Chapter three: Demographic characteristics of the construction workers

Introduction:

India is inhabited by different social and cultural groups. Each of these cultural groups has its own distinguishing characteristics. Although human population are identified one from another in innumerable ways, but language, caste, religion, customs etc. are of great value in understanding the diversity of cultural landscape. A large number of people, mainly artisans and sometimes, peasants used to migrate from their home due to various natural, economic, social and political reasons. As the Indian working masses know migration as a means of livelihood, we may term that the changes faced by the Indian working class were basically of an evolutionary nature.

According to Marxist theory the member of the working class belongs to society where the bourgeois notion of equality was ingrained in culture. Marx considered labour as a “moment” i.e. a constituent element of capital, and capital is a “bourgeois” production relation. The labourers of Marx’s assumption had internalised and enjoyed “formal” freedom, the freedom of the contract( which brought legal and market relations together) and he enjoyed this not just in abstraction but as the individual real person. Until this was ensured and so long as pre-capitalist ties made up and characterised the relations of production, capital is “not yet capital as such”. This is why Marx thought that the logic of capital could be best deciphered only in society where “the notion of human equality has already acquired the fixity of a popular prejudice.”

While discussing the workers of Kolkata, we should remember that they thrive on the cultural background of Indian society. The basic nature of inequality of Indian society is found

126 Hussain, Majid., Human Geography, Rawat publication, 1994, Jaipur, p.156.
130 Marx, K., Ibid, p. 464

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in an otherwise capitalist domain. Construction workers of Kolkata, are mostly migrant farmers from various underdeveloped places of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Murshidabad district of West Bengal, did not have a culture characterised by any "ingrained notion of human equality" and were thus very unlike the workers of Marx's assumption. There was largely a precapitalist, inegalitarian culture marked by strong primordial loyalties of community, language, religion, caste, and kinship. In a life characterised by poverty and insecurity of work, a labourer's need for economic and physical support from kin (real or putative) and linguistic or religious community naturally extended far beyond the stage of obtaining employment.  

Demographic characteristics (age, gender, religion, language, marital status, income etc.) of the construction workers of Kolkata are discussed in this chapter. This chapter is completely based on primary data. In this study 95% construction workers and 5% women are included, so the sex ratio is 52.6.

**Demographic characteristics of the construction workers of Kolkata:**
The major determinates of demographic characteristics are as follows:
a. Age & gender structure:
b. Religion
c. Caste/Tribe
d. Language
e. Marital Status
f. Education
g. Income

**Age & gender structure:**

It is one of the basic demographic characteristics of population. According to R.C. Chandna, The separate data for males and females are important for various types of planning and for the analysis of other demographic characteristics such as migration, marital status, economic characteristics etc. The balance of sexes affects the social and economic relationship within a community.

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135. Out of 1000 male population female population is 53.

There are 95% male and 5% female construction workers. [Table 3.1 and Fig 3.1]. These female workers are found only in the unorganised sector as this sector is mainly dominated by the local workers.

**Age & gender structure:**

The age gender structure of the unorganised construction workers shows that males far outnumber females in all age groups. There are no construction workers below the age of 18 years in this sector. Similarly, above 50 years there are female workers as they are mainly helpers and are sexually exploited by male co-workers or contractors. Only male construction workers are found above the age groups of 50 years. Female construction workers are mainly found at the young age. [Table 3.2A and Fig 3.2A]. The major percentages of construction workers are found between the age groups of 29-39 years which is 81% for male and 19 % for female respectively in the unorganised sector. [Table 3.2A(I)].

In case of age-gender structure of the roads and flyovers sectors, it is found that there are no female construction workers. [Table 3.2B and Fig 3.2B]. The project managers of roads and flyovers project at Alipur said that it is a day-night work so women can not stay at night with male construction workers in a same tent. Construction of tramlines or flyovers is a labourious work as well as a day night shift work so the concentration of construction workers is nil above the age of 50 years. 8% male construction workers are found below the age of 18 years, the highest percentages (54%) of construction workers are found between the age groups of 18 and 28 years. [Table 3.2B(I)].

Both Table 3.2C & Fig 3.2C denote that 62% construction workers are found between the age groups of 29 and 39 years. There are no one below 18 years of age and only 2% construction workers are above the age of 50. There is also a near absence of female construction workers because the work is labourious as well as skilled or technical in nature. In fact, the predominance of men in the age structure is explained mainly by the hazardous nature of work. According to the construction workers of metro maintainance work is mainly done by male construction workers mostly at night 90 feet below surface. [Table 3.2C and Fig 3.2C]. There is excessive heat and they have to work almost naked.

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138 Name of the project managers are Mr. Bijon Kumar Pal & Subrata Das, HRBC, Rail fabrication, GPT, Infra Projects limited, Tram track Improvement department.

139 Women Construction Workers: Two Report Surveys, Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi, October,1975, p. 23.
The maximum concentration of housing construction workers are found between the age groups of 18 and 28 years. This might indicate not just a higher propensity among younger workmen to work in the building industry but also the corresponding references off the employers or contractors. Only 6% are found in the age group above 50 years. It is found from the above discussion that workers have entered the construction or building industry at the age of below 18 years and either retired or are required to leave when about 50 years old. [Table 3.2D & Fig 3.2D].

