018)^[14].

Despair of Unorganized Workers Due to Covid- Pandemic

The outbreak of the novel Coronavirus disease (Covid-19) pandemic had disrupted the global economy and entire mankind to an unimaginable and miserable extent. While the unorganized workers have little or no social security benefits and are deprived to claim the protection of their rights, the pandemic had impacted so heavily and erupted as a nightmare which had caused the labourers to struggle for survival and their rights need protection more than ever. The data released by the Centre for Monitoring the Indian Economy (CMIE) indicates

that over one hundred million workers lost their employment, a vast majority from the unorganized sector. In such a desperate situation thousands of workers flee to their native places losing the hopes of their meager income and fearing the risk of contracting Covid-19 or facing starvation. The living conditions of a large number of workers are so pathetic that they were not even accessible to the basic needs of life. For instance, the decision of lockdown by the government requires isolation and sanitation, frequent washing of hands with clean water, or soap required, all these are just out of thinking in congested areas with many sharing a small room in the slum. The pandemic has highlighted the real working and living conditions of most workers. But the acuteness of their plight today is a result of the fact that India ignored them during normal times (Arun Kumar, 2020).

Review of Literature

To gain an insight into the issues and concerns of labourers in the unorganized sector, an in-depth study of existing research was carried out. The findings and views of research studies have been analyzed on various issues and concerns of the labourers separately follows the review of the literature. Some of the issues of labourers in the unorganized sector, which are considered for the study are namely exploitation of labour by employers/contractors, miserable working and living conditions, unregulated employment terms, denial of labour welfare measures, and social security benefits. The concerns of labourers, which are identified in the study are low literacy level and lack of training, poor family background, poverty and indebtedness, lack of knowledge and awareness. The review also enabled highlighting some of the schemes of the government to protect workers in the unorganized sector and identify the gaps in existing research which may be a scope for further research. Followed by analysis and interpretation, implications of the study concludes this paper.

1. Exploitation of labour

The workers engaged in the unorganized sector otherwise called as unprotected labourers or unorganized labourers are being exploited and continue to struggle at every stage of their working and living. Their plight remains only on the surface and problems continue to exist without receiving any support or amicable solution from their employer or the government. Normally, the workers in the unorganized sector are engaged by the owner or through the contractor / sub-contractor or agent and a large percentage of them includes migrant workers. The findings of various research studies reveals some of the causes of exploitation of labour such as the workers are overburdened with work and long working hours, refusal of their rights and privileges, male and female workers are humiliated at work from contractors, delay in getting wage payments, denial of public holidays and overtime payment, no prior notice before dismissal from work and no employment security and so on (Surbhi Kapur and Prasana Kumar Sethy, 2014)^[18].

The female workers face serious problems and constraints related to work such as lack of continuity, insecurity, wage discrimination, unhealthy job relationship, absence of medical and accident care etc. Further, the exploitation of female labours in rural region is to such an extent they face the threat of sexual harassment at the workplace which is an ugly form of gender discrimination making the female labourers to withdraw from the work and causing them emotional, physical and psychological problems (Divyakamakshi, G and Kalavathi, S., 2014)^[3]. Further, bonded labour or forced labour, an obligatory between an employer and an employee is another sort of exploitation derived from outstanding debt, where few labours do not get job elsewhere so alternately they prefer to incline toward security of any work once someone offers in bonded labour form (Subhasish Chatterjee, 2016)^[17].

Thus, contractual and casual employment has become more prominent than employment on regular basis to avoid the wage and benefits given to the regular employees. The exploitation of labour and sexual harassment of women workers at the workplace is commonly observed due to their lack of knowledge and awareness. Further, the worker unions in the unorganized sector are not given recognition by the employer and they are not encouraged to participate in union activities (Reetika Dadheech, 2016)^[15].

2. Miserable working conditions

The working conditions of labours in the unorganized sector are frustrating and demoralizing. Besides exploitation they are also exposed to miserable conditions at the workplace. The motivation level of workers is below par and not satisfactory (Madhu Balaaji, S. and Girija Anil, ML, 2018)^[8]. Workers employed in unorganized sector have deplorable access to clean drinking water and sanitation facilities and lack of cleanliness and hygiene conditions at workplace. They are exposed to work in confined spaces, pollution, noise, different hazardous and unguarded machinery, various toxic chemicals, coal dust, lime dust, blazes, exposure to lead, wood dust, paints, solvents, high rise in construction, and so on with minimal safety provisions and lack of first aid kits. Because of their lack of knowledge and awareness on health and safety aspects they are prone to accidents and occupational health hazards (Subhasish Chatterjee, 2016)^[17].

