

Socio-Economic conditions of Women
Construction Workers in Hyderabad.

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The working conditions and wage rates of women employees in the organised sector are protected by law; while the working and living conditions of the purely unorganised agricultural labourers are to some extent safeguarded by the local customs and habits.¹ The conditions of working and living of the workers in the vast nontraditional but unorganised sector are too complicated leading to multifarious problems of urban slums and under these circumstances the female workers are more vulnerable than their male counterparts in this sector.

Construction industry thriving in the urban areas employing about 16.6 per cent of the total female labour force as per 1981 census of India is a major urban industry engaging mainly the services of a large number of unskilled migrant workers hailing mainly from the families of agricultural labourers.

The female labourers work and live under harsh, unhygienic, and poorly sheltered semi-urban conditions. They are often underfed and suffered from many diseases. Uprooted from their traditional village surroundings, they find it too inconvenient to live here but for the regular employment for their family and attractive wage rates. Most of them hope to return to their natives after saving a good amount but analysis shows very rarely had any of them returned so far.

A few recent studies attempted to study the female construction workers could point out to some of their problems in Delhi, Bihar and Orarantal.² They could not find out the cause of their sufferings nor could they cover all the aspects of their living and working conditions.

The present survey³ was undertaken with the objects of: 1. Analysing the conditions of their working and living, and 2. Comparing and contrasting them to those in their native villages.

1. (a) Ester Boserup : Women's Role in Economic Development, George Allen and Unwin, 1970.

(b) M. Atchi Reddy : "Female Agricultural Labourers of Nellore" Indian Economic and Social History Review 20:1, March 1983, Pp 67-68.

2. G.P. Sinha and S.N. Ranade : Women Constructive Workers: (An ICSSR Survey Report of West Bengal and Bihar, Allied Publishers, 1975.

3. The first survey dates back to 1974-78 period when it was undertaken for preparing a project proposal. Next a part of the survey was done by Miss Y. Sarojini, 1980-83, and the final found was undertaken in 1984, 1985, by Miss. T. Aruna.

In addition the survey throws light on the problems faced by the poor workers living in the urban slums.

This paper is divided into three sections. Methodology is mentioned in the first section while their working and living conditions are analysed in the second and third sections respectively.

I

METHODOLOGY

The living conditions of the female construction workers in the city of Hyderabad are analysed and wherever possible compared and contrasted with those prevailing in their native villages, before they embarked on their migration to the city.

For this purpose 20 families with female workers were selected from each one of the 9 localities in the city of Hyderabad mostly outskirts, 8 corners of the city and one centrally placed locality. Those places where the workers clustered were chosen. Questionnaire were filled up after informal discussions but in a number of places data and information were drawn from outside the sample households. Even though the main questionnaire were canvassed during 1980-83 general observations relate to a period of eight years between 1978 and 1985.

Sample localities in the city.

<u>Name of the Sample locality</u>	<u>Location in city</u>	<u>Number of Sample Workers</u>
1. Malkajigiri	North-East	20
2. Uppal	East	20
3. Vanasthalipuram	South East	20
4. Chandrayangutta	South	20
5. Golconda	South West	20
6. Lingampalli	West	20
7. Kukatpalli	North West	20
8. Boyanapalli	North	20
9. Chakkadapalli	Central	20
		180

Each one of these centres has got hundreds of families of construction workers. On average male workers outnumbered the female workers in almost all the centres. Since ours is a purposive sample, we have selected only those families which got at least one female labourer engaged in the construction work for more than six months in the year and also getting more than one-half of her total annual income from such labour. Irrespective of the size of the family only one female worker from each of the sample families is studied in detail for this analysis. Some of the families are observed over a period of 3 years from 1978 onwards.

II
Working Conditions

about

The working surroundings consist of mostly open areas where new buildings are being constructed and only in a few cases old buildings are repaired.

