

BOTTOM OF THE CHAIN

**AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY
ON
HOMEBASED WOMEN WORKERS IN THE
COSTUME JEWELLERY INDUSTRY IN
VILLAGES AROUND HAPUR**

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Homebased Worker in the Global Market

At the threshold of the 21st Century, the competitive global market and growing e-commerce creates a virtual reality that open up possibilities of dissemination of information which can catalyse the sharing of gains all the way along the line from the producer to the consumer. On the other hand, as more and more industries' shift from factory production to put out homebased work producers lose their worker status and the family once more becomes the production unit. In such a situation child labour gets absorbed with cheap women's labour, exploiting the vast unemployment in our villages, widening the gap between the rich and the poor.

HENNES&MAURITZ (H&M) is a Swedish chain store company involved in retailing garments and accessories through over 600 outlets in Europe who also buy clothes and accessories from India. They have recently approached U.N.D.P for help in designing a programme to safeguard the rights of the homebased worker and child worker who make their costume jewellery. These products are sourced from a few villages in and around Hapur and Meerut. The production process is predominantly homebased and involves a large number of young women and girls.

U.N.D.P approached ACTION INDIA and HAQ to take up this particular action research study in order to recommend strategies for intervention. On the basis of the experience of both the organisations, it was decided that HAQ being a centre for child rights would look into the study and problems of the situation of the child workers and ACTION INDIA would focus on the problems of women home based workers. This study would complement the parallel research being carried out on the situation of child workers and business economic sector and analyse the role played by the homebased workers.

World View

The notion of globalisation conveys the interconnectedness of national and international structures, with a constant and continuous flow of commodities and information and consequently gives rise to internationally set social standards and aspirations.

An aspect of globalization has been the transnationalisation of ideas and movements. Ideas of empowerment and democratisation have taken root in many societies. India is one of them. Women's empowerment is a global idea that has engaged the women's movement in India. Strategies to challenge oppressive structures could link up women transnationally to initiate networks and trade links that are more equitable and less exploitative.

CHANGING TIMES - A GLIMPSE OF RURAL INDIA

The little boy asks his mother for a handful of grain. He runs out to get an ice-cream stick from the ice-cream vendor on a bicycle. The grain is thrown into a large cloth pouch attached to the cycle bar. The barter system is possibly the best value for exchange where the family has some land to grow wheat or rice for their own consumption.

The young man selling ice cream is one of four sons looking for an alternative livelihood as the portion of land divided between the four brothers is not economically viable to cultivate. Besides he has been to school, studied upto the 8th class, so he does not want to work on the land.

The ice cream factory is a mini production plant with no brand name. Availability of milk and a very basic freezing technology has created an opportunity for self employment without much investment for the farmer who sold his land after his potato crops fetched no price due to the over-production of potatoes. On a hot summer day the market is ready to consume all the ice cream he can make. Payment in cash and kind facilitates a mode of exchange in a subsistence economy. What strikes us is that the pressure to earn money has not changed the pace of rural life. In contrast Hapur is a busy market town. It is the centre for collection of agricultural produce in the district. There are thirteen cold storages for agricultural produce which told us that there was large scale farming of cash crops like potatoes, sugar cane, wheat and vegetables. Mechanization in agriculture had benefitted those who had consolidated their land.

Hapur is also the largest market in India for collection and sale of raw animal hide. Manufacturers come every Sunday from as far as Chennai to make wholesale purchases for the leather tanning industry.

Yet when you enter the villages there is little to show that they are part of this bustling economy. The first group of men we were introduced to were small farmers. They were moaning over their losses in the potato crop. Over production, fall in prices and the small farmer could not even recover his costs. Some of them had sold their farm land to brick kiln owners. Also standing out in the midst of the farm land were two cinema halls which had recently started. The village elders were concerned about the film culture attracting and influencing the younger generation. That is the extent to which modernization had crept into the villages.

Once in a way, a boy succeeds in reaching high school and continues his education in the town to graduate and complete a master's degree and a Bachelor's degree in Education. One such young man had a teacher's job in a government school, he said he had a hundred students in his class without complaining. A government job is considered the ultimate and all educated young men aspire to any government post.

However this educated young man had no thoughts for his village except to say "the people are very poor, too many half clad children". That is they are either covered on top with a shirt or below wearing a knicker.

The most recent development in Salai village was the telephone. An enterprising young man had set up a P.C.O /S.T.D booth to augment his income. However, there was no electric lights on the streets, and electricity supply in the homes was most erratic. Kerosene lamps were still in use. One of the astonishing features of Salaigaon is that there are no alcohol shops and no drinking, the residents proudly informed us.

As far as government facilities were concerned they were virtually non existent. There was no primary health centre in any of the villages. No drinking water except from hand pumps installed by people themselves. There were a couple of primary schools between villages but the teacher / teachers rarely attends his classes.

After the men left, they sent their wives and daughters to greet us. In keeping with the changing times, the unbounding energy of giggling adolescent girls, conscious of the latest fashion and hairstyles stood behind their mothers with a single demand – they want to go to high school – boys go to Hapur, girls stay at home. These young girls aged 12 to 20 years are the mainstay of the workforce producing chains, necklaces, bangles, rings of bead in the third world for their counterparts in the first world.

At the bottom of the chain we had identified our target group who would bring about the change for their future.

