



Socio-Economic Conditions and Challenges of Tamil Nadu's Construction Workforce

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Abstract

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This study investigates the socio-economic challenges faced by women workers in Tamil Nadu's construction sector. It highlights issues such as gender bias, poor living conditions, vulnerability, low wages, and economic instability, including savings and debt. Focusing exclusively on women, the research uncovers the significant hardships they endure, such as lack of social security, gender discrimination, and unhygienic working conditions. Data was collected from 160 women workers across four regions of Tamil Nadu (North, East, West, South) through primary sources using questionnaires, supplemented by secondary data from libraries and websites. The findings reveal substantial issues and underscore the urgent need for government intervention to secure their jobs and improve their working conditions.

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INTRODUCTION

In developing economies worldwide, the majority of the workforce is employed in the unorganized sector, which includes agriculture, dairy, small-scale industries, animal husbandry, fisheries, handlooms, and handicrafts. Women are particularly overrepresented in this sector due to factors such as lower educational attainment, limited skills, family restrictions, and a lack of suitable employment opportunities. The absence of strict regulatory frameworks in the unorganized sector means there is no comprehensive job security or standardized benefits for employees. This sector is characterized by high levels of contractual and seasonal employment, with 95% of jobs being temporary.

The construction industry stands as the largest employer in Tamil Nadu, India, and globally, second only to agriculture. It plays a crucial role in the infrastructure and industrial development of the country, significantly contributing to economic and social life by creating substantial employment opportunities and fostering growth in other sectors through backward and forward linkages. The growth of the construction industry is essential for the healthy development of the economy. Following the separation of Tamil Nadu, the construction sector recorded the highest growth rate in job generation over the last two years, doubling its share in total employment in the state.

Despite its importance, the construction sector falls under the unorganized economy. Unorganized labor comprises workers who are unable to organize for their common interests due to constraints like the casual nature of employment, ignorance, illiteracy, and the small, scattered size of establishments. Modernization and industrialization have significantly impacted the construction industry, often involving migrant workers who seek better employment and living conditions. Both skilled and unskilled migrant workers are essential for completing numerous construction projects.

Construction workers face numerous challenges, including mistreatment and discrimination. Article 19 of the Indian Constitution guarantees individuals the freedom to move, reside, and earn a livelihood anywhere in the country. However, poverty, unemployment, and helplessness force many to migrate from their places of origin to work under extremely difficult conditions. The construction sector, a major contributor to GDP, employs a substantial workforce in Tamil Nadu, but these workers encounter numerous daily hardships.

Previous studies have highlighted various aspects of the lives of construction workers. For instance, research on the wages and working conditions of construction workers in Madurai city reveals issues related to migration, recruitment, wage payment methods, differential working conditions, legislative protection, and socio-economic characteristics (Jesudoss, 1990). Another study on employment relationships in Nairobi, Kenya, shows that informal construction workers, mostly young men under 45, work under harsh conditions without formal employment contracts, social security, or health insurance, and face numerous health hazards (Mitullah & Wachira, 2003).

Migrant construction workers often lead nomadic lives, seldom returning to their native villages. They travel with their families, living in temporary shelters near work sites, and engage in various large-scale construction projects. These workers, as part of the unorganized workforce, remain among the most exploited groups even decades after independence. Illiteracy and lack of skills further limit their opportunities, making them vulnerable to exploitation.

This study aims to analyze the challenges faced by construction workers in Tamil Nadu, where the booming construction business attracts a large migrant workforce. By addressing the issues faced by these workers, this research seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on labor rights and the socio-economic conditions of construction workers, highlighting the need for improved policies and interventions to enhance their well-being and job security.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The socio-economic conditions of women construction workers in Tamil Nadu and other parts of India have been extensively studied, revealing a myriad of challenges and hardships they face in their daily lives.

