

## **A STUDY ON ECONOMIC STATUS OF UNORGANISED WOMEN CONSTRUCTION WORKERS IN TENKASI DISTRICT**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The present study was carried out with women construction workers, working in the Unorganized sector. An attempt has been made in the paper to understand the socio economic condition of women labourers, nature of their work, their working conditions, wage pattern, wage discrimination and other difficulties faced by them at their work place. In order to assess the economic status of women construction worker in Tenkasi district, 56 women construction workers of Tenkasi district were randomly selected with the help of construction engineers. To analyse wage discrimination and factors influencing the wage of women construction workers in Tenkasi district, Findings show that majority of the migrant women were engaged in the construction industry and were only employed in unskilled and low paying jobs as coolies, labourers and helpers. Women were exploited to a greater degree as they were paid less Compared to men for similar nature of work hours spent on work. The conditions of work in the unorganized sector were unsatisfactory and the problems confronted by them were acute. And that their illiteracy, poverty and indebtedness forced them to work for lower wages and under unjust conditions.

**KEYWORDS:** women construction workers, working conditions, wage pattern, migrant women, Construction sector, industrial employees.

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

A great majority of people in the developing nations are under the line of poverty. They are deprived of adequate access to the basic needs of life such health, education, housing, food, security, employment, justice and equality. Issues of sustainable livelihood, lack of social and political participation of the vulnerable groups are the major problems in the developing nations. Governments have failed to guarantee people's right in the implementation level itself. People who belong to the vulnerable groups are unable to acquire and use their rights. Construction sector is the world's largest industrial employees with seven per cent of total world employment out of 28 per cent of industrial employment. Construction activity is an integral part of a country's infrastructure and industrial development.

#### **Women workers**

Let us now examine the effects of Liberalisation and globalisation on women workers. Women have been losing their jobs in the formal sector for a long time, much before the present policies were conceived. We saw in the previous section that employment in the unorganized sector has been sluggish, resulting in job losses. However, job losses among women workers in this sector took place at a time when this sector was expanding. In the 1920s, employment of women in the three traditional industries, namely, jute, cotton textile and mines, was over 20 per cent. By the 1970, the number of women workers in the three industries had been reduced to less than 5 per cent. The only industry where women were employed in large numbers is the plantation industry where they form 50 per cent of the total permanent labour force, Kolkata. Their number continued to be high in plantations as women are more efficient in plucking tea leaves.

### **Women construction workers**

Women occupy an extremely disadvantaged position in the society. They are the victims of multiple forms of oppression. This is because they are women and they are occupied in mostly exploited areas in the society. Despite the existence of various constitutional and legal provisions guarding women is employment particularly in the unorganized sector, suffer from various disadvantages relating to their working lives as well as in their home. Illiterate women engaged only in some fields like agriculture, tailoring, biscuit company and construction work form our study area. Among these fields, in the construction field which is one of the oldest activities of mankind, the chance of getting exploited and dominated is more compared to that in other fields. This is because of the dependence of female workers on male workers. Under this work women are exploited very seriously. There is wage discrimination harassment, ill treatment, etc., particularly faced by women. The main work done by the women construction workers are: - breaking stone, digging stone, mortar mixing and carrying load (Mukta, 2001).

### **STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY**

The status of women is an important factor affecting the overall development of any country. Thus, women's development is a global concern in this new millennium (Islam and Sultana, 2006). In most of the developing countries and in India as well, women issues are in the forefront. The Government of India (GOI) has taken many initiatives including provisions for equal rights of men and women, but the impact is yet to be felt. Similarly efforts are being made in other countries in this area.

Lindsay (2005) reports that "Change the Face of Construction" is an independent project in UK which encourages greater diversity across all sectors of the construction industry. It is a practical campaign to tackle issues highlighted in two of the definitive reports on construction performance. Sir Michael Latham drew attention to the industry's poor equal opportunities record, and Sir John Egan ("Rethinking Construction") drew attention to the need for greater respect for the workforce. It is felt that there is a clear need to continue to foster greater awareness among those in the industry and to promote various initiatives in order to attract more women so that skills shortage within the industry can be countered.

Women in the construction industry could be categorized in three groups:

- Women in professional technical positions like architects, engineers etc.
- Women in administrative positions like finance, HR etc.
- Women as construction labour/workforce at site

The distribution of women workforce under these three groups differs between developed and developing countries. For example, in UK, 84% of women in construction hold secretarial posts, whereas only 10% are employed in professional capacity and the remaining 6% are craft and trade level employees at site (Amaratunga et al., 2006). Whereas, in India, women construction workers constitute 25% of the construction workforce in India. Out of 32.6 million of construction workers about 8.2 million are women and of these only 0.12 million or 1.4% are engineers, architects, designers and administrators (Chittibabu, 2007), rest are construction laborers. Thus, in India studies are primarily conducted pertaining to the women of the third group which are large in number.

## **II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

**Kalpna devi and Kiran (2013)**, Construction industry provides job opportunity to large number of skilled as well as unskilled workforce. The workforces employed in the industry

have to face several difficulties at the work place. Several issues related to health, job stress, and injuries at work place are the major concern of the research among researchers. The present study is review of past research work related to the women work force employed in construction industry in India. The major focus of the study is to identify the key factors related to the status of female worker in the industry. Women work as unskilled labour and face several other difficulties in comparison to males. Sexual harassment, gender biasness, wage discrimination are the major factor due to which the working environment becomes difficult for them in the industry and women's are remains at same level of skill even after working few number of years.

