

FEMALE CONSTRUCTION WORKERS IN INDIA

A STATUS REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

1. Various development cooperation programmes of the Dutch Government in India have a bearing on the construction industry.

The Royal Netherlands Embassy, New Delhi, through its Co-ordinator, Sector Women's Programmes, expressed a wish for a survey on already existing research and knowledge relating to the socio-economic situation of, particularly, female construction workers in India.

I was appointed to conduct a desk study of research papers to be found with relevant institutions and groups in Delhi. This report is its result.

2. A special word of thanks is due to the Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST) and the Mobile Creches organization in New Delhi for their valuable time and ready help.
3. A word or two on methodology.

The study, analysis and reporting, was to take place in about 3 weeks w.e.f. April 1st, 1986.

Considering the time limits I concentrated mainly on documents available with Mobile Creches and the ISST in Delhi. Mobile Creches is an NGO which provides welfare services to construction workers in Delhi and Bombay for more than 15 years now (more in Ch.6)

The ISST has recently concluded a survey of literature on a.o. female construction workers.

Only on working days I could visit both offices. Besides, there were 2 festival holidays in this period. Also, for 3 days I could not consult the documents at the ISST because of a workshop on the premises.

All this narrowed down the time margin.

On the other hand, a personal visit to one of the mobile creches in operation proved to me a time well spent.

Further I received useful information at Delhi University's School of Economics, the Ministry of Human Resources Development, the World Bank, and UNICEF, all located in Delhi. Yet I know from literature references that some 50% more documentation are available, partly outside Delhi. But, then, there was the constraint of time.

Initially, I had grouped the data under headings outlined in a first draft. In due course, and after a few discussions at the Embassy, the present chapter division emerged.

To be sure, the picture drawn is, of necessity, not complete. Much quantitative information is either confined to specific areas or not even given at all. Partly because it is not (yet) available and partly because I could not get at it. But whatever material I could collect has, I think, yielded already such qualitative information as to indicate fairly the actual status of female workers in the construction industry in India.

4. Who are female construction workers? What is their place in the wider context of the construction industry and the labour force in India? Chapter 1. tries to give some answers in a profile, followed by socio-demographic details in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 examines the working conditions including the employment pattern and wage structure. Legal aspects are the subject of Chapter 4. Chapter 5 reviews the specific problems of female construction workers and outlines some of their prospects and aspirations. Finally Chapter 6 takes a look at various welfare measures, undertaken and planned. A list of Literature References and the Appendices complete the report.

Ch.1. FEMALE CONSTRUCTION WORKERS - A PROFILE

1. "Today, or for that matter, tomorrow will be like any other day for her

She rises at the crack of dawn, that is 5.a.m. in Summer and 6.a.m. in Winter. Bathes, either under the hand pump placed at the site, or near a well or other water source, in the open air, without screen or shelter. As it is, the availability and quality of water vary from site to site. Sanitation, drains? Rubbish piles up. The small gutter dug by herself in front of the hut is overflowing. Contractor-Sahib is supposed to provide such amenities as drinking water, drainage, garbage removal. But who pays for it all?

Besides, there is no time to think of all that now. She has to be fast before the men come out. Then her 2 children of 2 and 5 have to be bathed too. And there are the clothes to be washed.

But she manages to be back in time inside her jhuggi, a makeshift hut -- like all the others a 'construction' of piles of bricks, pieces of wood or thatch for walls and roofs, sacking for a door, and the earth for flooring.

Again, contractor-sahib was supposed to provide the accommodation. But at the most he had looked the other way when she and the others had assembled their construction material at the site.

Inside the jhuggi the space is barely sufficient for a cot, a cooking place (for the not always smokeless chulha) and a few utensils. If it is wet or hot one cannot sit inside or find any other shelter.

But it is early morning now and not wet or hot. So she prepares the breakfast-cumlunch -- some rice or chapatis, potatoes and sometimes dal -- cleans the place, before she and her husband report for work at 7.a.m.

If they live on the edge of the site it costs her nothing but a walk. But those, who live further away have to spend considerable energy, if coming on foot, as also money, if commuting by bus.

Sometimes there is no work for the day. No supplies or a change in construction plans, the contractor tells them. Sometimes there is work for him but not for her. Women are less in demand. So they go home or hang around in the neighbourhood.