Religion:

Religion is one of the most important demographic factors and Indian masses are religious par excellent. Hinduism is the main religion in India and the predominance of Hindu religion is also found among the construction workers of Kolkata. There is the absence of individualism and individualistic identities that mark a bourgeois culture. The individual construction worker never appears "in the dot-like isolation" in which Marx placed the individual industrial worker belonging to a bourgeois society; the construction worker in Kolkata always conducted himself - to use Marx's words again - "only as a link, as a member" of a "community" defined, somewhat ambiguously, by the links of religion, language, habitat and so on.  

The compositions of various religious communities among the workers are due to various reasons- both economic and social. The construction workers of Kolkata are not only guided by the "economic factors of the industry. The very structure of labour market in the industry, created conditions conducive to the growth of racial and religious identities because of the informal method of recruitment and control and the keen competition for employment inevitable in a market that was overstocked with unemployed labourers and where the unskilled nature of work made every worker easily replaceable. Hence the religious, linguistic and geographical bonds are more important to guide the life of a worker than the usual economic factors are.

From the Table 3.3 and Fig 3.3, it is clear that the percentages of Hindu (60%) construction workers are higher than the Muslims (40%) - 10% from roads & flyovers sectors; 15% each are from metro and housing sectors respectively. The percentages of Hindu construction workers are higher in the unorganised sector among the three other sectors. In fact, in the unorganised sector there are no Muslim construction workers. All women in the unorganised sector are Hindus. The percentages of Muslim and Hindu construction workers are the same both in the metro and housing sectors.

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Religious, age & gender structure of workers:

Fig 3.4A & Table 3.4A show that there is an absence of Muslim construction workers and the dominant religion of the unorganised sector is Hinduism. Between the age groups of 29 and 39 years the percentages of Hindu construction workers are higher than the other age groups in this sector. In the roads and flyovers sectors, the percentages of Muslim construction workers are quite high (about 40%). But the dominant religion in this sector is Hindu (60%) too like in the unorganised sector. Between 29-39 years of age groups the percentages of Hindus are 2% more than the Muslims whereas, Muslims are found more below the age of 18 years. (Table 3.4B(I)). On the other hand, there is an absence of Muslim construction workers between the age groups of 40 -50 years. [Table 3.4B & Fig 3.4B].

Metro sector is dominated by Muslim construction workers: About 60% construction workers are Muslims which is 20% higher than the Hindu construction workers employed. [Table 3.4C & Fig 3.4C]. Muslim construction workers are 18% higher compared to the Hindu construction workers in the age groups of 29 and 39 years; Muslim construction workers are found above the age of 50 years. (Table 3.4C(I)). The percentages of Muslim construction workers are higher than the Hindus in the housing sector also. [Table 3.4D & Fig 3.4D]. As most of the workers are young migrants and they mainly come from Murshidabad district of West Bengal (e.g Isiampur, Beraripur, Lalghola, Birpara, Ranitola, Laskarpur etc). Maximum concentrations of Muslim construction workers are found in the age groups of 18 -28 years. [Table 3.4D(I)].

Caste structure:

In India on the basis of occupation and the colour of the skin the society is divided into four varnas, Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra. Scheduled Castes (the untouchable community of Sudras) have been a deprived, neglected and exploited lot in Indian society since the introduction of caste system in the country. On the other hand, the tribes are the autochthonous people of the land who are believed to be the earliest settlers in Indian Peninsula. They are generally called adivasis, implying original inhabitants. (Khullar: 2000: 225).141

The majority of construction workers came from a rural environment. They belong to a variety of castes and sub-castes. From Table 3.5 & Fig 3.5, it is clear that the upper caste is the dominant caste among the construction workers of Kolkata. The percentages of upper castes are highest in the unorganised sector and lowest in the roads & flyovers sectors. On

the other hand, Scheduled Tribe are found only in the roads & flyovers & housing sectors. In roads & flyovers the percentages of Scheduled Tribe population are negligible (4%). 18% Scheduled Tribe construction workers are found in the housing sector. Scheduled Caste population dominate in the unorganised sector. The percentages of Scheduled Caste construction workers are the lowest (20%) in the roads & flyovers sectors. [Table 3.5(I)].

**Caste, age and gender structure of workers:**

The age structure of the unorganised construction workers of Kolkata according to caste structure shows that amongst the males, upper caste is dominant whereas in the female population it is the Scheduled Caste. Upper caste is the dominant caste in this sector. It is also found that there are no Scheduled Tribe population in this sector as this sector is mostly dominated by the local workers. [Table 3.6A & Fig 3.6A]. Between the age groups of 29 and 39, the percentages of upper caste male population are higher. Similarly in the same age groups Scheduled Caste male population are also high. Female workers are completely dominated by Scheduled Caste population. Scheduled Caste females and upper caste females both are mostly concentrated between the age groups of 29 and 39 years and 40 and 50 years.[Table 3.6A(I)]. But the percentage of upper caste female workers are lower compared to the Scheduled Caste female workers as Scheduled Caste female workers are economically poorer than the upper caste female workers so their work participation rate is higher than the upper caste female workers and women in lower class move further away from base as compared to women in the class preceding immediately.142