R. Rajarathinam (2001) conducted a study on Dalit unorganized workers in the rural areas of Tirunelveli District, Tamil Nadu. He highlighted the critical issues of illiteracy and poor living and working conditions among these workers. This study underscores the entrenched

socio-economic disadvantages faced by Dalit workers, which perpetuate a cycle of poverty and marginalization.

Dr. B. Ravi Kumar (2013) examined the status of women construction workers, noting that many are illiterate, widows, and sole earners from depressed classes and low-income families, compared to their male counterparts. This study sheds light on the severe gender disparities and the additional burdens borne by women workers, including the lack of educational opportunities and socio-economic support.

M. Keerthana and Dr. J. Godwin Prem Singh (2014) emphasized the need for increased awareness about the issues faced by women construction workers in Trichy District. They argued that addressing these issues could improve the workers' standard of living and overall well-being. Their study suggests that systemic changes and equalizing socio-economic factors could significantly reduce the problems encountered by these women.

Dr. Sandhya et al. (2015) identified gender bias and sexual harassment as prevalent issues for women workers in Bengaluru's construction industry. The study also highlighted various health hazards and socio-cultural implications that limit opportunities for these women, illustrating the hostile and unsafe working environments they endure.

Dr. K.A. Rajanna (2015) conducted a study on 300 women construction laborers in Chikmagalur District, Karnataka. He advocated for the Government of India to provide equal rights and opportunities to both genders, emphasizing the need for specific provisions for the protection and welfare of working women. Rajanna's study calls for socio-economic and cultural development to empower women, enabling them to become self-reliant and confident.

S. Rasheedha Banu (2017) focused on 36 respondents from Mannachanallur Taluk, Trichirappalli District, highlighting major workplace issues for women construction workers, such as the absence of social security, low wages, sexual harassment, and gender discrimination. Banu's study pointed out that ignorance and illiteracy, along with the small and scattered size of establishments, contribute to the insecure work environment.

Sarika Patel and Rameshwari Pandya (2017) revealed the dismal economic and social conditions of women construction workers. Their study found that these women experience frequent unemployment, high vulnerability, and limited economic and social mobility. The work available to them is often poorly paid, unhealthy, demeaning, and insecure, contributing to a significant burden of both income-generating and household responsibilities.

Dr. I. Pandi Devi (2018) highlighted the dual role women workers play, balancing outside employment with household management, often under violent and harsh conditions. The lack of education and low family income compels many women to seek jobs in the unorganized sector to support their families. Devi's study pointed out the absence of social security and healthcare benefits for these workers.

Dr. Sandhya et al. (2018) reiterated the issues of gender bias and sexual harassment in the construction industry in Bengaluru, along with various health hazards and socio-cultural challenges that limit opportunities for women workers.

These studies collectively paint a comprehensive picture of the socio-economic struggles faced by women construction workers in India. They highlight the urgent need for policy

interventions and welfare measures to improve their living and working conditions, ensure gender equality, and provide adequate social security and healthcare benefits.

Research purposes: (1) Examine the socio-economic status of construction workers in Tamilnadu; (2) Examine the current conditions of workers in India and Tamilnadu; (3) Find out the problems and challenges faced by construction workers in India and Tamilnadu; (4) Analyze the sectoral approach with special reference to the construction industry in Tamilnadu.

Research Hypothesis:

1. Objective 1: To examine the socio-economic status of construction workers in Tamilnadu.

- Hypothesis 1: The socio-economic status of construction workers in Tamilnadu is at a lower level compared to workers in the formal sector.

- Hypothesis 2: Education and skills have a positive correlation with socio-economic status of construction workers in Tamilnadu.

2. Objective 2: Assess current conditions of workers in India and Tamilnadu.

- Hypothesis 3: Working conditions of construction workers in Tamilnadu and India as a whole are worse compared to working conditions in the formal sector.

- Hypothesis 4: Construction workers in Tamilnadu face worse working conditions compared to construction workers in other parts of India.