Construction labourers are employed in three ways. They are employed ^① directly by the house owners or they work for a ^② building contractor or they work mostly for a ^③ labour contractor. The last method is common and all the sample workers in our study work for the most part of the year for labour contractors.

It is not binding that they should work for the same labour contractor or (Guthadar) throughout the year. Whenever they want, they can change from one Guthadar to another. But in cases where they have taken advance wages or loans they have to repay the full amount or serve for the same Guthadar until it is fully repaid.

Operation of the labour market for construction workers:

There are as already noted three main ways of getting employment for construction workers including female labourers:

- 1. Labour Contractor (Guthadar) *stable*
 - 2. *Max - money* Open Market (adda), and
 - 3. One's own searching. *least used by women*
- ↓

The first case, namely working for a labour contractor, ensures continuity and some kind of stable employment but the wages are low. The rates paid by the Guthadar would range from 70 per cent to 90 per cent of the rates paid in the open market (adda) and also the Guthadar extracts a few hours more work than the open market employer, rates are stable for some months with the ~~gnt~~ Guthadar.

The open market offers the highest rate of wage and every day their rates would be decided on the spot depending on the forces of supply and demand. The labourers flock at a central place in the area called labour adda between 00-00 and 09-00 hrs. and the employers come and chose them after some hickling and bargaining. In cases of scarcity the employers should accept the going market rate and no bargaining is possible. Employment is secure only for that day.

The third method is adopted by very few women. During lean times they go to some 'bungalows' and accept a low wage, of course in kind medium too. Most of the female workers followed the first method, i.e. work for a Guthadar for fixed wages for a major part of the year.

Place of work:

The female construction workers along with their other family members would like to work for a single contractor and prefer the same work site too, so that they could help each other and could look after their children during the working hours.

In 129 cases of the female workers their husbands are employed at the same place of work and for same guthadar, in 27 cases both of them work for the same guthadar but at different places while in the rest not only they work at different places but employed by different guthadars too. In 8 such cases the husbands are employed outside the construction industry.

Places of work or construction sites are allotted for a day or a week by the guthadar and to suit his needs he may shift them from place to place within the same day. But the general rule is that whenever there are couples of husband and wife, they are placed at the same construction site. This ensures smooth working and the guthadar in such cases entrusts them with some supervisory functions too so as to make them responsible for other workers who are newly engaged from the adda (a place where the workers gather for casual labour). Empirical evidence showed that the males when placed along with their wives worked for more hours than otherwise.

Cooperation of the Husbands : on the work spots:

About 70 per cent of the women workers preferred to work on the same spot and under the same contractor along with their husbands. The contractors also found it advantageous to ~~extract~~^{extract} more work by keeping the husband and wife in as nearest an operation as possible. Especially in the case of pregnant ladies and inefficient workers, the husband is supposed to compensate by working himself for extra hours etc. They find it advantageous to take care of their small children and also for the midday lunch which they bring in a joint box and eat sometimes along with their small children.

As the guthadar is the authority of selecting workers for different spots, only 72 per cent of the women labourers could get the day's work in the same place along with their husbands. But they can be separated to different places or combined at any time by the guthadar. If the distance is more than 2 to 3 kilometres on the bus route they are paid bus fares by the guthadars, but the workers should reach the work site by 09-30 hours and the time spent in travelling is excluded.

Nature of the work:

Certain operations and sub-operations are allotted to the females; and adult males are not generally engaged in these operations, even though male children are often preferred along with the women. Construction work required certain degree of skill and alertness which was not necessary for agricultural labour.

Brick moving and all sub-operations connected to it, dismantling the brick heap, arranging the bricks in the baskets, carrying them to the mason and handing them over to him one by one - all are done by the female and child workers.

Their next important operations are pulling, carrying and sprinkling water, weeping the ground, cleaning the sand and carrying it to the place of mixing, removing and supplying earth, and undertaking different miscellaneous light operations such as supplying the various tools and instruments to the masons.

