

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

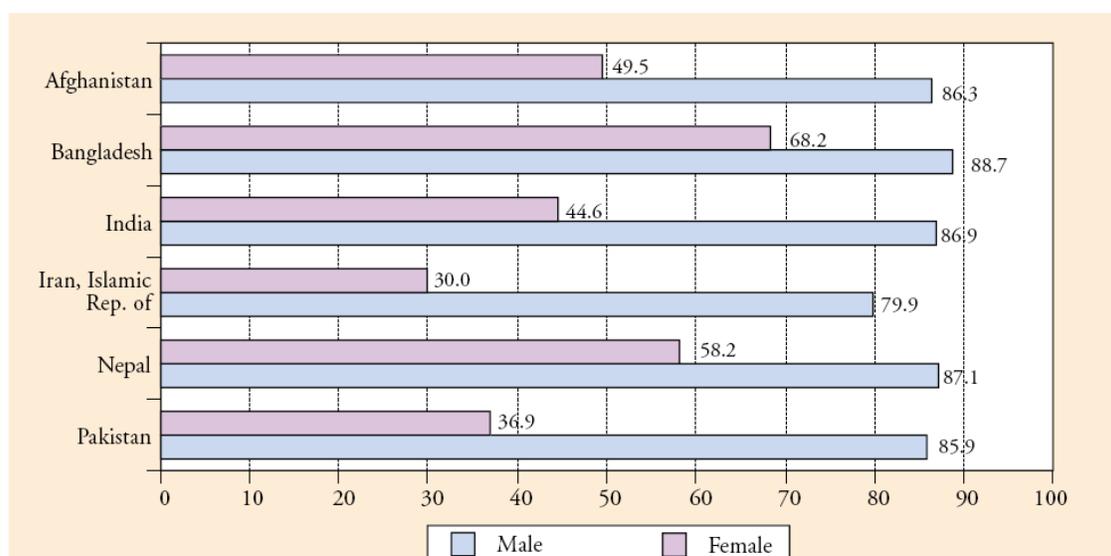
Gender-based discrimination is a universal phenomenon. Women comprise half of the world's population and perform two thirds of the work, but earn only a third of the total income and own less than a tenth of the resources. The most discriminated people in the world are usually the ones who lack economic power (Saksena, 2004).

Construction sector is the largest employer in the world and in India. More than 31 million people work in the construction industry, second only to agricultural sector. More than 35 per cent of construction workers are women and they get poor remuneration and are discriminated in the payment of wages (ILO, 2001a). When men construction workers have promotional opportunities, women have no opportunities to acquire skills and become masons or supervisors. They need to be empowered to grow in their profession. This study is an effort to identify gender discrimination among construction workers and identify the means of empowering women construction workers with special reference to Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu, India.

Global Gender Gap

According to the *Global Gender Gap report*, (Hausmann, Tyson & Zahidi, 2008) released by the Swiss - based World Economic Forum, no country closed the gap between men and women when it comes to economic participation and opportunity, education attainment, political empowerment, and health and survival. The three highest ranked countries – Norway, Finland and Sweden – closed a little over 80 per cent of their gender gaps while the lowest ranked country Yemen closed only a little lower 46 per cent. India was ranked 113 out of a total of 130 countries, with a score of 0.6060. India was ranked 125 in

economic participation and opportunity, 116 in education attainment, 25 in political empowerment, and 128 in health and survival. In the previous report of its kind, India's rank was 112 out of 128 countries. In the conclusion, the study points that the most important determinant of a country's competitiveness is its human talent - the skills, education and productivity of its workforce - and women account for one-half of the potential talent base throughout the world. A nation's competitiveness therefore depends significantly on whether and how it educates and utilises its female talent. To maximise its competitiveness and development potential, each country should strive for gender equality and give women the same rights, responsibilities and opportunities as men. In the current global financial and economic crisis, it is more vital than ever that women's economic participation does not shrink. The minds and talents of both women and men will be needed to produce the most creative solutions and to prevent such crisis in the future.



