CHAPTER 1

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Unemployment is a problem to be tackled with in the modern world. In all developing countries, employment has been growing faster in industrial sector than in agriculture. Women have started to take active part in industries too. At the global level, the proportion of women in industrial labour force has risen from 21 per cent in 1960 to 26.5 per cent in 1980. It would have been more than 28 per cent by now. The rapid growth of manufactured exports from developing countries has led to a specific demand for labour and relatively fast growth of female employment in industry. Export garments and shoes are good examples for it. The industrial revolution has brought about certain changes which are more fundamental in the case of women than men.

Equality of women is one of the important principles of democracy and a mark of respect of human rights and one of the most important conditions of social progress. The U.N. General Assembly adopted the resolution to proclaim 1975 as the International Women’s Year. The observance of the International Women’s Year was in recognition of the crucial importance of women and their participation for the success of social and economic development in all world countries.
The labour welfare legislation for women workers in India has become necessary to prevent exploitation of women labourers. The Indian Constitution provides special steps from the Government to improve the conditions of women by establishing separate women’s welfare associations and institutions.

The Trade Union Act of 1926, gave formal recognition to the workers and a right to organise themselves. After Independence, there was a rapid increase in the number of unions. Women workers, initially have not shown any particular enthusiasm in joining trade unions because of certain social factors. It was only during late fifties, their participation in the unions has increased. The present research work deals with the problems and perspectives of women industrial labour in India with special reference to women workers, in shoe-factories in North Arcot-Ambedkar District.

The presence of vast multitude of women as workers and producers in the unorganised sector, where earnings are low, employment seasonal and insecure, supportive services woefully inadequate or even non-existent, growth opportunities few and collective organisations weak, have brought into into sharp focus the failure of the mainstream to alleviate women’s predicament. While it is true that workers, irrespective of sex, are exploited in the unorganised sector, women suffer more by the fact of their gender. There is enough evidence to substantiate the view that developmental process has only pushed women to a state of only
mere survival. Until recently, their contribution to the economy through self-employed and home-based work has gone unnoticed. The national data-base pays little attention to women’s presence or contribution. It is only in the past decade and a half that there has been some recognition of the fact that self-employed and home-based workers are part of the labour force. The collectivisation of the self-employed into voluntary organisations and the success of their grass-root initiatives have done much to bring about this awareness.

The three major reports on women in recent times - 'Towards Equality' (1974), 'Shramshakti' (1988) and 'National Perspective Plan for Women' (1988) - have assembled considerable data on the work and life-styles of labouring women, their invisible contribution to the economy, states of consciousness, and nascent efforts to organise them. The movement to impute value to women’s home-based work and the need to give them an identity and thus to pave the way for appropriate legislation and welfare measures is gaining momentum. There is also growing recognition that women would be in no position to absorb developmental inputs unless they themselves participate in the developmental process. Several rich women add very little to the GNP. This has generated a debate on the strategy and methodology needed to galvanise them to participate in social transformation.1

Since 1950, the proportion of adult women joining the labour force has risen both in developed and developing countries, though much more markedly in the former. It is difficult to ascribe any international factors having specific contributory role in this. In the international economy, there has been an increase in the female labour force. A relative increase in the employment of women in the manufacturing sector in developing countries has also been experienced.

In all developing countries, employment has been growing faster in services and industrial sectors than in agriculture. The sectoral distribution of female labour force has been shifting in accordance with this pattern, moving into industry distinctly faster than the male labour force. As a result, the proportion of women in the industrial labour force in developing countries has risen from 21 per cent in 1960 to 26.5 per cent in 1980. The increase took place while the overall share of women in the total labour force remained constant at around 32 per cent. Now in some developing countries women are more important in the industrial labour force than in any developed country. Among countries such as Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Tunisia and Haiti, women play a major role. For instance, the share of women in the manufacturing labour force is more than 40 per cent in Hong Kong, in Taiwan and Tunisia, it is approximately 50 per cent and in no industrialised market economy women account for more than 31 per cent. On an average within each region, women are more important in the
industrial labour force in developed countries than in developing countries. They were 29 per cent of the total when compared with 26.5 per cent in developing countries. However, there are fewer women overall recorded in the total labour force in developing countries, 33 per cent compared with 40 per cent in developed countries. It can be said that women are under-represented in the industrial sector of the developing countries. But, the share of women in the industrial labour force of less-developed countries is still lower than their share in the overall labour force.