Majority of our sample workers about 162 are engaged in the above operations while the rest, 18 are employed in other operations. 8 work mostly as masons, and the other 10 as spaders. These 18 persons are paid higher rates than other female workers in lower operations but a few rupees less than their male counterparts. The reason is that whenever their main operation is exhausted they too attend to the lower operations along with other women workers.

Statement: 1 Operationwise importance of female workers in the construction industry.

Name of the operation (1)	Prevalent sex (2)	Importance of Females (3)
1. Guthadar/Contractor	Male	No females
2. Maistry/Supervisor	Male	4 Females
3. Uppara/Mason	Male	10 Females (8 in our Sample)
4. Parakadu/Spader	Male	36 Females (10 in our sample)
5. Brick movers	Female	3/4 females
6. Concrete carriers	Female	3/4 females
7. Water carriers and sprinklers	female	4/5 females
8. Sand cleaners and carriers	females	entirely females
9. Earth diggers	males	8 females (in our sample)
10. Earth carriers	Female	2/3 females
11. Cleaners	Female	entirely females.
12. Earth filling	female	3/4 females.

Source: Field data and observations.

It is very difficult to divide the operations and sub-operations as male and female dominated. There are many sub-operations which are equally common both for men and women labourers. Earth filling and digging, concrete mixing and carrying are often confined in small-scale workers and

both men and women are employed. Therefore, only general trends are exhibited in the above statement.

Hours of work:

A number of female workers put in active work for more than 12 hours a day and in almost all the cases it is reported, they work for longer hours than their husbands, when we take into consideration their total working hours both at home and outside.

Generally they get up from bed between 4-30 and 6 A.M depending upon the season and urgency of the day's work. Those who work as part-time domestic servants get up earlier than their husbands and complete the wage paid domestic service before 07-00 hours return home and start their own domestic chores like cleaning the vessels and clothes, cooking and arranging for the children. After cooking they eat their morning breakfast and attend on the worksite before 09-30 hrs. usually with lunch boxes. Working continuously upto 13-00 hrs. they break for lunch and start at 14-00 hrs. They stop in the evening between 17-00 and 18-30 hrs. depending on the length of the day light. They cook their evening meals between 17-00 and 21-00 p.m. and go to bed after supper generally around 21-00 hrs. The number of their working hours at construction work may from $6\frac{1}{2}$ to $8\frac{1}{2}$ and other than construction they put in active work for another 5 to 6 hours.

The women workers undertake in addition to their own domestic chores, paid domestic service in others' houses too. Very few females are reported to put in less hours of work than their husbands and this is due to mainly to their bad health and pregnancy. Their husband compensates the guthadar for any short fall in the working hours of his wife. Nursing mothers visit their children once or twice in the day.

The construction workers, especially the females, had to work for longer hours when compared to their agricultural labourer in their villages. And also they are often bored and fed up doing the same sort of job of brick moving or cleaning the sand. The only encouraging factor is the high rate of wages when compared to the agricultural wages in their villages.

Wage Rates:

Women labourers in general are paid lower rates of wage than the men labourers in the construction industry. The difference is, to a large extent due to the differences in the operations and sub-operations undertaken by them. However, in some cases, even in the same operation men labourers are paid slightly higher than the women labourers. To this extent, the

explanation is not found in the labour turned out on that particular day, but in some extra considerations. A men labourer can be used for other purposes in case of need or emergency. For example, he can be sent alone to fetch tools or as messenger etc. and women workers are restricted in those aspects. The female labour is cheaper than male labourers to the guthadar.

A general saying is that a female worker is not supposed to support the family while her counterpart the man worker is found to do. Of course, no single female worker accepted this explanation.

The total amount of tips and perquisites allowed to a women labourer worked out to the 25 per cent to 50 per cent of those allowed to a man worker. The tips include tea, cigars, cigarettes, bidis, chewing tobacco, toddy and wetts. Perquisites include clothes, chapals and lunch and dinner offered by the guthadar or the house owners now and then.

