

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

This study has made an attempt to investigate and compare the nature of employment, migration and living conditions of the several categories of construction workers in both urban and rural areas of Tirunelveli district. The construction workers are classified into three broad categories as (i) skilled, (ii) semi-skilled and (iii) unskilled. They are confronted with several types of problems. The working and living conditions of a majority of the workers leave much desired and for several reasons.)

Study Area:

The general characteristics of construction industry and its contribution to the socio-economic development were first reviewed for both all India and for Tamil Nadu. The review pointed out the poor working conditions of the construction workers and the need to study them in depth. This is the focus of the present study, albeit restricted to a small area; Tirunelveli district. This limitation was necessary because of time and other resource constraints of an individual - part time researcher. As Tirunelveli district has a large number of construction workers and the construction industry has shown significant growth in the district, the choice of the study area was justified.)

Problem Focus:

Construction comes next only to agriculture and weaving. It is an indispensable economic activity and enjoys a strategic role in the wider spectrum of economic opportunities. The contribution made by the construction sector has been economically and socially very significant. As a dynamic service sector, it provides direct employment to a considerable percentage of the population. A unique feature of this contribution is that it employs a large number of semi-skilled and unskilled male and female workers. This sector is able to help particularly the poor workers of the society. Being a labour intensive activity, construction promotes the welfare of the masses.

This industry has a strong backward linkages as it generates demand for materials and services which are needed for construction activities. Ultimately, the construction industry makes remarkable contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and capital formation of the nation. In a way, this industry is able to function as an engine of economic growth.

The construction sector is one of the key branches of the service sector. The utility and even the inevitability of this sector is widely understood, extensively applauded but rarely rewarded in full. The contribution made by the construction

workers is highly valuable. But the rewards extended to them have not been proportionate.

The construction workers work hard and at times they have to work under very difficult and risky conditions. They do not have full employment opportunities. There is no guarantee for continuous employment. The semi-skilled and unskilled workers are often hard hit. They move from place to place in search of employment and are highly migratory. These workers are generally unorganised and do not enjoy the effective services of trade unions. Naturally, their bargaining power is low. A few available welfare schemes are also not fully implemented. Rains bring spells of unemployment. Inflationary escalations and frequent transport strikes add fuel to fire. Not able to make both ends meet, the workers borrow and gradually slide down into a terrible debt trap and a bonded labour syndrome ultimately.

The market for the construction workers have been imperfect and discriminated. Some sort of differentiation and exploitation also are common. Gender discrimination in payment of wages and physical exploitation of female workers are real problems. The employers have an upper hand in this sector. Middlemen also play some havoc. Therefore, a careful study of these workers is warranted and this study aims at it.

Objectives:

The overall objective of this study is to highlight the general socio-economic conditions of the construction workers in Tirunelveli district as found in 1998-99. The specific objectives are (i) to understand the nature of employment, migration and living conditions of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled male and female workers in the urban and rural areas; (ii) to analyse the consumption pattern and the propensities to consume and save; (iii) to discuss wage structure and working conditions of the construction workers; (iv) to evaluate the role of trade unions in the fixation of wages and promotion of welfare of the workers; (v) to identify and rank the problems faced by construction workers; and (vi) finally to elicit the views and opinions of the contractors and maistries, to understand the other side of the problem.

Methodology

For the reasons stated above, Tirunelveli district is the universe for the study. The universe was stratified into (a) urban and (b) rural areas. The sample size was fixed at 300 construction workers. It was equally distributed between the two strata. Important work sites in each stratum were listed with the help of district officials and recognised building contractors. There were 15 work sites in urban areas and 15 in rural areas. Then the sample of 300 workers was distributed among the

work sites in probability proportion to the number of workers in them. Finally, the required number of workers were selected by simple random sampling method from the list of all workers in each site. Thus, it is a stratified two stage random sampling method.

In addition, 50 maistries, 20 contractors were also selected from the same work sites. Thus, the ultimate sample consisted of 300 workers, 50 maistries and 20 contractors. The workers were seen to have three skill categories viz., skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled. The sample of workers was post stratified into the three categories.

Selected respondents were visited and required information was collected by personal interview method with the help of pre-tested enquiry-schedules. The period of study is 1998-99.

The primary data collected from the sample of three categories of construction workers, maistries and contractors, were processed and analysed with reference to the objectives of the study.