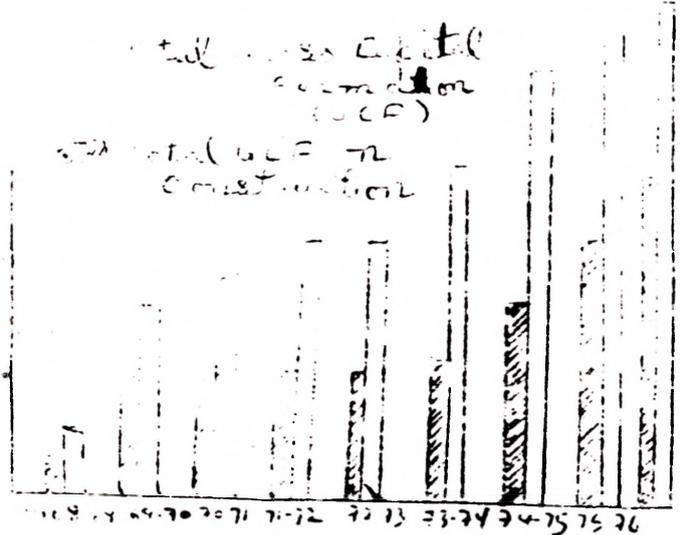
Those with a job work till 1.p.m. continuously. The food is re-heated for lunch and sometimes had thrice a day. Some neighbours who are still breast-feeding barely manage to take off some time to devote to their babies. After all, the contractor or his agent has a job to finish in time. What happens to the children who are not working along with their parent is a constant worry of the working mother, if not of the father too. Except for those lucky ones with a Mobile Creches centre operating at the very site there is no provision for day - care for the children. Yet this is also contractor-sahib's responsibility when at least 20 women are employed. But if his records show less than the number required who cares ? Who pays for it anyway ? At 5.p.m. the work is over. She can put away the basket in which she carried bricks or the hammer with which she pounded stone into chips.

The domestic chores start again. Vegetables have to be bought, rations -- if at all a card has been issued -- to be collected. And so today turns into a same tomorrow. (Adapted from an article in the Hindustan Times d.d. 9.3.86 and a text in Swaminathan, p.100).

2. The construction industry in India accounts for a major share of the national development expenditure. Construction programmes are interwoven, in a large measure, in all sectors of development: housing, transport, industry, power, irrigation, education, health and so on.
3. In successive Five-Year Plans the investment on construction has been assessed at \geq 50% of the total Plan budget (Ekalavya 1979, p.97). Where the total outlay under each plan increased, expenditure on construction has been increasing correspondingly.

The trend of contribution of construction to the total gross domestic capital formation is indicated in the graph:

(Ekalavya 1979, p.97)



4. In terms of employment the importance of the construction industry is next only to agriculture. It gives work, directly and indirectly, to millions, skilled and unskilled, men, women, in rural and urban areas. Directly i.e. on-site employment; indirectly i.e. employment through procurement of construction material and through supporting industries.

(1971 Census)
 Of the total labour force of 180.5 million:
 > 69% are in agriculture
 > 1% are in construction

5. As an earner of foreign exchange, through the financing of construction projects abroad, the industry contributes increasingly to the national economy. E.g. the Exim Bank financed projects for various countries in 1981 of >Rs.1,000/crores (National Seminar 1985, Introduction).
6. The construction industry may be characterized as labour-intensive, seasonal, temporary, and subject to a constant change in working sites for the men and women employed. It depends heavily on unskilled labour: 10 unskilled workers are needed to make 1 skilled worker productive (Mehta p.1). This means a massive mobilization of unskilled and semi-skilled, labour.

Of the total population construction workers :
 + 10% are skilled
 + 90% are unskilled/semi-skilled
 (Mehta, p.1)

This mass of labour operates in the unorganized sectors, which

- . no modern production relations
- . no laws (or enforcement thereof) for the protection of security and working conditions of the workers
- . no organizations capable of collective bargaining.

6. All women in the construction industry are working in the unorganized sector in unskilled, casual jobs.

Of the total population women:
 12% are working (Census 1971)
 20% " (Census 1981)
 Of the total population working women:
 ➤ 90% are in the unorganized sector
 (Swaminathan, p.13-15).

