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**NATIONAL JOURNAL**

ISSN : 23213914

Volume : II

A Multidisciplinary Indexed National Research Journal

## SCENARIO OF FEMALE WORKERS IN CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

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### ABSTRACT:

*In India, the construction industry is the second largest and a fast-growing sector. Transnational companies have been competing in the construction industry since the mid-1990s, engaging in both large public-sector infrastructure projects and private sector industrial projects (Jhabvala and Kanbur 2002).*

*India's construction labor force is estimated at 30 million people; about half are women. There has been a reduction of demand for unskilled labor since mid-1990s; one estimate suggests 1.5 million jobs are lost per year (Jhabvala and Kanbur 2002).*

*Women account for half (51%) of the total construction labor force. Women workers are almost exclusively unskilled, casual, manual laborers: carrying bricks, cement, sand, and water digging earth, mixing cement, breaking stones*

*Keywords: Women, Employment, Unemployment, Construction Industry*

### I. INTRODUCTION

In India, the construction industry is the second largest and a fast-growing sector. Transnational companies have been competing in the construction industry

since the mid-1990s, engaging in both large public-sector infrastructure projects and private sector industrial projects (Jhabvala and Kanbur 2002).

India's construction labor force is estimated at 30 million people; about half are women. There has been a reduction of demand for unskilled labor since mid-1990s; one estimate suggests 1.5 million jobs are lost per year (Jhabvala and Kanbur 2002).

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Women workers are almost exclusively unskilled, casual, manual laborers: carrying bricks, cement, sand, and water digging earth, mixing cement, breaking stones.

## **II. FEMALE WORKERS AND CONSTRUCTION WORK**

It is a fact that all female workers perform dual roles of production and reproduction. Their work goes unrecognized because they do a variety of jobs daily which does not fit into any specific 'occupation'. Most of them are involved in arduous household work. Although female work for longer hours and contribute substantially to family income, they are not perceived as workers by either the female themselves or data collecting agencies and the government. To understand the issue of occupational health problems of female, it is necessary to make a detailed study of the female's work in terms of the actual

activity undertaken, the hours of work and the extent of remuneration received.

The so-called housewife is already doing a single shift. If a female also works outside home, she is consistently working a double shift. When children or family members are ill, she does three shifts day after day. On an average, female work much longer hours than men. According to International Labor Organization (ILO), 2/3rd of the working hours around the world are worked by female because of the combination of various roles in the workplace, in the family and in the society. Most often, the women's work remains invisible but it contributes a major portion to the world economy.

The rate of growth of female construction workers has been large than male construction workers. The construction sector observed 3.55% of the female workforce in 1971 in class 1 cities. In most of the cities Guntar, Gaya, Kathar, Bilaspurm, Indore, Murwara, Puri, Sambalpur, Cochin, Rourkela, Bharatpur, Bhilwara, Bareli, Farookhabad, Mirzapurcum-Vindiyachal and Muzaffarnagar, rate of growth of female construction workforce over the decade 1971-81 was 2.35%. This has gone up to 4.04% in 1981. The corresponding percentages for male workers are 3.50 and

4.43 respectively. The composed annual growth rate of female construction workers has been 6.33 as opposite to 5.34% of males. The female's intensity was 9.098% in 1981. The rate of growth in a large number of cities is 152 out of 179 but that could have been because of the reason started low from lower in absolute terms in 1971. In other words, there were more women relative to men in the construction sector in 1981 as compared to 1971 (Source EPW March 11, 1989. Quoted by Arup Mitra Swapnal).

### **III. PATTERN OF EMPLOYMENT FOR FEMALES**

The pattern of employment for females is very different among different countries: In developed countries, most of the females are employed in white collar jobs or as semiskilled operatives in manufacturing industries. In USA in 1975, there were 37 million women workers (46.3% of all women) and in 1995 this figure is around 60%. In India on the other hand, according to 1981 census, workforce participation by females was barely 15% (main workers) as against 51.6% amongst males. According to the 1991 census, the participation of female workers has increased to 16.03 % (main workers). In addition, 6.24% of females have been shown as marginal workers and the

remaining females (305.2 million) are shown as a non-working population (Indian Labor Statistics, 1994, Labor Bureau, Ministry of Labor, Shimla (1996). The 1991 census also shows that of these 16.03% main female workers, 80.8% are employed in agriculture, 3.5 % in household industries, 4% in other industries, 0.3% in mining and quarrying, 0.6 % as construction workers and only 10.8% in other services.

