CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

General Introduction

In India like most developing economies, the unorganized sector is much bigger than the organized sector. The unorganized sector covers most of the rural labour and a substantial part of urban labour. It includes the so called wage earners or the ‘working poor’ who are largely non unionized due to constraints like casual and seasonal nature of employment and scattered location of enterprises. This sector is marked by low incomes, unstable and irregular employment, lack of protection either from legislation or trade unions. Insecurity of job, leads not only to their economic exploitation but also exposes them to a variety of hardships. According to the Census of 2001, in Tamil Nadu out of a total workforce of 27,811,647 about 23,684,611 (ie.38.13 per cent) were main (regular) workers (those who work for more than 180 days in a year) and about 4,127,036 (6.65 per cent) were marginal workers (those who worked for less than six months in a year) (Census of India 2001, Tamil Nadu).

Of the many who migrate in search of work a major portion settle down for work in the construction industry (Datt,1997). The construction sector is the largest employer in India after agricultural labour. The construction industry is also beset with all the problems and characteristics of the unorganized sector. Some of the characteristics of the construction industry are, scattered nature of work places, low levels of unionization, ignorance and illiteracy, casual nature of employment, small size of establishments and superior strength of the employers, lack of security of employment and other social security measures, lack of support from Government. Lack of housing and access to urban services and high percentage of migrant labour (Report of the National Commission on Labour, 2002).

In the era of globalisation, right to life and livelihood has become the central issue not only for organised sector workers, but more so with the unorganised workers, since the retrenchments are invisible and no compensation is provided. The situation of unorganised workers has not improved since Independence. Construction workers and other unorganised
workers in agriculture and segments like street vending, rice mill, forest, handloom and powerloom, fishing, gem-cutting and sugarcane-cutting face unprotected work with no guarantee of employment. They work for low wages without medical benefit. Due to Globalisation, closures and large-scale retrenchments are taking place. It has been estimated that in construction, only one in 20 would be the labour requirement and women will be completely out of the sector, due to globalization. In our country, during times of drought or industrial retrenchments, construction was the alternative. If mechanisation dominates, people will be deprived of employment. It is common to see workers perched on steel scaffoldings in multi-storied constructions. They are not provided helmets, safety equipments or nets. Sometimes the workers are given helmets, but none wear them. The only other safety provision was a basic first aid kit. The lack of protective gear aside, death traps lie uncovered in most construction sites. An unaccounted number die slow deaths due to respiratory disorders such as silicosis, caused by paint and cement inhalation.

Due to the migratory nature of the labour, short duration of projects, and the layers and layers of sub-contractors, there is no discernible and permanent employer-employee relationship in the construction sector. Usually, the Principal Employer never knows who is actually working for him/her and nor does the worker know for whom he/she is working. These characteristics also influence the working conditions, social security, health and safety of the workers in this industry' says D. Thankappan of the National Centre for Labour. A study conducted on the construction workers by the National Institute of Construction Management and Research in Delhi (1999) shows that working hours are not being regulated according to the law. At the time of casting slabs, the entire crew works round the clock. The work unit comprising of the gang normally works for 12 hours per day and all seven days of the week. Health and Welfare amenities stipulated in the labour laws are conspicuous by their absence. Members who conducted the study found that there were no rest rooms, urinals, latrines, first aid rooms or washroom at any site (Report of the National Commission on Labour, 2002).

With development concentrated around Chennai city, people from the rural hinterland migrate to the city for work. Almost all the people who migrate become part of the unorganized sector. Being a part of the unorganized sector they are subjected to severe
hardships. There is hardly any estimate of the extent of migrant labour. The migration of workers takes place largely due to distressing conditions prevailing in drought prone areas, non irrigation and low wage pockets. It is also due to wide spread poverty in some of the states. Even though several steps have been taken towards poverty alleviation in rural areas, inter state migration has been going on (Sharma, 1997).

