



# Breaking the Silence: The Plight of Women Workers in the Home-based Bangle Industry of Firozabad City.

**Vishwadeep Singh<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Anoop Kumar Bhartiya<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Department of Social Work, University of Lucknow, Lucknow, India

<sup>2</sup>Professor, Department of Social Work, University of Lucknow, Lucknow, India

## ABSTRACT

Firozabad is also called the "Glass City" or "Kanch Nagri," is renowned for its glass industry, especially its bangle and other glassware items like jars, bottles, and chandeliers. Much of the bangle production occurs in home-based units, which are largely run by women. Though they play a vital role, these women are economically insecure, exploited at work, and denied legal protection. This paper highlights the issues confronting home-based women workers in the bangle manufacturing sector, including their socio-economic status, health risks, and legal exclusions. Due to the informal nature of this sector, the women workers are denied protection under labour laws, minimum wage requirements, and social security provisions, making them susceptible to further exploitation and hazardous working conditions. Also, the lack of unions and an organized advocacy structure shows that their rights are hardly addressed. This paper encompasses the information from the government reports, policy documents, research publications within the time frame from 2001 to 2024. The paper brings to light the imperative of policy interventions in terms of acknowledging and safeguarding the rights of these marginalized women workers. These problems need stronger laws, active enforcement, and an effort to better the working conditions of women in Firozabad's glass industry. Recommendations can be used to inform policymakers, labour unions, and non-governmental organizations for the purpose of enhancing the working conditions of home-based bangle workers. Advocacy for the ratification of ILO Convention C-177 is crucial for guaranteeing equitable wages and social security.

**Keywords:** Firozabad, Home-based workers, Bangle Industry, Women workforce, Labour laws

## INTRODUCTION

Firozabad is a district of Uttar Pradesh, which is also called Glass city or Kanch Nagri across the globe. It is renowned for its glass industries that are involved in manufacturing glass bangles and glass items such as jars, wine bottles, light lamps, glass toys, chandeliers and many more. It is also referred to as Suhag Nagri. The majority of the Firozabad city workforce are engaged in the work of manufacturing glass bangles in factories and home-based manufacturing units. Home-based workers, as per the ILO, are those who perform paid work from their home-based settings and can be self-employed and are out of the social security net. The Bangle industry is in the informal or unorganized sector which is being represented by daily wage earners and contract workers. As per the National Human Rights Commission report, it is estimated that there are 100 million home-based workers and over half of it is in South Asia with 80 % women. In India, the predominant part of the unorganized sector is controlled by the women population. Though the bulk of the bangle making work is performed in factories, the shape is imparted at home-based bangle making units by using some processes such as Bhangar (coloured broken bangle sorting), Sadai (bangles leveling), Jurai (bangles joining after leveling), Jhalai (bangles straightening with the help of fire flame), Cuttai (designing of the bangles by cutting), Mudai (designing of the bangles with the assistance of a clipper and fire flame), Hill (gold polishing), Chaklai (bangle sorting), Coloring, Beads decoration. Home-based bangle industries have no organized industrial setup with a lot of people particularly the women. Unavailability of education, cultural taboo, lack of alternatives, highly increasing price of commodities are a few of the causes which are behind the involvement of women in the unorganized sector at large. Women have supporting roles in managing their families as they contribute to the total familial income. The involvement is maximum and is restricted to home-based work only where they experience employment insecurity, exploitation, fewer opportunities for income generation and socio-economic hardship. The units mostly rely on female labour, but the workers go unseen in official policy and statistics about labour. Their vulnerability to exploitation is increased due to the absenteeism of social security measures, low remuneration, and unsafe working conditions. This research will analyse the socio-economic status of women workers in their homes, the health hazards faced by them, and the law that does not provide them enough protection.

### Rationale of the study

Women are a major segment of India's informal sector workers, but they are underpaid, undervalued, and deprived of social security. They encounter problems like low wages, exploitation, absence of occupational, safety measures. The study is imperative to bring to the fore the conditions of women in home-based bangle units, analyse the legal and policy loopholes in their protection, promote the application of labour legislations to better their working environments, prescribe policy intervention for their socio-economic empowerment.

## OBJECTIVES

- To highlight the challenges and working conditions of women workers in home-based bangle manufacturing units.
- To know about the prevailing labour legislations and their pertinence to women home-based workers.

- To suggest recommendations regarding improvement in working environments and legal recourse.

## METHODOLOGY

- Desk review method is employed in which analysis and review of existing academic literature, government reports, and policy documents is done from the time frame 2001 to 2024 in this study.
- Data is collected through secondary sources of information like research papers on bangle industries of Firozabad, Reports by the ILO and National Human Rights Commission and policy documents on workers in unorganised sector.