In case the labourers are engaged in any casual labour by the help of the guthadar, they are paid slightly higher rates than in the case of the direct employment to the guthadar. But he shares in the wages paid by the employers and this share varies from Re. 0-50 to Rs. 1.50. Guthadar's share is higher $\frac{1}{2}$ in the case of female workers than in the case of male workers.

Wage Movements: 1977-1985:

Considering the movement of average rates of wage paid to the male and female labourers both in the construction work in Hyderabad, and also in agricultural work in a typical village of Nalgonda district, we do not find any considerable variations between 1978 and 1985 .

Wage Rates: 1977-85:

Table: 1 : Range of wage rates paid to Female and Male Constructive Workers

Year	Female Worker General Labour	Male Workers Spader	Average wage for female Workers in Kompally x village Rs.
1977	Rs. 3.00 to Rs. 4.00	Rs. 4.00 to Rs. 5.50	2-00
1978	3-00 to 4-50	4.50 to 6-00	2-50
1979	4-00 to 5-00	5-50 to 7-00	3-00
1980	5-00 to 6-50	7-00 to 8-50	4-00
1981	5-50 to 7-50	8-00 to 10.00	4-50
1982	6-00 to 8.00	9-50 to 11-00	5-00
1983	7-50 to 8-50	12-00 to 15-00	6-00
1984	10-00 to 12-00	15-00 to 18-00	6-00
1985	12-00 to 15-00	16-00 to 21-00	7-00

Source: Data collected from 'maistry' accounts and from the village of Kompally village (Nalgonda district)**

* For further details see H. Achi Reddy: "Rural credit and Lead Bank Scheme in Telangana Villages", paper read at the Seminar on Rural Development, Kavali, Feb. 1982.

The above rates were the amount actually paid to the labourers by the labour contractors and others. The same labourer, if employed outside the contractor's works, used to get higher wages and such difference ranged from 3-00 to 4-00 in 1977 while the range was from 12-00 to 15-00 in 1985. If the labourer works for her guthadar she is paid only Rs. 12/- while she can get Rs. 15.00 by hiring out in the open labour market (adda) in Chikkadpalli. She would get 13 to 14 rupees if she works for any odd local employer if she chooses so. Of course, the rates differed from locality to locality.

Domestic Servants:

In addition to their own cooking, a large number of female construction workers are employed as part-time domestic servants in others' houses for cleaning vessels, washing clothes, ~~xxx~~ sweeping and cleaning the floor and helping the busy housewives. A number of them worked in more than one such houses; of course in many case they are helped by their female children too.

A female worker in Uppal reported that she worked as a domestic servant in six houses, serving four in the morning and two in the evening. In other cases they served between 1 to 6 houses. The wages for domestic service depends upon the nature and amount of work and also the number of persons in that household. The wages ranged from Rs. 10/- to Rs. 100/- per month in addition to a number of free gifts and meals.

Around 80 workers are employed in one kind of domestic labour or other. In most of the cases, their annies too are working women.

Other part-time Occupations:

Seven female workers followed part time occupations other than domestic service. Four of them sold vegetables in the evening while the other three employed in the evenings as rice-cleaners and vegetable cutters in the local hotels. They informed us that there was a possibility of shifting themselves full time to these part time occupations if these proved profitable. In fact some of their predecessors followed this course of change of occupations and now become well versed in their new occupations and earning sizable incomes from their new occupations.

Women workers without any part time work furnished different reasons. In 42 cases they said that their husbands were not willing to send them to the bungalows. In other cases either they could not find sufficient spare time or they were in the process of searching for suitable avenues.

The part-time occupations in their native villages were mostly self-employment like dairying, poultry, collection of dung for manure, or roots and leaves and grass cutting from the fields.