OBJECTIVES

HENNES & MAURITZ, the multinational company has expressed concern for workers rights. A code of conduct has been designed to ensure that nobody who is contributing to the success of the company is deprived of his or her human rights or suffers mental or bodily harm. The company has demonstrated its concern for workers rights by making it mandatory for its suppliers to agree to a code of conduct that specifies social standards for workers.

The project objectives were:

1. To undertake an action research study on women home based workers in selected villages in order to assess the applicability of the code of conduct sent by H & M.
2. To find out the working condition of women workers such as nature of work, terms and condition of labour, wage rates and modes of payments, work availability and security of their livelihood.
3. To explore alternative ways of production that can safeguard the rights of home based workers and ensure quality of product.
4. To understand the employer-employee relationship between the suppliers, sub-contractors and the women home based workers.
5. To find out the strategies for the betterment of life in village and enhancement of social value addition.
6. To explore the feasibility of a centralised work place for empowering women collectively.

Methodology

This study is based on a brief but intensive interaction with the home based workers and some of their families. The activities of the study could be divided in two categories:

- Field Work
- Desk Work

Field work included the following steps :

Preliminary visits: Two visits were made to the villages before the survey. The first two visits were more social and learning to understand the village dynamics. The first visit to the villages helped the team to conceptualise the study better and also to formulate the adequate tools for survey. We met and talked to a number of contractors and subcontractors who were all local residents. Most of them as reported later had a dubious reputation for non-payment of work done. By the end of the second visit, the team decided to concentrate its efforts in Salaigaon and the production unit run by Gulfam and Mustafa. We felt it would be worth while to do a case study of the Ramayana in Salai gaon. The emphasis during the second visit was on the pre-testing of the questionnaire and the checklist developed for the study.

Survey :

A study of workers by workers:

As action India is a community based women's organisation the interviews were conducted by grassroots activists who were completely at home in the village and could probe with a cultural sensitivity and affiliation.

A conscious effort was made to involve the muslim women in our organisation to create an easy and immediate acceptance of the team as all the home based workers in the target villages were muslims. City women arriving in the village create certain expectations and the team had to tread very softly, making it clear that we were not buyers and we could not give work. From the start we made it clear that we were social workers, interested in questions of women's health, children's education and particularly interested in working with adolescent girls.

Our entry into the village was sanctioned by a group of 15 men who verified our credentials. We also meet with a group of 20 women who wanted to know why we were here. Very soon the dialogue changed to jokes and laughter and the warmth emanating from them assured us that our approach was on the right track.

The actual survey was conducted by a team of 14 members in 6 villages. The members of the team got divided in smaller groups to maximize the data collection. In an effort to get the views from the male members in the villages, two men workers were included in the team. General information was collected by these two men while women workers were being interviewed by the women groups. Data was collected through participatory methods and individual interviews with various women workers of different age groups.

Post - survey visit: In the process of analysis of the information, it was realised that there were gaps in certain places. And it became necessary to fill in the gaps and thus another visit was made to collect the specific information.

Desk work involved the following activities :

Preparing an analytical framework: As the thrust of this study was to find out and analyse the role played by the women home based workers in costume jewellery, it was imperative to develop an analytical framework with parameters for the study.

Preparing the tools for the survey: On the basis of the preliminary field visits and interaction with the women in the villages it was decided to develop a questionnaire, a checklist and a time study table to ensure maximization of the data collection. The questionnaire was developed which was finalised after pre-testing. This involved information regarding the base line demographic and socio-economic data about the home based workers in the costume jewellery industry. A time study table was constructed to understand the family workday and distribution of work between male, female and children in the family. A checklist for the focussed group discussion with men was also made to assess their opinion on perceptions of the people in the village level and to cross check their responses.

Analysis and Report Production: The collected data was sorted out in a systematic and organised way so as to facilitate the process of analysis. The findings of the survey is discussed later in the report.

Sampling

Due to the short duration of the study it was not easy to spread out over 10 villages as originally envisaged. As it did not provide variations of any consequence, it was decided to concentrate on one central village-and five neighboring villages within a distance of 5 to 20 kilometers that is six villages in all –Salaigaon, Gondi, Ghungrela, Sultanpur, Tatarpur and Vyayet.

The target sample was drawn on the basis of stratified, purposive random method so as to fulfil the requirement of the study. A total of 76 women and girls were interviewed in Hapur district. In order to find a comparative it was decided to interview women workers in similar home based production in Delhi. With the aim to find the variation in rural and urban wages and opportunities that urban women may have we covered different kinds of home based production, quilt making, bindi making, bone and bead jewellery, 33 women workers were interviewed in Delhi.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Village Profile

This is a summary of the information collected from the six villages which gave us a picture of the socio-demographic composition of the area.

Most of the villages are predominately muslim followed by 20% jats and other castes. Agriculture is the main occupation with 10% of the farmers having large land holdings, 50% with land enough to grow food for their own consumption and 40% are landless agricultural labour earning Rs 60-70 (men) and Rs 30-35(women) as daily wages. This work is seasonal and they must seek alternate forms of income.

Tractors are owned and rented out by the well to do farmers to the smaller farmer. The use of the urea and chemical fertilizers was a common practice. The economic status of people could be assessed also by the kinds of facilities they have. These included hand pumps, tractors and telephones. Although the main occupation is agriculture, men look out for alternative employment opportunities in Hapur and neighboring towns.