3. Poor living conditions

There exists a wide gap in the living conditions between workers in the organized sector and unorganized sector. While the workers in the organized sector are eligible for house rent allowance, can get an allotment for the house from the housing board, can avail bank loan for constructing a house, etc. But in the case of labourers working in the unorganized sector are deprived of all these facilities (Subhasish Chatterjee, 2016)^[17]. In other words, the working and living conditions of the majority of the labourers in the unorganized sector are very poor

and they are compelled to live in deplorable conditions. The living conditions of the vast majority of unorganized workers are below the minimum standard level or below the poverty line. They even struggle to meet their daily essential needs and most of the time it is a hand-to-mouth situation. Added to that female workers are consistent victims of low wages when contrasted with male workers and face miserable conditions of maintaining their family (Madhu Balaji S and Girija Anil, ML, 2018) ^[8]. Further, the workers particularly in the construction industry are left with no option but to stay in construction sites and as far as their living is concerned they have to leave in the cluster with no proper lighting, unhealthy drinking water, unhygienic conditions like no separate bathing and toilet facility, improper sanitary and sewer seepage frameworks, overflowing drainage systems flooding amid storm (Subhasish Chatterjee, 2016) ^[17]. Furthermore, the majority of the migrant labourers live in thatched houses / hut in labour colony or slum and their living conditions are deplorable.

4. Unregulated employment terms

The vast majority of workers in the unorganized sector are not covered under the employment terms than the workers employed in the organized sector. This is mainly due to the low level of education and lack of awareness of the workers, and their poor family background which makes them to the threshold of a job for their livelihood. The employers/contractors in the unorganized sector take advantage of the needs and urgency of a job with their poor background and ignore the workers to give any awareness and deprive them of various provisions under the terms of employment. For instance, a worker engaged in the construction industry through a contractor never gets an employment letter nor is aware of the benefits he/she is eligible for. Further, the seasonal employment of labourers in certain areas is also another reason for not following any employment terms by the employers/contractors. The legislative policies governing the regulation of employment like the Payment of Wages Act, 1936; Minimum Wages Act, 1948; Industrial Standing Orders Act, 1946; Contract Labour (Abolition and Regulation) Act, 1970 and so on are not complied in the strict sense and in most of the cases it is manipulated by the employers/contractors (Niraj Maniar, 2017) ^[11].

5. Renunciation of labour welfare measures

The labourers in the informal or unorganized sector give their might and contribute to the growth and development of the economy. Labour welfare relates to taking care of the well-being of workers by employers/contractors or the agencies with an objective to improve the labour over and above the wages and keep them happy to lead a comfortable life. Some of the labour welfare measures comprising of working and living conditions include reasonable hours of work and adequate wages, avoid overcrowding and maintain a safe distance between machines and equipment, proper lighting and ventilation, avoid worker fatigue and provide rest or intervals, ensure the safety of workers and fire protection to avoid accidents, provide restroom, canteen, and Crech for women workers, arrange for housing, transport, medical assistance in case of sickness and hospitalization, insurance scheme in case of accidents, financial assistance to meet unanticipated family obligations, and support education and recreation for children of workers and so on. But it is a fact that the working and living conditions of labourers are miserable and pathetic where their basic necessities, hopes, and anxieties are given the least importance by their contractor/employer and government (Madhu Balaji S and Girija Anil, ML, 2018) ^[8].

Despite the various enactments and welfare schemes of the government, the labourers in the unorganized sector continue to live in poor conditions and suffer from their woes for various reasons. The employer/contractor either ignores to extend the benefits or take the advantage of the number or wage filters and eligibility requirements in most labour laws except the Minimum Wages Act, 1948. Further, poor employer-employee relationships, seasonal employment particularly in the construction and agricultural sector also are the reasons for repudiation of welfare benefits to the labourers. Furthermore, the workers do not have proper knowledge about various welfare schemes of the government, and in addition lack of government intervention to amend the schemes also adds to the despair of workers in the unorganized sector (Reetika Dadheech, 2016) ^[15].