(Source: Calculated ILO database of the Economically Active Population, 2000)

Figure 1

Labour Force Participation Rates by Sex (Aged 15-64), South Asia, 2000 (in per cent)

According to the *Labour and Social Trends in Asia and the Pacific* (ILO, 2005), South Asia's labour force has been growing at a strong annual average of about 2.3 per cent. However, labour force participation rates of South Asia remain low, compared with other sub regions in Asia and the Pacific. Women's share in labour force and participation in India is relatively low compared to other countries. Figure 1 shows that India lags behind Iran, Nepal, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. At the same time, female unemployment rates are generally much higher than male unemployment rates within the sub region, particularly in countries where female labour force participation is still low. Women in these economies have limited employment opportunities and, if employed, generally earn less than their male counterparts.

Indian Gender Gap

According to the Indian Census 2001, the total labour force in India is 402.5 million of which only 32 per cent (127 million) are women. The Economic Survey 2003-04 (*Women workforce in rural areas down*, 2004 July 08) found that the number of women employed in the organised sector (both public and private) stood at 4.95 million on March 31, 2002, which is about 18.1 per cent of the total organised sector employment in the country. The Survey found that the proportion of women in organised sector employment is higher in states with higher female literacy. Women working in the organised sector form only 3.2 per cent of the female workforce, while the rest of the women work in unorganised sector. More and more women are being pushed into the highly exploitative unorganised sector jobs with no job security and less pay.

There are many dimensions of gender bias and equity in the economic sphere (Kannan, 2007). However the worst sufferers are women from the poorer household in rural areas belonging to socially weaker sections. There could be other layers on this bottom layer.

First, there is the issue of narrow range of economic opportunities. Ninety six per cent of women workers in the country are unorganised workers as against 89 per cent for men. The percentage of women not able to secure minimum wages, is quite high.

Table 1

Gender differences in work participation - 2001

Rank	States	Gender gap
1	Daman & Diu	48
2	Delhi	43
3	Chandigarh	42
4	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	41
5	Lakshadweep	36
6	West Bengal	36
7	Pondicherry	36
8	Kerala	35
9	Punjab	35
10	Goa	33
11	Uttar Pradesh	31
12	Tripura	30
13	Bihar	29
14	Assam	29
15	Jammu & Kashmir	28
16	Orissa	28
17	Gujarat	27
18	Tamil Nadu	27
19	Karnataka	25
20	Haryana	23
21	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	23
22	Jharkhand	22
23	Andhra Pradesh	21
24	Maharashtra	20
25	Uttaranchal	19
26	Sikkim	19
27	Madhya Pradesh	19
28	Rajasthan	17
29	Arunachal Pradesh	15
30	Meghalaya	13
31	Chhatisgarh	13
32	Himachal Pradesh	11
33	Nagaland	9
34	Mizoram	9
35	Manipur	8
	India	26

(Source: Census 2001 & Annual report of D/O Women and Child Development, 2001-02)

According to the 58th Round (July-December 2004) Survey of National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO), the female workforce participation rate in rural areas declined

to 281 per thousand from 299 in the 55th Round (July 1999-2000). In urban areas, while there was an increase in the number of working women, it was very marginal - from 139 to 140 per thousand. (*Women workforce in rural areas down*, 2004 July 08). In 2001, the gender gap in work participation was maximum at 48 for Daman and Diu and minimum for Manipur (Table 1). The average of the gender gap in work participation for India is 26.

Women Work Participation Rate in India and Tamil Nadu

For the state of Tamil Nadu in India, the Work Participation Rate (WPR) for the female had increased from 33.55 per cent in 1981 to 38.50 per cent in 1991 against 59.24 per cent and 58.28 per cent for male during the above period in rural areas (Table 2). In urban area, it rose from 11.97 per cent to 13.10 per cent for female and from 51.25 per cent to 52.78 per cent for male in urban areas.

Table 2
Work Participation Rates and Number of Workers in Tamil Nadu and India.