Findings :

Salient findings of the results of analysis of data are briefly stated below:

For construction workers, the most effective or potential range of age is very narrow, between 25 and 35 years. Majority of the male and female workers are able to work at the optimum level only during this range. In the urban area, 50 per cent of the workers are found between the age group of 25 and 35 years. The corresponding percentage for the rural area is 48.67. It is found that the majority of the workers in both urban and rural areas are unskilled and they are in the age group of 25 and 35 years. However, the workers continue in work as far as possible, even upto 50 years, because their only source of income was the wage.

The male workers are found in all the three categories namely skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled categories but the female workers are found only in the unskilled category. In the urban area, the male workers claim 69.33 per cent and in the rural side 76 per cent. Their share in the total sample is 72.67 per cent. In Tirunelveli district, mostly the male members work in construction activities. Less than 30 per cent of the workers only are females. This may be due to the differences in physical fitness and stamina.)

Most of the construction workers are illiterate. Actually, many of them are not able to put their signatures, even in their mother tongue. Illiteracy is also a cause of

their ignorance. That does not mean that the construction workers lack common sense and innate wisdom. In the sample under study, 41.33 per cent of the total workers can read but not write, 31 per cent cannot read and write and just above 25 per cent of the total sample can read and write. The urban skilled and semi-skilled workers possess a tolerable literacy level. The female workers are mostly illiterate in particular.

The institution of marriage has taken strong roots in the community of construction workers. Most of them got married a little early in life. In the sample, nearly 65 per cent of the workers are married. A few cases of remarriage also were found. The construction workers do not seem to be much interested in family planning and small size families. Most of them have three or four children. There are a few workers having more than five children also.

In Tirunelveli district a large number of workers belong to scheduled caste (SC) and scheduled tribes (ST). This is so due to the fact that most of these SC/ST labourers are agricultural workers and their second source of employment is the construction sector. Next to SC/ST's the most backward (MBC) and backward class (BC) workers form a major section. An insignificant minority of workers come from the forward community (FC). Thus, construction is the field for workers of the socially backward classes.

A characteristic feature of construction workers is their migration from one work site to another and place to place. They migrate within the Tirunelveli district and also to nearby and even a little distant districts. Likewise, the workers of other districts also migrate to Tirunelveli district.

Living Conditions:

The living conditions of the construction workers is studied in terms of accommodation and shelter, income, expenditure, consumption pattern, living style and indebtedness. More than 50 per cent of the workers live in independent houses. Around 35 per cent of the workers sleep at work sites and others live with their relatives.

Nearly 80 per cent of the sample construction workers dwell in rented houses only, and nearly 60 per cent of them pay a rent of more than Rs.100 per month.

More than 60 per cent of urban skilled workers earn a monthly income of more than Rs.1500. 30 per cent of them earn between Rs.1001 and Rs.1500 and 9 per cent of them earn from Rs.501 to 1000. No skilled labour both in urban and rural areas earn below Rs.500 per month if he or she attends to work regularly.

The scene in the rural areas is a little different. Less than 50 per cent of rural skilled workers earn Rs.1500 and above per month per head. Looking at the grand

total of the sample size (300), 49 workers earn Rs.500 and below per head in a month; 109 earn between Rs.501 and Rs.1,000 each per month. 67 workers are found to earn between Rs.1001 and Rs.1500 per head per month. In the Rs.1501 and above range, just 75 workers come up. Thus, most of the construction workers are poor or just above poverty line.

Consumption is a measure of the standard of living of workers. Results show that most of the construction workers are able to meet their necessities for living, working and habitual needs, but just that. They rarely possess any items of comfort or luxuries. The construction workers are poorer as compared to the industrial workers, because they receive no bonus and other exgratia payments available for the industrial workers. Periodical increases in dearness allowances cannot be thought of by the construction workers. No doubt, a few gifts are given to these workers during festival times, but their value is small. Food and house rent are the main items of expenditure, followed by expenses on clothing. Expenses on ceremonies, entertainment and for conventional necessities such as cigarettes, beedi, tobacco and drinks are large and they have to borrow.

The habits of thrift and economy are found among only a few responsible workers. Others seem to live beyond their means. In the sample, just 10 per cent of the workers have savings bank account and about 14 per cent of the workers use chit funds. More than 75 per cent of the sample workers prefer transactions with co-

workers, friends and relatives for a limited level of savings and rarely use banks. The banking habits are seen with few urban workers only. It may be due to the fact that the rural workers are mostly illiterate, and the rural parts do not have adequate number of banks.