6. Negation of social security benefits

The unorganized sector plays a pivotal role in the growth and development of the Indian economy. Social security is needed to ensure stable and anxiety-free lives in preparation against difficulties that might endanger the stability of living such as illness, injury, medical aid, unemployment, retirement without means to earn money, and unforeseen accidents. To safeguard and protect the workers against these causes various social security legislation were enacted such as Employees' Provident Fund Act, 1952 to help them financially on retirement or separation from their jobs; Employees' State Insurance Act, 1948 as a financial relief in cases of sickness, maternity, disablement and for providing medical benefits to the workers; Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 for female workers to provide maternity benefits before and after childbirth; Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972 as a monetary award given for services rendered to the workers upon their retirement; and Workmen Compensation Act, 1923 to provide compensation relief in case of accidents to the workmen and/or their dependents during the course of employment and causing death or disablement of workmen (Muna Kalyani, 2015) ^[10].

Further, the social security measures of the government mentioned above apply only to those factories or establishments which fulfill a certain minimum number of workers employed by them and thus remained ineffective due to their eligibility criteria. The enactment of Unorganized Sectors' Social Security Act, 2008 also

has inherent structural gaps and inadequacies that make the Act totally ineffective in providing social security to the unorganized workers, and the Act further requires compulsory registration for the unorganized worker to avail the benefits who has completed 14 years of age, which itself is a big question mark, due to their lack of awareness and low literacy level (Niraj Maniar, 2017) ^[11]. Though various security legislations are available, issues concerning the unorganized sector are neither feasible nor practicable (Pradeep, M.D., *et.al.*, 2017) ^[12]. Thus, the workers in the unorganized sector are deprived of social security protection either due to lack of employer-employee relationship, seasonality of employment, contractual and casual nature of work, or inadequacies of the social security legislation.

7. Low literacy level and lack of training

It is a fact that the labourers in the unorganized sector are vulnerable to exploitation due to illiteracy and lack of effective bargaining power (Annual Report GOI, 2018). Lack of understanding or illiteracy is one of the major concerns of labourers and deterrent for their growth and development. While literacy is considered as an acid test of socio-economic and cultural improvement of society, education is considered as the major component of human resources development and socio-economic development of society. The research study indicates that most of labourers in the unorganized sector are confined either to primary education or school dropouts due to their poor family background and poverty, which is one of the primary reason for their low confidence and to accept any kind of job (Harish Tigari and Nazneen Taj, S.K., 2019) ^[20]. Though the labourers are the backbone for infrastructural development or productivity improvements of an establishment, their children are deprived of getting formal education from a good institution. Further, migration followed by seasonal employment is also another reason for the lack of proper education for children of labourers. The ignorance and lack of understanding of the labourers are taken undue advantage to the maximum extent by their employer/contractor or middleman. Besides their ignorance, they are not considered for any artisan training or on-the-job training for their skill development. Furthermore, female workers are engaged only as helpers to assist male workers particularly in the construction industry and also in domestic, tannery, and beedi industries where there is no scope for improvement of their skills while at work (Divyakamakshi, G and Kalavathi, S., 2014) ^[3].

8. Poor family background

It is evident from various research studies that the hard-working employed population are from poor family backgrounds and more prominent among daily wage labourers, and those employed in the unorganized sector. They are forced to migrate from rural to urban areas to find a job because of poor family background and acute unemployment in their native places. In fact, a significant percentage of the population living in rural areas are mainly dependent on agriculture and migration becomes inevitable due to the absence of irrigation facilities, failure of crops, huge debt burdens, cost of cultivation, shrinking yield, family conflicts, domestic violence, academic failures, unfulfilled needs and so on.

Further, due to the poor family background, many of the workers remained illiterate and hence they are not able to provide education to their children too. As the children are being deprived of their basic right of education, the prospects, possibilities, and opportunities are totally closed for them and obviously that their future is in utter darkness. In such a situation, they are found working in workshops and small factories, dhabas, and restaurants, on the street as well as domestic servants which clearly indicates that child labour is directly related to the poor family background (Lajwant Singh, *et.al.*, 2017) ^[7]. While leading life with the family itself is difficult particularly for those working on a contractual basis or seasonal employment, displacement from work either due to age factor or inability to work causes insecurity and seemingly a challenge among unorganized workers because of their inadequate savings and lack of public health facilities for the aged (Pradeep, M.D., *et.al.*, 2017) ^[12].