The most striking fact about these villages is the total lack of civic amenities. There are no primary health centres, no post office, no banks, no roads, no street lights, no sewerage and no transport system provided by the government. A private passenger carriage plies with the use of an innovative vehicle operated by steam, called "juggar".

Immunization teams come to the villages periodically with polio and other primary vaccines for children. In spite of the fact that there is no Primary Health Centre (PHC) we were surprised to find no presence of traditional medicine, or even remnants of knowledge of home remedies with the older generation. They resort to the local doctor when they fall ill, who treats them pills and injections from the allopathic medicine. In case of serious illness they have to take the patient to Hapur. The health status is grim, Tuberculosis is rampant and often left untreated. Due to the unsanitary conditions flies and mosquitoes flourish making life unbearable-impossible to sleep or eat a meal without a person fanning away the flies to prevent them from falling into the food. The open drainage overflows onto the narrow lanes along the walls of the houses. We found only two houses with a toilet and septic tank. The remaining are still using the abominable system which requires the carrying away of "night soil".

Education

Amazingly in the midst of poverty and deprivation the need to educate their children was strongly expressed. With peoples contribution and donations from charities a “madarsaah” teaching the Quran and Urdu, Hindi, and even English they said is educating 800 students, both boys and girls upto class V. Even more surprising was the fact that people said they would like to educate daughters if there was a high school, but they were not willing to send them to Hapur.

Local Self Governance

Though two of the villages visited had elected women representatives to the Gram Sabha, we found that neither took any interest in village matters or was even aware that she had a role to play. Nor were their husbands concerned about village development as was obvious from the total lack of amenities. However in Ghungrela, people were impressed by the new pradhan who had constructed a few roads and upgraded the local school.

In Salaigaon we met a very vociferous woman who is aspiring to stand for the next election. She makes it a point to meet us every time and even talks of women’s empowerment. She and her husband stated (independently) that there was only one “dai” who serviced 5 villages and they felt something should be done to create facilities and personnel for child birth.

In five of the six villages visited one common factor had emerged very strongly. Bundi dai was the only traditional midwife who serviced all the villages. Bundi was ageing and there was no one to take per place. It was obviously a matter of grave concern to both men and women.

Major Findings

A total of 76 respondents were interviewed in 6 selected villages namely Salaigaon, Gondi, Sultanpur, Ghungrela, Tatarpur and Vyayet.

Socio-demographic profile

We interviewed 76 respondents out of whom 34 of them were unmarried girls and the remaining 42 are married women of whom two are widows. The girls belong to the age groups between 12-20 among whom 7 girls are below fifteen years and 27 of them are between 15-20 years. Some of them are literate and some are not. Those girls who had studied to a certain level have the urge to study further. As there is no middle or high school boys go to Hapur town. But girls cannot travel to Hapur and their schooling ends at class V.

Marital & Educational Status Table 1

	Marital Status			Educational Status		
Age	Unmarried	Married	Widow	Literate	Illiterate	Undeclared
11-15	15			8	7	
15-20	19			11	8	
21-35		20	1	10	10	
36-50		14	1	3	11	
50+		6			6	
						2
Total	34	40	2	32	42	2

It is interesting to note that despite the orthodox muslim background the age of marriage for girls as seen in the table is over 20 years. This delay in age of marriage in comparison to the girls from similar background in the city, which is 16-18 years, is a striking phenomenon.

As far as educational status is concerned it is important to know that in the context of this study literacy means religious learning of the Quran and elementary knowledge of Urdu. In more recent years girls have been to school either to the “madarsaah” or the government primary school, where they also learn Hindi. Being able to read and write is of great importance to their self esteem. Those who cannot read feel a deep sense of inadequacy.

Family Structure

The structure of the families interviewed were both nuclear and joint families. Every household owns the land on which their house stands. All houses have a courtyard of arying sizes. A nuclear family in this scenario could mean a man, his wife and children have separated from the joint family and live and earn independently. Though physically they continue to live within the same compound, they have what in India is known as a separate “chulla” - that is a separate kitchen and thus the earnings are clearly defined.

The joint family has property in common, keep their earnings in the hands of the head of the household, who also takes all major decisions. Two to three generations sometimes four, stay together, eat together and are bound by the family code. Women usually have little say in the family untill they reach an elderly position. The “purdah” system is most strict in this patriarchal set up and the women eat after the men and children have eaten. When the women go out of the village they have to be in “burkha” and usually accompanied by their family. Even at home they must keep their heads covered in the presence of elders and male members.

As the data collected does not include indepth details of land ownership we are not attempting to correlate the changings family structure to division of family property. However, what struck us, and all of us, was the remarkable difference between the two families we interacted with intensively in this brief period. Both families were strongly bonded but the women headed household of Allah Bandi and the patriarchal head of the loving and generous household of Gulfam and Mustafa had very distinctly different characters which we will attempt to describe later.

As feminists we were particularly sensitive to/aware of the social environment in the home. Concepts of equality and freedom, the level of self esteem and confidence of its members were some of our concerns. Taking it for given that women don't have decision making rights we tried to observe the different roles women played in the household. It is in this framework that the comparison between the two families become relevant.