In the sample of 300, 57 workers own houses; 75 mopeds or bicycles; 175 workers have radio or transistor and TV; 88 persons have some ornaments in gold or silver; and 251 workers own some tools and equipments. About 200 workers; own furniture. Just 24 workers - 15 in the urban area and nine in the rural area - own some small areas of land. It is found that the unskilled workers in either areas do not own any land. It cannot be ruled out that some workers might have inherited some assets like ancestral houses and land and a few have received vehicles or electrical and electronic items by way of dowries and gifts.

Debt is a very common feature among the construction workers. Very often they lead to 'debt traps'. It is seen that all the 300 sample workers have some big or small debts. This does not mean that all of them do not have any saving at all. More than 100 respondents have some type of savings. The urban workers save more than rural workers and also borrow more indicating the fact that they aspire for comparatively a higher standard of living than that of the rural workers.

There are three major sources of debt for the construction workers, namely contractors and sub-contractors, friends and relatives and private money lenders. Institutionalised source seems to be almost unknown to them. More than 40 per cent workers fall a prey to the private money lenders. More than 35 per cent avail themselves of loans from contractors and sub-contractors, and 20 per cent depend on friends and relatives.

Once a worker falls into the trap of private money lenders, it is very difficult to extricate easily, because of usury. The loans from contractors and sub-contractors lead to some type of bondage. The defaulters of loan and interest payments become bonded labourers in due course. The nature of monetary help from friends and relatives is bound to be small and for very short periods as petty loans.

Consumption:

An analysis of the estimated consumption function of the households reveals that the annual disposable income has greater influence in rural areas than in urban areas. Secondly, the family size has a strong influence on the annual consumption expenditure in both urban and rural areas.

It is found that the annual disposable income of unskilled labourers has been the most significant variable determining their annual consumption expenditure of both urban and rural workers.

An examination of the values of the marginal propensity to consume (MPC) and the marginal propensity to save (MPS) highlights the direct and the indirect precautionary motive of the workers to tide over the rainy days. Generally, the urban workers save more than the rural workers. The propensity to save is not small but the potential to save is very limited by their small income, high consumption, and borrowing for unproductive purposes.

Standard of Living:

The standard of living of construction workers of different categories, is analysed by using the standard of living index (SLI) which comprises of the index of consumption expenditure (ICE), index of quality of residence of the households (IQH) and index of basic facilities (IBF). The values of percapita annual consumption and total family expenditure are worked out, with care to standard norms and classifications. This exercise reveals that on an average, the standard of living of construction workers is only one half of what is required for a decent living in urban and rural areas. The skilled and semi-skilled workers are better than the unskilled workers. Consideration is given to the nature of house, flooring facilities and roof. The indices worked out suggest that all construction workers have a level of living below the standard for a decent living.

As far the factors influencing their standard of living, consumption expenditure, average wage rate, level of employment and the dependency ratio have considerable bearing.

Employment:

Majority of the skilled, semi-skilled and un-skilled workers work for 181 to 300 days in a year, it can be considered a stable employment. It is also seen that as the skill and also income increase, the workers long for the enjoyment of more leisure. The unskilled workers normally work for more than 181 days in both urban and rural areas as their wages are comparatively low. In the sample, 116 workers work below 180 days ; 156 work between 181 and 300 days and 28 workers go for work above 301 days in a year. Thus, full employment is very limited. The builders need the services of unskilled workers for more days than that of the skilled workers. Thus, low wage and more days of work are characteristic of unskilled workers.

Construction workers change their employers frequently. In the sample of 300 workers, 63 have changed less than three employers, 96 between three and five employers 81 between five and seven and 60 are found to have changed more than seven employers in their total tenure. The reasons for such frequent change of employers are very often family oriented problems and the expectation of higher wages and facilities and benefits with regard to the hours of work. Usually, in the

urban areas more people work for eight hours; while six hours of work has the second place and 10 hours work has the third place. In the rural areas, eight hours, 10 hours and six hours have the first, second and third ranks respectively. One can understand the nature of exploitation if a worker is asked to work for 10 hours in a day. The absence of adequate trade union protection may be a strong reason for such a pitiable situation. Overtime work fetches no additional wage.

Most of the workers in both urban and rural areas secure their employment opportunities through contractors and sub-contractors. The co-workers and self effort help many labourers to secure their jobs.

Experience is a vital input and it is much needed in the construction side. In the total sample, nearly 25 per cent of the workers have 11 and more than 11 years of working experience, 46 per cent of workers possess six to 10 years of experience and 29 per cent of workers have a working experience of one to five years.

