CHAPTER VIII

PROBLEMS OF
CONSTRUCTION WORKERS

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8.1 INTRODUCTION

Construction sector comes under unorganised sector of an economy. The term unorganised labour has been defined as those workers who have not been able to organise themselves in pursuit of their common interest due to certain constraints like casual nature of employment, ignorance and illiteracy, small and scattered size of establishment etc. As per the survey carried out by the National Sample Survey Organisation in the year 1999-2000, the total employment in both organised and unorganised sectors in the country was of the order of 39.7 crores around 2.8 crores in the organised sector and 36.9 crores (about 93%) in the unorganised sector.

Out of 36.9 crores workers in the unorganised sector, 23.7 crore workers (60.00%) are employed in agricultural sector, about 1.7 crore in construction sector (4.00%), 4.1 crore in manufacturing (10.00%), 3.7 crore in transport and communication services (9.00%) and 3.7 crores in trade (9.00%). The need was felt, therefore, to put focus on the problems faced by the workers in unorganised sector with special reference to the workers in construction work. The present topic will describe various problems of construction workers.

Construction business in Kolhapur city is performing well. In all respects it helps to the economy of the district. It provides ample employment and income generation opportunities. It is one of the fast growing sectors in the city as well as district. Apart from all the above good things; construction workers undergoes with the following problems.

8.2 GENERAL PROBLEMS

8.2.1 CASUAL NATURE OF EMPLOYMENT

Workers in the construction field are scattered in nature and unorganised. Most of them were migrated and poor. The strength of employer is superior. Hence, the nature of employment in construction
sector remains casual and uncertain. No one either contractor or owner gives an assurance of job to the workers.

Construction activity is in slack in rainy season, which results in less demand for workers. Again when there is a shortage of water in summer season, the construction work falls in danger, which ultimately turns into unemployment of workers required. As such, the nature of employment in construction sector remain causal and uncertain.

8.2.2 IGNORANCE AND ILLITERACY

Most of the construction workers are illiterate or literate. Therefore, they are very much unaware about the rules and regulations of their working conditions. As they are scattered in nature, they are totally helpless in pursuit of their common interest. Most of the workers are ignorant about market conditions and labour market variations.

8.2.3 LOW WAGES

Low wage is another important problem of construction workers. Minimum Wage Act is not applicable in unorganised sector. Skilled and unskilled construction workers work for low wages. In Kolhapur city workers are supplied by the labour contractor on commission basis. Naturally commission of the contractor is cut-off in the wages of labour. Construction workers does not get any overtime payment, as there is no provision of such payments in any Act. In this way problem of low wages is an important and unsolved problem in construction field.

8.2.4 LACK OF STABILITY OR DURABILITY

The nature of work in construction field is causal and uncertain. Hence, there is a complete absence of stability of work regarding staying in a single work or same place. Sometimes, workers themselves change their work or contractor dismis them. Skilled workers as well as unskilled workers are very unsure about their durability of work. They are working under unsecured environment or work culture.

8.2.5 ABSENCE OF SOCIAL SECURITY

The concept of social security is derived from the provision of Article 38 of the Constitution of India. The workers in the house construction are far away from the benefits of social security as well as labour welfare programmes run by Government. Workers work under the conditions like, uncertain work, no medical facilities, unsafe working place, no pension and lack of fair wages, insurance etc. In short there is a total absence of social security schemes in construction sector.
8.2.6 UNCERTAIN WORKING HOURS

Hours of work are not fixed in construction sector. They are totally elastic and depend upon the mood of foreman or contractor. Long working hours does not mean the extra payment. Daily work schedule commences at 8.30 a.m. and ends at 6.30 p.m. some time it is extended up to 8.30 p.m. Every worker have to follow the daily work schedule, nobody have an excuse.

8.2.7 UNHYGIENIC AND UNSAFE WORKING CONDITIONS

The working conditions are very bad and harmful to the health of workers on the construction sites, contractors are not paying attention towards any improvement in working conditions. There is no provision about accidents and emergencies. There are several occasions of accidents with the workers especially working in construction of multi-storied buildings.