The growth in their numbers reflects the general growth pattern in the construction industry over the last 10, 20 years.

% women is :	(Census 1971)	(Census 1981)
Of the total labour force	➤ 17%	+ 25%
Of the total population construction workers	9%	+ 11% x)

x) The National Sample Survey 1977-78 and Ekalavya, 1979, p.99, give a range of 10 - 20 %.

"Thus it may be said that the largest proportion of working women in India is in unskilled, low-status, and low-paying jobs in the unorganized sector. They are among the neediest sections of the population and, at the same time, among the least visible and the least articulate." (Swaminathan, p.17)

7. This applies even more to the situation of female construction workers.

The present characteristics of the industry and economic pressure compel the unskilled workers to encourage their women folk to join in, sometimes even their children. Child labour, according to one report (Ekalavya 1979, p.99) is of the order of 1.5% of Census 1971: >3%.

This will weigh extra on the female child worker who, like her mother, shares in the 'triple burden' of earning, house-keeping, and looking after the rest of the family.

Add to this the discriminatory payments women workers receive till today. Their low skills and low-status jobs give them no chance to work themselves up.

Their responsibilities and constraints are far greater than those of the men. Moreover, the sheer physical exigencies of the work take their toll at an early age.

More on these and other problems in Ch.5, however,

Ch.2 SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

2.1 Migratory Labour Force

1. The large group of unskilled construction workers are almost all migrants. Most of them belong to the categories of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
2 Forms of migration are relevant here: rural - urban migration and inter-/intra-city mobility.

2. Rural - urban migration.

An overwhelming majority (> 65% according the Ekalavya, 1979, p.99) of workers hail from rural areas. Particularly in the unskilled category their number is high (no % given). This surplus force is being mobilized from States as far as Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Orissa.

Of unskilled workers:
> 75% are landless agricultural labourers
+ 20% are marginal farmers
(Ekalavya 1979, p.98).

They seek refuge from the tight economic conditions at home caused by :

- lack of work, due to :
 - . very small landholdings combined with
 - . frequent droughts and
 - . lack of adequate irrigation
 - . bad harvests
- inadequate income possibilities
- debts.

3. Almost 10% of the female workers are migrants (Mehta, p.58). Their migration is linked, to a great extent, with marriage and other family ties. They follow their husband and other male members of the family to the work site. Single women usually come in groups in any case. The bonds with home remain strong, though. At least once a year workers tend to visit their native place, whether it is for a wedding, child delivery, or farming (harvesting) activities.

Also, after the work is over or when there is no (more) work the village is their anchor and backdrop. To most of them urban work is only a temporary affair, even though it pays sometimes as much as 5 times (Mehta, p.22) as compared to their earnings at home

4. Inter-/intra-city mobility.

The camping sites are scenes of constant movement: labour going, labour coming.

This moving from site to site is mainly attributed to :

- lack of work in one working place, which in turn may have been brought about by :
 - . irregular supply of material hampering construction activities
 - . changes in building plans
 - . inadequate planning
 - . the sequence of separate jobs: every work item is carried out by different (sets of) workers. Their employment is restricted to the duration of that activity only.
 - . climatic conditions.
- shifting by the same contractor elsewhere.

5. This non-continuous, migratory, casual character of employment in construction brings a great deal of instability in the lives of both male and female workers.

There are no prospects for any permanency, either of work or of residence. There is no chance to settle down to a regular life, develop more than passing acquaintances, set up a regular home.

This is especially poignant in the case of the women and the children who are less equipped and more vulnerable to cope with the continuously changing conditions adequately.

2.2 Age Structure

The literature consulted gives only piece-meal information on the age structure. Yet a trend is clear: we are dealing with a fairly young labour force:

> 66% are in the age group of 20 - 35 years

50-75% began their first construction job
when they were 15-20 years old

(Sinha & Ranade, p.3)

2.3 Literacy

Literacy is defined here as the ability to read and write an Indian Language.

Almost 100% women in this group are illiterate as compared to 70% averagely (Mukhopadhyay, p.14).

2.4 Marital Status

Predominantly female construction workers are or have been married. One report even says 100% (Sinha & Ranade, p.9). About 90% got married when they were 15-20 years old. Their husbands are about 5 years older. Child marriages, though, are still prevalent in various parts, notably in Rajasthan.