It is found that experienced semi skilled workers become skilled workers in due course and the unskilled workers are able to climb up through the ladder of experience to higher strata. The contractors and sub-contractors mostly prefer workers with six to 10 years of working experience. Others have to work as unskilled casual workers for a few years.

Wages:

Wages are the main motivating factor for employment. The wage rates of masons represent a combination of time and piece rate. Usually, the contractors and sub-contractors fix wages. The skill and experience of the workers determine wage rates. There are piece work wage rates and time rates. There is no standard basis to determine wage rates and so there is no uniformity in wages. Practically, skilled labourers are paid higher wages than others. Naturally, the semi-skilled workers get more than the unskilled workers.

The sub-contractors fix the wages of skilled workers considering the work requirement, experience and ability of the workers. Location of the work sites and the duration of work also go to influence the wage levels. The unskilled workers are paid comparatively low wages.

There is considerable differences in wages paid to several types of skilled workers. For example, a painter is paid Rs.120 per day on an average and an electronic stone cutter is paid Rs.202 per day. A mason is paid an average wage of Rs.128 per day and a lift erector is paid nearly Rs.200 per day. Thus, differential wages are paid to all the categories under skilled workers based on the required skills, experience and the risks involved.

There are differential wages among the several types of unskilled workers. For example, in the urban areas a watchman is paid Rs. 51 per day and a carpenter gets Rs.101 per day. A female coolie gets only a wage ranging from Rs.50 to Rs.70 per day whereas a male coolie gets a wage varying between Rs.75 and Rs.100 per day. Usually, the newcomers are paid the minimum rates of wages. The wages of unskilled workers are fixed on the basis of their experience, caste, nativity and relationship with the contractors also have a say in it. Thus, there are no standard bases for the wage fixation particularly when the workers are unregistered and non-members of trade unions. Such nebulous and adhoc method of fixation of wages is more widespread in the rural areas than in the urban areas. In most cases, energy rather than skill is the deciding feature of wage fixation. An energetic worker with a greater physical strength gets higher wage than a more skilled but physically weak worker. However, the wage differences are not too wide in the case of skilled and semi-skilled workers.

The workers who are continuously working with the same masons or contractors are paid weekly wages and temporary workers are paid on daily basis. In Tirunelveli district, there are no fortnightly and monthly wage payments. Wages are paid directly to the workers by the contractors. In the urban areas, nearly 55 per cent of the workers receive weekly wages and 45 daily wages. Weekly wage payments are found in all categories of the workers. On the other hand, daily wage payments

account for more than 60 per cent in the rural areas. Majority of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled construction workers in the rural areas prefer daily wage payments, probably because they are casual workers.)

Working Conditions:

Generally, the working conditions of construction workers are found to be highly unfavourable and the environmental aspects are not conducive for satisfactory performance. Construction workers work in the open atmosphere and are usually exposed to the vagaries of nature. In certain worksites, the basic facilities much needed for the female workers are absent. Privacy and child care facilities are not always found.

The working hours matter much. The construction workers are put to hard work for long hours. Usually, work starts around 8 A.M. and extends upto 7 P.M. or even 8 P.M. with a brief 45 to 60 minutes lunch break. In the urban areas, out of the 150 sample respondents, 99 have worked upto eight hours and 51 worked from eight to 11 hours a day. Almost the same condition prevails in the rural areas also. A remarkable feature is that the skilled and semi-skilled workers are not much exploited. Invariably, the unskilled workers are exploited very much.

(The skilled workers enjoy one full hour of rest while others have less time for rest. Majority of the urban and rural workers are able to enjoy one hour rest during a day).

(During certain days, the construction workers have to work for overtime and some nominal payment is made for the same. In certain cases, cash payments are made. In certain other cases, light refreshments are given. In some cases, no payment is made for overtime. In the sample studied, out of 61 urban workers, 49 used to get cash for overtime work; eight got light refreshment and four went without any payment. In the rural areas, out of 67 workers 52 received cash; nine light refreshments and eight went without any payment. From this, it is obvious that no standard rules or conventions are adopted for overtime payments.)

Job Satisfaction:

Of 150 urban workers, 84 report job satisfaction and in the rural areas 66 workers had no job satisfaction at all. Defects in the working conditions and delays in payments of wages are causes of dissatisfaction. If other workers feel satisfied with their jobs, it may be perhaps due to the traditional values of contentedness.)