Rural / Urban	WPR (%)			Workers (Lakhs)			WPR (%)		
	Tamil Nadu			Tamil Nadu			India		
	1981	1991	2001	1981	1991	2001	1981	1991	2001
Rural									
Male	59.24	58.28	59.38	96.7	108.2	104.2	53.8	52.6	52.4
Female	33.55	38.5	41.33	54.1	70.1	71.8	23.1	26.8	31.0
Persons	46.48	48.49	50.39	150.8	178.3	175.8	38.8	40.1	42.0
Urban									
Male	51.25	52.78	56.37	41.8	51.4	77.6	49.1	48.9	50.9
Female	11.97	13.10	18.42	9.3	12.2	24.8	8.3	9.2	11.6
Persons	32.05	33.34	37.59	51.3	63.6	102.4	30	30.2	32.2
Total									
Male	56.58	56.39	58.96	138.5	159.6	181.6	52.6	51.6	51.9
Female	26.52	29.89	31.32	63.4	82.4	96.6	19.7	22.3	25.7
Persons	41.73	43.31	44.78	201.9	241.9	278.2	36.7	37.5	39.3

(Source: Census 1981, 1991 and 2001)

Women account for 34 per cent of the total workers in the State as per 1991 Census.

The total organized sector employment of 2.52 million accounted for 8.7 per cent of total workers (28.98 million) in 1999 – 2000. In the organized sector, the share of women has increased from 0.297 million (16 per cent of total organized sector employment) in 1979–80

to 0.754 million (30 per cent) in 1999–2000. Women in public and private sector employment accounted for 0.426 million and 0.299 million, respectively (Government of Tamilnadu, 2003). In 2001, Tamil Nadu had the highest WPR for men, 58.96 per cent. The All-India figure was 51.9 per cent (Table 2). The WPR for women at 31.32 per cent, was also substantially higher than that for many States and All India (25.7 per cent).

Construction

Construction is the world's largest industrial employer at seven per cent of world employment and 28 per cent of industrial employment. The worldwide market volume of the construction sector is over USD 3 trillion, and it accounts for around 10 per cent of the world's GDP. It is the largest industrial sector in Europe (11 per cent GDP) and in the US (12 per cent), whilst in the developing world it represents 2–3 per cent of the GDP. In most countries, 50 per cent of capital investment goes to construction. The construction industry has a deservedly notorious reputation as being dirty, difficult and dangerous, and accounts for 30 – 40 per cent of the world's fatal injuries, while it represents around 7 per cent of the world's employment (International Federation of Building & Wood Workers, 2004).

The construction sector is the largest employer in India after agricultural labour in the unorganised sector. It is an integral part of a country's infrastructure and industrial development. The contribution of the construction industry to the economic and social life of the country is noteworthy. Besides, the construction industry generates substantial employment and provides a growth impetus to other sectors through backward and forward linkages. It is, essential therefore, that, this vital activity is nurtured for the healthy growth of the economy. Majority of construction workers, up to 95 per cent of them are estimated to be temporary workers and most of them are seasonal. The Indian economy, buoyed by the

growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at market prices exceeding 8 per cent every year since 2003-04, is projected to grow at 8.7 per cent for 2007-08, says the Economic Survey for 2007-08 (8.7 per cent GDP growth in 2007-08, 2008 February 28). The growth in the services sector continued to be broad based with transport and communication being the fastest growing with an average of 15.3 per cent per annum during the 10th Five Year Plan followed by construction. The contribution of the construction sector increased to 10.8 per cent while that of telecom to 11.4 per cent. There was 13.9 per cent growth in the financial services comprising banking, insurance and business services in 2006-07.

Table 3
Gross Domestic Product - Growth by Sector in per cent

	GDP	Agriculture	Manufacturing	Services	Construction
2002	3.8	-7.2	6.8	7.4	7.7
2003	8.5	10.0	7.1	8.5	10.9
2004	7.5	0.0	8.2	9.6	12.2
2005	9.0	6.0	9.1	9.8	14.2
2006	9.2	2.7	11.3	11.2	9.4

(Source: Central Statistical Organisation, available: <http://mospi.nic.in>, downloaded 2 March 2007.)

Table 3 shows the growth of GDP by sector in India (*Asian Development Outlook 2007*). The growth in construction sector is 9.4 for the year 2006.

Table 4
Credit Growth rate by sector, October 2006, per cent, year on year.