However, there is gross underestimation of female's work in this data. Almost 30-40% of non-working females are actually marginal workers. A large number of these marginal female workers are engaged in occupations in order to supplement family income in various ways such as, collection of firewood and cow dung, maintenance of kitchen gardens, tailoring, weaving and teaching. Moreover, inadequate attention has been paid to 'unpaid family labor' and household work.

In India, most of the working females are employed in the unorganized sector, which includes agricultural laborers, workers in traditional village and cottage industries, migrants to the cities in domestic service, day laborers, street vendors etc.

When it comes to female employment, however, the trends revealed by statistical

analysis are more mixed. The construction sector accounts for a significant share of women's participation in the labor force. In this sector, women can create their own jobs. All over the world, self-employment provides some with a means to add the income to their family and helps ease unemployment. It makes it easier for women to combine family responsibilities and unpaid subsistence work with income earning. The nature and character of employment in this sector although manual to some extent, also requires some skill for efficient management. Despite the unpredictability, women are attracted to this sector due to the severe absence of alternative employment (Murali Manohar Sobha and Jhanaradhana Rao). Mostly the women workers are classified as contract labor and casual labor. A large number of women workers are employed in the construction industry.

In construction under the prevailing WTO regime, the essential requirement of global tendering has facilitated the entry of many large companies in the Indian construction scene in a big way. The presence of some of these companies is increasingly visible in many infrastructure projects being undertaken under government funding as well as under bilateral/multilateral assistance arrangements with increased mechanization, there would be massive

displacement of labor in nearly all construction operations. Women labor would be completely eliminated from the main operations in which they have been traditionally deployed, namely, soil digging and carrying, carrying inputs in concrete curing and brick carrying.

Females form an important constituent of labor force in India. According to the information provided by the office of Registrar General & Census Commissioner of India, the Census 2011 shows that the total number of female workers in India is 149.80 million and female workers in rural and urban areas are 121.8 and 28.0 million respectively. Out of total 149.80 million female workers, 35.90 million females are working as cultivators and another 61.50 million are agricultural laborers. Of the remaining female workers, 8.55 million are in household industry and 43.79 million are classified as other workers. As per Census 2011, the work participation rate for women is 25.51% as compared to 25.63% in 2001. The work participation rate of women has reduced marginally in 2011 but there is an improvement from 22.27% in 1991 and 19.67% in 1981. The work participation rate for women in rural areas is 30.02% as compared to 15.44% in the urban areas. Given in the following Table 1.1 Sonia Gurjao in her research

paper titled, “The Changing Role of Women in the Construction Workforce”, published by, “The CIOB (The Chartered Institute of Building, Berkshire)” has

mentioned that in UK the construction industry currently accounts for 10% of the workforce.

| Population/Workers    | Persons |                | Male         | Female    |
|-----------------------|---------|----------------|--------------|-----------|
| 1                     | 2       |                | 3            | 4         |
| Population            | Total   | 1,21,05,69,573 | 62,31,21,843 | 58,74,47, |
| Workers               |         | 48,17,43,311   | 33,18,65,930 | 14,98,77, |
| Percentage of workers |         | 39.79          | 53.26        | 25.51     |
| Population            | Rural   | 83,34,63,448   | 42,76,32,643 | 40,58,30, |
| Workers               |         | 34,85,97,535   | 22,67,63,608 | 12,18,34, |
| Percentage of workers |         | 41.83          | 53.03        | 30.02     |
| Population            | Urban   | 37,71,06,125   | 19,54,89,200 | 18,16,16, |
| Workers               |         | 13,31,45,776   | 10,51,02,862 | 2,80,42,9 |
| Percentage of workers |         | 35.31          | 53.76        | 15.44     |

Source: Office of the Registrar General, India

**Table 1.1: Total Workers in India-2011 Census**

According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), construction jobs in most countries are undertaken almost exclusively by men. However, in the countries of South Asia women play an important role which consists of performing unskilled tasks for low wages. In India, it is estimated that up to 30% of the construction workforce are women. They are integrated into the building workforce at the bottom end of the industry, as unskilled workers or head-load carriers.

#### **IV. WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY**

Women play a prominent role at various levels in our economic status. They are the backbone of our nation. Both men and women are integral part of the society. Given appropriate skills and opportunities of decision making, women can prove equal or better than men. The women employment in the construction industry is very high, even though they work only as the helpers or unskilled workers. Their

skills are always at the same level and are not upgraded as they assist only the male work force at the work place. About one-third of these workers are women and children. Construction workers as a whole are included in exploited category of workers. Women workers within this category are subject to a more intensive form of job insecurity. Women occupy an extremely disadvantages 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 their home. The benefits of labor laws have not covered these women workers in many

areas especially health, maternity and social security.