Safety:

The nature of construction activities is such that there is an in built insecurity in the job. At any time, accidents of different types can occur. Nearly 20 per cent of the sample workers have met with some type of accidents. The accident rate is higher in the rural area than in the urban area. Mostly, the semi-skilled workers in the urban areas have suffered greater risks. Majority of the urban workers seem to be safer than rural workers, because modern technology and strict safety standards are followed in urban areas.

For every accident a compensation is required. However, only 38.46 per cent of urban workers have received compensation, and it was 37.50 per cent of rural workers. Majority of the rural workers have not received any compensation at all for the accidents met with. The urban skilled workers have invariably received some compensation. The problem deserves suitable remedy.

Trade Unions:

Trade unions work wonders in the labour world. It is an established fact that the chains of bondage, shackles of the past and the pangs of ill treatment have been broken and eradicated only by the trade unions as far as world labour force is concerned. The construction workers should know the values of trade unions and participate in their functions. Out of 300 workers, as many as 228 were not knowing

about trade unions. Just 72 workers (24 per cent) know about trade unions. Among rural workers only 24 (16 per cent) are aware of it. The unskilled workers were mostly unaware of it. The skilled workers in urban and rural areas are quite aware of trade unions.

Awareness has not motivated them into action as 290 (96.66 per cent) out of 300 respondents, are non-members of trade unions. On the urban side, just 8.51 per cent of the skilled workers are members of trade unions. The corresponding figure for the rural area is 8.16 per cent. There is a very low level of participation also. Even the handful of members do not evince keen interest and participate enthusiastically in trade union activities in Tirunelveli construction sector. The reasons are that unions have brought little benefit to the construction workers and union leaders demand money for any help demanded by the workers.

Worksite Problems:

Work site problem also are there. Working in high elevation, non-availability of proper toilet and drinking water facilities cause considerable hardship to workers. At many places, first aid kits are not provided.

Construction workers generally do not enjoy fixed wages. Those who are close to contractors, maistries are shown favours. Newcomers are paid less wages

than others. At times, wages are paid with much delay. Usually, no special or extra wages are paid for over-time work.

The casual nature of work, no-work, no-pay, employment not possible throughout the year, permanent disability in work, high cost of construction materials, fatal accidents at work sites, and lack of protective measures in sites are some of the other severe problems faced by all types of construction workers.

The Government of Tamil Nadu has implemented a few welfare measures for the benefit of manual workers including construction workers but the implementation is poor. Non-union members are not eligible for many welfare measures. Majority of the construction workers are non members of the union. There is no old age pension scheme. The Minimum Wages Act is not being implemented fully. Risks often go uncovered.

Different views are expressed by construction workers on the role of trade unions. It is a fact that trade unions can still help construction workers to improve their standard of living. But, trade unions do not evince any interest in wage fixation or in ensuring continuous work, worse still, the union leaders expect huge amounts as gifts from members for getting the benefits of government welfare measures to them.

The above problems are faced by the skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled male and female construction workers of the urban and rural areas of Tirunelveli district, only the degrees of seriousness vary.

The unskilled female workers also face a few additional problems. Conditions are highly unfavourable to them. They are paid lower wages than men workers. Some cases of physical (sexual) exploitation are also reported.¹ Severe social criticism and absence of any maternity compensation are some problems faced by female workers.

The Other Side:

Contractors and maistries are the real rulers of the construction world. They are very powerful. They have a strong say in fixation and payment of wages. Yet, they also have problems.

The contractors and maistries have to ensure steady supply of workers. It is very difficult to extract work from a few thick skinned labourers. Paying standard wages is another basic problem because of un-standardized work and non-co-operative attitude of some workers.

They have to face stiff competition from their counterparts. They have to tune their methods to the psychological frame of workers and act accordingly. They

manage the situation by advancing money, bonus and festival loans to the workers. A good rapport with the workers is the best way to enhance productivity and promote work culture.

A very intricate problem faced by the contractors and maistries is the escalation of costs and shortage of materials. They have to avoid suspension of work but much is beyond their control. Contractors and maistries will have to do some administrative job also. It is their duty to place tenders, arrange for initial payments, win the favour of officials and complete the work promptly and profitably. Very often they suffer much to keep the officials in good humour and also extract adequate work from the workers without losing their smiles.