Women workers took to the part-time employment mainly to meet their increasing cost of life. A common factor is the drinking habit of their husbands. An interesting point is that drinking habit is more prevalent among the women who are not domestic servants while the husbands of most of the domestic servants are addicted to drinking.

Holidays:

Only festival days and other public holidays like polling day, are declared holidays for construction workers. However, Sundays too are declared holidays in lean seasons, but non are paid holidays. 62 female workers spent the holidays either at home or by going to a movie. 15 workers paid visits to their relations. 82 workers attended to some miscellaneous wage labour. The rest attended to the household work of their part time domestic employers.

Taking only their work on holidays in 152 cases the earnings of the female labourers exceeded those of their males. Regarding their spending, male workers spent more on holidays especially on drinking. Even though some female too drink, they consumed less than their male counterparts.

On all holidays some females go to the bungalows in search of work, help the busy housewives and are not only provided with meals, but get some clothes, utensiles and other used commodities.

They did not have any strict holidays in their villages but they used to attend to light works even on festival days. It was the seasonal exigency that determined their working days and holidays and not any other agency. As they got self-employment at home, they did not enjoy any workless holidays in their villages.

Unemployment and Leave:

Unemployment among the construction workers is due to a number of reasons. But there are some issues which affected specially the woman workers. 1. During lean seasons, men labours get some casual employment and it is very difficult for females to get employed on normal rates of wage. At the most they may get partial employment in some bungalows where they are paid very low daily wages. 2. They taken an effective leave of one month for every child birth and one week to ten days for family planning operations and abortions. 3. They had taken a leave of one or two days to shift their residence or to arrange small social functions in their homes.

4. Lastly, construction labourers and especially the females were very much affected during the days of communal disturbances and the consequent curfews mainly in the old city areas. A number of cases of atrocities on women workers are reported from around Chandrayangutta and a number of them continued to starve completely or partially for a number of days during such disturbances. During such difficult times they used to return to their native villages and resorted to agricultural labour. No paid leave is granted to the female construction labourers in any of the 9 centres. Only in the case of their domestic labour, in some cases, they get full month's wages even if they were absent for 4 to 6 days in that month. The usual practice is upto 3 absents in a month are ignored provided she is a servant with continuous service of more than 6 months. Of course, it depends on their good relations and it varied from place to place and also from case to case.

Caste:

The caste composition of the workers changed from locality to locality and in the same locality from period to period. The main sample of 1982-83 consisted of a large number of Yadavas or Gollas.

Statement 2: Caste Composition of the women workers: 1982-83

<u>Name of the Caste</u>	<u>No.</u>
Yadavas	86
Harijans (including Christians)	32
Ganjallos and Telagas (Bostha)	25
Reddys	12
Others	25

	180

'Others' include Lambadas, Yerukalas, Dudekulas, Mutharachas, Wadders etc. Yadavas are found in large numbers in all the localities.

It is stated that mostly the guthadars preferred the workers from their own castes or different castes hailing from their surrounding villages. Workers chosen from adda are not stressed about their caste status.

Guthadars from Reddy caste employed the female workers from a large variety of castes while the Christian guthadars had engaged mostly the Harijans and Christian workers. Yadava workers also are widely distributed in all the localities with guthadars of different castes. No direct evidence is available about any wage discrimination on the basis of caste. But the sub-operations entrusted sometime depend on one's caste. Harijans were not generally employed for water work.

Changes in the occupational structure:*

Changes in the occupational structure of the female workers is not as common as among the male workers. Very few female constructive workers got up in the ladder of construction industry itself but a large number of them were absorbed outside of it. A number of them got appointed in the local factories and schools in unskilled occupations both as casual and also on permanent basis.