The caste structure of the roads & flyovers workers shows that the percentages of Scheduled Tribe population in this sector are really very low (only 3%). The domination of upper caste population is very prominent in this sector (about 76%).[Table 3.6B & Fig 3.6B]. Maximum concentration of upper caste as well as Scheduled Caste workers are found between the age groups of 18 and 28 years [Table 3.6B(I)]. There are no Scheduled Tribe population in the metro sector and the percentages of Scheduled Castes are 10% higher than the upper caste workers. [Table 3.6C & Fig 3.6C]. The highest percentages of the upper caste workers (54%) are found between the age groups 29 and 39 years. [Table 3.6C(I)]. In the housing sector, Scheduled Caste dominates. [Table 3.6D & Fig 3.6D]. The highest percentage (47%) of Scheduled Tribe construction workers are seen in this sector between the age groups of 18 and 28 years. The same percentages (50%) of upper caste and Scheduled Caste construction workers are found between the age groups of 29 and 39 years. [Table 3.6D(I)].

142 Sen, l. , 'Class and Gender in Work Time Allocation', Economic and Political Weekly, Vol- No- 23(33), 1988, pp.1702-06.
**Language:**

Language is an important demographic characteristic. In fact, India is a country of heterogeneous ethnic and social groups which have their own languages.\(^{143}\) Construction workers mainly speak Bengali. The Royal Commission report of 1931 admits that “the immediate employer of the worker is sirdar.”\(^{144}\) Sirdars in construction industry generally recruit in their own native villages and surroundings areas; hence there is a tendency for people from the same village or the immediate neighbourhood or a specific caste to congregate in the said industrial area. It is shown that the labourers have come mainly from Murshidabad of West Bengal, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. However it is also found that there is a preponderance of Bengali labour. [Table 3.7 & Fig 3.7]

**Linguistic, age & gender structure of workers:**

Table 3.8A & Fig 3.8A show that the percentages of Bengali language speakers are the highest in the unorganised sector. It is also found that women workers only speak Bengali. Only 33% males above the age of 50 years know English in the unorganised sector. [Table 3.8A(I)]. 77% construction workers speak Bengali in the roads & flyovers sector. Here no one can speak English but 23% speak Hindi as some construction workers have migrated from Hindi speaking states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar etc. [Table 3.8B & Fig 3.8B]. Bengali is also the dominant language in the metro (88%) and housing sectors (86%) irrespective of all age groups. Only 14% and 12% metro and housing workers speak Hindi. [Table 3.8C, Fig 3.8C, Table 3.8D & Fig 3.8D].

**Linguistic & religious structure of workers:**

Among the unorganised sector, the Hindu construction workers including 89% male Hindus speak Bengali, 9% male Hindus speak Hindi and 2% can speak English. [Table 3.9A(I) & Fig 3.9A]. Bengali is also the dominant language in the roads and flyovers sector. [Table 3.9B & Fig 3.9B]. 52% workers speak Bengali. The percentages of Hindi speaking Hindu workers are higher. Similarly the percentages of Bengali speaking Muslim construction workers are higher in this sector. [Table 3.9B(I)]. It is found that the Hindu and Muslims workers mainly speak Bengali in the metro sector. [Table 3.9C & Fig 3.9C]. Bengali is the dominant language of the housing sector too for both Hindu and Muslim workers [Table 3.9D & Fig 3.9D] but the percentages of Bengali speaking Muslims workers are 4% higher than the Bengali speaking Hindus. [Table 3.9D(I)].


Language & caste structure:

In the unorganised sector, most of the upper caste construction workers speak Bengali. Only few male upper caste workers speak English and Hindi. Both upper caste and Scheduled Caste women workers can only speak Bengali. [Table 3.10A & Fig 3.10A]. 7% and 4% male upper caste workers speak Hindi and English also. [Table 3.10A(I)]. In the roads and flyovers sector, Hindi speaking upper caste workers (52%) are from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. [Table 3.10B(I)]. Scheduled Caste workers from Murshidabad mainly speak Bengali. [Table 3.10B & Fig 3.10B]. In the metro sector, Bengali is the main language of workers. [Table 3.10C & Fig 3.10C]. Both upper caste (55%) and Scheduled Caste (45%) workers speak Bengali only. [Table 3.10C(I)]. 43% Scheduled Tribe workers speak Hindi only in the housing sector. [Table 3.10D(I)]. All upper caste housing workers can speak Bengali only. [Table 3.10D & Fig 3.10D].

Linguistic pluralism:

In case of the construction workers, they speak only one language as most of them come from the same places. Linguistic pluralism is not prominent for the construction workers as the "sardari" method of recruitment and control and the keen competition for employment inevitable in a market that was overstocked with unemployed labourers and where the unskilled nature of work made every worker easily replaceable. Hence the linguistic and geographical bonds are more important to guide the life of a worker than the usual economic factors. Very few speak two languages [Table 3.11 & Fig 3.11] and only 2.5 % unorganised male workers know three languages (Bengali, Hindi & English). [Table 3.11(I)].

Marital status:

In our society marriage is closely related to other demographic factors like gender, age, caste, religion, language, income etc. (Chandna: 1986:108). In construction sector, marital status of the construction workers is also closely related to the above mentioned demographic factors. From Table 3.12 & Fig 3.12, it is found that the percentages of married construction workers are higher than the unmarried construction workers except in the roads & flyovers sector as this sector is mainly dominated by young workers. All women in the unorganised sector are married. [Table 3.12(I)].