9. Poverty and indebtedness

The inadequacy of wages earned by labourers due to contractual and seasonal employment and exploitation of employer/contractor or middleman has resulted in a high degree of poverty and consequently pushed them to indebtedness and bondage as meager income cannot meet their livelihood needs. The standard of living of labourers particularly daily wagers is so poor even if their earning is missed for a day they have no option other than making small or hand loans to meet their daily needs. In fact, the labourers get into the loan trap in some way or the other and indebtedness is a dire need due to their low wages and earnings. The research studies reveal that particularly migrants in large numbers have to make remittances every month to their native place for their parents/family members to meet household expenditure, for repaying debt, make little investment in agriculture, education of dependent, repair, and maintenance of the house, etc. That is the reason the migrants struggle to survive with poor living conditions with the money left over after remittances to their family (Dilip Saikia, 2015) ^[4]. Further, in case of illness/hospitalization or accident or death in the family of a worker, the only option left for them is to spend small savings or borrow money from lenders as they find it difficult to avail of private health facilities and underprivileged of utilizing public health care benefits. Furthermore, banks are not able to provide loans for labourers due to various reasons such as lack of awareness of bank procedures, low-income groups, and for security reasons.

10. Lack of knowledge and awareness

Indeed, the struggle and dismay of labourers in the unorganized sector continue to exist until they improve upon their knowledge and awareness particularly to avail the welfare benefits and the schemes of the government applicable to them. It is a fact that awareness and the level of understanding ensure the labourers about their entitlement, eligibility for various welfare schemes, registration for process and documentation, mode of availing benefits and grievances redressal mechanisms for their issues, etc., (Muna Kalyani, 2015) ^[10]. It is observed from various research studies that illiteracy and lack of awareness of labours are the major hurdles in organizing themselves and a major cause for exploitation by their employer/contractor or middleman. Further, due to a lack of knowledge and awareness, they are not able to raise their voice with their employer and hence deprived of the social security benefits which compel them to live in poor standard of living. Due to a lack of knowledge, awareness, and fear of being dismissed from the job, often female workers are bound to work at cheap wages in poor working conditions and feared to complain about sexual exploitation (Reetika Dadheech, 2016) ^[15]. Furthermore, because of lack of skill and education, deficient work quality, and unawareness of legal rights, the labourers are succumbed to work in the available vortex of the unorganized sector and lose the opportunities to work in the organized sector (Lajwant Singh and Chandra Shekhar Singh, 2017) ^[7]

11. Status of Legislative and policy framework for unorganized labour

The despair and exploitation of unorganized labourers remain status quo though state and central government have enacted various legislations under the regulation of employment and social security measures which are common to both organized and unorganized sectors or some sections of the enactments that can be extended to the labourers in the unorganized sector also (Akula Joshna Rani, Yerramsetty Lavanya, 2018) ^[1]. Few of such acts are Workmen Compensation Act, 1923; Payment of Wages Act, 1936; Industrial Disputes Act, 1947; Minimum Wages Act, 1948; Employees State Insurance Act, 1948; Employee Provident Fund and Miscellaneous provisions Act, 1952; Maternity Benefit Act, 1961; Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972; Equal Remuneration Act, 1976; The Contract Labour (Abolition and Regulation) Act, 1970; Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979; Child Labour (Regulation and Prohibition) Act, 1986; The Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulations of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1996., etc.

The beneficiaries under the above acts are comparatively more from the labourers of the organized sector than the unorganized sector for various reasons such as suppressing the benefits to the labourers, taking the advantage of the limitations in the law, or finding the loopholes to manipulate by the employers/contractors. Further, the legislation of the central government on Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act' 2008 which was enacted as a single-window welfare measure for the unorganized workers has inherent structural gaps and inadequacies that make the Act totally ineffective in providing social security to the unorganized workers (Madhu Balaji S and Girija Anil, ML, 2018) ^[8].

Therefore, the coverage under the mentioned acts for unorganized labourers is far from satisfactory. More importantly, though, various enactments and schemes of the government are available for the welfare and development of labourers of unorganized sectors, due to their lack of awareness and literacy rate, which are observed as the major hurdles to avail the benefits of the government. Thus, resulting in inadequacies and vulnerable living conditions of the labourers.

