CHAPTER 2

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS
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Introduction

The present research study deals with the women workers employed in shoe factories and their socio-economic problems. This is one of the organised export-oriented industries, where many workers are women. Women are going out for work to improve the living standards of themselves and their families.

"Nerinjipu salladiyam,
Nenjukkulle Vedanaiyam"

(பாணி சள்ள பொன்று போட்டேனையம்,
பண்டேனையம் வெடணையம்)

This song, giving out a haunting melody, is sung by the peasant women of a cluster of 300 villages of Usilampatti taluk, hardly 40 kms away from Madurai in Tamil Nadu, while they are baked under a sizzling sun in their paddy fields. It loses its poignancy in a poor English translation.

"It is a sieve of prickly bush,
and the heart is filled with grief"
Among the women who sing this song are those who have been resorting to female infanticide to save the babies from a heartless, dowry-seeking man's world waiting to crucify them when they grow up. The tragedy is that female infanticide has become almost an accepted practice only during the last 10 or 15 years and it was not prevalent earlier. The chilling and incredible part of the story is that even educated parents resort to female infanticide. The young wife of a graduate had to submit to the demand of her husband to kill the first baby girl since otherwise she would have been rejected by her husband. The infants are killed because of the fears of having to meet the extortionate demand for dowry when they grow up. The clan system of the Piranmalai Kallar Community has a great deal to do with the evil of female infanticide. Religion also does not seem to have anything to do with the killing of baby girls, according to Dr. Kothandapani. There have never been human sacrifices in the community. But there is a belief among the women that if a female child is killed, the next would be a boy. How superstitious they are can be understood by this. The killing which is done generally by old women is also regarded as a social service as it saves the child from the hardship she will have to face later in life. The old women do not take any money for killing the female child, as they consider it a service. Though a few children have been saved and handed over to orphanages, the women in general consider it a shame to give away children in this manner.
If this is the reality, what about the education we are imparting on our people? Can we ever hope that the spread of education will end this evil? Several graduates and post-graduates in the area are jobless, their standard is so poor that they could not contest in any competitive examination. The educated men in the area show an amazing unawareness of attitudinal change towards issues like female infanticide. If women in villages practise female infanticide, women in urban areas resort to female foeticide. No mother would like to kill her female infant. But the circumstances force her to accept for abortion. In fact, she is risking her life and health. Likewise, no father would really prefer to kill his female infant or female foetus. India is now a country where several people attach more importance to material things than non-material things. Gone are the days in which Indians were proud of telling about their inherited tradition, custom, social and pious life. Now we have to hang our head in shame for the crimes committed by at least a few people in the Indian society.

If murderer is hanged as a punishment for murder committed, those who are responsible for female foeticide by abortion and female infanticide are left scot-free. There is no justification at all in this. The entire Indian society has to be blamed for it. The main reason for such inhuman killings is the ‘dowry problem’. If this problem is solved female infanticides would stop instantaneously.
While the Indian society accuses always men for the dowry problem, it does not admit that women are also responsible for it. Many family problems are more created by mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law than by fathers-in-law and sons-in-law.

To arrive at a conclusion, the only solution would be to make the women economically independent by expanding job opportunities for them. Such economic liberation of women would gradually take away their belief that honour lies only in a life of dependence on man. The new awareness will make them defy the customs and traditions which tend to make her a barterable commodity. This will also give her the strength and pride to give birth to a daughter and see her grow. This is how we could all bring into being the new Usilampatti woman.

This economic liberation that has been suggested above is still a dream to the women who work in the shoe factories. Though they work, their wages are neither adequate to support their families nor to lift them up enough from their poverty. To maintain confidence and to avoid social isolations, undertaking economically productive work is necessary for women. The Government of India has been taking extensive measures for the welfare of the women workers and especially after the International Women's Year of 1976. Women are given preference in all economic activities. Women belonging to high income group rarely come forward to take up productive job. Only women of low
income group and middle class are taking up jobs, due to poverty and their poor family condition.