Sector	Growth Rate in per cent
Retail	34.3
Housing	32.3
Commercial Real Estate	83.9
Industry, Including	24.8
Infrastructure	23.2
Metals	34.6
Textiles	34.2
Engineering	58.3
Chemical	26.9
Food Processing	23.6
Construction	49.5
Agriculture	30.8

(Source: Reserve Bank of India, available: www.rbi.org.in)

Table 4 shows that the credit growth rate for construction is 49.5. While India's agrarian crisis has unfolded slowly but relentlessly, the dynamics of employment have shifted recently. Table 5 shows that employment growth has quickened over the last 5 years. It has done so among both men and women, and those living in rural and urban areas. Further, the data show that construction sector has grown by 8.2 per cent in 1999/2000-2004.

Table 5

Overall employment growth rates, per cent

	1993/1994 to 1999/2000	1999/2000 to 2004
Rural Male	1.0	1.9
Rural Female	0.2	3.2
Rural Persons	0.7	2.4
Urban Male	2.6	3.7
Urban Female	1.0	6.2
Urban Persons	2.3	4.2
Total Male	1.4	2.4
Total Female	0.3	3.7
Total Persons	1.0	2.8
Sector Employment		
Agriculture	0.1	1.5
Mining and Quarrying	-2.8	2.4
Manufacturing	1.6	5.0
Electricity, Water, etc	-4.7	3.1
Construction	6.4	8.2
Industry	2.4	5.8
Trade, hotel, restaurant	6.3	3.9
Transport, Storage and Communication	5.3	4.9
Other Services	-0.7	3.5
Services	2.9	3.9
All Sectors	1.0	2.8

(Source : National Sample Survey reports of 1993/94, 1999/2000, and 2004)

The construction sector is one of the largest employers in the country. In 1999-2000, it employed 17.62 million workers, a rise of 6 million over 1993-94 (Government of India, 2002). The sector also recorded the highest growth rate in generation of jobs in the last two decades, doubling its share in total employment.

The construction industry sets in motion the process of economical growth in the country; investment in this sector contributes 6.5 per cent of GDP growth. Every Re.1

investment in the construction industry causes an increment of Rs.0.80 in GDP as against Rs.0.20 and Rs.0.14 in the fields of agriculture and manufacturing industry, respectively. Statistics over the period have shown that compared to other sectors, this sector of economic activity generally creates 4.7 times increase in incomes and 7.76 times increase in employment generation potentiality. Sustained efforts by the Indian construction industry and the Planning Commission have led to assigning the industry status to construction today. This means formal planning and above board financial planning will be the obvious destination of the construction sector in the country, with over 31 million persons employed in it.

The construction industry in India is facing a huge shortage of manpower, especially those with skill-sets to sustain the burgeoning growth in infrastructure and housing sectors. Although the construction industry employs about 31 million people, second only to the agriculture sector, the workforce requirement is about 5 million people per year over the next seven years to sustain the current eight per cent growth rate (Manpower shortage hits construction industry, 2007 November 16). With only 10 million workers available in the country every year, the construction industry will face a heavy manpower challenge, as it requires employing 5 million people per annum. There is also dearth of contractors due to the fact that while the existing contracting agencies are overloaded, attempts are not being made to form new ones.

Construction workers are one of the most numerous and vulnerable segments of the unorganised sector in India. The building and other construction works are characterised by their inherent risk to the life and limb of the workers. The work is also characterised by its casual nature, temporary relationship between employer and employee, uncertain working hours, lack of basic amenities and inadequate welfare facilities. There is no discernible and

permanent employer-employee relationship in the construction sector due to the migratory nature of the labour, short duration of projects, and the numerous sub-contractors (Suchitra & Rajasekhar, 2006). Usually, the principal employer never knows who is actually working for him and nor does the worker know for whom he is working. These characteristics also influence the practice of gender discrimination, working conditions, social security, health and safety of the workers specially the women in this industry. Even though construction is considered to be one of the principal industries in the country, the workers in the industry still remain unskilled, exploited and discriminated against (Mathew, 2005).

Background for the Malady of Gender Discrimination in India

Discrimination is treating one or more members of a specified group unfairly when compared to other people. Article 1(1a) of the *Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention*, 1958 defines discrimination as “any distinction, exclusion or preference made on the basis of race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction or social origin, which has the effect of nullifying or impairing equality of opportunity treatment in employment or occupation” (ILO Report, 2003a: pp 16, Box 2.1).