8.2.8 VULNERABILITY TO OCCUPATIONAL DISEASES

Construction workers work in stone, mud, cement, steel nails, sand, bricks and water etc. masonry work and centring work depends upon cement mix material. The workers who prepare cement mix material and who operate that material did not wear socks or shoes, hence they were suffering from various occupational diseases. Body ache, craches, asthma, bronchial diseases, heat exhaustion and Malaria are the common diseases of these workers. One can identify these workers with one or more of the above said diseases. In another words, vulnerability to various occupational diseases is one of the identification mark of construction workers.

8.2.9 SERIOUS INJURIES

Construction workers work in difficult conditions. They have to go up and down on several floors taking the brick, sand and cement. Workers are doing all these things very easily as they are habitual with them. But, sometimes accidents happen due to break down of foundation and slab failure, etc. The nature of accidental injuries depends upon the seriousness of an accident. Many times workers die in such accidents and several times they have to loose their limbs. Thus, workers are facing the problems of serious injuries.

8.2.10 LACK OF SOCIAL SECURITY

It is obligation on contractors to provide social security to their workers. Labour insurance, first aid box, accidental benefits, canteens,
restrooms and pensions etc. are some of the important social security schemes. But, unfortunately construction workers are far away from all these social security schemes. They have to work in an unsecured environment with the accepting the life risks.

8.2.11 IMPROPER IMPLEMENTATION OF LABOUR LAWS

Government has made number of legislations for the workers working in unorganised sector. The government intention behind legislations is to provide full protection to unorganised labour class. Minimum Wages Act-1948, Contact Labour Act-1970, Building and other Construction Workers Act-1996, Payment of Wages Act-1936, Workmen’s Compensation Act-1923 and the Unorganised Sector Worker Bill-2005, etc. are the important regulation made by the government. But experience regarding implementation of these Acts in practice is not satisfactory. Helpless and scattered workers cannot change the situation, rather he bears and suffers unlimitedly.

8.2.12 LACK OF LABOUR WELFARE ACTIVITIES

Labour welfare is an extension of the term welfare and its application to labour. In India, labour welfare started in its broader meaning, but has gradually become narrower in its outlook. The workers in India works for long hours under unhealthy surroundings and afterwards have no means to remove the drudgery of their lives. Removed from the village community, and thrown into a strange and uncongenial environment, they are liable to become easy victims of alcoholism, gambling and other vices, which tends towards their demoralisation and ruin. Hence, the labour welfare is now beyond the stage of debate. Well sanitary and hygiene facilities, medical facilities, educational facilities, recreational facilities, rationing facilities and transport facilities etc. will create good feeling about work amongst workers.

8.2.13 NO HOLIDAYS

Construction workers have to work continuously. There is no provision for holiday and payment of holiday. They could get wages only after work. “No Work No Wage” is the rule of unorganised sector. Construction workers take weekly off on their bazaar day without wages.

8.2.14 ABSENTEEISM

This is one of the common phenomenon of Indian workers that they have a tendency to bunk off from work without any reason. They are very whimsical and capricious that they do not attend their work. Many
time they give reasons about their ill health or local ceremonies. Absenteeism of workers result in low productivity and low earnings, which ultimately results in their poverty.

8.2.15 ADDITION OF VARIOUS HABITS

Construction workers have an addiction of various bad habits. Chewing tobacco, smoking, eating Gutkha, drinking alcohol at the time of work are the major drawbacks of construction workers. Some of them are involved in adultery and always indulge in family quarrels. All these bad habits badly affect on their body as well as their working efficiency.

Thus, construction workers are facing all the above problems. These unsolved problems are the basic causes of poverty, ill health and unsatisfactory low living standard of labours.

8.3 PROBLEMS OF FEMALE WORKERS

Large number of female worker engaged in construction sector. In Kolhapur city more than 10,000 female workers are engaged in house construction activity. At the time of their personal interviews, we were well aware about their several problems. The basic problems of female house construction workers are as under –

8.3.1 LOW WAGES

Wage discrimination is the common phenomena in Indian economy. In construction sector, also females are paid less than male. In our observation we found that wages of a female worker was Rs. 40 per day less than a male worker. The ongoing per day wages of a female workers was Rs. 80 and a male worker was Rs. 120. In house construction activity, male and female unskilled workers doing near about the same work; yet female workers got 30% less wages than male workers.

8.3.2 EXPLOITATION

Working women are always in danger of physical and economical exploitation by their male co-workers. Physically females are supposed to be gentle and weaker than males.