The main cause of migration is lack of employment in the home state. There are large number of migrants from Bihar, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, parts of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Kerala to other parts of the country. In some cases the workers migrate because of specialization in a particular type of job. While there are various reasons for migration, the main cause is poverty. The decision to migrate is thus a rationale response to their poor economic condition and expectation of better prospects (Nigam,1997). Studies of migrant labour have shown that those who fail to get employment or get very low wages in their own area migrate to other states in the hope of getting a better job. The living conditions in the place of migration are bad because the migrant labour stays in slums and between open drains. The local labour is normally paid higher wages than migrant labour (Mahadevan, 2004).

The migration from one state to another is because of lack of employment or insufficient employment. The study of migrant labour from Bihar to Punjab has shown that migrant labour gets almost half the wages of the local labour. Yet this will be a better position for him rather than in his home state. The search for livelihood- physical and economic security, as well as better quality of life can be said to be major factor driving migration. The system of employing of Inter State Migrant labour in construction project is as exploitative system prevalent in many states. Inter-state Migrant workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act 1979 seeks to regulate the employment of inter-state migrant workers but it is all in papers and not being implemented (Ali, 1997).

The status of female migrants is appalling. Gender based discrimination at work is the most pernicious, enduring and universal phenomenon in the world today. The increasing growth of female participation in the industry has major implications on the nature of work and family life. As a group they are discriminated both at the workplace and within the family.
The women with their husbands and children migrate to the cities because of several reasons like unemployment, insufficient income, indebtedness, high wages in the city, displacement by irrigation and industrial projects and expectations of better prospects in the city (Mathew, 1999).

In building construction, women are engaged in jobs, which involve hard physical labour and earn poor wages. They handle jobs like carrying the loads, breaking stones and assisting bricklayers. The women are relatively paid lesser than their male counterparts handling the same type of jobs on the grounds that they are unable to lift the same quantity of load and are slower than their male counterparts, an assumption not based on facts. The construction labour women work under hard conditions, carrying their children with them and leaving them unattended. Low earning, lack of skills, health problems, motherhood and child care, sexual harassment, non cooperation of husbands are few of the problems faced by the migrant women construction workers.

Despite legislations like the Inter State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act 1979, Equal Remuneration Act 1976, Maternity Benefit Act 1961, which have been enacted for the welfare of the migrant women construction workers, they are not being enforced effectively. A strict enforcement of the act is necessary for attaining their objectives. Others reasons are that the intended beneficiaries do not make complaints due to lack of knowledge about the act and or fear of reprisals from the employers. There are only a few non-governmental initiatives that are addressing the urgent issues of the migrants (Sircar, 2004).

**Statement of the Problem**

1. It is believed that the process of globalisation all over the world has accelerated the migration trend, particularly in the case of women in search of survival, fulfillment and a better life for themselves and their families. Recent studies in India have reported an increasing number of young women joining the migrant flow to cities, many of them going on their own to find work in service, manufacturing and informal sectors. Many scholars have analysed the phenomenon of migration, but it is only since the 1970s that scholars have
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made attempts to understand migration from a gender perspective on account of the realisation that there are gender related variations in the causes, consequences and patterns of migration (Sundari, 2005).

There is steady deterioration in the quality of life of migrant households. They are deprived of basic amenities like housing, water supply, drainage. Prior to migration all households had at least a roof over their head. Now the migrants live on pavements/roadsides/under bridges. A large proportion do not have latrine facilities of any kind. Slum dwellers are the worst victims of urban environmental degradation. Thus the living and working conditions for the rural migrant in the urban areas are deplorable.

2. Various factors account for a woman entering the labour market. According to many reports, poverty and destitution force women to accept low paid, unskilled and insecure work in the unorganised sector (Manimekalai and Sundari, 1991). Considering only the internal migration, 58 million males constituting 18 per cent of all male population, and 138 million females accounting for 44 per cent of all females, were classified as migrants in 1981 (Sundari, 2005). Out of 138 million female life-time migrants, 105 million moved due to marriage, while another 21 million moved because their families migrated. The 21 million females would include wives and other female members of the family. About 2.8 and 1.3 million females, respectively, moved out of their place of birth for the purpose of employment and education. On the other hand, of the 58 million male migrants, 19.5 million moved for employment; 3.3 million for education. Another 19 million males moved because the family moved and only 1.9 million moved as a result of marriage.