Whether the women/girls stepped into marriage with heart and soul their parents never asked ("100% no consent taken" according to Sinha & Ranade, p.10).

2.5 Child Birth

> 80% got her first child when \leq 20 years old. On an average a women would give birth to 5 children of whom about half died at birth or in infancy. > 20% have been working up to the delivery day. If she had not she would have had no income, being a casual worker. Daily wages after all mean "no work no pay".

> 60% are working beyond the 7th month of pregnancy.
> 35% are working again < 4 weeks after delivery. (% data mainly derived from Sinha & Ranade, p.10 ff.) Almost 100% go back home when her days are full. There, if nothing else, the trusted 'dai', midwife, and the sometimes not so trusted mother-in-law are available to help her. But it is a costly affair in more than one respect. Not only does she have to forego any income during her 'maternity leave' but also does she have to spend, in cash or in kind, on the ceremonies around the newly-born.

In conclusion:

Frequent and early pregnancies make the women worker an 'experienced mother' at 20 with all the responsibilities for 2 or 3 children at that.

The high child mortality makes her a very burdened woman, physically and emotionally, with death so dramatically near her door.

The virtual absence of maternity leave facilities, to mention only this, makes her an exploited worker in an already exacting working environment.

2.6 Family composition

>> 75% of the families are nuclear with an average of 5 members: father, mother and 2 or 3 (usually small) children. Since there is no other grown-up to look after the children this task falls solely on the mother.

When she goes off to work she has to leave them to fend for themselves, often in the care of a slightly bigger sister or brother, in the absence of day-care provisions at the construction site.

Ch.3. WORKING CONDITIONS

3.1 Work/Employment

1. What do construction works consist of ?

- building activities;
 - . for housing (25% of all construction work)
 - . for commercial, educational, welfare, recreational, communicative purposes (no further % found).
- civil works i.e. the construction of road and waterways.
- the construction of water supply and sewerage systems and their treatment plants.
- supporting industries and maintenance activities.

2. Who are involved ?

1) The contracting party - also referred to as the principal employer: the Govt, the public or the private sector.

The Govt. of India, through the Central and State level Public Works Deptts -- CPWDs/SPWDs -- and the Indian Railways, is the largest principal employer (no % found). In the public sector are prominent:

- . the National Building & Construction Corporations (NBCC)
- . the National Projects Construction Corporation (NPCC)

In the private sector, there is a variety of contracting parties ranging from major business houses through co-operative housing societies to individual investors.

2) The management or implementing party, comprising:

the Chief Engineer

- . the contractor(s) for the execution of actual construction activities
- . (sub)-contractors for the supply of labour and general supervision of work
- . specialists like architects, engineering consultants.

3) The labour force which consists of :

- . the group leaders, also known as 'gangmen'
- . the workers, distributed over some 25 skilled and unskilled categories.

Workers may be employed for:

- . construction work per se
- . maintenance of works.

Skilled workers have acquired some formal training for a particular job. Their place in the hierarchy of occupations correlates with the level of technology used. The range goes from a machine operator and sand blaster down to an electrician and plasterer. Unskilled workers are also placed in a vertical order with a dust lifter on top and a watchman at the bottom.

3. What work do women do ?

As unskilled workers, often named 'coolies', they are involved in manual, frequently very strenuous jobs:

- earth work: e.g. cutting earth, carrying mud
- stone/brick work: e.g. crushing stone, un/loading bricks
- water work: e.g. operating hand pumps, drawing water from wells.
- cement work: e.g. collecting sand, making mortar
- pipe line work: e.g. laying ground pipes, constructing sewers.

Significantly, weight lifting, in some or other form, is by far (80% Subrahmanian, p.57-58) a woman's job.

4. How do they get employed ?

Through:

subcontractors : + 70%
friends/relatives: > 20%
own visit at site: + 10%
(Sinha & Ranade, p.25)

Apparently employment exchange offices which do recruit technical/skilled labour are not operative here.

Women are being recruited because they are considered:

- . cheaper
- . more docile, better disciplined
- . more open to jobs men are reluctant to accept.