3. Objective 3: Find out the problems and challenges faced by construction workers in India and Tamilnadu.

- Hypothesis 5: Construction workers in Tamilnadu face greater problems of low wages, unsafe working conditions and lack of social security compared to workers in other sectors.

- Hypothesis 6: Gender discrimination and sexual violence are significant problems faced by women workers in the construction sector in Tamilnadu and India.

4. Objective 4: Analyze the sectoral approach with special reference to the construction industry in Tamilnadu.

- Hypothesis 7: The sectoral approach adopted in the construction industry in Tamilnadu has not been effective in improving the socio-economic conditions of workers.

- Hypothesis 8: Government policies and programs specific to the construction sector in Tamilnadu have a significant positive influence on the welfare of construction workers.

METHODOLOGY

This research is descriptive and analytical. This is an empirical study based on primary and secondary data. Data is collected from various Government of India reports, such as All India Census Report 2011, Economic Survey of India (Various Issues), Plan Documents (Various Issues), and Standing Committee Reports (Various Issues).

1. Research Design:

- This study uses a descriptive design to provide an overview of the socio-economic status of construction workers in Tamilnadu.

- An analytical approach is used to analyze data and draw conclusions about the problems and challenges faced by construction workers.

2. Data Source:

- Primary data will be collected directly from sources such as field surveys, interviews and observations.

- Secondary data will be obtained from the previously mentioned Indian government reports, as well as from academic literature and other reliable sources of information.

3. Data Collection Techniques:

- Primary data will be collected through a field survey using a questionnaire specifically designed to collect information about socio-economic status, working conditions and problems faced by construction workers.

- Secondary data will be obtained through analysis of government reports and study of relevant literature.

4. Data Analysis:

- Data will be analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. Statistical analysis such as regression, frequency analysis, and descriptive analysis will be used to analyze quantitative data, while thematic analysis will be used to analyze qualitative data.

- The results of the analysis will be used to identify patterns, trends and important findings related to the socio-economic status and working conditions of construction workers in Tamilnadu.

5. Validity and Reliability:

- To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, techniques will be applied such as selecting representative samples, using valid and reliable measurement instruments, and verifying data through different sources if possible.

By using this approach, it is hoped that the research will provide an in-depth understanding of the socio-economic status and working conditions of construction workers in Tamilnadu, and be able to identify effective solutions to improve their welfare.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

CONSTRUCTION WORKERS IN INDIA

The scale and growth of regional disparities has been a subject of much concern and debate, particularly since the post liberalization period. One of the indicators of such disparity is the ratio between the highest and lowest state per capita income, which, represented by Punjab and Bihar in the period 1980–83 and Maharashtra and Bihar in the period 1997–2000, witnessed a rise from 2.6 to 3.5 over the same period (Srivastava, 2003). The same ratio, represented more recently by again Bihar and Haryana, further rose to 4.78 for the period 2008–10. As the state has moved away from the elements of regional policy to encourage agglomeration economies in and around the pre-existing growth centres in advanced regions, such regional disparities have only got accentuated in the post-reform period (Srivastava, 2009b).

Almost one-third of India's population still lives below the poverty line and a large proportion of poor live in rural areas. A great majority of rural poor are concentrated in the rain-fed parts of eastern and central India, which continue to have low productivity in agriculture. Generally, the rural poor in India possess meager physical and human capital and also tend to be concentrated among the socially deprived groups such as SC and ST and religious minority such as Muslims. In 2004-05, scheduled castes and tribes accounted for 80 percent of the rural poor although their share in total population is smaller. As some of these resource-poor regions fall behind in their capacity to support populations, poor households participate extensively in migration (Connell et al., 1976). India has a long history of internal migration, with urban pockets like Kolkata and Mumbai receiving rural labour mainly from the labour catchment areas like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Orissa in the east and some parts of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka in the South (NCRL, 1991; Joshi and Joshi, 1976; Dasgupta 1987).