A number of them became part time or full time sweepers and ayahs in the local schools and other establishments. They were also absorbed as unskilled workers into the local industries and factories. A number of women workers were recruited from construction workers into the tobacco factories in Uppal and Vanasthalipuram, army establishments around Chandrayanagutta and Golconda, Alvin and B H E L in Lingampally area, I D P L near Kukatpalli, military establishments near Boynapalli and Alwal and Cinema houses and Cigarette factories around Chikkadapalli.

III
Living Conditions

Wherever they lived and whatever they ate, most of the construction workers are poverty stricken. Mason and upwards are better than their lower cadres. Males who constituted the bulk of the lower ranks are not only paid low wages but suffer more than their male counterparts at home and outside too.

Problems of Residence and Privacy

Around 60 per cent of the construction workers lived in the unfinished buildings under construction while the rest lived in hired houses and in the huts made in the vacant places or in the bungalow compounds of others. Those with huts in the bungalow compounds are the blessed ones in the sense that they enjoyed most of the civil facilities in that compound including the latrines and bath rooms in their capacity as the part-time domestic servants in that bungalow.

Those who lived in the unfinished buildings generally stayed along with a member of other families. Sometimes, they effected separations by putting some gunny, cloth or mat as a curtain while in other cases they shared the rooms in that building. Sometimes, the unfinished buildings are roofless and doorless and the workers families are exposed to direct sun, rain and wind. Street dogs and pigs often enter their rooms day and night. And even that residence is not permanent and they are ever-ready to shift from place to place depending on the period of completion of the buildings and the change of the place of their work.

* Here we went out of our strict questionnaire and made inquiries and observations between 1970 and 1985. But the entire information is got from the sample localities.

Huts put nearest to the work-spot are independent residences but they lacked civic facilities and they are shifted as frequently as the shifting of the working spot.

A number of female workers interviewed informed us that they preferred domestic work at low wage rates in bungalows mainly with a view to use the civic facilities like electric light and lavatrines. They are protected from the outside disturbances like quarrels or communal disturbances.

Cooperation of Husbands : at home

In 10 cases the female workers reported that they enjoyed the sharing of their domestic chores with their husbands. This was mainly in cooking and child care. Whenever the cooking involved special items like mutton, fish or chicken, the males dressed it and sometimes cooked it to suit their tastes. With respect to child care it is very difficult to ascertain the exact share of the males.

Education:

There are five cases in the sample workers who got some elementary education as to read letters and cinema posters. Of course, this did not deter them from toddy. One of them is addicted to alcohol along with her husband who has got a lucrative employment in a local cigarette manufacturing company. Four of them are usual cinema goers, at least once a week and twice if possible. Every Saturday, they watched the Telugu movie on televisions of their 'Annas' the local elite ladies with whom they made friendship or employed to. A distinctive feature is that four of them are sending their children to schools while one does not have school aged children. Pochamma of Chikkadpally sends both her son and daughter to a local school.

These four women labourers got education in their native villages under different circumstances. Ramulamma of Uppal was taught Telugu alphabets by her 'dorasani' and later was sent to school to make her a better domestic servant. The other three got their schooling by attending during lean seasons mainly to satisfy the teachers' request for attendance.

Not much difference is found in working or wages between the educated workers and illiterates when employed in the same operation. However, the educated workers fare better in pointing out to time of work, hours of work, wage calculations etc.

Health

142 out of 180 female workers reported that they felt some ill-health or other after coming to the city. 26 workers had improved their health after migration while the rest, 12 could not ascertain.

Health disorders are mainly fever, cold, headache and nerves disorders which were not so common while they had been in their villages. Nor did they use so many medicines in their villages. They generally resorted to fasting or consumed only limited quantity and restricted quality of food for a few days until they were cured off. Only rarely did they apply any medicines, that too were crude preparations from the locally available roots, leaves, barks and flowers of some selected plants on the advice of the local doctors or Vaidyas.