Besides most of them are married to a worker who is already employed. Mehta (p.25) suggests that "recruiting wives (....) acted as some sort of insurance for the men remaining on the job.(...) Bind the male worker to his family at the construction site and the wives to their husbands, so that the couple continued to work at the site. This couple recruitment also suited the workers as it enabled the men and wives to live together at one place".

Inducement to women's employment:

- > 40% own decision
 - + 35% by relatives, other than
 - + 20% by husband
-

5. What are the terms of employment

Employment can be on an individual or group(:'gang') basis, in the private or the public/Govt. sector.

In the gang system one group of labour digs foundations, another does the brick work, a third is involved in concreting, and so on.

According to the tempo and nature of the construction activity the employment may be:

- permanent i.e. the worker is :
 - . confirmed in the service of the employer
 - . expected to keep on working for him
- temporary i.e. the worker is:
 - . employed for a definite period
 - . agreeable on the respective terms and conditions.

- casual i.e. the worker has:
 - . no prospects or guarantee with respect to continuous employment
 - . a daily income

Almost all female workers are casual labourers (Mehta p.3). The majority work on oral contract and receive cash payment; some receive cash and kind like rice, flour.

"The nature of construction work makes such heavy demands on the physical strength of the workers that advancing age renders them incapable of undertaking the strenuous jobs of a construction industry." (Sinha, p.107)

Duration of female workers in construction:
> 50% works 1-4 years
> 40% works > 7 years
> 90% stops work when 35-45 years old
(Sinha & Ranade, p.4-5)

3.2 Wages/Income

1. Till the legislation for minimum wages in 1948 the contractor fixed the wages according to his work requirement and an assessment of the experience and the ability of the workers. Since then the wages are determined by a committee appointed by the State Govt. It considers factors such as requirements of the workers, size and composition of the family, and increase in the cost of living. On consideration of these and other factors the wages are revised from time to time.

Ultimately, though, the wage structure is positively correlated to the level of skill and, to a certain degree, to the difference in sexes. At any rate wages are on a consolidated basis: there are no supplements like Dearness Allowance or City Compensatory Allowance.

2. The mode of payment can vary in that sometimes only part payment is done:

- to prevent workers from leaving prematurely
- to keep them from spending their entire earnings
- to force them to save from dependants elsewhere.

Payment, not uniform in any case, ends to take place fortnightly. Usually the gang leader or the sub-contractor receives the money on behalf of the individual worker. In the family the men ultimately deal with the combined incomes both in terms of receiving and spending.

As a rule neither male nor female worker gets his or her due in full: the sub-contractor keeps some payment for himself (Mehta, p.30; Sinha & Ranade, p.6) in return for providing work and shelter, guarding of property in the worker's absence, etc.

3. >70% of the female workers have assets back home in the village: some land, a house, few cattle (Sinha & Ranade, p.8). These assets are usually put in the name of the husband or the father-in-law.

4. Despite financial limitations quite a number apparently manage to send money home to their parents/in-laws (25% according to Sinha & Ranade, p.9)

There is hardly any question of substantial saving, however, owing to the heavy indebtedness most have incurred.

5. 30-75% mention some debt (Ekalavya 1979, p.96; Sinha & Ranade, p.8-9). They borrow to meet the expenses on:

- . marriages, festivals
- . daily requirements (food mainly)
- . maternity and medical care.

Loans may be taken from a variety of source, in the village or at the work site.

Mostly the money comes from money-lenders in the village who may charge interest rates upto 25% a month (Mukhopadhyay, p.19) .

The labour (sub)-contractor are the second largest suppliers of ready cash. They do not charge any interest, generally, but deduct their dues invariably from the payments received for the workers.

Obviously, friends and relatives, the third category in this respect, are preferred as they neither multiply nor deduct. But they do not always have such amounts at ready disposal.

Sometimes collaterals are given, e.g.:

- . a mortgage on land or house
- . a promise to work for the same employer in the future
- . bonds, the contents of which the women usually are not aware of.

Consequently, one may conclude, these conditions tend to perpetuate their economic dependence, turning it almost into a bonded labourship.

3.3. Actual Working and Living Conditions

1. The Contract Labour (Registration and Abolition) Act, 1970 and the Contract Labour Central Rules, 1971 state explicit regulations regarding the actual working conditions and the welfare and health of contract labourers.

All reports coverage on the grim conclusion that these laws, and other relevant ones (see Ch.4), are paper rules as far as construction labourers, particularly the women, are concerned.