Though such pattern of migration continued unabated even after independence, increased labour mobility and migration have become more prominent in the national economy in the recent years. That migration has been a significant livelihood strategy for poor households has been confirmed by some more recent studies. The importance of migration as a livelihood strategy has, however, been belied by official statistics such as Population Census and NSSO, which grossly underestimate some migration flows such as temporary, seasonal, and circulatory flows, both due to conceptual and empirical difficulties. However, a closer examination of migration pattern from the perspective of poverty and livelihood requires a focus on temporary and short-duration migration, because such migrants lack stable employment and sources of livelihood at home. Moreover, the socio-economic profile of the temporary/ seasonal migration is very different from the other migrants, as most of them are more likely to be from socially deprived and poorer groups, have low levels of education, and are more likely to be engaged in casual work. Data from the migration survey carried out by NSSO in 2007/08, though poor in coverage, indicates some broad patterns of such short-duration migration. According to the

survey, more than two-thirds of short-duration migration involves migration to urban areas, with 45.1 percent of them migrating to other states, of which 8.6 percent is to rural areas and 36.5 percent to urban areas in destination states (Srivastava, 2011a).

Some micro surveys also attest to both high incidence and growth of seasonal and circular migrants, while estimates based on macro surveys put these figures in the range of 80 to 100 million (Deshingkar and Akter 2009; Srivastava 2011a, c). A number of detailed empirical studies suggest that in the out-migration endemic rural areas of Central and tribal regions, Andhra Pradesh, North Bihar, Eastern Uttar Pradesh, etc, the incidence of households with at least one out-migrant ranges from 30 percent to 80 percent (Srivastava 2011a). However, not many of these studies traced the migrants to their workplace or from workplace to the source area to better understand the factors that trigger such migration and the impact such migration has on poverty. Most of these micro studies have at best given a static picture that gives a one-point snapshot of the impact of migration on poverty either in the source area or at destination. According to latest NSSO estimates, the construction sector is one of the most predominant sectors employing labour migrants and is also a sector which has seen a rapid increase in employment in the recent years. The highest percentage of short-duration migrants work in the construction sector (36.2%), followed by the agriculture-related sector (20.4%), and manufacturing (15.9%) (Srivastava 2011a). Both in terms of the share in GDP and particularly, the people employed, the importance of the construction sector has increased significantly in the recent years.

In the last decade between 2000/01 and 2012, the GDP of India's construction industry grew on average by 14.58 percent annually, making the sector the third-fastest growing industry, after other industries such as "trade, hotel, transport and communications" and "finance, insurance, real estate and business" (RBI, 2012). Despite the large number of workers involved, we have limited information on the impact of such large-scale migration on the well-being of workers in particular and on rural poverty in general. The lack of evidence, both at the macro and micro level, belies enormous significance that migration to the sector holds for rural livelihoods. We identify this as an important gap in the literature. With stagnation in employment in both agriculture and manufacturing in India, it is all the more important to see what impact such migration entails for the migrants in both source and destination areas.

Given that many of these seasonal/temporary migrants are undercounted in data and are invisible in policy discourse, this study of migrant workers engaged in the construction sector can present an important case study of what is happening to the vast mass of informal workers who migrate from resource-poor areas in search of livelihood. Using survey-based evidence collected in two phases from destination and source areas, the present study aims to fill the gap in the literature through an in-depth study of both living and working conditions at the destination areas and the impact of such migration at the source areas. To begin with, India is the ninth-largest construction market, with a share of 3.3 percent in the global construction market and is set to become the third-largest construction market by 2020 (Global Construction 2020, 2013). The sector is extremely diverse. While a sizeable part of the construction activity is very small scale, and is in the unorganized sector, larger scale construction activity is organized by firms in the private and public sector. Most of the construction activity is organized in sites in the

form of projects. The present study focuses on labour migrants in the construction sector and the impact of such migration on poverty, both at destination and source.