The increasing importance of women in the industrial labour force in developing countries has been systematically related to certain factors. First of all, the rate of mobilization of female labour into industry has been the fastest where the rate of growth of total industrial output and employment has been the most rapid.

In the recent past, the most rapid total industrial growth has taken place in countries that have integrated their industrial sector with the international market. They have increased their exports of manufactures at the fastest rate. It follows from this three-way association among rates of industrial growth, export orientation and increasing female employment. The latter two factors have been correlated with each other as well as with industrial growth.

But there is also a direct link. The sexual division of labour takes a very pronounced form in industry in terms of the
distribution of male and female workers by industrial branch. Women are typically concentrated in branches manufacturing light industrial consumer goods adopting relatively labour-intensive techniques. In many countries, even industries of this kind do not use female labour, the reverse situation of women employed in heavy and capital-intensive production is never found. These light industries are mostly of a traditional kind, but they have a new strategic value to developing countries in the modern global economy. What this means is that exports of manufactures from developing countries have been made up in the main of the kinds of goods normally produced by female labour. Industrialization in the Post-War period has been as much female-led and export-led. The very rapid growth of manufactured exports from developing countries has therefore led to a specific demand for female labour and relatively fast growth of female employment in industry. In terms of the level of female employment, the influence of the international economy has been more clearly favourable in industry than in any other sector at this aggregate level. But the assessment gets complicated when the distribution of employment creation and the conditions of work are considered. In particular, the international factor has also put a premium on low wages. The benefits are thus highly equivocal. Nevertheless, on balance, these events have been good for women. There is an absolute gain for women in earning cash, as opposed to working without any monetary reward. In an exchange economy, to be without the means of exchange is truly to be powerless. By
implication, the conditions of work undertaken must be a secondary consideration, however deplorable they are. The only exception to this ranking is if the conditions of earning cash are such that they seem to preclude any consolidation of women's position in the cash economy. This would be either because the work is so temporary that expectations are not affected by it or because women have no control over their earnings and the work is not acknowledged as productive for some reasons, despite money usually being seen as a flag of acknowledgement in this respect. These considerations are relevant to conditions of work for women in the electronics industry and in domestic outwork.

Women's earnings are lower than men's. In 1982, the ratio of female to male earnings in manufacturing averaged 70 per cent for the eight developing countries for which information was available and 69 per cent in seventeen developed countries (ILO/INSTRAN, 1985). This is partly a consequence of the occupational distribution, with women being more important in low-grade occupations. But it is increasingly recognized that women's earnings are less than men's even in the same occupation and for the same job (Lele 1986; Triman and Roos 1983; Lloyd and Niemi 1979). This wage differential is reduced but not eliminated by adjusting for differences in educational attainment and training between male and female workers.²

Women in the Indian labour force have been widely researched into since the mid-seventies. A number of studies have highlighted their status visibility and importance in the economy. There are, however, many problems related to the definition of work, enumeration and coverage of workers, which have marred the construction of systematic profiles for regional and temporal comparisons. One of the significant changes during the post-World War-II period is the phenomenal increase in the work participation rates of women. According to the ILO report, out of 1800 million industrial workers in the world, 600 million are women. They account for one third of the total work-force in 1985. In the past, the USSR had the highest participation rate (60 per cent), closely followed by other centrally planned East European countries (56 per cent). The female work participation rate in the OECD European countries in 1980 was 48.3 per cent while the total for the OECD countries was 53.3 per cent (OECD, 1985). The political and ideological basis of the social system and the resulting higher status accorded to women may, perhaps,


4. Some estimates show that labour force participation rates of women in the USSR was as high as 82.2 per cent in 1980 (Mincer, 1985). This estimate considers women in the age groups between 20 and 54 years.
explain the higher participation rate of women in the socialist countries.\textsuperscript{5}

In poor and middle-income families in the rural Third World countries, women do more work than men. F.O'Connell of the United Nations describes hours of work (economic work and household work) per week done by women and men in world countries. In North America and Australia, in a week's time women work for 49 hours and men for 50 hours; in Japan women 57 hours, men 55 hours; in Western Europe women 49 hours, men 44 hours; in Eastern Europe women 70 hours, men 63 hours; in Latin America women 60 hours, men 55 hours; and in Asia Women 62 hours, men 49 hours. Out of economic necessity and acute poverty, women in over-populated under-developed countries do work for longer hours. Women labourers are also getting exploited by the avaricious industrialists and by those who are elite.