Marital status, age & gender structure:

92% male unorganised workers are married and the highest percentages (57%) of the unmarried male unorganised workers are found between the age groups of 18 and 28 years. All unorganised women workers are married. [Table 3.13A, Fig 3.13A & Table 70

3.13A(I)]. In the roads and flyovers sectors, the percentages of married construction workers are about 12% lower than the percentages of unmarried construction workers and all the construction workers below the age of 18 years are unmarried. [Table 3.13B, Fig 3.13B & Table 3.13B(I)]. 97% married workers are found between the age groups of 29 and 39 years in the metro sector. [Table 3.13C (I)]. There are no married workers between the age groups of 18 and 28 years. The percentages of unmarried roads & flyovers (71%) and housing workers(57%) are higher compared to the married workers. [Table 3.13C(I) & Table 3.13D (I)]. In fact, married workers are higher than the married workers both in the metro and housing sectors. [Table 3.13C, Fig 3.13C,Table 3.13D & Fig 3.13D].

Marital status & religious structure:

From the Table 3.14A(I), it is found that only 10% male unmarried Hindus are found in this sector. 92% Hindu married workers are found in the unorganised sector. [Table 3.14A & Fig 3.14A]. In the roads & flyovers sector a very interesting feature is found. The same percentages (50%) of Hindus are found as married and unmarried in the roads & flyovers sector. The percentages of Muslim unmarried workers are higher (about 30%) compared to the married construction workers as migrant Muslims are mostly under 18 years or between 18 and 28 years. [Table 3.14B(I) & Fig 3.14B]. The percentages of married construction workers are also very high (90%) in the metro sector. [Table 3.14C & Fig 3.14C]. Unmarried Muslim workers are very less(7%) in this sector. Similarly the percentages of unmarried Hindus(15%) are also less compared to the married workers. [ Table 3.14C(I)]. The differences between the percentages of married and unmarried construction workers are only 16 % in the housing sector. [Table 3.14D & Fig 3.14D]. Though this sector is Muslim dominated but the percentages of married Hindu workers(76%) are higher than the Muslim married workers(24%). 55% unmarried Muslim workers are seen in this sector. [Table 3.14D(I)].

Marital status & caste structure:

Concentration of male married workers is higher among the upper castes rather than the Scheduled Caste population but the percentages of unmarried are almost same in both groups. In the case of females, the percentages of female married workers are higher in the Scheduled Caste population than in the upper caste as the literacy level and status of women both are very less in the Scheduled Caste population. [Table 3.15A, Fig 3.15A & Table 3.15A(I)]. In fact, gender inequality is much more prominent in the Scheduled Caste population than in the upper castes.  In this group early marriage is a common feature of women. In the unorganised sector, the percentages of Scheduled Caste unmarried

construction workers are higher compared to the married upper caste workers. Similarly in the roads & flyovers sector, the percentages of Scheduled Caste unmarried construction workers are higher. [Table 3.15B, Fig 3.15B & Table 3.15B(I)]. In the metro sector, upper caste dominates. [Table 3.15C & Fig 3.15C]. The percentages of the upper caste married workers (91%) are higher than the rest of workers. [Table 3.15C(I)]. In the housing sector, all Scheduled Tribe workers are unmarried [Table 3.15D & Fig 3.15D] and only 10% Scheduled Caste workers are unmarried as those construction workers either belong to the age groups between 18 and 28 years or under the age of 18 years. [Table 3.15D(I)].

**Marital status & linguistic structure:**

The unorganised workers mainly speak Bengali. They are mainly local workers coming from North 24 Parganas, West Bengal where Bengali is the major language. [Table 3.16A, Table 3.16A(I) & Fig 3.16A]. Unmarried workers dominate the roads & flyovers sector. [Table 3.16B & Fig 3.16B ] The same percentages(50%) of the married and unmarried Hindi speaking workers are found in the roads & flyovers sector. [Table 3.16B(I)]. Bengali speaking workers also dominate the metro sector. [Table 3.16C & Fig 3.16C ]. 90% married workers speak Bengali only and all Hindi speaking workers are married in this sector. [Table 3.16C(I)]. In case of the housing sector, Bengali speaking workers are locals. They are older and mostly married. On the other hand, the unmarried ones are younger and migrants who speak mainly Hindi. [Table 3.16D,Table 3.16D(I) & Fig 3.16D ].

**Education:**

Indian census 1991, considers the ability, to both read and write a simple message with understanding in any language, a sufficient basis for classifying a person as literate.(Khullar:2000:217)147. Like India, in Kolkata literacy differentials exist between various social groups, caste, and religion. Educational level is very low amongst construction workers also since they mostly belong to poor families and they have to earn their own livelihood from childhood. Several socio- economic factors (like India’s long colonial history, deep rooted caste based social structure, mainly farm based subsistence economy, deep rooted prejudices against female education, limited availability of schools) have contributed to such a sorry state of affairs( Khullar: 2000: 217).148 There are wide gaps between male and female education levels as well as literacy rates. Women in India have far long been confined to the four walls of the house. Moreover, there are not many opportunities for them to participate in the family’s economic ventures. General poverty, low status of women, early marriage (especially in rural areas), high incidences of dropouts from the schools even at the primary level, household responsibilities of women, prejudices against their physical and social