Some recent studies have disclosed that a significant proportion of female migration in India takes place for economic reasons and therefore, there is need for a closer analysis of the pattern of employment of the migrant women in the changed circumstances. The main reasons for migration were poverty, loss of agricultural land in the village, lack of alternative sources of local employment, inadequate earnings from self-employment and the contract signed by the community for getting consumption loans from the employers in times of scarcity. Others who were not compelled by any bond, migrated due to poverty and
the unavailability of jobs in various drought-prone areas of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra.

The causes of migration are generally traced to economic, socio-cultural and environmental determinants. The primary push factor was lack of employment opportunities in the place of origin. In more than 50 per cent of the cases, lack of employment due to the failure of monsoon has been the reason for the exodus. The economic motive is seen as the principal force in female migration. When poor migrant women moved to urban areas it is the social network which helps them in job and house search, food and shelter during the waiting period for work.

3. The preamble of the Indian constitution is the sole-repository of social security measures and provide for establishment of a Socialist State. Construction workers form a large population earning less than subsistence level. There is no provision of temporary ration cards to suit this particular section of people. Even if the provision is made, it is difficult for the workers to prove their identity as a migrant worker since they are invariably not legally registered. In the absence of a Ration Card a worker remains invisible, and more so stateless without a political and legal identity that is essential to claim statutory entitlements.

Construction workers from a particular building stay on site itself. The provision of water, dwelling and toilet are left to the mercy of the Contractors. Construction workers do not go to vote due to various problems like migration and the temporary nature of stay (Anand, 1998). The right to open a bank account in any bank or to avail of saving schemes meant for the poor is still an unachievable dream for many construction workers. Due to the migratory nature of work and irregularity of salary, workers find it very difficult to save. Totally 27 labour laws are applicable to the construction industry. None of the measures or provisions are implemented and enforced.

4. The problems related to child care and mother care of the migrant married women construction workers are vast and complex be studied. Women work up to the ninth month of their pregnancy, and rejoin the labour force immediately one or two months after
delivery. They do not receive any kind of maternal benefit or concessions in work. Often maternity leave is not extended to women building workers, although it is a statutory obligation. This results in frequent miscarriages. Many a time, infants are left to the older siblings or are unattended. All building sites had the statutory obligation to provide creches for young children of women workers. A study conducted on the construction workers by the National Institute of Construction Management and Research in Delhi (1999) shows that mothers brought their children to sites and kept near the work places. There they lay often covered with dust and the chips of materials used, with flies settling on their faces. Older children looked after the younger ones; the mother kept an eye on them and visited them on and off. From birth itself the child does not receive sufficient care and attention. Children not being covered by immunisation services which proves fatal to their health. They are deprived of mother’s milk as the mothers cannot get maternity benefit or concessions to look after their infants. Creche services which could take children out of this unhealthy environment is not available. Children are known to suffer from hazards related to the construction industry and sometimes get killed in accidents.

5. The gender discrimination and the economic problems, especially the disparity in payment of wages faced by the migrant married women construction workers are major issues. There is a very rigid compartmentalization of work on the basis of sex. Women worked as unskilled workers carrying head-loads. There is a clear difference in the wages paid to men and women, but it was not perceived as such by the women because of class exploitation and grinding poverty. A study conducted in Mumbai by Sinha, 1991, among Women construction workers illustrates their plight in the industry. Building workers are employed mostly on daily wages, and occasionally according to quantum of work completed. However, the names of women do not often appear on the wage register because their output gets added to that of their men folk except in the case of single women workers.