\textsuperscript{5}"The revolution leadership which proclaimed the establishment of the new Soviet State in October 1917 promised a radical transformation to bring about the full equality of women in economic, political and family life. Soviet effort represents the first and perhaps the most far-reaching effort ever undertaken to transform the status and role of women" (Lapidus, 1976, p.199). "The unique Soviet Socialist economic system, ideology and growth strategy have played a key role, together with specific geographic and historical circumstances in changing and shaping the role of women at work in the family". (Ofer and Vinokar, 1985, p.329).
Irrespective of the differing rates of work participation of women between developed and developing countries, there is a general agreement that women are subjected to labour market discrimination and are segregated to low paying and low status jobs. The argument is that women are pushed to the periphery in terms of their employment. This is sometimes referred to as feminisation of occupations. (Davies, 1979) which contributes to marginalising the economic role of women in the process of development.

As pointed out by O'Malley "The Industrial Revolution has brought about changes those are more fundamental in the case of women than men. To men it brought about a new conception of the world of material resources, ethical standards, political possibilities; but for women, it brought slowly but potentially a new status of themselves as human beings in a social order." 


7. Most of the writings on women employment, irrespective of their ideological stands, subscribe to this view. Eisensterin (1979), Blaxal and Reagon (1976).

Some believe that profound changes are taking place in social status and role of women with new economic and industrial developments. In support of their arguments, they compile and analyse statistics for women working in new professions, occupations, factories and industries. Others believe that the position of women has changed but little when one studies the life and work of vast masses of illiterate rural women in India. The industrial changes are slow and limited to certain sectors of our economy, and a vast majority of Indian women work in unorganised sectors like agriculture, handicrafts, animal husbandry, etc. The industrial changes started in India early at the turn of this century.

Equality of women is one of the important principles of democracy and a mark of respect of human rights as also an important condition of social progress. The 27th Session of U.N. General Assembly adopted the resolution to proclaim 1975 as the International Women's Year, testifying that the problem of women's participation in labour and socio-political life is far from being solved in many countries. The U.N. Resolution further mentions that the struggle of women against the discrimination towards them with regard to their right to work and remuneration etc., must be supported. The observance of the International Women's Year in 1975, is in recognition of the crucial importance of women's participation for the success of social and economic development. As a part of the observance of International Women's
Year programme, an opportunity has been taken to present a statistical profile of women in industry in the country. 9

Labour is an important factor of production and has assumed greater significance in the modern economic and industrial growth. In the opinion of David, "Labour is a comprehensive term and refers to workers both of hand and head who work for others against payment in cash or kind. All trained, skilled, semi-skilled, unskilled, clerical and salaried staff constitute labour force of a country". There is no substitute for human brain. In the present era of computers and robots, things are done at a faster pace. But human brain is superior to computer in the sense that a computer requires to be operated by a human being only. After all, computers and super computers were invented and innovated by human mind only. But humans have become subordinates to computers themselves.

Prof. Marshall has defined labour as "any exertion of mind or body undergone, partly or wholly with a view to some good other than the pleasure derived directly from the work."

"Labour has at all times, been recognised as a separate factor of production. Any work, whether manual or mental, which is undertaken for a monetary consideration is called 'Labour' in

Economics." But household work by housewives is not done for any monetary consideration. According to economists who are rational, the household work should also be considered as productive.

According to the Census of India 1981, 48 per cent of the 665 million population in India was consisting of females and among them 14 per cent was engaged in economically productive activities. Out of the total female workers, 79 per cent was engaged in agriculture as labourers and 5 per cent in household industries, leaving a mere 16 per cent to be distributed among all the different non-agricultural and non-household activities. When restricted to rural areas, the corresponding proportions were 87 per cent, 4 per cent and 9 per cent respectively.

According to the Census of India 1991, the total population was 843.93 million, consisting of 437.60 million males and 406.33 million females. The total percentage of workers in India was 37.64. The percentage of male workers was 51.52 whereas the percentage of female workers was only 22.69 implying that hardly one fifth of total female population is only contributing to the G.N.P. A mere 9.74 per cent of the total urban female population goes to work whereas an overwhelming 48.95 per cent of urban male

population does productive work. In rural areas, 27.20 per cent in females and 52.50 per cent in males are the work participation rates in India.