Income Analysis

Our study reveals that of the 76 women interviewed, 31 women still maintained a joint family status and 43 women lived in nuclear units as shown in Table 2.

INCOME GROUP per month in Rupees	FAMILY TYPE	NO. OF WORKING WOMEN	TOTALS
<1000	NUCLEAR	6	8
	JOINT	2	
>1000< 5000	NUCLEAR	16	31
	JOINT	15	
>5000	NUCLEAR	3	5
	JOINT	2	
UNDECLARED	NUCLEAR	18	32
	JOINT	12	
	UNKNOWN	2	
		TOTAL	76

Table 2 depicts the income of the total 76 women interviewed 32 of them could not specify their income. Often women are unable to state the family income as they are not aware of what the men earn. Sale of agricultural produce is done by men, who keep the money in their own hands. Other incomes consists of the daily wages of the men's earnings from cultivation or income from some activity outside the village. The earnings of the women workers and their daughters or daughter in law from the making of the costume jewellery, also are not very consistent. However, this table gives an approximate estimate of the family income. Majority of the nuclear households belong to the category where the income is more than 1000 but less than 5000. There were almost equal number of joint household who belong to the middle income group.

The main source of income is from sale of agricultural produce, or wages for agricultural labour. We learnt that men are paid Rs.60-70 per day while women earn Rs. 30-35 per day. However, it is only the women from the very poor income group, less than Rs.1000 who work on other people's land. The second source of income is from the sale of buffalo milk. The milk is sold in Hapur city. Most families do not keep milk even for their children. Both men and women in the family tend and feed the buffaloes, and women make cow dung cakes for fuel.

Table 3

Landholdings (in bhighas)	No. of Families
None	19
1-5	23
6-10	5
11-15	2
16-25	5
25-30	4
75-100	3
More than 100	1
TOTAL	62*

- There are 7 agricultural labourers who do not own land.
- Five respondents have land but could not specify the number of bhighas.
- Two respondents could not give information about the landholdings.

The land ownership differs from nil to 200 bhighas land among the homebased workers in villages studied. It is noteworthy here that poverty has driven the landless muslim women to work in the field breaking the age old tradition of their community. Limited earnings of the family compel these women to do beads work so as to supplement the meagre wages.

In an agrarian society, the landholdings of a family usually indicate their economic status. We therefore presumed that women from well to do families would not take on homebased beads work. To the contrary we found two exceptions where two families in Salaigaon have 200 bhighas and 100 bhighas land respectively. Surprisingly, 16 year old Khushnama from the family owning 200 bhighas also does beads work in order to put herself through higher studies. This family is unique in the way that their father had educated all his children leaving behind two graduate daughters before he died.

On the other hand 17 year old Tabassum from the family owning 100 bhighas does beads work to contribute towards household expenses.

Reasons why women do homebased work

Customarily muslim women do not go out for work. Earning an income is not considered to be a woman's role. However homebased work has provided women a means to earn without breaking social norms. This seclusion of women from the public domain restricts their mobility both in keeping them housebound with no scope for exploring any other opportunity that may exist.

The reason for working is described as follows:

Table 4

Reasons Given	No Of Women
To run the household.	57
To pay back the debt.	4
To pass their time and earn some pocket money especially for girls.	8
Women gave varying reasons.**	5

**

for my mother's medical treatment

to meet expenses for my own studies.

for my dowry.

to give presents to my sisters-in-law.

a 50 year old said she needed money for her own medical treatment.

Table 3 shows that majority of the respondents who belong to the middle income group, work to support their families. Very few of them work to repay their debts, and none to save for their daughter's marriage. **It is noteworthy here that no one said that they work to save for their daughters' marriage.**

The women from the lower income group have to depend upon this bead work because they said that they must supplement the meagre family income from their agricultural wages.

Though these women are being exploited as cheap labour yet the younger girls are quite happy with the money because that gives them a certain level of independence. Not in the survey but from the observation, 70 year old aunt of Mustafa said the money she earned was for the donation to the masjid. Her grand nieces also teased that she quite took away their work and claimed it to be hers!

Mode of Payment

There is no regular time period for payment. When an order is completed, payment is made per piece, per dozen and per hundred depending on the item. It is difficult therefore to assess the income per day, as the number of women and girls in the household put in labour whenever they are free from other chores. The payment is made to one worker only through the work has been done collectively by all the female members in the family. Each worker maintains a little notebook, or records on a piece of paper, the volume of work done by her.

Amazingly, the one common factor applicable to all the contractors was not revealing the rate of payment at the time of distributing the order to the workers. This system is mutely accepted because they depend on there local contractors for work. They have no power at all and have no say in this matter. There was a widespread complaint of not receiving payment for work done and delivered from the three villages Gondi, Sultanpur, and Ghungrela. The contractor takes the completed pieces of bead jewellery on the basis that payment will be made after the export house has accepted the lot . Over and over again we heard that girls had done work worth Rs 300-700, and even upto Rs 2000/- and had not been paid.

Why did they continue to work for these middlemen if they were not paid? The subcontractors were men from the same village and known to the women. They fully exploited the situation, because they knew that the women being secluded in the homes could not take any steps to demand their money. The women were helpless as they did not have any negotiating strategies.