India is a multi lingual, multi ethnic, multi religious and multi cultural nation and consequently the source of gender discrimination is culture, society, religion and home. Most of the cultures in India practice gender discrimination, and favour boys and men, under valuing girls and women. In families, sons are taught that they are superior over daughters. In most of the cultures women are forced to be submissive to men.

In most families, women are not treated as partners. They are treated as servants, who are for serving the men. Some cultures practice female infanticide and dowry system. At the time of marriage the parents of the bride are expected to pay a large amount in gold or cash

or property as dowry. This practice of dowry, forces parents to encourage the birth of male children. This leads to selective abortion of female fetus. Even though the government of India has enacted legislation to prevent these social evils which are due to gender discrimination, these practices continue.

In India, there are many castes which are divided on the basis of the type of work that the people perform. The caste system in India is believed to be nearly 3,000 years old (Deshpande, 2000). The low caste people are called as Scheduled Caste (SC) people and they are treated as untouchables in rural areas even though untouchability is a crime. Low caste people cannot enter into temples or the area where the high caste people live. They will not eat or drink with high caste people. They are not treated on par with others and are isolated from other high caste people. There are also other people who belong to Most Backward Caste (MBC) and Backward Caste (BC). Their status in society is higher than the Scheduled Caste people but they are also not well accepted by the high caste people. Most of the people belonging to the Scheduled Caste, Most Backward and Backward Caste live below poverty line and so they take up the construction sector for making up their livelihood.

Major religions like Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism and Buddhism originated in India with the worldview that men are superior to women. Most of the religions in India teach the superiority of men and justify gender discrimination. This worldview brings discrimination in work place. Legislation has been enacted in India to get rid of these maladies in the society. In spite of this legislation, gender discrimination is still practiced widely. This worldview brings discrimination in work place and affects the efficiency of a woman.

Women Construction Workers

Outside the agriculture, manufacturing and service sectors, which together employ more than 80 per cent of women workers, a significant and gradually increasing proportion of women workers are engaged in the construction sector (Shah, 2002). Among the informal sector workers, women doing construction are some of the worst victims of discrimination and deprivation. Working on construction sites is a very difficult task. Unlike other industries where women are employed in semi-skilled or sometimes even in skilled jobs, in the building industry they are employed only as unskilled labourers. The industry does not allow its women workers to acquire skills. Consequently, women begin at the lower rung of the job hierarchy and remain there till the end of their working life. They can never aspire to be good painters, masons or carpenters (John & Sharma, 2002).

Women are engaged in a whole range of unskilled work, which though invisible, are unavoidable in the construction activity. They are mostly head-load workers, who carry bricks, cement, sand and water from one place to the other, sometimes over great heights along precariously balanced wooden beams or structures. This exposes them to high risks of accidents as well as physical and mental strain. They are also involved in cleaning up, concreting and earth work. In construction industry unskilled men, as helpers, also do head-load, concreting and earth work, but women are usually paid less than men for equal work.

The job of an unskilled worker is more strenuous in the construction industry than in other manufacturing industries. As casual workers, women not only face insecurity of work but are also paid lower wages compared to their male counterparts. Minimum wage and other legislation are violated for women. Women face instability and insecurity in work, they get poor remuneration, discrimination in the payment of wages and virtual absence of

enforcement of protective labour legislation. Their work is regarded as unskilled, but they are given no opportunity to acquire skills on the job. Men, on the other hand, learn and up-grade construction skills while working. Usually, women workers in construction industry have to assume multiple burdens, of household work, looking after children and work in the sites to earn a living.

More than 35 per cent of the construction workers are women (ILO, 2001a). Unlike other industries where women are employed in semi-skilled or sometimes even in skilled jobs, in the construction industry they are employed only as unskilled labourers. For example, Shahjehan is a 55-year-old woman who worked as an unskilled construction worker for over two decades (Dogra, 2004). She says:

As there was no other support for the family I went on working year after year, even though my body ached badly. Carrying heavy loads on my head I would walk and climb again and again even though I felt my body can take it no longer. Then I had an accident, but after some rest I had to return to the same work again. Now I've left work and my eldest son supports the family, but even though I don't work now my head aches all the time. It appears as though the loads I carried have come to exist permanently on my head. I just touch my head with my own hand and it starts paining so badly.