148. ibid, p. 217.
mobility have resulted in low female literacy rates and wide gap between male and female literacy rates (Khullar: 2000: 219).\(^{149}\)

Golden (1968)\(^{150}\) remarked that the literacy differentials are due to the institutional structure of a society, particularly the occupational structure. It has often been observed that certain occupations have literacy as a prerequisite, while others can be taken up even by illiterates. For instance, in the less developed countries the primary occupations like agriculture, mining, general labour, construction work etc., can be carried out even by illiterate people. The education levels vary between different gender, as well as age groups, castes, religions etc. There are some socio-economic factors behind the illiteracy of women in our society. Firstly, the prevailing social milieu in these countries perceives an ideal female as a dutiful home bird (Krishan and Shyam: 1973: 204).\(^{151}\) Women, in general, are not allowed much mobility; they remain confined to the four walls of the house only. Also it is very rare that a girl is sent to school in the adjacent village, if there is no school in the home village. Women construction workers generally come from remote villages so the above mentioned reasons are quite applicable for them. Secondly, women are granted relatively low social status in comparison to men. Female literacy has a positive correlation with the status of the women in the society. Third is an early age of marriage for women. Generally, female children who join school at an early age have a tendency to drop out in the event of their marriage. Last, but not the least is the economic factor. The appalling poverty and low degree of occupational participation among females are the factors responsible to the large gap in the male and female educational disparity rates. (Chandna:1986:257).\(^{152}\) According to Agarwal, some social systems (particularly in the north and north western regions where male centred kinship pattern dominates) do not accept women's property rights. So women are less valued than their male counterparts. In fact, women are looked upon as "unproperited class" who have no property rights as well as land rights. Agarwal again stresses the importance of land, inheritance and ownership in India, arguing that "the single most important factor affecting women's situation is the gender gap in command over property."\(^{153}\)

\(^{149}\) ibid, p. 219.


\(^{151}\) Krishan G; and Shyam, M., Spatial Perspective on Progress of Female Literacy In India: 1907- 1971, Pacific Viewpoint, Vol- 14, 1973, p.204.


Education structure:

Most of the construction workers are illiterates as they had to join this profession to earn their livelihood. [Table 3.17 & Fig 3.17]. All women workers are illiterates. Only 2% literates are found in the housing sector. The percentages of the secondary passed workers are very high and very few graduates are found as construction workers. [Table 3.17(I)].

Education, age & gender structure of workers:

Unorganised sector is dominated by the secondary passed workers (50%). [Table 3.18A & Fig 3.18A]. The highest percentages of male illiterates are found between the age groups of 29 and 39 years in the unorganised sector. The percentages of the secondary passed workers are the highest in the age groups of 40 and 50 years. [Table 3.18A(I)]. According to the construction workers of the roads & flyovers sector, they have to join this profession at a very early age due to poverty. So 50% workers are illiterates below the age of 18 years. In this sector, 56% workers are found who passed secondary level in the age groups of 18 to 28 years. [Table 3.18B(I)]. The percentages of secondary passed workers are higher compared to the primary or higher secondary passed ones. [Table 3.18B & Fig 3.18B]. The percentages of illiterates are the highest (62%) in the metro sector. [Table 3.18C & Fig 3.18C]. The highest percentages of illiterates are found between the age groups of 29 and 39 years in this sector. In the same age groups the same percentages (3%) of the workers are found who are higher secondary passed and graduates. [Table 3.18C(I)]. In the housing sector, 14% graduates are found between the age groups of 40 and 50 years and 56% illiterates are found between the age groups of 29 and 39 years. [Table 3.18D(I)]. Illiterates and graduates both work together as construction workers in Kolkata. [Table 3.18D & Fig 3.18D].

Education & religious structure:

The differences in the educational levels of various religious groups are observed in India. These differences appear because different religious groups living together may be at different levels of socio-economic development. In the unorganised sector both Hindu illiterates and graduates are found. [Table 3.19A, Table 3.19A(I) & Fig 3.19A]. In the roads and flyovers sector, secondary and higher secondary passed Muslims are more than the Hindus. [Table 3.19B, Table 3.19B(I) & Fig 3.19B].

Table 3.19C, Table 3.19C(I) & Fig 3.19C show that the education levels of the Muslims are strikingly low compared to the Hindus, while it is a fact that Muslims in India, constitute socially and economically the most backward population group (Chandna; 1986: 258). The housing sector is also dominated by the Muslims like the previous sector and

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most of them are migrants from the remote areas of Murshidabad district (Muslim dominated district of West Bengal). Educational levels of Muslims are lower than the Hindus in India which are also reflected in this sector prominently (Chandna: 1986: 258). Only 5% literates are only seen here. The same percentages of graduates are also found here. The highest percentages of construction workers both in Hindus and Muslims are found in the secondary level- education group. [Table 3.19D, Table 3.19D(I) & Fig 3.19D].

**Education & caste:**

The Varna system (caste-system) unwittingly propagated the idea that educational skills were to be acquired only if these had any functional relevance (Gosal:1967:3). Consequently the Brahmans, who were placed at the top of the caste-hierarchy were given the right to get educated and were assigned the job of imparting knowledge and education. By contrast, the Sudras, who were kept at the bottom of the social scale, were denied the right to get educated on the plea that it would impede the performance of their duties (Mitra: 1964:101).