2. In what respects ?

- Hours of work: they usually exceed the stipulated 8 hours daily/48 hours weekly.
- Rest interval (of 1 hour): it is generally arranged for but often enough not availed of. Either because of lack of time ('the job is behind schedule') or because of the workers' own wish to finish fast before relaxing.

- **Wages and mode of payment:**
The wages are kept at a minimum level with an apparent disregard for the recent increased costs of living. Handing over the wages to middlemen who take illegal commission violates the law in a number of ways. The very act is illegal. There is no check on the factual amount paid, the time (also fixed by law) of handing over the money to the workers, and so on.
- **Paid holidays including Sundays:**
Though the workers are free on Sundays, in many cases that is, they do not receive any continued payment for them or for any other holiday. Sometimes, though, the contractor gives them a lump-sum for festivals, usually Holi and Diwali only.
- **Overtime:** is rarely paid. As it is, most workers do not know their exact working timings, let alone their exact overtime periods.
- **First Aid/Medicare:** is generally not or nominally available at the site, except perhaps in the case of accidents. But compensation is usually denied and during the disability wages are being withheld.
- **Safety regulations:** are found to be the most neglected aspect in the construction industry. Even elementary safety equipment such as head gear, gloves, boots are not supplied to workers at the sites.
- **Transport per se or a transport allowance is sometimes available.**
- **For those who stay at the site, where relevant also for those who work there but stay outside, the contractor must make available:**
 - . accommodation
 - . drinking water, bathing and latrine facilities (for men and women separately)
 - . drainage and garbage disposal
 - . canteens and rest rooms (also separately for men and women)
 - . a creche when >20 female workers are employed.

In fact:

- . the workers usually put up their own shelter arrangements
- . the other facilities/amenities, if at all available, are never provided with special consideration for the needs of the female workers
- . cooking arrangements including the collection of fuel are entirely the women's responsibility
- . there are no child day-care facilities at the site other than the centres run by the Mobile Creches organization.
- . electricity, ventilation, standing space are unseen luxuries
- . recreation facilities are nihil. In this field, however, the workers do manage their own arrangements. They have a tendency to live in clusters with colleagues from the same place or the same background. As such they can find themselves again within their own circle and share common patterns of entertainment.

Ch.4. LEGAL ASPECTS

1. Some 20 Acts are applicable to the construction industry. A list is given in Appendix I.

Also, Central and State Public Works Deptts as well as State Governments have drafted regulations pertaining to the industry with special clauses for women

2. As a rule the contractor is responsible for providing proper working conditions and amenities. If in default the 'principal employer' or contracting party is authorized -- and obliged -- to provide the needful and to charge the costs thereof to the contractor. (Contract Labour (R&A) Act, 1970).

When law abidance is so costly it is hardly surprising to note the contractor's apparent inclination not to bother. Besides, the law enforcement machine itself is rusty if nothing else: inspecting officers are too few and overburdened, to say the least, to be able to execute their duties adequately.

Moreover, the pertinent labour laws come under various handling authorities:

- . the Ministries of Labour, Works & Housing, and Human Resource Development
- . the Central and State-level Public Works Departments
- . municipal corporation and development bodies in cities.

Reports express an obvious need for more co-ordination, simplification and re-activation with respect to law enforcement for the benefit of the workers.

3. Specifically, protective measures in the construction industry tend to fail because of :
 - . the migratory, casual, intermittent nature of its labour
 - . the dependence on sub-contractors/middlemen
 - . the lack of organization 'to make a fist'.

This is especially relevant to female workers with regard to laws concerning: maternity leave, prevention of night work, and restraints on dangerous work including lifting of heavy loads. They are simply not operative in this industry.

- . the predominance of unskilled jobs involving workers, particularly women, who are easily dispensable, especially if non-compliance of rules brings hassles from inspecting bodies.

More so, there are no laws regulating:

- . service conditions
- . annual leave
- . safety precautions
- . social security benefits,
as is the case in other industries (coal mines, textile industry.)