**Azadeh Barati et al**, India is a traditional country and there is diversity in religions, culture and customs. Role of the women in India mostly is household and limited to domestic issues. In some cases women can find employment as nurses, doctors, teachers the caring and nurturing sectors. But even if well qualified women engineers or managers or geologists are available, preference will be given to a male of equal qualification. The present study investigated to identify the factors preventing women employees from aspiring for higher post and challenges & problems faced by women workers. Further the study try to explain the real condition of Indian working women and also make an effort to clear main problems of working women.

### **III. Statement of the Problem**

The construction industry is the single largest employees of migrant labourers, the poorest of the poor, in Indian cities." Millions of women construction workers have left their native villages to escape from extreme rural poverty and find a job in big cities. Construction industry is an integral part of a country's infrastructure and industrial development. But, it is typically a male dominated industry and presents a major challenge for equal opportunities for women. Construction industry is the key for the success of the globalization of Indian economy. Construction sector is providing employment to 7 per cent of total world employment.

Several factors responsible for their plight are indifferent attitude of the employers towards women workers, their weak bargaining power and in many cases the women workers themselves being unaware of their rights. Women constitute half of the construction workers in India as semi-skilled / skilled jobs in other industries but in the construction industry, women are employed mostly as unskilled labourers. In the construction sector most of the women are unskilled. Though there are skilled women workers are employed in other sectors, but it is very difficult to find skilled women workers in the construction sector.

Hence, an attempt is made to bring out the hidden facts in the real life of the women construction workers.

### **IV. Scope of the Study**

It is hoped that the outcome of the research work definitely would bring many policy implications relating to handloom Industry. The findings of the study would be much more useful for the Government and Policy makers to formulate strategies for the development of women construction workers.

### **V. Objectives**

The following are the objectives of the study

1. To study the socio-economic conditions of women construction workers in the study area.
2. To make a study on the working conditions of women construction workers.

3. To determine the factors that influences the wages of men and women construction workers
4. To identify the obstacles and problems faced by women construction workers mainly the exploitation of women workers and gender discrimination.

## **VI. Methodology**

The researcher used the descriptive design for this study. The research is interested in studying about women construction workers. The research purpose is to describe the problems faced by the women construction workers. The Universe for this research was taken from Tenkasi District in Tamilnadu. In this study the researcher adopted the purposive sampling method. The Universe is 56. The total Universe was taken for the research data collection as respondents. The researcher has collected data self-prepared interview schedule.

## **VII. Limitations**

1. The study has covered only one district also the findings of the study cannot be applied to other districts
2. Some of the women construction workers are hesitant to provide correct information of their salary. In such a case, it is necessary to resort indirect method for gathering information.
3. The population of construction workers is scattered hence the coverage was a major problem

## **VIII. Major Findings of the Study**

1. The number of women construction workers consists of 4-6 members and majority of the family are of nuclear type.
2. It is seen that majority of the women construction workers are interested in giving their children higher education. They send their children to Tamil Medium schools. But their children do not show much progress in their studies
3. The study reveals that are all women construction workers possessed land of their own and a house. Majority live in huts. Housing conditions are very poor.
4. Majority of the respondents are indebted to money lenders.
5. Women construction workers are prone to various health problems.
6. It is found that 74 per cent of the respondents reported to sexual harassment at work place.
7. It is evident that the overwhelming majority of women in the industry are young, being between the ages of 16-40 years.
8. It is observed that the most of the workers are married. Women of this age group have the capacity to do hard work and easily exploited and harassed by the contractors.
9. The findings revealed that about 46 per cent of respondents reported that they do not have any other option, as they are widows or abandoned by their husband, or if husband is there, he is either drunkard or unemployed, therefore to meet the basic needs of family and to support children they have to take job at site.
10. It is found that 90 per cent of women workers confirmed that the contractors do not give them any additional benefits such as a bonus.

## IX. Suggestions

1. Each and every woman has a potential in them. Motivation should be given to bring out their potentialities in other occupation. This will improve their status.
2. The critical areas of the concerns are lack of education, health care, decision making, planning process and poverty of women. To implement policies on these concerns more vigorously and strongly women's political participation should be enhanced.
3. The employment, conditions of work and service may be regulated.
4. In order to develop the living conditions of women construction workers social security and labour welfare measures may be provided.
5. Safeguard of women construction workers in health and also safety measures are very essential and much attention is needed in this regard.
6. Gender discrimination in terms of conditions of employment, wages etc may be Prohibited in order to rescue the women construction workers.
7. Minimum and equal wages should be fixed by State Government for women construction workers and wage rates should be reviewed periodically.
8. There is need to make available credit facilities with less interest to needy women construction workers to start self-employment and as a result of that women construction workers may get additional opportunity for gainful employment.
9. Conscious efforts are needed for training of female construction workers in the rural areas in alternative skills.
10. There is need to bring about some attitudinal and institutional change to remove prejudice against women construction workers and to remove the general feeling that women are suitable and fit for doing only unskilled and semi-skilled works.

## X. Conclusion

Women in the construction sector is not easy, within the industry they have to face several adverse situations such as sexual harassment, wage discriminations, injuries and deceases are the major factors due to which women's even though works hard, but lack behind the men and remains unskilled even after hardship a lot of years. The scenario only can be changed with the government intervention, through implementing the policies strictly. Stem action has to be taken against all those who harass the employees. The status of the women only can be improved when major transition in the society occurs and that can be achieved by mind set transition of every individual in the society.

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