In the unorganised sector, the total percentage of male illiterates in the upper caste population are 16% lower than the male Scheduled Caste population as the educational levels among the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are markedly lower than those of non-Scheduled Castes/Tribes. [Table 3.20A & Fig 3.20A]. All women are illiterates irrespective of caste in this sector. [Table 3.20A(I)].

There are several reasons for differentials in educational levels among different social groups. Most people belonging to the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities are forced to engage in menial occupations for which literacy has hardly any relevance. The poverty stricken parents prefer to send their children to work rather than to school. Low degree of awakening and lack of interaction with other social groups are the other reasons for such a situation (Chandna: 1986:258). The percentages of male educated upper caste workers are higher than the Scheduled Caste workers.

Indian society is characterised by prejudices against the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, thereby subjecting them to deprivation and denials in various spheres.

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155 ibid, p.258.


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including education (Khullar 2000:225). In the roads and flyovers sector all Scheduled Tribe workers are secondary passed. [Table 3.20B, Table 3.20B(I) & Fig 3.20B]. The upper caste workers dominate the metro sector. [Table 3.20C & Fig 3.20C]. The percentages of illiterates are the highest in the Scheduled Caste population but graduates are also seen in this group. [Table 3.20C(I)]. 15% upper caste graduates are found in the housing sector. In our society educational levels of Scheduled Tribe population are very low but 53% Scheduled Tribe workers studied upto secondary level.[Table 3.20D(I) & Fig 3.20D]. Due to the education system of India, Scheduled Tribe population can get formal education easily but they are the economically poor section in our society who have no resources like the upper caste population. So they have to depend on their acquired education which is not sufficient for getting jobs nowadays. The percentages (50%) of Scheduled Caste illiterates workers are also the highest in this sector.

**Dropout structure:**

The discontinuation of education, or drop outs as it often called, at school level is a serious problem in countries like India. The problem of dropouts in India's countryside is very serious. Thus, appalling poverty prevalent among backward sections of Indian society not only keeps many children unenrolled but also forces some of those who get enrolled to drop out. In India, primary education is compulsory. But in reality large number of school dropouts, who find their way into various low paid and odd jobs, shows the failure of Indian state to legally enforce primary education.180

Among the construction workers, most of them dropped out at the secondary level (91%). Amongst them dropouts rates are the highest among the unorganised and housing sectors. [Table 3.21, Table 3.21(I) & Fig 3.21].

**Dropout & age structure:**

91% construction workers left their studies in the secondary level to earn money for their better livelihood. 39% unorganised workers left their studies between the age groups of 29 and 39 years to join this profession and run their poor families.[Table 3.22A & Fig 3.22A ]. On the other hand, the highest percentages (88%) of the roads & flyovers workers dropped their studies in the secondary level and join this job as migrant workers between the age groups of 18 and 28 years. [Table 3.22B & Fig 3.22B]. Metro sector is also dominated by the secondary dropouts (87%). Some migrant metro workers left their studies in the primary level

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between the age groups of 29 and 39 years. [Table 3.22C, Fig 3.22C & Table 3.22C(I)]. Similarly housing sector is also dominated by the secondary dropouts [Table 3.22D, Fig 3.22D] but between the age groups of 18 and 28 years some (10%) of them left their studies at an early age and join as migrant construction workers. [Table 3.22D(I)].

**Dropout & religious structure:**

All unorganised Hindu workers dropped their studies in the secondary level. But Muslims dropouts are higher in the roads, flyovers, metro and housing sectors than the Hindu dropouts. [Table 3.23A - Table 3.23D, Table 3.23A(I) - Table 3.23D(I), Fig 3.23C & Fig 3.23D]. Low level of education and unavailability of facilities of education for Muslims are the reasons behind the higher percentages of Muslims dropouts in India. (Chandna: 1986: 260)

**Dropout & caste structure:**

Most of the construction workers of the four sectors left their studies in the secondary level but the percentages of the dropouts are higher among the deprived groups (Scheduled Caste & Scheduled Tribe). [Table 3.24A - Table 3.24D, Fig 3.24C & Fig 3.24D]. 34% Scheduled Tribe housing workers and 25% Scheduled Caste metro workers left their studies in the primary level. [Table 3.24C(I) & Table 3.24D(I)]. Poverty, lack of interaction with other social groups as well as lack of awareness of education all are the reasons behind the dropouts of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe workers.

**Income structure:**

*The wage rate of different groups of construction workers in Kolkata, 2007*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construction workers</th>
<th>Rates/per day(Rs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mason</td>
<td>155/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpenter</td>
<td>180/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painter</td>
<td>150/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Smith</td>
<td>180/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plumber</td>
<td>190/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert or skilled workers</td>
<td>95/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coolies Male/Helpers</td>
<td>80/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coolies Female/Helpers</td>
<td>75/-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Builders Friend; 34th year of publication; issue 406; May 2007: 78.