Research Findings

Given the relevance of the study on issues and concerns of labourers in the unorganized sector, needless to say, the unorganized sector is the engine for growth of the Indian economy which makes a substantial contribution of 50 percent to GDP with 90 percent of the total workforce. However, it is deplorable to note the problems being faced by the labourers in the unorganized sector remain unattended by the government even after seventy-four years of independence of the country. The characteristics of the unorganized labourers indicate that due to their poor family and rural background, below the poverty line, low literacy, the inadequacy of earnings in their home town has forced them to come to urban areas in search of work for survival and basic needs, and left with no option but to work in an unorganized sector where the job is easily available. The following are the findings that have been cautiously analyzed on the issues and concerns identified for the study.

1. The labourers are generally engaged for heterogeneous jobs on a contractual or casual basis either by the proprietor or through contractor / sub-contractor and as such, there is no job security, have lower protection to fight against the employers indulging in unfair labour practices.
2. Despite the plight of unorganized labourers, the Covid-19 endemic had impacted heavily and erupted as a nightmare causing the labourers to struggle for survival and basic needs more than ever.
3. The exploitation of labour at the workplace is to such an extent that they have to face problems like humiliation, gender discrimination, delay in wage payments, long working hours without overtime payment and denial of public holidays, dismissal without prior notice, refusal of workers privileges and rights, no job security and so on.
4. The labourers are prone to accidents and face occupational health hazards due to lack of safety provisions at the workplace and the hazardous nature of work, and succumbed to unhygienic conditions at work like the confined workspace, no proper drinking water, lack of cleanliness, and poor sanitation facilities.

5. The majority of the unorganized labourers are deprived of basic necessities of life when compared to their counterparts in the organized sector. They live in deplorable conditions particularly those constrained to stay in construction sites have to manage to live in a cluster with no proper lighting, unhealthy drinking water, unhygienic conditions like no separate bathing and toilet facility, improper sanitary and sewer seepage frameworks, overflowing drainage systems make the living conditions of labourers dreadful.
6. The ignorance and lack of knowledge of labourers in the unorganized sector is an advantage for the employer/contractor when they are engaged for certain jobs which include seasonal employment as well to deprive them of the various provisions under the terms of employment. As a result, the legislative policies governing the regulation of employment do not comply in a strict sense, and in most of the cases, it is manipulated.
7. Though the labourers give their might and contribute to the growth of the economy, their working and living conditions are miserable and pathetic. Despite various welfare schemes of the government, the woes of the labourers are ignored and the least importance is given in extending the benefits by the employer/contractor and neutrality of the government.
8. To safeguard and protect the workers against difficulties that might endanger the stability of living such as illness, injury, medical aid, and the like, various social security legislations were already available such as the Workmen Compensation Act, 1923; Employee State Insurance Act, 1948; Employees Provident Fund Act, 1952; Maternity Benefit Act, 1961; Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972, besides Social Security Act which was introduced particularly for the unorganized sector during the year 2008. But these legislations remained ineffective due to eligibility criteria and perceived as neither feasible nor practicable for unorganized labourers.
9. In addition to the struggle and dismay of labourers for basic needs in the unorganized sector, they are vulnerable for exploitation due to their low literacy and inadequate training. The labourers engaged by the employers/contractors take undue advantage of their ignorance and consider them as helpers without giving any training and depriving all the rights and benefits.
10. Indeed, the vast majority of the labourers are migrants from rural places and poor family background mainly dependent on agriculture, migration becomes inevitable due to failure of crops, huge debt, family conflicts, academic failures, and so on, through to urban areas in search of jobs for survival and need to maintain their family members through small savings from their earnings.
11. The labourers get into the loan trap in some way or the other and indebtedness is a dire need due to their low wages and earnings and that too particularly in case of daily wagers where their living conditions are so poor even if their earning is missed for a day they have no option other than making small or hand loan to meet their daily needs. In addition, indebtedness has become part of their life as the majority of the labourers are committed to making remittances to their family members in native place every month to meet household expenditure, repaying debt besides medical expenses in case of illness or hospitalization.
12. The agony and dismay of labourers in the unorganized sector continue to exist till they improve upon their knowledge and awareness which is the major cause for their exploitation by their employer/contractor or middleman. Due to a lack of knowledge and awareness, the labourers tend to have a fear of being dismissed from the job, not able to raise their voice with their employer/contractor on their pleas, and in most of the occasions, their feelings are either suppressed or ignored. It is a fact that awareness and the level of understanding ensure the labourers about their entitlement, eligibility for various welfare schemes, registration for process and documentation, mode of availing benefits, and grievances redressal mechanisms.
13. Though various legislative policies are available on regulations of employment and social security measures to protect the workmen from their hardship, evidently that benefits are being utilized more by the workmen in the organized sector than in the unorganized sector. The various reasons for suppressing the benefits to the labourers in the unorganized sector by the employers/contractors are identifying the limitations in the law or finding the loopholes to manipulate or taking the advantage of their ignorance and thus pushing them to live in vulnerable living conditions.