### V. TYPES OF WORK OF WOMEN WORKERS IN THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR

Most of the women workers in construction sector are employed on a casual basis. They are engaged in unskilled job. Unstable employment earning and shifting of workplace are the basis characteristic of work for construction workers. The nature of work is such that there are no holidays. It is established that female workers do not get minimum wages. Female construction work can truly be described as sweat labor, and violation of laws on minimum wages as well as equal wage unskilled workers have no fixed working hours. They have to do the work what the foreman asks. The following table gives focus on the types of workers.

| SL.No. | Types of work   | Percentage (%) of engaged female workers |
|--------|-----------------|--|
| 1      | Water Feeding   | 3  |
| 2      | Material supply | 20                                       |
| 3      | Mall Mixing     | 2  |
| 4      | Brick Handling  | 38                                       |
| 5      | Stone Shaping   | 1  |
| 6      | Slab Pouring    | 14                                       |
| 7      | Other           | 2  |
| TOTAL  |                 | 80                                       |

Source: Personal field investigation

**Table 1.2: Types of Work of Women Workers in the Construction Sector**

The above table indicates that the maximum numbers of female workers (80%) were doing the job of maternal and brick supplying. Both activities are

lightweight as well as unskilled activities. Our observation is that not a single female worker was engaged in skilled job and heavy weight activity.

| Worker's Group         | Presence of Women workers |
|------------------------|---------------------------|
| Unskilled Workers      |                           |
| Weight Lifter          | High                      |
| Dust Lifter            | High                      |
| Digging Worker         | High                      |
| Watchman               | Nil                       |
| Centring Worker        | Medium                    |
| Worker's Group         | Presence of Women Workers |
| Semi - Skilled Workers |                           |
| Steal / Bender         | Nil                       |
| Concrete Mixer         | Low                       |
| Brick Layer            | Low                       |
| Glass Fitter           | Nil                       |
| Scaffolder             | Nil                       |
| Worker's Group         | Presence of Women Workers |
| Skilled Workers        |                           |
| White Washer           | Nil                       |

|                      |     |
|----------------------|-----|
| Sand Blaster         | Nil |
| Carpenter            | Nil |
| Plastering Operator  | Nil |
| Mason                | Nil |
| Tile Fitter          | Nil |
| Painter              | Nil |
| Plumber              | Nil |
| Cement Finisher      | Nil |
| Glazier              | Nil |
| Electrician          | Nil |
| Black Smith          | Nil |
| Pipe Fitter (Cement) | Nil |
| Machine Operator     | Nil |

**Table 1.3: Categories of Construction Women Workers according to types of skills**

From this table, worker's groups are divided in different occupations in construction industry like: Unskilled, Semi-Skilled and Skilled work. We can see that presence of women workers in the unskilled work, weight lifter, dust lifter and digging workers are high, watchman is nil, waterman medium and centering workers are nil. In semi-skilled work, steel bender nil, concrete mixer low, brick layer low, glass fitter nil and scaffolder nil. In skilled work, white washer, sand blast operating, plastering operating nil, mason low and tile fitter, painter, plumber (iron), cement finisher, glazier, black smith, pipe lifter (cement), machine operators are nil. We can see that unskilled women work participation are very high in construction industry, the work participation of semi-skilled women workers are poor and skilled women workers have no presence in the construction industry. Women are employed in semi-skilled jobs and sometimes in skilled jobs in other industries but in the construction industries women are unemployed mostly as unskilled laborers. Women workers in India are not considered to do skilled work like bricklaying and basic masonry.

On the other hand, there would be an increase in factory production as a will as a growth in the need for various skills such

as masons, tile fitters, painters, plumbers, cement finishers, glazier's electricians etc. Unfortunately, there are practically no women with these skills.

## **VI. CONCLUSION:**

In our country as the literacy level among women is far better than past, but still the gender biasness is a crucial factor for the discrimination. In India large group of female unskilled workers work in the rural areas as well as in urban areas. Most of them belong to the families, where family members also create obstacle for them due to lack of literacy among them. Their job is not so easy within the construction industry as they have to face several adverse situations. Female, work for longer hours and contribute substantially to family income as major male members are drunker, due to this reason they hardly contribute to the family and depend on them.

The scenario only can be changed with the government intervention, by implementing policies and other awareness program me. Though, scenario of female in construction industry has changed significantly due to societal changes.

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