The study area is shoe factories located in North Arcot-Ambedkar District, Tamil Nadu State, which is one of the main centres for the manufacture of shoes. This district has got 21 per cent of total number of shoe factories in Tamil Nadu. Nearly one fourth of the total number of shoe factories in Tamil Nadu is concentrated in North Arcot-Ambedkar District. There are reasons for the large number of shoe factories concentrating in this district such as availability of raw-materials, entrepreneurs, cheap labour, other infrastructure facilities like transportation, power, etc., suitable climatic and atmospheric conditions, and better quality of Palar river water. Women workers and a few men workers of all categories working in shoe factories form the respondents of the present study. The study is based on primary data collected from a cluster sample of 240 women labourers and 60 men labourers from 15 shoe factories. The sample forms 6 per cent of total workers in the selected factories.

The analysis of data is focused on shoe factory workers (women and men), their socio-economic and demographic profiles, labour welfare measures, working conditions and wages. Five hypotheses were framed for the present study and empirical verification was made to test them using primary data by applying
the appropriate tools, chi-square test, multiple linear regression model, analysis of variance (ANOVA), and association of attributes. The work in theoretical, analytical and for highlighting the poor economic status of the women workers in selected shoe factories.

**Results and Findings**

The total number of women workers in the shoe factories in North Arcot-Ambedkar District is 12,354. There are 300 shoe factories in Tamil Nadu, out of which 63 are situated in North Arcot-Ambedkar District. For the purpose of research, 15 shoe factories were selected as sample. It is observed that the female workers form nearly 80 per cent of the total employees.

Caste and community have some influence on women labour participation in different activities. The present study shows that a majority of the total factory workers belong to scheduled caste (39 per cent) (Illustrated in Figure 5.1.). But the caste factor will be waning in the years to come, as persons belonging to other communities other than SCs also prefer to work in shoe factories, to make out a living. For them 'any work' is better than 'no work'. 75 per cent of the total employees belongs to Hindu religion (Figure. 5.2). The mother tongue of about 70 per cent of the employees is Tamil, as these factories are situated in Tamil Nadu. As the study area is near the border of the Andhra Pradesh, for some workers Telugu is the mother tongue. It is
observed that one-third of the employees comes under the age group 21-25 and one fourth of employees are below 20 years. The data collected show that 56 per cent of the women labourers is unmarried and 41 per cent married. The rest, 3 per cent is separated and widowed. The majority of women are below the age of twenty five. The common reason for the preference for younger women is that they are physically more fit than the aged and therefore able to cope up with work intensity.

The general educational qualification does not play a vital role in the appointment of workers. The majority of the workers possess, primary (12 per cent), middle (27 per cent), high school (39 per cent) education and this has been (Illustrated Figure 5.3). The annual family income of the majority of the employees lies between Rs.2000 and Rs.4000. This is definitely a very low income when compared with the income of the labourers in other industrial units. It is found that many shoe factories are situated in the outskirts of the towns (71 per cent). As the wages are very poor, many of the workers (86 per cent) are unable to save anything for their future. They have a zero or negative saving potential. The women workers of the shoe factories are actually entitled for higher wages than what they get now. But they do not seem to claim it, as they are threatened by the authorities, that the wage given to a senior worker lady approximately is Rs.1,200. It could very well be given to four new employers in her place if the senior worker is thrown out of
job. This kind of threatening makes them accept what they get and not to claim for what they actually are entitled to.

One may rightly raise the questions, such as "What is the Government doing? Where is the union?". 'Union' is a banned word for almost all women workers. Anyone talking about any labour union, leave alone their owner, would be dealt with the termination of her services. The Factory Acts are very much there black and white, but they are not at all followed. A Labour Inspector was of the view that due to various factors such as surplus labour, poverty and unemployment, there are labourers who could be hired even at a very low wage of Rs.2 per day (unbelievable!). Even if it is assumed to be Rs.10 per day, it amounts to exploitation of labour.