4. In the absence of a properly functioning law enforcing apparatus and even of certain laws themselves several steps have been taken to improve the legal situation:

1981	:	Tamil Nadu initiates move for Bill to reorganize labour laws
1984	:	TN State Legislature introduces Bill, found not comprehensive enough
1985 (Nov)	:	National Seminar in Delhi proposes comprehensive, central legislation for construction labour

Such a legislation would have to be implemented by an autonomous institution. It should concentrate on:

- . the regulation of employment
- . a uniform wage structure
- . the management of security and welfare funds.

A 'National Campaign Committee' set-up after the Seminar is to draft this legislation and to lobby its introduction in Parliament. Currently there is already a 'National Tripartite Committee on the Construction Industry' with a.o. labour representatives.

Ch.5. PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS/ASPIRATIONS

5.1 Problems - a review

1. Particularly the unskilled labourers in the construction industry are constantly confronted with:
 - . uncertain job prospects
 - . poor working and living conditions.
2. Specifically for female workers the problems may be reviewed as under :
 - 1) Economic disparities:
 - . unequal wages for similar work
 - . less, if any, compensation for accidents at work.
 - 2) Social inequalities:
 - . often the female work force is reduced because of legal encumbrances or the compulsion of compliance with special regulations benefitting female workers.
 - . there are no opportunities for upward mobility due to a lack of training facilities.
 - 3) Biological inhibitions:
 - . female workers are constraint to undertake certain jobs due to a women's biological disposition, pregnancy or the care of babies.
 - . working late into the pregnancy period and starting work early again is, apart from a form of exploitation, a severe drain on health reserves.
 - 4) Psychological constraints
 - . there is the traditional inferiority complex of women, as viewed from both sides
 - . often defeatist tendencies, a reluctance to venture into new types of roles and work are serious impedements to their development.
 - 5) Physical limitations:
 - . malnutrition and ill-health
 - . dissipation of energies due to the requirements of child bearing and rearing, and the daily responsibilities.

- 6) Legal inadequacies:
 - . factual absence of law enforcement
 - . special provisions for female workers' welfare are ~~is~~ absent or inoperative.
- 7) Technological inaptitudes:
 - . traditionally the arduous, low skilled jobs are reserved for women.
 - . there is no training for upgrading.
- 8) Administrative Shortcomings:
 - . ignoring of specific requirements for women regarding requirements for hygiene, welfare on the part of the implementing or inspecting agencies.
- 9) Personnel maladjustment:
 - . there are no personnel provisions for female workers who have to divide their time and concentration between work at the site, housekeeping, and looking after their family.

5.2 Prospects/Aspirations

1. Mehta (p.51 ff.), Mukhopdhyay (p.22) suggest that the women are more explicitly positive, "less despondent" about their children's future situation than about their own.

For themselves they could envisage a change of job if training were possible. Yet there is no sweeping change in mind. For a certain conditioning to their present situation has been taking place so much so as to make "the thought of working in a different category unusual and remote to them". (Mehta, p.28).

So if they were asked to do this work again they would say 'yes', in principle. And if there were no work they would hang around hoping for better times although a portion would return to the village readily.

2. For their children their wishes centred round (better) education and better job possibilities like "office clerk and factory worker".

Education is still considered more important for boys than for girls, especially with a view to getting better jobs.

Girls, so they thought, should be married as soon as possible. Yes, with a dowry as it is considered useful for:

- . the set-up of a household
- . more prestige of the family.

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Ch.6. WELFARE MEASURES

6.1 Government-level

1. Each State has laws for the protection and welfare of construction workers.

Each State has also launched welfare schemes with varying degrees of intensity and success.

Efforts are on to amend various Acts, like the current review of the Workers' Act in Parliament.

Already in the 6th and now in the 7th Plan more and more welfare schemes a.o. for rural housing are being evolved. One of the consequences might well be that rural labour in the near future need not travel so far away from home which could change the pattern of migration considerably.

2. For women in general a host of programmes and implementing agencies have been set up culminating in the establishment of a separate Deptt. of Women and Children's Welfare in the Central Ministry of Human Resources Development. There are no schemes aimed specifically at female construction workers although quite a few general ones are applicable to them, e.g. the Central Social Welfare Board's Programme of Creches for Children of Working (and Ailing) Mothers and the Govt. of India Programme for the Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas.

3. At State-level the initiative of the Govt. of Tamil Nadu towards the end of 1984 is noteworthy. They began a 'Safety Deposit Scheme for Irregular Workers' which was open to construction workers as well. The idea was to help workers build up some capital in case of accidents by getting themselves registered individually and paying a monthly 'insurance' fee.