Women face accidents, insecurity in work, sexual harassment, poor remuneration, discrimination in the payment of wages and virtual absence of enforcement of protective labour legislation. Many women workers are exploited by overwork, sexual abuse and low salary. Empowerment of these women is the need of the hour. Empowerment is about changing the unequal distribution of power in society. It is a process and the result of a process. It is about the redistribution of social power – the rights, resources, opportunities and responsibilities of individuals and social groups in relation to one another in a given society. Empowerment is aimed at creating both equality (sameness, as in law) and equity (equal access, such as to education or health) between individuals and social groups.

Women's Empowerment is the process, and the results of the process, through which gender and social relations are transformed in favour of women; to create greater equality and equity between men and women within social groups; and to create greater equality and equity between women and men of different social groups. Empowerment is the process by which the disempowered or powerless people, can change their circumstances and begin to have control over their lives. Empowerment results in a change in the balance of power, in the living conditions, and in the relationships. Perhaps the most important effect of empowerment is that the person says "Now I do not feel afraid." (Jhabvala, *Organising is the way to empowerment*)

An example of empowerment of women construction workers is the *Karmika School for Construction Workers: Sewa (Self Employed Women's Association)* established in 2003 in Ahmedabad. Its goal is to impart skills training for various trades in the construction industry to all workers with a focus on women workers. They provide training in basic functional literacy and relevant skills: using customised audio-visual training modules and materials. They provide testing and certification of skilled construction workers and offer refresher courses and distant learning courses. They have collaboration with other vocational training centers and provide technical input and supervision and monitoring and facilitating training courses. They conduct three month training modules on masonry, painting, plastering, plumbing, electrical wiring, carpentry, welding, mechanics, tiling and operating equipment (rollers, excavators). Their key partnerships in training and job placement are private construction firms like the Larsen and Tubro for hiring of SEWA trainees and joint training. For testing and certification, the Construction Industry Development Council is the

partner and distance learning courses are offered by Indira Gandhi National Open University and financial support and capacity building are by Care India.

More than 5,000 people were trained in three years (2003-2006) in SEWA. The impact of training was found in a survey of 193 trained women. They said that they had more working days, higher daily incomes by 10-50 rupees per day (80 per cent), increased skills, ability to do any type of work (45 per cent), better quality/more efficient work (18 per cent). Twenty five per cent of women were skilled in plastering and masonry, 20 per cent were hired as masons and 30 per cent as masonry assistants (Baruah, 2008). This example has to be emulated all over India to empower women construction workers.

Significance of the Research

Women constitute nearly half of the population of India but form only 32 per cent of the labour force. The potential in women is still unexploited. In construction about 35 per cent are women and their potential is not used to the maximum. They clean the building site and serve the male skilled workers by carrying the materials to them. They perform very heavy work and exert more physical strength than masons. Women are not assigned masonry work purely on the ground of socially assigned roles. The differentiation in work between men and women in the construction industry occurs on the grounds of what is considered appropriate for men and women, not on the basis of capabilities.

In India, about 350-400 million people live under absolute poverty of 275 dollars per capita per annum and a majority of them are women (Nandal, 2005). Women among these poor families are even more poor and powerless. In the economic sphere, women have even less opportunities than men. They earn about half of men's income, and they have practically no ownership of resources. In the social field, their status is much lower than

those of men. The rural women work in fear of physical harm, of economic deprivation or of social oppression. These women are pushed to construction jobs for the sake of earning.

While men can move up the ladder of career in construction, women have no promotion or aspiration. Interests of patriarchy and entrenched gender inequities, rather than any inherent differences in physical capability, have drawn these divisions and made acquiring of any construction skills taboo for women in India (Habitat, 1997). While men start work as helpers or coolies on construction sites, and gradually acquire and upgrade their skills on the job, it is unthinkable for a woman to do any other task than the ones she performed on her first day on the job. They join as unskilled workers and retire as unskilled workers. They earn very much less when compared to men. Men move up to be masons and then become supervisor and many even become contractors. But women are denied promotional opportunities. The male dominated construction sector does not encourage women to become masons.