The factory owners, instruct the workers not to tell their wage and reveal their actual age also as there are child labourers working in factories. At the time of inspection, the Labour Inspector is given to understand that everything is fine and in accordance with the rules and regulations and it will be so on files too. Things are stage-managed during times of inspection. Inspectors are 'made' to believe that the factory laws have been followed rightly. There is a 'price' for everything in India today. But a better or higher real price is not paid to sincerity, dedication, hardship and discipline of the workers. The majority of the workers in the shoe factories (72
per cent) dwell in rural areas, around the town. The others are from the residential areas in the towns and from the fringe areas of the town. Most of the shoe factories are maintained in sheds (91 per cent). The conveyance (bus facility) for majority of the workers is arranged by the owners of the shoe factories. There are six categories of work in a shoe factory and it is found that maximum number of the employees are working in the stitching section (37 per cent) (shown in the Figure 6.1.). The new recruits are considered to be unskilled labourers and those who have put in 3 to 4 years of service are treated as skilled labourers. The majority of the workers are unskilled (60 per cent). It is also felt that segregation of workers as 'skilled' and 'unskilled', on the basis of years of experience is not justifiable. Wages should differ on the basis of the workers' skills. Workers with limited experience ('unskilled') outnumber workers with large experience ('skilled').

Poverty is the main reason for the workers choosing this job and 78 per cent of the labourers comes under this category. The other reasons for choosing this job are: unemployment, ineligibility to get any other job, and family's poor economic status. Out of the 300 employees selected by the researcher, it is found that the services of 237 employees are regularised and the others work on a temporary basis. So far as the wage structure is concerned, 36 per cent of the employees earns from Rs.300-600 per month and 31 per cent of the employees earns from
Rs.601-900 per month. Only a few earn more than Rs.900 per month. The position of women in these shoe factories is pathetic in the sense that they receive very low wages. The Minimum Wages are neither fixed nor followed. Exploitation of workers is generally seen in the shoe factories. Women workers are more exploited than men workers. Though there is no wage discrimination men and women, women are exploited more in the sense that they are employed in large number. As lower wages are only offered, men workers are found in limited number. It remains to be seen how the exploitation of women labour is ended in these factories.

All the shoe factories provide benefits such as bonus, provident fund and medical assistance to their employees. Out of 300 employees 76 per cent has expressed job satisfaction and the others are not satisfied with their job for various reasons such as low wages, long hours of work, job insecurity and exploitation. The service of the workers vary from one year to ten years. Majority of the workers have put in more than three years of service; 46 per cent of workers have put in less than five years of service. Though there are trade unions, most of the female labourers do not take active participation for fear of losing the job. They hold the view that active union participation might result in victimisation. Women are generally considered sincere, hard working and easy to control. Factories freely float all existing resources without minding much about
factory laws. As women workers generally do not resist or agitate, managements adhere to authoritarian culture. Women's 'feminine' nature has been used conveniently by the managements to place them in specific jobs and at their mercy.

The owners prove to be real 'Iron gates'. No stranger, social worker, reformer, research scholar or sometimes even viewers are not allowed in their territory. Since the shoe factory owners were not willing to spare the time of their 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 workers do not even enjoy the freedom of expressing their grievances to others. The proprietors seem to be the sole dictators of their factories, dictating the rules and norms according to their whims and fancies. They are unwilling to give what is reasonable to the workers, which may be a small proportion of their profit. The ratios of profits and wages have no correlation.

There are various welfare measures for the shoe factory workers like medical benefits, protection against industrial diseases and dependent benefits, provident fund benefits, H.R.A., D.A., gratuity, E.S.I., maternity benefits and creches. But all these benefits are not enjoyed by all the workers. It is observed that 90 per cent of the shoe factory workers has taken this job
to support their families and the others have chosen this job to earn for their livelihood, to educate their children and to acquire self-status (or economic independence). Excepting the last one, all other factors are inter-dependent only.

It is generally believed that women's participation in production activities would change their status from that of subordination to self-determination. But the data collected have shown that the shoe factories reinforce women's subordination by playing upon existing social norms. The factories' atmosphere and other controls restrict women's development.