As the homebased work does not provide a collective forum the women workers do not share their experiences or grievances about payments or rates. Also there are more women desiring to do bead work than the contractor can provide. This principle of demand and supply is well exploited by the middlemen who tries to minimize the rates. The cut throat competition in the export oriented industry keeps sub-contractors at loggerheads and secretive about their source. **There are no norms or fixed value for this nature of put out work thriving on cheap labour.**

Nature of Work

All these women are engaged in the making of costume jewellery with glass beads which includes chains, bangles, necklaces, rings and earrings, clips and other accessories. These items include a variety of designs, which often come from the supplier and sometimes are created by the more talented women who do the sampling and teach others. This work is done by all the female members and the older women are so experienced and used to this that they put the beads into a needle without even looking at their hands. They are also quick at their work. And can finish a number of pieces in a day. These homebased workers earn about Rs. 400 to 500 hundred in a month and sometimes more when they get raw material on a regular basis.

Availability of work

In many places we visited they told us that at present there was no work. Remnants of the beads lying somewhere in their rooms told us that they too do this work. The home based workers are totally dependent on the local contractor who in turn must get orders from the middlemen in Delhi, who takes on the manufacturing responsibility from the export house. There may be one or more links in the chain before the order reaches the hands of the home based worker.

At present, the women in Salaigaon confirmed that there was sustained work. When there is a greater demand for production a sub contractor will take an order to another village.

In the five villages, the homebased women worker get work through a number of contractors and subcontractors - Islam, Israt, Umed, Haqiqat, Pehelwan, Hafiz, who get work as and when available.

Lack of Information

Having no contact with the outside world leaves the women in these villages totally ignorant of the industry and production processes. They are merely puppets in the hands of the contractor because they have no access to information about where and how to organise, or lodge a complaint or even articulate a grievance or demand their rights.

The Ramayana Story

Salaigaon produces only for one export house i.e. Ramayana. Shahid, Gulfam, Mustafa network apparently have a good working relationship and they are able to provide work to 350 women in Salaigaon on a regular basis. The relationship between the girls and the contractor i.e the two brothers Gulfam/Mustafa is based on trust. They are sympathetic to the problems of each and every women and girls and they help them in advance payments in times of need.

Ramayana has constructed a three room set in Salaigaon with the idea of starting a production centre. However, we found this room was used to receive guests, house buffaloes and provide a meeting place for the men. On the other hand, the front room in Gulfam and Mustafa's house is completely used for storage of raw material for work distribution and collection. The rush starts in the morning at 6 O, clock and every one including younger brothers and a sister play an active role until they go to school. Ramayana has facilitated the production and delivery process by providing a Maruti van. As a result the contractor travels between Hapur and Delhi every day working under the pressure of meeting deadlines for shipping consignments. In none of the other five villages visited did we find any attempt by suppliers to set up any infrastructure.

Sustained Work

The most crucial factor for improving the conditions of work is to ensure sustained work. The Ramayana supplier is the only one we met who has given the contractor sustained work. This has resulted in creating a steady work force of over 350 women. This has also given the contractor confidence in handling the workers, leading to a satisfactory relationships all the way up the line. The net result- an award for the best designed / produced costume jewellery was received by Ramayana, who then passed the credit to their contractor Shaheed- who passed on the laurels to the sub-contractors who shared the success with the women workers. Unfortunately this picture is like an oasis in the desert.

However, in none of the other five villages visited did we find any attempt by suppliers to facilitate the production process. As a matter of fact we could not find out the name of the suppliers. We found that all local contractors worked from home. As a result the wife and female members of the family of the contractor were equally involved and in fact in-charge of distribution sampling, collection and payment, while the men did the outside work of getting and delivering orders.

At a meeting with the suppliers from Togh and Fashion line at UNDP in December 1999 called by Ditte it became very clear suppliers could not possibly ensure continued work. They shifted from beads to brass to leather to any material that was in vogue, and they would move from area to area where the skill and material were available.

Under these circumstances it is virtually impossible to safeguard the interest of the homebased workers, as the suppliers have no long term interest in sustaining a reliable work force. The net result of this is workers may go without of work for months.

Re-organising the work space

Re-organising the work space or streamlining the production process must benefit the worker and productivity. There is no scope for assembly line production, each piece is done by one worker. Some stages of production are given out like the wire rings are made to brass fixed with pliers to make chokers. This work is done by boys.

The concept of a centralised work place needs to be debated and understood in the context of socio-cultural milieu. Women work at home as they keep an eye on their children, attend to their animals and undertake numerous chores even as they sit with their beads and threads working to reach a complete dozen or a hundred. Being away from home would free her to produce more without interruptions. But then who will look after the children?

For secluded muslim women to go out to work may not be socially acceptable but economic needs may compel those households living at a subsistence level to allow their women to go to the centre, but their domestic responsibilities will not allow them to work for 8 hours as done in a factory.

The distribution and collection of material could shift from the contractor's home to the Ramayana work centre. This would indirectly take the load off the women in the household and they would formely be recognized for the invisible work they do at home at present.

Occupational hazards

Continuous sitting causes pain in the lower back. This was a common complaint of both older & younger women. The older women often work wor with impaired eyesight but would not use spectacles as it is considered to being "intellectual".

Most of the work is done in the daylight as then is no electricity and this work cannot be done with oil lamps.