The paragraph highlights the scale and growth of regional disparities in India, particularly since the post-liberalization period. Despite economic progress, a significant portion of India's population, particularly in rural areas, still lives below the poverty line. Rural poverty is concentrated in regions with low agricultural productivity, such as eastern and central India. Socially deprived groups like Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and religious minorities like Muslims are disproportionately affected by poverty.

Internal migration has been a significant livelihood strategy for poor households in India. However, official statistics often underestimate the extent of migration, especially temporary and short-term migration, which involves socially deprived and poorer groups engaged in casual work. The construction sector emerges as one of the predominant sectors employing labor migrants, with a high percentage of short-duration migrants working in this sector. Despite its significance in terms of employment and contribution to GDP growth, there is limited information on the impact of large-scale migration on the well-being of construction workers and rural poverty.

The lack of evidence underscores the importance of studying migrant workers in the construction sector, particularly given their invisibility in official data and policy discourse. This study aims to address this gap by providing an in-depth analysis of the living and working conditions of construction workers in both destination and source areas. Given the sector's diversity, ranging from small-scale unorganized activities to larger organized projects, understanding the impact of migration on poverty is crucial for informing policy decisions and improving the well-being of migrant workers.

Overall, the paragraph highlights the urgent need to examine the socio-economic dynamics of construction workers in India and the implications of migration on poverty alleviation efforts.

CONSTRUCTION WORKERS IN TAMILNADU

Due to lack of employment, low wage payment impoverished conditions are some of the factors behind the concentration of migrant workers in the cities. These migrant construction workers lead a very miserable life because of the absence of job security as well as opportunity for better jobs. In India there are 30 million of people are seasonal migrant labourers. The State Government has not conducted any survey to know the number of people going to other States in search of work; but gathers information on migrant labourers only through the licensed worker-contractors. Under the Tamilnadu Building and Construction Workers Welfare Board 17,95,145 construction workers have been registered till now. The migration pattern studied in this paper is predominantly inter-state in nature, which is determined by the fact that 21% of total migrants move within the state to find work. The important destination the coastal region is Madurai, Theni. This along with Cuttack and Puri compose of 84% of intra-state migration from different regions. These migrated workers basically work as daily labourers in different construction site. Especially, in the Madurai district they are hired by the contractors from the labour congregation points for daily work with a fixed payment and some other women are hired as domestic help in households (Tamilnadu State Migration Profile, July 2014). Moreover, the workers are not registered and the absence of documentary evidence restrains them from accessing measures for social security, pension and insurance from the Construction Welfare Board etc. Within a very

limited income they don't have any savings, investments and remittance and are also deprived of basic amenities like sanitation, clean drinking water, electricity, shelter and a safe environment. Both the women and children face additional vulnerabilities in relation to health, safety, nutrition and hygiene. Basically, the impact is seen on the children as due to seasonal migration, they are deprived of education, exposed to the risky work environment and significantly limits the overall development of the child disallowing them a better future than their parents. Unfortunately, no attention has been paid to the plight of the migrant workers despite the prevalence of these ubiquities.

Construction workers Problems

Labour Productivity

Construction labour productivity is having importance to check the output for given input in the form of payment, social security schemes. By doing micro-measures of construction labour productivity indicate improvement and some macro-measures indicate otherwise, the opportunity for improving construction labour productivity clearly exists. The way to find opportunities for construction labour productivity improvement is to identify which factors are affecting it. Factors which are the construction labour productivity is related to these variables management, labour, Government, contracts, owner characteristics and financing. Similarly the American Association of Cost Engineers defines productivity as a relative measure of labour efficiency, either good or bad, when compared to an established base or norm. and rectified the factors affecting labours productivity in construction planning. It is difficult to calculate absolute value of labour productivity by analyzing the information from varies sources. And the outcome is adequate coordination, union agreements, restrictive work practices, Absenteeism, Delays, Social Characteristics, environmental rules, climate and fixed price, unit cost i.e. payment to the labour.