There is a national 'Employers' State Insurance Act' but it is not (yet) valid for the construction industry.

6.2 NGO Activities

1. Various NGOs, like SEWA Ahmedabad, organize creches for working women. Only the Mobile Creches organization with centres in Delhi and Bombay has been set up specially for construction workers.
2. Mobile Creches.
 - In 1969: begin in Delhi at one building site
 - In 1970: introduction of adult education programmes for men and women
 - In 1972: start with special carpentry classes for women
 - In '70-s: set-up of monthly mothers' meetings with cooking demonstrations, health education, child care, special diet programmes, etc.

6.3 International Efforts

There are no specific programmes (yet) for this group from international agencies. But various UN organizations and development agencies (DANIDA, SIDA) have initiated projects for general development of women in India.

6.4 In conclusion

Various legal improvements are being suggested. But at the same time a word of caution is heard: it is not a mere law enforcement but an adjustment to pragmatic requirements which will have beneficial effects.

There is a growing correlation between Govt. and NGO efforts (of the 1974 launched grant-in-aid scheme for financial support to NGO activities). At the same time there are not a few bureaucratic hurdles to overcome to make the exchange flow smoothly for the benefit of the construction labour force in general and the female construction workers in particular.

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APPENDIX-I: A list of Acts applicable to the Construction Industry with some highlights.

R.B. Not all enactments are equally applicable to all construction firms. This depends on the size and type of work undertaken.

1. Workmen's Compensation Act 1923:
"Compensation is to be paid by contractors in cases of accidents."
2. Indian Trade Unions Act 1926
3. Payment of Wages Act 1936:
"The wage period is to be fixed by the contractor but is not to exceed one month after the date of commencement of the work. No deductions are allowed except for the recovery of fines, advances, etc."
4. Employment of Children Act 1938
5. Industrial Disputes Act 1947
6. Factories Act 1948
7. Minimum Wages Act, 1948:
"The wages a.o. of construction workers shall be regulated by Central and State Govts. on recommendations of sub-committees appointed by the Labour Commissioner."
8. Employees' State Insurance Act 1948:
It is held in abeyance: efforts are on to make it applicable to the construction industry as well.
9. Employees Provident Fund & Miscellaneous Provisions Act 1952:
From 1980 it is also valid for construction labour.

10. Delhi Shops & Establishments Act 1954
11. Employment Exchanges (Compulsory Notification of Vacancies) Act 1959
12. Apprentices' Act 1961:
"Formal training is to be given to upgrade the workers' skill in the building construction trades. It is the responsibility of the builders.
There are schemes for apprentices and craftsmen."
13. Maternity Benefit Act 1961
14. Motor Transport Workers' Act 1965
15. Contract Labour (regulation & abolition) Act, 1970:
"Generally the contractor is to provide the wages, housing, medical and sanitary services, safety measures. If defaulting the principal employer, responsible for the overall provision of essential amenities and payment of wages, has to pay for the same and recover the cost from the contractor."
16. Payment of Gratuity Act 1972
17. Equal Remuneration Act 1976
18. Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act 1979
19. Shops and Commercial Establishments Acts of other States
20. Payment of Bonus Act.

APPENDIX II: A List of Resource Institutions and Persons

1. Committee on the Status of Women in India
2. Delhi School of Social Work: Prof S.N. Ranade (1975 study)
3. Deptt of Labour & Social Welfare, Patna University: Prof. G.F. Sinha (1975 study)
4. Indian Federation of Construction & Wood Workers - various State Construction Workers' Unions
5. Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi: Mrs. Swapna Mukhopadhyay
6. Ministry of Human Resources Development
7. National Buildings & Construction Corporation
8. National Buildings Organization
9. National Campaign Committee for Central Legislation on Construction Labour & Industry
10. National Commission on Labour
11. National Institute of Construction Management & Research, Bombay: Mr. K.N. Vaid, Director
12. National Institute of Urban Affairs, 11 Nyaya Marg, New Delhi - 110 021
13. National Labour Institute
14. National Projects Construction Corporation
15. National Tripartite Committee on the Construction Industry
15. Office of the Labour Commissioner, Delhi

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