According to the women construction workers they are usually the only earning member of their families. Women workers are exclusively hired for unskilled jobs such as earth work, loading or unloading of bricks, shifting of stone chips or their cleaning, concreting etc, helping

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male co-workers.\textsuperscript{162} Wages are received by the respondents on the basis of their daily work. It is also notified by the Government of West Bengal for the employment of women workers in construction under the Minimum wages Act of 1948. However, in view of the recent price rise, this wage rate is too little to suffice even the food requirement of the worker alone. It must be mentioned that the wage rates above are almost invariably on a consolidated basis and are not supplemented by any dearth allowances.\textsuperscript{163} They can get work 15-18 days a month and their rate is 80-120 per day. According to the recommendations of the Tripartite working groups for construction industry in 1988 recommended that wages of the construction workers should be fixed under the Minimum Wages Act. (Chakrabarti: 2005: 330).\textsuperscript{164}

In this study, the workers are classified into four income groups. Most of the construction workers (74.6\%) earnings are found between Rs.2000 and Rs.4000. All metro construction workers earnings are between Rs.2000 and Rs.4000 as they are appointed by Government contractors. [Table 3.25 & Fig 3.25]. A carpenter and a painter should have been paid Rs.180 per day in Kolkata but they are paid less than their present wage rates. There are wage differences between the skilled workers and unskilled workers as well as female and male workers. Women workers are fully conscious of such variations, but, accepted the right of the employer to employ a particular person at any rate of his choice.\textsuperscript{165}

**Age & Income structure:**

Most of the unorganised workers (68\%) monthly income is between Rs.2000 and 4000. [Table 3.26A & Fig 3.26A]. In the roads & flyover sector, most of the workers (62\%) monthly earnings are between Rs.2000 and 4000. [Table 3.26B & Fig 3.26B]. All the minors earn monthly Rs.2000 in this sector. Only few skilled (4\%) roads and flyovers workers earn monthly Rs.4001-6000 between the age groups of 18 and 28 years. [Table 3.26B(I)]. All metro maintenance construction workers monthly earnings are fixed (between Rs.2000 to 4000 monthly) as they are appointed by the Government.[ Table 3.26C & Fig 26C]. Most of the housing worker's (62\%) monthly earnings are between Rs.2000 and Rs.4000. Minors are also found in the housing sector and their earnings are also very low. [Table 3.26D, Table 3.26D(I) & Fig 3.31D].

\textsuperscript{162} Woman Construction Workers: Two Report Surveys, Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi, October, 1975, p. 23.

\textsuperscript{163} ibid, p. 28.


\textsuperscript{165} ibid, p. 28.
Conclusion:

Generally construction workers have entered the construction or building industry below the age of 18 years and either retired or are required to leave when about 50 years old. The maximum concentration of construction workers are found between the age groups of 18 and 28 years. This might indicate not just higher propensity among younger workmen to work in the building industry but also the corresponding references of the employers or contractors. Female workers are found only in the unorganised sector as this sector is mainly dominated by the local workers. Female construction workers are mainly found at the young age as helpers and are sexually exploited by male co-workers or contractors. There is also a near total absence of female construction workers in the labourious work as well as skilled or technical work.

The religious, linguistic and geographical bonds are more important to guide the life of a worker than the usual economic factors. The predominance of Hindus are also found in the construction workers of Kolkata.

The majority of workers came from a rural environment. They belong to a variety of caste and sub-castes. The percentages of upper caste are the highest in the unorganised sector and lowest in the roads & flyovers sectors. The age structure of the unorganised construction workers of Kolkata according to caste structure shows that amongst the males, upper caste is dominant whereas in the female population it is Scheduled Caste. But the percentages of upper caste female workers are lower compared to the Scheduled Caste female workers as Scheduled Caste female workers are economically poorer than the upper caste female workers so their work participation rate is higher than the upper caste female workers. Construction workers mainly speak Bengali irrespective of caste and religion. Recruiters in construction industry generally recruit workers from their own native villages and surroundings areas. Most of the labourers have been recruited from the same states and districts like Murshidabad of West Bengal, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. However it is also found that there is a preponderance of Bengali labour. Linguistic pluralism is not prominent for the construction workers as the "sardari" method of recruitment.

It is found that the percentages of married construction workers are higher than the unmarried construction workers except in the roads & flyovers sectors as these sectors are dominated by very young workers.

Educational level is very less amongst construction workers since they mostly belong to poor families and they have to earn their own livelihood from early ages. All women

167 Sen, I., 'Class and Gender In Work Time Allocation', Economic and Political Weekly, Vol- No- 23(33), 1988, pp.1702-06.
workers are illiterates as women especially are the most deprived group in the poor families. Educational levels of the Muslims are strikingly low compared to the Hindus, while it is a fact that Muslims in India, constitute socially and economically the most backward population group. There are several reasons for differentials in educational levels among different social groups. Most people belonging to the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities are forced to engage in menial occupations for which literacy has hardly any relevance. Low degree of awakening and lack of interaction with other social groups are the other reasons for such a situation.\(^{168}\) 91% construction workers left their studies in the secondary level to earn money for their better livelihood. Low awareness level of education and unavailability of facilities of education for Muslims are the reasons behind the higher percentages of Muslims dropouts in India.

\[^{168}\]Chandna, R.C., Geography of Population, Kalayani Publishers, New Delhi, 1986, p. 258
Fig 3.7: Linguistic structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Languages</th>
<th>Bengali</th>
<th>Hindi</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unorganised male</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unorganised female</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roads &amp; Flyovers</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig 3.8A: Linguistic, Age & Gender structure: Unorganised workers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age groups</th>
<th>Bengali</th>
<th>Hindi</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig 3.8B: Linguistic & Age structure: Roads & Flyovers workers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age groups</th>
<th>Bengali</th>
<th>Hindi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28-39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig 3.8C: Linguistic & Age structure: Metro workers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age groups</th>
<th>Bengali</th>
<th>Hindi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig 3.8D: Linguistic & Age structure: Housing workers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age groups</th>
<th>Bengali</th>
<th>Hindi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28-39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fig 3.9A: Linguistic & Religious structure: Unorganised workers