Not in the survey, but findings by CHW's who held two clinic days show that prolapse uterus, leuchorrea, lower back pain and menstrual disorders were common problems suffered by women. Almost all the elderly had complaints of joint pains or respiratory ailments.

Recreational and leisure activities

Needless to say that the concept of "leisure", merely means when they are not working. Majority of them said they relax by chatting with their neighbours. Cracking jokes and laughing with friends. Some of them said they like watching television or listening to songs on the radio.

There is very little free time for these women and girls between domestic work and bead work - that is between unpaid labour and paid labour. These women do not have any time for themselves as is depicted in the following time studies. Comparitively the men work hard to earn money but also have time to relax, rest and seek other forms of entertainment.

Whatever free time they get, they are engaged in the domestic work. It is therefore seen that these women do not have time for themselves at all.

A Woman Headed Household

Allah-Bandi means God's own person

It's difficult to say how old she is. She frolics around like a young girl, fancy free and footloose. Judging by the age of her first born son who is 42, she must be in her mid-fifties. Allah bandi is the mother of five sons, one of whom has broken away from the joint household. "He lives with his wife and children on the other side of the wall", she tells us, "but this grand child spends all the day here", she say to the clinging half clad child.

Sitting around the courtyard are her two younger daughters-in-law, one preparing "rotis" for the mid day meal and the other cleaning the utensils and leaving them to shine and dry in the sun. In another part of the courtyard two other daughters-in-law and two teen-aged girls, her daughter and grand-daughter sit on "charpais", working swiftly on beads as they laugh and chat. It's difficult to remember the number of children, they are all over the place, playing, seeking attention, eating, sleeping.

This is a woman headed household, twice widowed Allah Bandi is now completely free of household chores. The household chores in this family of 24 people is smoothly divided between the sons, daughters and daughters-in-law. They all share the feeding and care of the buffaloes. In this household they keep the milk for the children. On one of the days we visited they had treated us all to rice pudding cooked in pure buffalo milk. They have 3 animals and they sell some of the milk. The tea in her house is always wonderful, as warm and welcoming as all the women who never waste a moment, always busy but have lots of time to talk to us and answer all our questions. This woman's brigade has a good out put of work, they say they can earn 100 rupees a day. Also they do not get there beads from Gulfam. They have another contractor.

Their mother-in-law is obviously a darling "Take me to Delhi, I want see the world", she says another time. She lifts her shirt and says, "tell me how to reduce my stomach. Give me something to get rid of the gas", she says to everyone's amusement. On the first visit I had shown her a few yoga asanas, which she actively practiced at the cost of becoming a joke in the family. One daughter-in-law teases, put her in jeans and T-shirt and take her with you to Delhi!

We all just loved this family. Without the slightest effort we were fed sitting on the charpai. You can't leave hungry. And each of us were also given a kilo of rice from their fields to bring back.

Time Study

The time study helped us to understand the family work day and the unequal distribution of work between male and female in the household. As orthodox muslims faith plays a very important role in their lives. The time of day is marked by the five “namaaz” or prayers offered in the morning

4pm	-	Fazar
2 pm	-	Zohar
4 pm	-	Asar
6 pm	-	Magrib
8.30 -11 pm	-	Esha

As the time of day is often referred to the hour of the namaaz we decided to do the time study accordingly to fall in line with their way of life. A strong sense of identity is at once a great strength and constrictive, especially for women who live in patriarchal structures within the family and obey the bounds of institutionalised religion.

In the house of Mustafa and Gulfam, the two young women Mobina and Gulfam’s wife Praveen were continuously doing household chores. Grinding huge quantities of spices to cook meals for whoever dropped in as their family generosity and hospitality to guests was unbounding. The woman bore the brunt without complaining. Serving meals to guests and male members is long drawn out. An old bachelor without a family comes for regular meals, as does a student from Bihar studying for priesthood at the madarsaah. And of course guests like us landing in the middle of the day must be fed a five course meal.

As we stayed in the house of Gulfam and Mustafa we were able to observe the life of the women in this household at close quarters. As Mobina’s time study very clearly shows that even before she is married she has taken a great deal of responsibility at the age of 19.

Her sister-in-law Gulfam’s wife who has two children is doing kitchen chores all day and doesn’t eat till Gulfam returns from Delhi, some time as late as 11 pm. The older women in the house, the mother-in-law and aunt give a helping hand now and then. It would appear that once over 50 women do hand over the domestic duties to the younger generation, and take on the role of safeguarding and perpetuating patriarchal values.

The two younger women appear to be completely in-charge of all activities in the household. They spend most of their day working in the open courtyard. We noticed that the women don’t sit on the “charpai” in the presence of their elders, they instantly cover their heads when the husband or father-in-law enter.

Our experience of a woman headed household in comparison was very different and so well worth talking about.