Women are generally more willing to work at lower wage rates which compensate to a certain extent for the more labour-intensive nature of the technologies adopted. Though shoe factories make use of machines, utilisation of labour power is more. Automation can never be resorted to in shoe making. Hence, more use of women labour is found in shoe factories in order to reduce cost and to hike profits. Women workers are less-inclined to become members of labour unions as they are usually more desperate and not fully conscious of their rights as workers.

Shoe factory workers are eligible for a weekly holiday, annual leave, which is one day for every 20 days worked, casual leave of 12 days for 240 days of work performed and 9 days of
national and festival holidays for 240 days of work. Facilities such as drinking water, lighting and ventilation are satisfactory. Provisions for latrines, urinals and effluents are not satisfactory.

The hypothesis tested is "women labour supply in the shoe industry is inversely related to family income and in relation to their social background". Association of attributes method is used by co-efficient of contingency table with two attributes, family income and religion. Null hypothesis is accepted and there is no association that exists between the attributes of family income and religion. Individuals belonging to different religions engage themselves as workers in shoe factories. Poverty-ridden and unemployed persons from all religions work in these factories. But in leather processing units workers mostly comprise of oppressed or suppressed classes. Now-a-days working in shoe factories is not much considered as undignified. But working in leather processing is thought to be not dignified.

"Though the shoe industry is an export oriented industry, the workers are temporary and working conditions are not satisfactory" is another hypothesis tested. The shoe factory workers are paid very low wages (minimum Rs.300 and maximum Rs.1500 per month). So the hypothesis was found to be correct. When the cost of living is ever-increasing, the wages paid are meagre. It is noteworthy that these shoe factories are earning profits to the tune of at least a few lakhs of rupees.
The welfare measures do not reach the women labourers of the shoe factories. Out of 15 shoe factories, 7 factories do not have maternity benefits. Another hypothesis tested is that, "the labour welfare legislations are more on paper than being observed or followed". Of 15 shoe factories 10 factories do not have trade unions. Table 6.16 explains the other welfare measures extended to the shoe factory workers by the management. Complete fulfilment of welfare measures to the workers is non-existent. Factory Inspectors seem to be indifferent about all these. It was found, therefore, the welfare legislations are more on paper rather than being observed or followed.

The hypothesis, "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" was also tested. The result was that there is no association between types of work and community. The chi-square test was used and the null hypothesis accepted. For testing the hypothesis, "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", multiple linear regression was used. The service has a significant positive influence at 1 per cent level on wage. Sex has a significant negative effect at 5 per cent level. The average days' of work has a negative influence over wage at 5 per cent level. The age has a positive influence over wage at 1 per cent level. The trade union benefits have a
positive influence over wage at 1 per cent level. The education has a significant positive influence over wage at 1 per cent level. The Table 6.20 shows independent variables (age, sex, etc.) at 37.11 per cent of the variability in the dependent variable wage. Analysis of variance for service and wage in shoe factory workers was made. Table 6.22 shows that the calculated value of 'F' is 34.34 which is more than the table value of 0.0001 at 5 per cent level with 3,243 (degrees of freedom) thereby establishing significant variation in shoe factory workers between the service and wages. Hence, it is concluded that the mean wages for the four groups of service are significantly different. There is no wage discrimination between male and female workers. It should also be noted that only very few workers are paid with reasonable wages who have put in many years of service, whereas many of them are given lower wages only. Hence, the inference is that the workers generally are exploited by the factory owners. When labour is available cheaply, the employers make use of it to their favour. The workers do not have a good bargaining power to get an enhancement in their wages.

According to Seetharamaiah Committee Report, in the leather industry, semi-finished goods are not to be exported and only finished goods are to be exported. All tanneries have established their own shoe factories as ancillary units (sister concerns) in order to export finished goods. The shoe factories
come under medium-scale and small-scale industries. All shoe factories come under formal sector; but they do not come under cottage industries. The major markets for India's leather products are Germany, U.S.S.R., U.S.A., Italy and U.K.

**Policy Issues and Suggestions**

On the basis of the research analysis, the following suggestions have been made, which may be of some use in framing Government's policies and their implementation.