Implications

This research study is an attempt to emphasize the distress and miseries of the labourers in the unorganized sector in India. Although many research studies and surveys have been conducted to voice the woes of labourers in the unorganized sector, the government is yet to give thrust to address the grave concerns of unorganized labourers. When the country claims so much of technological advancements in other sectors, it is unfortunate that millions of labourers across the country are still being exploited and harassed by their employers/contractors or the agencies.

This study envisages the following suggestions to be considered as a priority by the concerned authorities and government intervention is very much-needed to eliminate the exploitation and sufferings of the labourers in the unorganized sector.

- As exploitation of labour is gone to the roots and exists even before the pre-independence period, the government should promote and encourage NGOs to come forward and take initial steps to identify the areas of concern and listen to the woes of labourers to build confidence. Organize counseling programs to

curb the exploitation by proprietors/contractors indulging in unfair labour practices and to bring awareness of the rights and privileges of workers.

- Combating Covid-19 endemic may continue for some more period or till herd immunity develops in the society. Its impact is so heavy for the entire mankind and more particularly for millions of poor unorganized labourers in a country like India who struggle even for a meal a day. Support must be extended by Government / NGO's / Voluntary organizations not only through sympathetic statements in media but necessarily by providing essential basic needs to overcome their dismay and struggle.
- The employers/contractors must own the responsibility to ensure the health and safety of the workers engaged by them. Safety precautions must be taken to avoid occupational health hazards of labourers and safety awareness must be conducted periodically through NGOs.
- The intervention of government is necessary to make surprise visits to establishments in the unorganized sector for inspection and audits to enforce welfare and social security measures of the government are implemented in a strict sense and extended to labourer's else penal actions must be imposed to avoid denial of benefits to labourers.
- The flaws and limitations of legislative policies should be identified by the government on priority and corrective actions must follow to extend benefits to the deprived labourers in the unorganized sector. Further, it is deemed necessary for the government to create a social identity for unorganized labourers to uplift them on par with others in society.
- Indeed, lack of awareness and low literacy level are the main hurdles for labourers in the unorganized sector for exploitation by their employers/contractors and ignoring or denial of benefits of the government. Their inability to understand the legislative policies of the government and initiatives affected them to live in awful conditions. The working and living conditions of labourers call for rejuvenation which can be sponsored by the government through NGOs / Voluntary organizations in counseling and educating them to overcome their dismay and struggle.

Conclusion

The unorganized sector is highly diversified and pervasive which generates employment and livelihood for the majority of the workforce. The productivity of labourers in the unorganized sector is considered as the driving force for the growth of the Indian economy. The labourers in the unorganized sector contribute their might to provide goods and services to the life and living of society at large which are easily accessible at an affordable price. Further, they are part of the infrastructure facilities and are involved in all kinds of human activities. But due to their lack of awareness and low literacy level, they are being exploited by the employers/contractors and struggle continues for basic needs, also deprived of various benefits of the government. Besides their pathetic living conditions, giving education to their children is beyond their expectations. The implications of the study explicate that the exploitation of labour from the employers/contractors needs to be stopped and government intervention is deemed necessary on a priority to regulate the service conditions of unorganized labourers and initiate corrective actions to make effective use of legislative policies to unorganized labourers also. Further, voluntary organizations and NGO's should come forward to educate and bring awareness among unorganized labourers to know their rights and improve literacy and knowledge to gain recognition in the society. In addition, government, voluntary organizations, and NGO's should come forward and extend support in view of the agony of labourers caused by Covid-19 endemic. To claim India as a superpower country, it is deemed necessary for the government to create a social identity for the vast majority of unorganized labourers and uplift them on par with others in society.

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