TIME STUDY AT A GLANCE

<p>NAME : MOBINA AGE : 20 Fazar Namaz</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Offer my morning prayers, read the Quran. Feed the Buffaloes, milk them ⇒ Prepare the breakfast along with my sister-in-law ⇒ Start cooking ⇒ Take care of my nieces and nephews ⇒ Make cow dung cakes ⇒ Wash clothes ⇒ Eat my breakfast after everyone has eaten ⇒ Prepare butter milk
<p>Zohar 2 p.m.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Namaz - feed the guests ⇒ Wash utensils ⇒ Prepare for the evening meal ⇒ Grind the masala ⇒ Cut and cook the veg ⇒ Give water to the cattle ⇒ Mix the cattle feed ⇒ After everyone has taken their food if there is any shortage of chapati, I make again, and then I eat my food
<p>Asar 4 p.m.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Namaz, milk the cattle ⇒ Mix the cattle feed ⇒ Wash utensils ⇒ Clean the cattle shed
<p>Magrib 6 p.m.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Namaz : in the meantime my sister-in-law cooks the food ⇒ Feed the student guest and the old homeless person. When one dish is ready, prepare the next
<p>Esha 8.30 p.m.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ When my brother's come home from Delhi I prepare fresh chhapati's for them. ⇒ By 11o'clock, I finish all my work and then offer my prayers and go off to sleep, But when we have guests I have to cook for them, make their beds. During nights I usually have body aches. I feel as if I an a machine. I hardly sleep for 4-5 hours.

NAME: DILJAHAN AGE : 19 Fazar Namaz	<i>Allah Bandi's grand daughter</i> ⇒ Get up early in the morning and say my prayers, make cow dung cakes, take my food ⇒ Get the raw material from the supplier's place which is very near by and sit with the beads work till 2 o'clock.
Zohar 2 p.m.	⇒ Namaz, then again sit with the beads work.
Asar 4 p.m.	⇒ Namaz, do the bead work.
Magrib 6 p.m.	⇒ Namaz ⇒ Eat my dinner at 7 o' clock.
Esha 8.30 - 11.30 p.m.	⇒ Namaz, go to bed at 9 o' clock.
	<i>I have not been to school . My mother has taught Quran Sharif at home itself.</i>
NAME : Rahisa AGE : 22 Fazar Namaz	<i>Daughter-in-law</i> ⇒ Get up early in the morning and say my prayers and read the Quran Feed the Buffaloes and milk them. ⇒ Broom the house, make tea and food, Feed my husband and children. I eat after all of them has eaten. Till 10 o'clock after my work gets over, I sit with the beads work.
Zohar 2 p.m.	⇒ At 2 o'clock, I say my prayers then again I sit with my
Asar 4 p.m.	⇒ Around 4 o'clock, I offer my prayers, give water to the Buffaloes and feed them. Cook the dinner.
Magrib 6 p.m.	⇒ Namaz, feed my children and husband. After that I take my food.
Esha 8.30 - 11.30 p.m.	⇒ Namaz, go off to sleep around 9-10 o'clock.
NAME: SHABNAM AGE : 24 Fazar Namaz	<i>Another daughter-in-law</i> ⇒ I get up at 5 o'clock and offering prayers. ⇒ Give water to the Buffaloes and feed them. ⇒ Make tea for all my family members - wash the utensils. Cut the vegetables, cook them and make chapatis - Mop the floor one a week, sit with the bead work till 2 o' clock.
Zohar 2 p.m.	⇒ Namaz, give water to the Buffaloes, milk them. ⇒ Cook food and serve everyone, wash the utensils and takes my food.
Asar 4 p.m.	⇒ Namaz, give water to the Buffaloes, do the beads work.
Magrib 6 p.m.	⇒ Namaz
Esha 8.30 - 11.30 p.m.	⇒ Namaz - Feed my childrens wait till my husband comes from work, feed him, take my food and go to bed.

NAME: SHAHJAHAN AGE : 40 Fazar Namaz	<i>AlaBandi's Daughter-in-law</i> ⇒ Offer my morning prayers, cut the grasses, milk the buffaloes, feed them do the cleaning and washing utensils - Mop the floor. Make cow dung cakes. ⇒ Have my food and sit with the bead work till 2 o'clock.
Zohar 2 p.m.	⇒ Say my prayers and again sit with the beads work.
Asar 4 p.m.	⇒ Namaz ⇒ Give water to the buffaloes and milk them
Magrib 6 p.m.	⇒ Namaz ⇒ Have my dinner at 8 o'clock.
Esha 8.30 - 11.30 p.m.	⇒ Namaz, and go to sleep at 10 o'clock
	<i>Now that I have two sister in laws - the burden of work is also less. Earlier I use to do the work all by my own. Now I could also offer my namaz five times a day.</i>
NAME :FAROOKH KHAN AGE : 35 Fazar Namaz	<i>AlaBandi's Son</i> ⇒ After Azan, I comes home, because I sleep here only. I wake my family members. After half hour or so I take my breakfast. After that I go off to my field. Give water to the crops and work. During summers, I come back by 10 o' clock and during winters around 12 o'clock.
Zohar 2 p.m.	⇒ Go to the Mosque for Namaz - have food- go to the field to stroll around.
Asar 4 p.m.	⇒ Offer my Namaz in the field itself. Comes back home I do not do any work after that.
Magrib 6 p.m.	⇒ Offer my Namaz, talk or chat with my neighbours - have my food.
Esha 8.30 - 11.30 p.m.	⇒ Namaz and go off to sleep.
	<i>Note : During harvesting time, we need to work for a longer hours. We have our own tube-wells, that is why we water the field of other villagers also. We have to be present there ourselves because it gives us our daily wages. We grow vegetables and engaged labourers to pluck them. Then we take them to Hapur or Delhi Mandi for sale.</i>

Name : SAFKAT KHAN Age : 65 Fazar Namaz	<i>AlaBandi's Son</i> ⇒ Get up at 4.15 in the morning - offer my prayers. Go to the jungle at 5.15 AM. Cut the grasses. Feed the animals, Rest a while and have my food.
Zohar 1.45 - 2.50	⇒ Namaz, give water to the animals - bath them and feed them.
Asar 5.15 - 5:30 p.m.	⇒ Milk the animals - give water to them - have my food. Till, 7 o'clock, all these work gets over.
Magrib 7:15	⇒ Namaz - tie the animals. Rest a little otherwise go to the jungle. By 8 o'clock night, my work gets over. ⇒ Namaz - Feed my childrens wait till my husband comes from work, feed him, take my food and go to bed.
Esha 8:30	⇒ Namaz, come back home from the mosque. Go off to sleep.