The sixth five year plan (1980-85) noted that the low status of women in large segments of Indian society cannot be raised without the opening up of opportunities of independent employment and income for them. But as the report of the Working Group on Employment of Women 1978 had pointed out, "a Policy of Promotion of Women's Employment has to go hand in hand with the broader social policy of strengthening women's participatory roles and their ability to exercise their rights with autonomy and dignity". Otherwise 'the increased employability of women' will only further increase the load on women and reduce them to mere beasts of burden.

The results of development have not had the intended effects on women. The sex ratio of women has been declining since the early part of this century. Female foeticide by way of abortion and negligence towards female children are mainly responsible for it. Literacy rates have also remained low for women; a mere 24.8 per cent in comparison with 46.7 per cent for men (Government of India, 1981). In 1991 Census, literacy rate for females was 39.42 per cent in comparison with 63.68 per cent for males. It is indeed a remarkable improvement in the literacy rates of both females and males.
While a few urban elite women have been benefited from improved education and employment, for a majority employment has been drastically reduced. Women formed 34.4 per cent of the total labour force in 1911 and by 1971 they constituted only 17.35 per cent (Government of India, 1975). Only during the period 1971-1981, the Census estimates indicated an increase in women's employment in manufacturing, though it was not more than 8 per cent of the total employment of women. Roughly, every fifth woman is a worker as against every second man. For certain sociological and other reasons, women's employment has not picked up as development is gaining momentum. Moreover, a man remaining unemployed (of course the fault lies not entirely on him) is looked down by the Indian society. However, the society looks with pride a woman employed. In India, equality is not to be found in almost all walks of life. Fixing quotas on the basis of religion, caste, sex, etc., has resulted in losing many a bright brains in the professions of doctors, engineers, administrators and business executives.

Of course, the burden of house work continues to fall on women. This coupled with wage discrimination, lack of education and inability to enforce labour legislations make the women a vulnerable section of the work force.
WELFARE LEGISLATIONS IN INDIA FOR WOMEN WORKERS

Prevention of exploitation of working women is the aim of all the legislations regarding women. The Indian Constitution provides for special steps by the government to improve the conditions of women by establishing separate institutions. The fundamental rights and the directive principles of state policy of the Constitution have helped Indian women a great deal. The directive principles of state policy, through Articles 39 and 42 give necessary protection to women workers.\textsuperscript{11} Article 46 directs the States to "promote with special care the education and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people". This has also considered a directive to improve employment opportunities and conditions of women workers.\textsuperscript{12}

The International Labour Organisation has also taken an interest in the welfare of Indian women. This Organisation came into being in 1919 and immediately after its formation a number of laws were passed to protect labour. Women have a special place in the history of labour legislation in India.\textsuperscript{13} Social security

\textsuperscript{11} CSWI Repore, p.184.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.,

\textsuperscript{13} Planning Commission : 'Social Welfare of India', (Government of India, New Delhi), pp.149-172.
is provided to women workers under the Workmen’s Compensation Act of 1923 and E.S.I., (Employees State Insurance) Act of 1948. The Factories Act of 1948, the Mines Act of 1952, Employees’ Provident Fund Act of 1952 and the Plantation Labour Act of 1957 provide for physical amenities like separate bath and latrines for women, maintenance of a creches where more than fifty women are employed. The Maternity Benefit Act of 1961 provides for a periodic cash payment in case of confinement or miscarriage or sickness arising out of pregnancy for a maximum period of twelve weeks, six weeks prior to and six weeks after delivery, besides leave for twelve weeks at full rates. The Payment of Gratuity Act of 1972 protects the interests of employees and workers. The Equal Remuneration Act of 1976 provides for equal pay for equal work.

Apart from these two legislations, there are various other labour legislations in which employing women during night shifts is prohibited. Further, those legislations have also made some provisions regarding welfare and health aspects of women’s employment. All these are only in papers or as legislations. In reality, women labourers are ill-treated and exploited in a number of ways.
AND TRADE UNIONS

In India, the passing of the Trade Unions Act in 1926 gave formal recognition to the workers' right to organise themselves and encouraged further growth of the movement. It was, however, after Independence, particularly during the period 1947-1957, there was a rapid increase in the number of unions. Women workers, initially had not shown any particular enthusiasm in joining trade unions mainly due to social factors. It was only in late fifties that their participation in the unions increased. "With social awakening and the newly acquired freedom, taste for economic independence, and a state in employment, women workers are becoming more and more alive to their interests and joining unions in larger number". Literacy, higher education, growing awareness among women have made them, in recent times, to fight for their rights and to stand against the atrocities committed against them.