## FINDINGS AND OBSERVATIONS

The participation is maximum and is limited to home-based work only where they face employment insecurity, exploitation, less income generation opportunities and socio-economic distress. The women workers in home-based bangle industries have a very significant contribution in bangle production but their contribution goes unnoticed, is mostly invisible. The primary issue is that they are deprived and exploited on grounds of benefits and their rights because they lack legal as well as social protection. Home-based bangle industries women workers are unregistered and unrecognised by any law, regulation and in any National as well as local level government's official statistics. Hence, they are not covered under labour laws and denied the benefit of accompanying privileges such as minimum wages and welfare services. They are mostly unprotected and invisible. They are forced to work in a substandard working environment for extended periods of time leading to exposure to harmful diseases and health problems such as watering and pain in eyes, joint ailments, backache, poor posture, Bronchial Asthma, skin infections and lower and upper tract respiratory disorders etc. There are no safety measures for occupation in the workplace of home-based bangle industries. There is total job and life insecurity for women workers in home-based bangle industries. On average, the work of manufacturing bangles is provided by the owners of factories on outsourcing to home-based workers where women work in various stages of bangle production. The industries based at home are classified on a piece rate basis where once a bundle of bangle is finished at any phase of bangle production, it is sent back to the middlemen or the contractors and afterwards payment is released to women employees. The rate of piece is currently 7 rupees per Toda in Sadai and 11 rupees per Toda in Jurai which are below according to subsistence rates. At times, wage deductions, overtime work without payment of extra wages and threat of dismissal is followed by the middlemen or contractors. Women workers in home-based bangle units have little autonomy in negotiating and bargaining because they fear losing the job, financial insecurity, burden on family members, illiteracy and debt. These situations compel home-based women workers to work below the minimum wage level and in deplorable working conditions which come up with serious health effects in the long run. As far as the wages by the contractors are concerned because they depend greatly on them for the job. The majority of women workers are not provided with formal contracts and are not included under labour legislations like the Minimum Wages Act (1948) and the Equal Remuneration Act (1976) because the home-based Women workers work under unorganized sector, they don't come under the labour legislation that provides guarantee of minimum wages. The standard of living of these women workers and



their families too are much below satisfactions as they earn low incomes and have unhygienic working environments leading to several health problems and diseases. Long-term low wages and absence of social protection led to poverty and deplorable living standards to these women workers. There is lack of a rightful basis for rights advocacy, occupational safety and health or wage related concerns of home-based women workers. Home-based Bangle industries unions particularly for women workers do not exist in Firozabad city. The women workers in home-based bangle industries also contribute to the overall National economy by putting their health and safety at risk. They must be identified and entitled with all the legal, health and social benefits for their well-being and rights protection. There is a need to solve the discrimination, exclusion and exploitation problems of women employed in home-based bangle industries of Firozabad. There are several laws, policies and schemes for workers of the Unorganized sector but the biggest challenge is the enforcement of these legislations for the actual cause. It is more difficult to apply the laws for the protection of rights and well-being in the case of working women in home-based bangle industries. The ILO Home Work Convention (C-177) identifies fundamental rights of home-based workers such as wages equal to at least the legal minimum wage for equal work done for the same employer, social protection, freedom to organize and associate, and non-discrimination. All these rights remain unenacted by the government of India to date. Their ratification of C-177 is key in order to acknowledge and safeguard the rights of home-based women workers. The other significant legislations concerning wages and remuneration, social security, occupational health and safety and protection are as follows: The Minimum Wages Act, 1948, The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, The Payment of Wages Act, 1936 but all these are non-operational to home based bangle industries due to their presence in informal sector. While on the other hand provisions like The Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act, 2008, National Policy on Safety, Health and Environment at Workplace, 2009, Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (ABPM-JAY), Aam Admi Bima Yojana, Atal Pension Yojana, 2015 etc. are still unknown to women workers in the city due to unawareness, bureaucratic obstacles and absence of trade unions and organisations meant especially for these women workers.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Home-based female workers in the bangle-making industry of Firozabad are essential to its production system but still subjected to economic exploitation and health hazards. The absence of specific labour laws meant for home-based women workers rendering them insecure. To overcome these challenges, it calls for legal protection, social security entitlements, and better working conditions. Subsequent research and policy measures need to empower home-based workers by collective bargaining rights and incorporation under labour laws. The results uncover acute gender discrimination and economic exclusion of women workers in Firozabad's bangle sector. In spite of their invaluable contribution, women workers are invisible in official labour policy. Lack of social security, protection against minimum wages, and occupational safety further exposes them to vulnerability. Global standards like the ILO Convention on Home Work (C-177) focus on fair wages and social protection, which India has not ratified. Effective implementation of national legislation

like the Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act (2008) is essential to bringing about an improvement in their working conditions.

## GAPS IN THE LITERATURE

- Limited empirical data on the actual working conditions of the women workers in home-based manufacturing units.
- Insufficient focus on occupational health and safety measures specific to the home-based bangle manufacturing industry.
- Need for studies in unionization and collective efforts for women home based workers.

## IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Implications can be shared with policymakers, labour unions, and non-governmental organizations involved in enhancing the working conditions of home-based bangle workers. Advocacy to ratify ILO Convention C-177 is crucial for the payment of fairly wages and social security.

## LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The research is based on secondary material, and the absence of field-based empirical evidence can restrict the level of analysis.

## SUGGESTIONS

Home-based female workers in Firozabad's bangle sector are subjected to severe exploitation and health risks due to the lack of regulation of their work. To eliminate these problems, the following measures are suggested:

- There should be legal Recognition of home-based women workers by enrolling them under labour legislations to achieve wage and employment protection.
- Payment of minimum wages should be given by the bangle businessmen by ensuring adequate remuneration through incessant government supervision and enforcement of existing legislation.
- Proper availability of occupational safety measures is mandatory at the work place along with safety protocols and medical facilities to women workers who come in contact with dangerous materials.
- Including benefits under programs such as Ayushman Bharat and pension programs for women home-based workers to ensure their social security inclusion.
- Creation of union is done which is specially meant to women workers in home-based bangle manufacturing units to give power to women workers to bargain for higher wages and working conditions.

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