8.3.3 FAMILY PROBLEMS

Women are playing multiple role in the society. Hence, they are also facing multiple problems. Every member in a family expects a lot
from women. As expectation increases number of family problems increases. Domestic violence, betting, and divorce etc. are the general family problems, which occurs only with women. All these family problems put female workers into trouble.

8.3.4 IGNORANCE AND ILLITERACY

Most of the female construction workers are illiterate. Some of them are totally illiterate and some only know 3 R’s i.e. Reading, Writings and Simple arithmetic. They doesn’t know the government rules and regulations as well as working conditions. They are very ignorant about market conditions as well as ups and downs in their wage rates. As they are scattered in nature they are totally helpless in pursuit of their common interest. Ignorance and illiteracy are the prime obstacles in the progress of working women.

8.3.5 TEMPORARY WORK

The nature of employment in construction activity is seasonal and uncertain. No one, either contractor or owner is ready to give an assurity of work. In rainy season construction sector take a halt, which results in shrinkage the demand of unskilled workers. Maximum (99 per cent) women engaged in construction work are doing unskilled work / job. Hence, the first axe of unemployment falls on women, at the time of depression in construction sector. Temporary nature of work always push female workers in chain of problems like no work no wages, low earnings, poverty, low social status and dirty living environment.

8.3.6 POVERTY

There are several low wage seasonal occupations. Poverty is the curse to casual workers in this occupation. Women in construction work suffer a lot from this curse. As they are not getting full time and continuous work, they are liable to get low earnings. Low earnings results in low income and low income ultimately push them into an abyss of poverty.

8.3.7 NEGLIGENCE TOWARDS CHILDREN

Female construction workers are long hours away from their home. As there are no fix timing of working hours, they have to work for long hours. Early in the morning when they leave their home, their children are in sleep and again when they returned at late night, most of the children are in sleep. Remaining all the time their children are on the mercy of God. Hence, very few time they came into the contact with their children.
8.3.8 UNHYGIENIC HABITS

Women workers in construction activity normally work with male co-workers and are habitual with several bad habits. Chewing tobacco, rubbing tobacco (mishry in Marathi) and even sometimes drinking alcohol and abusing co-workers are some of the bad habits found in many women workers.

8.3.9 LACK OF SOCIAL SECURITY

Social security is a basic need of all people regardless of employment in which they work and live. It is an important form of social protection. It should be begun with birth and should continue till death. In general sense social security refers to protection extended by the society and State to its members to enable them to overcome various contingencies of life.

The basic social security need in the construction women workers are the maternity benefits, health care, child care, nutritional food, drinking water, shelter and education at site. Unfortunately, nobody including Government and non-government bodies are paying proper attention in providing social security schemes to women construction workers.

8.3.10 GENDER DISCRIMINATION

Women experience gender discrimination in labour market due to many reasons. Women have lower accessibility than men to productivity argumentation, opportunities like schooling, required training and experience continuity in career regional mobility. Women receive less favourable jobs than men or they will not get any job because of their lower education and experience. Women get lower wages than men for the same job.

8.3.11 OUTSIDE THE REACH OF VARIOUS LAWS

Government has made various laws and directive principles for securing the women workers in unorganised sector. Unfortunately women labourers are outside the reach of most of laws and regulations, which seek to protect labourers, security and living conditions. They are exposed to various exploitations and discriminations. Indian women constituting nearly half of the total population, play a crucial role in the domestic sphere. Yet, our traditional attitude is to treat women as second class citizens. Their contribution is not given due credit.
8.3.12 DIRTY ENVIRONMENT

Women workers are living in slum areas of the city. The living environment in these slums are very dirty. Most of the males are drug addicts and abusing to their spouses at home. Lack of civilised culture turn them towards bad habits. All in all, women workers are living in a very bad and adverse situations.

8.3.13 OTHER PROBLEMS

Lack of adequate protection, non payment of overtime wages, no leave, unhygienic and unsafe working conditions, vulnerability to various occupational diseases, accidents causing serious injuries, also resulting in death or disablement tendency to devalue the female work contribution, devalue the minimum wage and bring it closer to the poverty line or pauper wage etc. are the other very important unsolved problems faced by women construction workers.

Thus, above all and other, so many problems are the permanent headache of female construction workers in the study area as well as outside the study area. All these problems are also applicable (more or less) to the female workers working in unorganised sector in general.