Note : In comparing their statements we find that the men mention 'rest', 'sleep' in the middle of the day, they take time off to sit and relax and talk with other men etc. The women on the other hand go from one chore to another often doing two-three things at a time. Not to say that women don't chat and joke and laugh etc. They just don't think they have time only for themselves. There is no concept of leisure.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Exclusion and Seclusion

This study of a cluster of villages in Hapur district reveals how the benefits of the green revolution in western U.P excludes 50% of the farming families. Fragmentation of land and changes in the modes of agriculture drives the poor and marginal farmer away from farming, adding to the vast hordes of unemployed deskilled rural poor. Due to lack of necessary facilities and absolute lack of opportunities, the employment scenario in these villages is very bleak. Thus the burden to earn a living falls on women as well. Men in the villages try various ways to earn while women strive to keep the hearth burning ,providing cheap labour to be exploited by any kind of piece rate work brought by contractors, producing for suppliers to export to the global market.

Secluded in the private sphere, muslim women are doubly deprived for lack of mobility. Tradition and faith play an important role in maintaining the custom of purdah and imposing restrictions on their mobility. Their earnings have neither changed their status nor reorganized domestic chores. If anything they now face a triple burden, functioning simultaneously between cooking, cleaning, child care and bead work.

Thus any intervention has to be made in a very gradual and organic manner involving the community and people of all ages in the process of change.

A Model Unit

Creating a model unit could set off a process for others to emulate. The Ramayana case study opens a possibility of initiating a community development process starting from the work center and evolving activities around it in a way that will create a collective ownership.

Building on the existing social group formations, the roles of men, women and adolescents specifically will be defined without hierarchy.

The major challenge of this action research project is to create a business model which safeguards the rights of homebased workers. A new code of conduct to safeguard the rights of the homebased workers will have to be formulated.

In order to design the interventions that are potentially beneficial to all stakeholders we need to identify :

What H&M can do?

What UNDP can do?

What Action India can do?

What the women/girls/men can do?

What the contractors/suppliers can do?

The social responsibility of H&M can only begin with a commitment to providing sustained work as negotiating for fair and better wages will need the collective strength and awareness of the women's community when they recognize their role in the market chain.

H&M could stipulate conditions upon the suppliers to re-organize work for a competitive market incorporating the perceptions and needs of women workers, the sub contractors and their interests which are mutually linked.

The distribution and collection of material could shift from the contractor's home to the work centre. This would indirectly take the load off the women in the household and they would formally be recognized for the invisible work they do at present.

Recommendations of strategies for the betterment of life in the village and enhancement of social value additions are as follows:

Education - Affiliation with Aligarh Muslim University to gain official recognition for the "madarsaah" to develop their classes upto high school for boys and girls is recommended. H&M could begin with a small stipend for all children in the family below the age of 16yrs. who are enrolled in the village school. Parents would on their part contribute to the salary of the school teacher and monitor the running of the school. Similarly day care could be organized to free the girl children to go to school.

Health being a fundamental component of the production quality and output will need attention. A base line data for ensuring minimum health standards could mobilize community action which H&M would match in the form of health insurance. For instance the central government scheme for group insurance for health @200/- per person per annum in groups of 25 families could be experimented.

Toilets – The basic lack of toilets and sewer system is the most unhygienic and inconvenient, aspect of the villages life. Immediately needed and possible to implement with peoples participation are septic tanks and toilets and an underground sewer system. This would have to be initiated by the youth/men with resource inputs from a development agency such as UNDP in order to combat the flies and mosquitoes.

Health Awareness – Self Help activities on women's health and reproductive rights could be introduced by training 4 local women as community health workers (CHW). These CHW would initiate and indirectly monitor the environment and sanitation programme.

Micro Credit Programme could be facilitated to initiate small group formation of 10-15 members, which would give the women control over their earnings/savings and make them conscious of how much they actually earn individually.

The responsibility of facilitating and supervision of the above two activities could be entrusted to an NGO.

Summary

H&M must take the social responsibility to better the life of those who produce their goods and earn them profits.

H&M must ensure steady and sustained work in order to ensure a productive workforce capable of quality work.

A code of conduct for the business house i.e. suppliers, and contractors must be charted and implemented to ensure fair rates of payment in the costing of products. Workers must have the right to know what they will be paid for piece rate work.

A monitoring cell - a community watch group-must ensure that homebased workers receive due payment for every unit of work done.

The creative potential of the women workers needs to be further explored, and an attempt to create avenues to include women workers in making decisions that concern them should be made.

ACTION INDIA

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