Working women of India have occasionally found a spokesman to voice their grievances through trade unions. But, on the whole, they are not yet fully class conscious. They are not yet organised or very much vocal of their grievances. They cannot be compared to the working classes of the West, in any sense. They do not have the aggressiveness or assertiveness of the working

women of the western countries. The confinement and dependence have left their indelible marks on the working women of India. Due to their ignorance and illiteracy, much of the advantages secured to them by the Government and the trade unions are lost by them. Unions symbolise workers' rights to organise, to press for their rights in a collective way and to go on strike, if their claims are not accepted. They prevent economic insecurity, political exploitation and social degradation of the working class. Participation of the women labourers in trade union activities seems to be less due to various reasons like social barriers, poverty and the fear of unemployment. Their vulnerability has been cruelly exploited by the opportunist men.

THE LEATHER PRODUCTS' INDUSTRY

The tanning and curing of leather is an industry of long-standing in India and semi-finished leather is a traditional item of export. Although the bulk of this industry was concentrated in Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh have always participated in it. These two latter states had also been the chief producers of footwear and other selected finished products of leather travel goods for the domestic market as well as harnesses and saddles for the army. Although India had produced substantial amounts of semi-finished leather for a long time, it was only in 1973 that the government announced a Policy of Export Trade Control for the leather industry in the hope of creating
more employment opportunities and greater value added to it within the country. Following this order, the export of semi-finished leather was to be discouraged and the production and export of finished leather products was to be encouraged. In response to this, the industry of leather products, other than footwear, has expanded fairly rapidly. The value added to the factory sector of that industry rose from Rs. 220 million in 1960 to Rs. 2,020 million in 1978-'79. It would have improved remarkably by 1994; but data are not available for comparison.

The relatively late developing section of the industry, namely the section producing leather products other than footwear has not attained a high level as such. This is for two reasons. On the one hand, the organisational changes and conditions of work in the footwear industry of Calcutta have been very competently discussed in a study by Basu in 1977. On the other, in the traditional industry of tanning and curing of leather, there have been women of Scheduled Castes, and in Calcutta, women of Chinese origin are working as helpers. The division of labour and the tasks assigned to women were of long-standing tradition. In the shoe factory section selected for this study, however, women are new entrants. Therefore, it provides an interesting example of how and why certain jobs are identified as women's work. Also, in a sense, production units working on these products were doing pioneering job in that and they were competing for markets with producers from developed countries.
like France and Italy: in products where they had no initial advantage of indigenous designs or styles and in which they had to follow the lead given by the latter. There was stiff competition for the raw materials from the exporters and indigenous producers of other leather products. Therefore, the units are likely to be squeezed out of both the input and the output markets unless they remain highly competitive. Hence, the industry provides a good example for studying the relation between high competition in export markets and the employment of women workers.15

The present research study deals with the women workers employed in shoe factories. This is one of the organised export-oriented industry where major proportion of workers are women. The women are shifted from traditional agrarian setting to modern market-oriented industrial labour market. The women workers employed are completely different from their counterparts employed either in agriculture or even in other production units of the informal sector. The study assumes greater significance as it makes an attempt to present the women workers' hardships under an entirely different scenario.

OBJECTIVES

The major objectives of the study are the following:

1. To assess the role of women labourers in shoe factories and to analyse the causes for their working in these factories.

2. To study the socio-economic conditions of women labourers employed in the shoe factories, and to find out their contribution to the household income.

3. To elucidate the employment pattern and working conditions of women labourers in industrial sector in general and shoe factories in particular.

4. To examine the wage differentials between men workers and the women workers and the wage policies of the Government with a view to discuss the problem of discrimination.

5. To analyse the welfare measures extended by the Governments to women labourers in industrial sector. (such as maternity benefit, creches, medical benefit, E.S.I., bonus, P.F. etc.).
HYPOTHESES

In consonance with the above objectives, the following hypotheses were formulated for testing:

1. Women labour supply in the shoe industry is inversely proportional to family income and in relation to their social background.