Wages are paid every ten days only to men, and these include the wages due to other members of the family. In general, women building workers are seriously affected by conditions of work, pay inequalities, invisibility as producers and earners, blocked opportunities of advancement for want of skill, frequent relocation, lack of freedom to plan
their work, hard and long working hours, child care difficulties and coping with multiple roles result in a high level of stress. It generates attitudes of passive acceptance of helplessness and misery and conformity, rather than reaction (Sinha, 1991).

Only men have the option to become skilled workers, not women in the unorganized sector, especially in the construction industry. Therein lies their vulnerability as they can easily be replaced. Women were spared for the lighter work of carrying mud to the machines. One could see that the women's jobs were unskilled. They are on their feet all day, carrying heavy loads on their heads. Many women do more work because they work in the house as well as earn a living. The gender differentials were glaringly obvious in the construction industry with regard to the nature of the work done by the men and women as well as the payment of wages received, though both put in the same hours of work and did almost equally tiring work.

In the building industries in the big cities, the contractors held sway over the pattern of hiring and firing the workers. The jobs for women and men were quite clearly defined. Women were employed only as unskilled labourers. The tasks assigned to them were carrying soil, mortar or bricks, crushing bricks and working on hand pumps. Some of the women were the sole providers of the household. It is common to see women deserted by their husbands. The women are unable to comprehend why the employers paid the men more when both did equally tiring work and put in the same hours. The notion that the woman's income only supplements the family income is widely prevalent and this accounted for their low income.

6. Health problems and occupational hazards faced by the migrant married women construction workers are highly prevalent and no steps have been taken to reduce the exposure of the workers to these hazards. Women suffer occupational health hazards due to poor working conditions, body aches, skin irritation and sunstrokes. At the end of the day's work, their feet are too strained to be able to walk. Cramps in the legs were also common due to continuously working.
Skin infection and blisters occurred frequently due to working in the mud for long periods of time. Accidents often take place when pieces of glass, sharp stones or other foreign bodies are found in the soil. The employers make no provisions for first-aid or help of any kind. The cut or bruise is treated locally and the women resume their work almost immediately as the work target has to be achieved.

Another area of concern is the accident rate in the industry. Even though there are extensive safety guidelines and codes practiced regarding operations such as excavating, blasting operations, erection of pre-fabricated parts, working at heights and on towers, use of scaffolds, safety belts, ladders and so on, workers continue to work unguided, unaware of hazards and saving themselves only by instinct or intuition. Since they are under the constant threat of unemployment, the workers’ main concern is to earn as much as possible even at great personal risk. The Contractor does not implement any of the prescribed procedures to ensure the safety of the workers. Workers rarely get compensation. A worker not only loses his/her job but also has no means to sustain or subsist himself/herself during the period of incapacitation. Generally the affected person lies in the hospital with helpless relatives or alone without any kind of follow up by the Contractor. Sometimes he/she may die due to lack of financial and medical aid.

7. The trends in the unionization of this component of the unorganized sector can be studied. A study conducted on the construction workers by the National Institute of Construction Management and Research in Delhi (1999) shows that only eight out of 999 workers interviewed, stated that they were members of any trade union. Delhi has at least three registered trade unions of building workers, and though many social activists claimed to be leaders of building workers, the Report says none of them had visited building sites or labour colonies of building workers. This may be an exaggeration. But it indicates the scant attention these workers receive from organised Trade Unions. There are very few organisations and trade unions, working for the rights of the construction workers. Trade unions have played a role in campaigning for the rights of workers in the organised sector. However, construction workers do not form a popular target group for unionising.
Need and Importance of the study

With the steep increase in the number of migrant women construction workers in the construction industry, the exploitation met by these powerless and voiceless workers are also increasing. Day by day their condition is deteriorating economically, physically and psychologically. Through the study,

1. The intensity of the problems faced by the migrant married women construction workers can be quantified.

2. The reasons for migration of this workforce can be found out.

3. Violations of Constitutional Rights which every Indian citizen can claim and which are not being offered (voting rights, provision of decent standards of living etc.,) to this community can be specified.