Fig 3.9B: Linguistic & Religious structure: Roads & Flyovers workers

Fig 3.9C: Linguistic & Religious structure: Metro workers

Fig 3.9D: Linguistic & Religious structure: Housing workers

Fig 3.10A: Linguistic & Caste structure: Unorganised workers

Fig 3.10B: Linguistic & caste structure: Roads & Flyovers workers
Fig 3.10D: Linguistic & Caste structure: Housing workers

Fig 3.11: Linguistic pluralism structure

Fig 3.12: Marital status

Fig 3.13A: Marital status, Age & Gender structure: Unorganised workers

Fig 3.13B: Marital status & Age structure: Roads & Flyovers workers
Fig 3.14A: Marital status & Religious structure: Unorganised workers

Male Hindu construction workers

Fig 3.14B: Marital status & Religious structure: Roads & Flyovers workers

Fig 3.14C: Marital status & Religious structure: Metro workers

Fig 3.14D: Marital status & Religious structure: Housing workers
Fig 3.15A: Marital status & Caste structure: Unorganised workers

Fig 3.15B: Marital status & Caste structure: Roads & Flyovers workers

Fig 3.15C: Marital status & Caste structure: Metro workers

Fig 3.15D: Marital status & Caste structure: Housing workers

Fig 3.16A: Marital status & Linguistic structure: Unorganised workers

Bengali speaking male: 66%
Hindi speaking male: 7%
English speaking male: 2%
Bengali speaking female: 19%

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Fig 3.16B: Marital status & Linguistic structure:
Roads & Flyovers workers

Fig 3.16C: Marital status & Linguistic structure:
Metro workers

Fig 3.16D: Marital status & Linguistic structure:
Housing workers

Fig 3.17: Education structure

- Unorganised male
- Unorganised female
- Roads & Flyovers
- Metro
- Housing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education levels</th>
<th>% of workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literate &amp; Literate</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary (I-IV)</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary (V-VIII)</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Secondary (IX-XII)</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Unorganised male: 4% 1.50% 12.50% 1.50% 0.50%
- Unorganised female: 5% 3% 11.50% 2%
- Roads & Flyovers: 15.50% 0.50% 1% 7.50% 0.50% 0.50%
- Metro: 9.50% 0.50% 3% 10% 1.50% 0.50%
- Housing: 9.50% 0.50% 3% 10% 1.50% 0.50%
Fig 3.19A: Education & Religious structure: Unorganised workers

Male Hindus
- Literate: 16%
- Primary (I-IV): 6%
- Secondary (V-X): 2%
- Graduation: 50%

Fig 3.19B: Education & Religious structure: Roads & Flyovers workers

Hindus
- Literate: 6%
- Primary (I-IV): 24%
- Secondary (V-X): 20%
- Graduation: 8%

Muslims
- Literate: 6%
- Primary (I-IV): 24%
- Secondary (V-X): 20%
- Graduation: 8%

Fig 3.19C: Education & Religious structure: Metro workers

Hindus
- Literate: 0%
- Primary (I-IV): 0%
- Secondary (V-X): 0%
- Graduation: 2%

Muslims
- Literate: 0%
- Primary (I-IV): 0%
- Secondary (V-X): 0%
- Graduation: 0%

Fig 3.19D: Education & Religious structure: Housing workers

Hindus
- Literate: 6%
- Primary (I-IV): 12%
- Secondary (V-X): 2%
- Graduation: 14%

Muslims
- Literate: 0%
- Primary (I-IV): 0%
- Secondary (V-X): 26%
- Graduation: 26%
Fig 3.20A: Education & Caste structure: Unorganised workers

Fig 3.20B: Education & Caste structure: Roads & Flyovers workers

Fig 3.20C: Education & Caste structure: Metro workers

Fig 3.20D: Education & Caste structure: Housing workers
Fig 3.21: Dropout structure

- Unorganised Roads & Metro Housing
- Flyovers

Construction workers

Fig 3.22A: Dropout & Age structure:
Unorganised workers

Fig 3.22B: Dropout & Age structure:
Roads & Flyovers workers

Fig 3.22C: Dropout & Age structure:
Metro workers

Fig 3.22D: Dropout & Age structure:
Housing workers

Fig 3.23C: Dropout & Religious structure:
Metro workers

Fig 3.23D: Dropout & Religious structure:
Housing workers
Photo 3.1: Unorganised construction workers waiting for daily work early in the morning in Kolkata

Photo 3.2: An interview of a contractor at the over bridge at Bagha jatin

Photo 3.3: The housing construction workers at Kalighat at their workplace cum temporary residence
Photo 3.4: Construction site of tram line (roads sector) at Gopal Nagar

Photo 3.5: Construction site of flyovers (roads sector) at Bagha Jatin

Photo 3.6: Housing project under construction at Kalighat
Photo 3.7: Construction site of housing sector at Kalighat

Photo 3.8: A Tollygunge metro maintenance at his makeshift residence