Women are paid lesser than what men get for the same kind of work. According to the National Institute of Public Finances and Policy study on Gender Budgeting, the average female wage is almost 80 per cent of the male average in urban areas but falls to 60 per cent of the corresponding male rate in rural areas (Women workforce in rural areas down, 2004 July 08). In the unorganised sector women are paid less than men, even though there is legislation to get rid of this anomaly. Their earnings are not at all adequate for a minimum basic life. National Centre for Labour (NCL) has calculated that in order to meet Minimum Basic Needs, a family of four requires a minimum wage of Rs. 125 per day, but in fact the daily income of a poor family maybe as low as 1/5th of this amount. There is no move to implement the existing laws on equal remuneration or to make new ones covering the

unorganised sector. This gender discrimination in wages is widely prevalent in the construction sector.

Discrimination in any form hampers peace at work place and prevents the women from coming out with their maximum potential in their vocation. There have been some attempts to measure the intensity of work done by women in construction work (Girija & Geetha, 1989). For example, in concreting, it was found that in 15 minutes, about 55 bundles, each weighing seven - eight kg (Kilogram), passed through the hands of women. In an 8-hour shift, therefore, an incredible 32,000 kg would have passed through a woman worker's hands. For masonry work, women carried 9-12 bricks (each weighing 2.5 kg) on their head and moved with grace and skill along the scaffolding. While doing earth work, women carried on their head 15 kg of mud and walked 30 feet to deposit the mud and return. In an hour this was repeated 180 times. In an 8-hour shift a woman on average would have walked about 13 kms (kilometers) carrying about 21,000 kg of mud. While using a crowbar to dig into the earth, women would do this 15 times a minute, matching the efficiency of able bodied men. In curing, women were found carrying water in pots each weighing eight kg, 15 times per hour, to pour over concrete structures. In breaking stones, women used an iron hammer 52 times per minute and went on doing this for a nine-hour shift with a one hour break in between. In the construction sector, women are forced to carry out hard physical menial work for long hours, under unsafe and inhumane working conditions and there is no provision for using their skills to the maximum.

Women work only as unskilled workers, there is no scope for promotion. The reason for this condition in construction has to be probed. Is it because of illiteracy or poverty or

gender discrimination? There are women in other professions who perform equal to men.

Why are there no masons among women?

The barriers which prevent the male contractors, masons and other male construction workers from allowing women to take up masonry work have to be determined. This study will find out the reasons for the discrimination and rejection of women by the male workers.

The factors affecting the willingness of women to be trained as masons and take up masonry job, and the willingness of male masons and contractors to train women as masons are to be probed in this context

National Institute of Technology, Tiruchi conducted a three day training programme for the masons (Masons to learn latest technologies, 2006 August 11). For the masons, most of whom were semi-literate, it was a rare opportunity to gather inputs from top ranking institution. The initiative provided value addition, since the masons were given a certificate at the end of the training. Each of them were entitled to a honorarium of Rs.100 a day, in addition to free food, under the world-Bank aided Technical Education Quality Improvement Programme community scheme. Each of them were also given a tool kit worth Rs.250 at the end of the training programme. Similarly the Seshasayee Institute of Technology (SIT), Trichy conducted theory and practical lessons for 30 masons at a training programme organised by the Institute's Department of Civil Engineering in association with Ultra Tech Cements (Masons undergo training at institute, 2008 February 21). They were exposed to several aspects of construction including mixing, nuances of ready made concrete and laboratory testing of building materials. At the end of the three day programme, the participants were provided with certification, which will certainly improve their earning

prospects. But all those who were trained were only men. This research study will find out why women construction workers are not being trained in such programmes.

Men are trained for construction work. But little effort is taken to train women workers for masonry work. Even when women are trained, they find it hard to find skilled work or acceptance by men (Habitat, 1997). Hence this study will find out how they can be motivated, facilitated, trained and empowered for masonry work in Tamil Nadu.

This research *A Study on Gender Discrimination among Construction Workers and the Means of Empowering Women Construction Workers with special reference to Tiruchirapalli* is an effort to study all these issues including the problem of gender discrimination in the construction sector in wages, and to find the reasons for the gender discrimination with the view to eradicate this problem in Tiruchirappalli. A special emphasis is given in this study to find out the reasons why women workers are not being employed as masons, even though they are capable of doing this work as efficiently as men. This research is an attempt to make women construction workers aware of the opportunities, and studies the means to empower women on par with men in the construction sector by training them as masons.