4. The problems related to child care and mother care of the migrant married women construction workers can be studied.

5. The gender discrimination and the economic problems especially the disparity in payment of wages faced by the migrant married women construction workers can be described.

6. The types of health problems and occupational hazards faced by the migrant married women construction workers can be identified and steps can be taken to reduce the exposure of the workers to these hazards.

7. The trends in the unionization of this component of the unorganized sector can be studied.
After the study is conducted, the analysis and interpretation can be published so as to make the Governments both Central and State, aware of the existing conditions and violations of rights of the Construction workers. The study will have recommendations which will facilitate in framing new policies and programmes for the welfare of the migrant married women construction workers particularly implementation and enforcement of existing acts. The results can be also useful for Social Development Organisations to plan for projects and services for these migrant married women Construction workers. Recommendations will also be given to these organizations, to re-frame welfare measures for the migrant women construction workes. The results can also be utilized by the trade unions working for the cause of the unorganized sector especially the migrant married women construction workers, in formulating programs as well as unionizing this unorganized group. The study will also be an conscience stirrer for the principal employer with regard to about the plight of his/her employees in the hands of the contractors.

The researcher also proposes to formulate a Social Work Intervention model which will empower the migrant women construction workers.

**Relevance of the Study to Social Work**

Social work is a professional discipline committed to the pursuit of social welfare and social change. This field, works towards research and practice to improve the quality of life and to the development of the potential of each individual, group and community of a society. Social Workers perform interventions through research, policy, community organizing, direct practice and teaching. Social work is all about improving the lives of people by helping them to deal with their problems such as personal issues, diseases, unemployment etc. The present study is an attempt to study the Psycho, Socio, Economic Conditions and the Working Conditions of the Migrant Women Construction Workers. The findings of the study will be published, which will ensure exclusive focus of the Policy Makers, Trade Unions, Employers and NGOs on the current state of the Migrant Women Construction workers, thereby the quality of life of the Migrant Women Construction Workers as Individuals, Groups and Community will improve.
Social Work can be practiced effectively only when there is a better understanding of the problem. This research would help any Social Worker to understand the dynamics of the various forces impacting on the Migrant Women Construction Workers. The better understanding will help in effective practice of Social Work.

The researcher has also attempted to link theories of Social Work with the present study. Theories such as Systems theory and the Social Inclusion theory have been presented pictorially with reference to the Migrant Women Construction Workers. Hence this research will help in building the Social Work Base.

**Chapterisation**

The research report has been divided into seven chapters.

Chapter I gives a general introduction about the study. It also contains the statement of the problem, the need and importance of the study and the chapterisation of the research report.

Chapter II is the review of already existing literature. The review has been named ‘Away from Home’. Review has been collected from various articles from various journals, books, websites, reports both published and unpublished and also from researches done earlier in the same area.

Chapter III contains the Field of study and the research methodology. The general and specific objectives have been listed in this chapter. The operational definition has also been mentioned in this chapter. The procedure by which tool for data collection was framed, the data was collected and how it was analysed are also mentioned in this chapter. In this chapter few photos which were shot at the time of data collection and the map of the area in which data was collected is also presented.

Chapter IV contains the analysis of the data collected. The data has been analysed in the form of tables and figures. For the purpose of analysis SPSS (Statistical Package for Social
Sciences) and MS Excel has been used. The chapter is further subdivided into sections based on the objectives of the study.

Chapter V contains the discussion of the analysed data. The analysed data has been presented along with findings of earlier researches conducted in the study area. Linkages with theories has been established. A social work intervention has also been prepared for the empowerment of migrant women construction workers.

Chapter VI contains Main findings. Chapter VII contains the suggestions given by the researcher for the purpose of betterment of the situation of the construction workers. The conclusion for the research, scope for further research in the topic and related to the topic have also been mentioned.

Bibliography of the books, journals and reports both published and unpublished, which were referred are mentioned. The interview schedule in English and Tamil are attached at the end of the research as appendix. In addition extracts of few acts and report of the consultation organized by the researcher have also been appended.