A number of them informed about their costly medical budget after their migration especially for them and their children. Of course, they got help from many of the local doctors, sometimes free treatment and sometimes at concessional rates. Lakshamma, a worker with 8 years experience got Ceasarian operation and gave birth to a son after 9 years of her marriage. She felt that it might had costed her life if it was in her own village. Bharatanma who fell from a building in 1981 was immediately admitted in a local hospital and now is completely cured and in normal health.

Not only poor diet but the unhygienic conditions of living among mosquitos, pigs and dogs seem to be the main reason for a number of their health disorders.

Habit of Drinking:

In general a large number of male workers enjoyed the toddy at least once in a week. There are a number of cases where they consumed it daily. The amount of wages spent on drinks varied from person to person and from place to place.

A number of females too are accustomed for toddy. Some times they accompanied their husbands to the toddy shop and in other cases the gents brought a bottle or two to home for their females.

About 1/20th of the monthly income was spent on toddy and alcohol in the cases where toddy is consumed by the single male member in the family once in a week. But more than 1/3 of their family income was spent on toddy where both husband and wife consumed it frequently or daily in the evening.

All workers are offered toddy once in a week or on days of hard labour like roofing. Some house-owners too offered toddy or tips for toddy on some important days like the inauguration of the house, foundation day etc. Females used to take the drink served on such occasions and later became addicted and had to spend their own and hard earned income from wages.

The toddy habit among the female workers seems to have been there in their villages too, but had increased after their migration to the city. A number of females from the Gamalla caste reported that they used to consume toddy in their villages but sporadically. After migrating to Hyderabad the frequency had increased. Some female workers from other castes who never tasted toddy in their villages got accustomed to it after migration. It seems that they were afraid of touching it in the village in the presence of their elders, whereas no such fear is felt in the city surrounding.

Toddy habit is most prevalent among those female workers whose husbands have got more than one wives. Mr. Sathaiah a well sinker and his four wives who worked, along with him informed that he married so many wives so that they could earn enough money for his drinking. But later he found it was foolish since all the wives too turned into drunkards and it became very difficult to support the children.

Yadaya of Kukatpally married thrice, but spent on drinking all the riches brought by his wives and now all the three wives turned into construction workers and are forced to set apart 1/3 of their wages for his drinking.

In general the wives of all drunkards are forced to over work to support their families.

Only 13 women labourers did not like their husbands to drink, 32 did not like them to spend on drinks, 17 felt that drinking was a masculine characteristic while the remaining (from total sample size of 180) were either indifferent or did not bother at all.

The reasons furnished by the 13 workers for their opposition to drinking are: 1) eight of them did not like the small while the rest five were afraid of damage to health).

The thirty two workers who did not like their husbands to spend on drinking put forward their economic reasoning. While 19 of them felt that they were too poor to afford drinking, the rest, thirteen wanted to save that money and purchase other durables mainly jewellery.

There is a strong feeling among the workers especially among the women that drinking toddy is not a mistake since it is sold by the Circar. Some of them justified drinking on the ground that they saw most of the well-to-do upper sections consuming it. However, a number of them agreed that over-drinking was bad for health and it ruined the economic status of many families. Those female workers that did not bother about the drinking habits of their husbands were fully opposed to their children drinking toddy and alcohol in many cases but they could not fully control them from drinking.

Jewellery

Almost all the female workers have got somekind of jewellery or other. They are made chiefly of gold, silver copper, brass, aluminium and other metals, sometimes studded with stones, pearls, corals etc. They ranged from ear-rings, nose-fits, necklaces, anklets, waist rounds, armlets, hairpins and so on. A number of jewels are put on as a symbol of their socio-economic status and it is very difficult to estimate their cost since they seem to possessed much more than those they put on at the time of interview.

The number, nature, shape and the weight and cost of the jewels differed not only by their economic status but from caste to caste and to some extent with age and dressing habits. They did not put a number of items on their bodies while on work, due to the fear of losing and spoiling and wear and tear.

Most of the jewels were brought along with them from their villages. They purchased only cheap items from the city and got the costly items manufactured from their village goldsmiths since they did not believe in the purity of city made jewellery.