2. Though the shoe industry is export-oriented, the workers are paid low wages, jobs are temporary and working conditions are not satisfactory.

3. The labour welfare legislations are more on paper than being observed or followed.

4. The entry of women in industrial sector has given them more economic freedom, and earn them a fair treatment by other family members and by the society.

5. Low wages prevail for both men and women workers, exploitation of workers is generally found in unorganised shoe factories and wages are lower for women than men.
The study area is shoe factories located in North Arcot-Ambedkar District, Tamil Nadu, which is a main centre for manufacture of shoes. This district accounts for 21 per cent of total number of shoe factories in Tamil Nadu. Since this study is based on cross section data pertaining to current period, field survey was undertaken from 01.12.1992 to 31.01.1993. The total samples were 300 workers, consisting of 240 females and 60 males out of the total 15 shoe factory workers of 5026 including casual labourers. The multi-stage sampling method was adopted to get the required number of samples.

At the first stage, taluks were selected out of 5 taluks such as Arcot, Vellore, Thiruppatherur, Vaniyambadi and Walajapet. In the 5 taluks, three taluks were selected on the basis of more concentration of shoe factories. In the second stage, 15 shoe factories were selected. Out of 63 shoe factories situated in those three taluks adopting simple systematic random sampling method (i.e., 25 per cent of the total shoe factories). The particulars regarding the total number of factories and the general profile of the workers were gathered from the Inspector of Factories, Vellore. In the third stage, 40 samples were collected from two factories selected at random in Walajapet taluk, 120 samples from six factories located at Vaniyambadi taluk and 140 samples from seven factories in Vellore taluk. In
each factory, 4 male and 16 female workers were interviewed. Since the female workers in this industry form 4/5th of the total workers a 4:1 female-male ratio was followed in allocating the samples. Thus, data were collected from 240 females and 60 males. This was for an indepth study and for the purpose of making comparison wherever appropriate. The preliminary details regarding the factories and the work force were collected from the managers of the factories concerned. The muster rolls of the factories were used to select at random the workers in order to have an interview with them on their socio-economic conditions on the basis of a structured interview schedule. The primary data were collected by using a pretested questionnaire and a direct personal investigation method had been adopted by the researcher.

Data pertaining to socio-economic background of the workers' family (caste, creed, education, earnings of family, age, marital status), working conditions, wages implementation, welfare measures, bonus, trade union memberships, future of their employment, strikes, lockouts and decision making power had been collected.

Simple statistical tools such as the mean, standard deviation, co-efficient of variation, correlation co-efficient were used in analysing the data. Multiple linear regression was fitted to explain the women labour supply in shoe factory. The findings are given in the final chapter.
LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1. The study is not concerned with the process of dispute settlement, or labour recruitment as the shoe factories come under unorganised sector in reality (Though they are registered and supposed to come under organised sector).

2. Though generalisation is made with the help of survey of literature and secondary data, women labour in shoe factories alone is taken as the focus area of research wherein primary data are collected and made use of for analysis.

3. Many Indian women (especially those who live below the poverty line) are exploited and ill-treated by men and those who have more wealth and income because of the eroded ethical value system due to growing materialism. It does not mean that all women in India are not allowed to enjoy equality and freedom. India is one of the countries in which women are most respected and well-treated by men. Exceptions are only exaggerated.

4. Since the shoe factory owners were not willing to spare the time of the workers in the factory premises, the researcher had to collect information from the workers outside the factory site, i.e., at their residence. This is an indicator that the workers are being exploited by the factory owners. The different types of exploitation of female workers of shoe factories were not completely probed into. Their social and economic status, wage discrimination and working conditions are alone discussed.
In all, there are seven chapters in the research study. The first and introductory chapter narrates the theme of the study, objectives, hypotheses, methodology and limitations of the study. The second chapter gives a detailed review of literature. The third chapter delineates an account of women labour in India and abroad. The fourth chapter discusses the area profile or the description of the study area North Arcot-Ambedkar District and specifically the three taluks, viz., Walajapet, Vellore and Vaniyambadi where shoe factories are concentrated. The fifth chapter constitutes the core of the study, describes and analyses women labour in sample shoe factories, and their socio-economic and demographic profiles. The sixth chapter analyses women labour welfare measures, working conditions and wages among the sample workers. The last chapter summarises a brief account of the findings and suggestions obtained from the discussion of the earlier chapters.