Nature of Working Profession:

Now we are in the twenty-first century, many of us would dispute that the construction industry has a poor image. In the scenes of devastation as buildings collapse, numbers of accidents on construction sites, corruption in the compensations and corruption in construction itself. All of these problems contribute to the poor image of the industry in the eyes of its clients and the public at large also contribute to the poor image of the industry in the eyes of its workforce, or potential workforce. The poor image of the construction industry is generally thought to stem from the nature of the work, which is often described as dirty, difficult and dangerous. But the real reason why construction work is so poorly regarded has much more to do with the terms on which labour is recruited than the Nature of the Work Itself. For many construction workers around the world the duration of employment have always been a problem. And it is been temporary in nature which cause instability, insecurity in labour. The outsourcing of labour through subcontractors and other intermediaries is now the fad in our country. It means that work in construction has become increasingly temporary and insecure, and workers' protection has been reducing at large numbers are excluded from social security schemes. The

increase in the practice of employing labour through subcontractors has also had a profound effect upon occupational safety and health and it has undermined collective bargaining agreements and training provision.

Project Delay Reasons:

The construction industry is one of the main sectors that provide important ingredient for the development of an economy. However, many projects experience extensive delays and thereby exceed initial time and cost estimates. The wealth of any country is gauged by its performance in infrastructure provision through its construction industry. The construction industry is large, volatile, and requires tremendous capital outlays. For developing economies, it means that much of the national budget on infrastructure development. On the other hand, delayed payments, financial processes and difficulties on the part of contractors and clients, Labour Disputes, Labour strikes materials procurement, changes in drawings, staffing problems, equipment unavailability, Poor Supervision, and Poor Coordination on site, Rates of accidents these are found to be the major causes of schedule delays. The Reasons for the delay in construction projects material shortage, they are: (a) Machinery fail-down; (b) Absentee of construction labour; (c) Owner - Contractor – labour dispute; (d) Accidents on construction site; (e) Financial shortage.

Accident on Construction Site:

The construction industry is generally thought to stem from the nature of the work, which is difficult and dangerous. And the main person who is actually executing the project is in maximum risk and danger to his life. Every year rate of accident on construction site is regular which 5.2 percentage of total accidents is and minimum 11,614 fatal accidents must be occurring in Indian construction industry. In other way, on an average 38 (11,614/300 working days in a year), fatal accidents occur per day in Indian construction sector. As the number of accident are more than that directly effects on the project duration, and cost of project also cost the associated with the accident and crating the faire of accident in the eyes of labours. Also, the provision of compensation is extra burden on the construction project. And it comes out in the form of shortage of labour and strikes on the construction work.

CONCLUSION

The contribution of Tamil Nadu's construction workforce to economic growth activities is significant, yet often overlooked. Predominantly comprised of young migrants escaping poverty, these workers face numerous challenges such as poor living conditions, limited education, and skills. Consequently, they lack proper representation and remain marginalized from public services and opportunities for advancement in the burgeoning economy. This exclusion perpetuates their vulnerability to exploitation and discrimination. To rectify this situation, interventions are necessary to ensure the safety, security, and entitlements of construction workers, both at their destinations and places of origin. One crucial step involves raising awareness among the workers about their rights, including those related to health, education, and

legal protection. Additionally, addressing the specific issues faced by women in the construction workforce is paramount. By sensitizing the workers to their vulnerabilities and empowering them with knowledge about their rights, interventions can help mitigate exploitation and discrimination. Moreover, efforts to improve living and working conditions, along with access to education and skills training, are essential for enhancing the socio-economic well-being of Tamil Nadu's construction workforce. In conclusion, acknowledging the invaluable contribution of construction workers to economic growth and implementing targeted interventions to address their challenges are imperative steps towards fostering inclusivity and ensuring equitable opportunities for all members of society. Only through such concerted efforts can Tamil Nadu's construction workforce truly thrive and contribute to the state's sustainable development.

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