Some of them left their jewels safe in their villages while a number of them kept them with their 'bungalow ammas'. Some of them had obliged their husbands to mortgage their jewellery to get a loan to meet the exigencies. 26 of them had mortgaged jewellery costing between Rs.75/- to Rs.4,600/- both in the city and in their villages.

Dressing:

About 137 of the female workers are clad in a sary and jacket, 7 in sary along while the rest are dressed in different attires, mainly in the Lambada dress and Punjabi dress.

The cost of the sarees varied from Rs.20/- upto Rs.250/- While the cost of other dresses could not be ascertained. It was very difficult to estimate the cost of the dress of the female lambada workers since it was woven with so many other materials like lace, pieces of glass, metal and so on. The jacketless women were Yadavas and they were forbidden by their tradition from putting an upper cloth.

In 37 cases, the workers reported that they got their sarees gifted by their 'ammas and corasanis' for whom they work as part-time servants.

About 87% workers brought their leather shoes from their villages while 68% have brought their Havai shoes in the city itself. The rest are either shoe-less or got their shoes from their 'ammas'. Shoes are not compulsory in the winter and rainy seasons, while invariable in Summer in Hyderabad City.

82% women workers got left shouldered sarees while the rest got right shouldered sarees. Only 5 are white while the rest are coloured sarees. They preferred coloured sarees and blouses to withstand the dust and sweat while in work. Most of them purchased their dresses from the city even though they brought a few clothes from their home now and then.

Almost all the women workers, except those who were shaven before God, got long hair dressed into various shapes using coconut oil and castor oil and in a few cases they applied groundnut oil to their hair.

Brushing of Teeth

The workers used margosa indica, tooth powder and brick powder too. Some of the women used the ashcoal left in their stoves after cooking with wooden pieces as fuel.

Cooking Appliances

Country choolahs and Kerosene stoves are used for cooking. Immediately after landing in the city they used only wooden pieces as fuel in the country choolah but after sometime shifted to kerosene stoves. Two workers got the LPG gas connection but sold it to others at a higher price and returned back to kerosene stove. In case of shortage of Kerosene they resort to a coal burnt stove or the country choolah. On rare occasions they purchased their daily meals from the local hotels.

Visits to the Native Villages

There is some correlation between number of visits the female labourers made to their villages especially to their mother's house, and the distance from the city. The nearer the place, they went on visits more often. Female workers from the surrounding district, of Ranga Reddy, Nalgonda, Mahboobnagar and Medak visited their places more often than their coworkers from the far off areas like Karimnagar, Adilabad, Warangal, Khammam and Prakasam .

About 28% of the sample female workers returned to their villages in the busy agricultural seasons of sowing and harvesting for one or two months and brought here rice and other foodgrains which they got as wages from the villages; 5 female workers said that they would brought dried chillies tamarind and pulses from their villages and sold them to the households where they were employed as part-time domestic servants.

13% of the female workers said that they visited their villages only once or twice in the year only to attend the social celebrations of their relatives like birth, deaths and marriages or the first haircut ceremony.

The rest 59% visited at irregular intervals and provided varied reasons of their visits which could not be conveniently analysed. However, most of them could recover their health by such visits to their native villages.

The living and working conditions of the female labourers are the result of a complicated structure of their own socio-economic background and that of the construction industry that simple generalisations are not possible. A detailed survey into all the socio-economic aspects of the living and working conditions of all the construction workers, both male and female, may yield good results. However, a few concluding points can be made from the foregoing analysis:

1. Female labourers migrated to the city along with their male relations, generally husbands.
2. Female labourers are paid lower rates of wages than their male counterparts even in the same operations.
3. Female construction workers faced more serious socio-economic problems in their new surroundings than their male counterparts, and
4. Including their domestic duties female workers put in longer hours of work than their husbands.

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