1. Factory legislations should be properly implemented and followed.

2. The government must be strict enough to make the owners to implement the welfare measures for the benefit of workers.

3. Trade union leaders should be among workers themselves and not the managers of the factories, who normally represent the interest of the owners of the factories. Managers are generally relatives of the owners. So a specific legislation may be passed forthwith to prevent the managers of the factories becoming the trade union leaders.

4. Government should come forward to fix minimum wages for shoe factory workers and give them proper training in the manufacture of leather products.
5. Wage rates prevailing in the shoe factories are only at or near subsistence level. The wages are neither linked with productivity nor with market prices. Perhaps it is only based on the surplus manpower or womanpower prepared to work at any low wage.

6. Nothing could be found wrong in Factory Laws. But these laws should be strictly enforced for the betterment of the living conditions of the workers. Then only the poor shoe factory workers might be retrieved from the exploiting hands of the factory owners.

The abundant supply of labour, unemployment in rural areas, poverty and poor living conditions of the families can be related to low wages in the shoe factories of North Arcot –Ambedkar District.

Women in general are not engaged in the industrial sector. But a great thing to be commendable is that many women are engaged as wokers in shoe factories. Women’s participation has been increasing in capital market, service sector and market economy. They are participating in the decision-making processes. Women are also forging ahead as doctors, engineers, teachers, lawyers, computer programmers and business executives. Urban women have been learning shrewdly everything on par with men. But women in rural areas who are ignorant and illiterate face ill-treatment and exploitation in the society.
Conclusion

Shoe factories come under an export-oriented sector and therefore logically wages should have been reasonable, if not equal to the international standards. All the findings show that the wages are much lower and can be compared only with the lower wages of agricultural labourers and not with any industrial workers. Since women labourers are in large number in the shoe factories, the wages are kept as low as possible. Perhaps the lower wages are generally accepted by women. It is interesting to note that 76 per cent of workers have expressed job satisfaction. Women workers feel satisfied with whatever the wages paid to them. The earnings of women are merely considered supplementary to the family income rather than the primary income. Women workers are not demanding higher wages, even though they deserve to get them. It would be in the fitness of things to conclude with the words of Ms. Susmitha Sen who is the first Indian woman to win the Miss Universe title for 1994: "The new Indian woman does not stay at home any longer. She goes out and strives for opportunities and positions that were, till the other day, exclusive to men. She is beginning to command - not demand - respect, and travelling in crowded trains or buses is a far more attractive proposition for her now than being indoors. Even the one use to being a 'housewife' in the conventional sense of the term, sells pickles from home or converts her garage into a tailoring unit. In short, she has
begun to assert herself. What she wants is that freedom to make a choice or decision on her own. This is bound to make a lot of difference to our society."

This is definitely for the better and not for the worse. Ms. Aiswarya Roy has also won the Miss World title. These titles are not only for their beauty but also for their intelligence. It should be a starting point for the success of Indian women in all walks of life. Indian women have done it for the first time by bagging two coveted world titles. A great coincidence! Both Miss Universe and Miss World titles for girls from India. The two most beautiful women in the world are Indians. Six months after Ms. Susmitha Sen got the former, for the first time in the 43-Year history of the pageant, another Indian girl was chosen the Miss World at the conclusion of the pageant at Sun city (South Africa) on 19th November 1994. These were unprecedented success for the Indian Women, and more so for India. Though such beauty contests are not to be treated as economically productive by many, let such successes be spreading to Indian women in all their efforts and endeavours. Let not the Indian women be exploited by men; let the Indian women come forward to protect themselves by their economic, social and political awareness.

India's income has grown appreciably in the past five decades; but poverty amidst plenty remains the norm. While some progress has been made in ending malnutrition, improving health
and generating more jobs, this is too small when compared to what needs to be done. Attacking poverty, building solidarity and sincerity, creating jobs, and maintaining economic and social equality and justice between men and women should be the goals of our Central and State Governments. Women in India should shed their fears, tears, complexes and fight for their rights. They should not talk about their rights alone; they need to share the responsibilities along with men in nation-building activities. In fact, women's liberation in the real sense in our country lies only in all these achievements.