Labour Market :

The market for construction workers is far from perfect. It is primitive with much dependence on kinship and personal relationship between maistries and the workers rather than the free play of market forces. The usual laws of demand and supply do not always function effectively in this market. It is differentiated in terms of types of workers, work assignments and the provision of benefits. Wage discrimination between male and female workers is the most common phenomenon. Since the bargaining capacity of construction workers who remain unorganised, is very low, the scope for open exploitation is wide.

Conclusion :

The widely prevalent poverty conditions among certain semi-skilled and unskilled labourers result in a few more hardships. For example, since a worker is poor he borrows even for his subsistence. He has to pay high rates of interest and ultimately falls into the back-breaking debt trap. In due course, the trap leads to bondage and the worker becomes a bonded labourer. A crisis of identity follows. Frustration is the net result. The very dangerous effects of the vicious circle of poverty enter into the workers world. It is said, "Poverty is cruel but curable". It is a question of when and how. Quick answers are needed but rarely available.

Insecurity of job and instability of employment are the two other features causing concern. Very often the job of construction workers suffers from insecurity. Adequate protection is not available. Different types of risks and hazards challenge the workers. Most of the workers feel hapless and helpless. A fairly high degree of unemployment is also found. Instability of employment is the worst form of discouragement to any worker.

Any one can easily understand that accidents are quite probable in the construction field, that too in highly elevated areas. They do occur but no scientific provision of compensation is presented. Mercy may play a role and some very nominal compensation may be offered. If a worker loses any of his vital parts of the

body, he becomes invalid throughout his life. Such pathetic situations are ignored if the worker has not become a member of a union.

Again, holidays have become built-in in modern societies these days. The construction workers are not fortunate enough to have paid holidays. 'No work, no pay' is the rule of the day. Effective steps have not so far been taken for the provision of paid holidays to construction workers)

Employees' State Insurance (ESI), Medical Allowances and Insurance coverage are not made available for all the construction workers. One can understand if the casual workers are deprived of such benefits. It is beyond logic and reason that even the permanent workers go without such benefits in a large measure.

Organising workers for their collective bargaining is a solution, but it has to begin with efforts to build awareness among the construction workers about the likely benefits of the unionism and convincing them. This must be done against probable resistance of contractors and maistries who now have complete control over the labour market. Then, it is a long and difficult path to tread, Non-government organisations can play a lead role and government support should strengthen their efforts.

Policy Implications:

Above conclusions have a few specific implications for policy. They are stated below:

- ❖ The labour market for construction workers is imperfect and buyer dominated. Therefore, the workers have little bargaining power. The only remedy is to organise them in trade unions. However, many are not aware of the benefits of union. A few who are members of unions have gained nothing, not even the benefits of welfare schemes, not to speak of fair wages. Union leaders demand money and it spoils the hope, if any of the workers. The contractors and maistries enjoy the market power and they are sure to resist any effort to organise the workers. Therefore, there are only two options. Non-government agencies can educate the construction workers to build awareness and conviction in the workers about the institutional advantages of the organised market. However, in the context of widespread illiteracy, this course will take a very long time.

- ❖ The second approach is to constitute a labour welfare board and make registration of construction workers compulsory. This arrangement is already there, but it is to be made more effective. For the registered workers the board can arrange employment and fix wages. This is a short-term

measure but needs high levels of efficiency and commitment of the bureaucracy and it is difficult to come and be free of corruption. Probably a combination of both the options may succeed.

- ❖ The Minimum Wages Act is applicable to construction workers. Its enforcement is weak. Efforts may be taken to improve enforcement of the Act. Here again, organised buyers of the labour market (contractors and maistries) may work against it. Even if it is successfully implemented, the Act can assure a fair wage but not sufficient days of employment. Therefore, the possible solution is to promote a system of formal contracts and to create an independent authority to enforce it. This system should allow recruitment of workers only from the list of registered workers and by the registered contractors. This measure also implies strong and effective market intervention by the government in the market for the labour of construction workers.

- ❖ High cost of construction materials, seasonality in employment and lack of skill are the real constraints of construction workers. Huge investment by the government in construction of buildings – public facilities and houses for sales and free distribution to the poor-will increase the market demand for construction workers. Benefits of additional days of employment and high wages would follow ‘House for all’ may be the motto then.

- ❖ Skilled workers are economically well off. Therefore, promotion of skill will help the construction workers. This can be arranged by special training centres for construction workers; giving them both literacy and work related skill. Alternatively, construction practices may be included in vocational courses at high school level.
- ❖ The government has already formulated several welfare schemes for the benefit of manual workers, including construction workers. Results of this study show that the benefits have not reached the needy. So, the schemes must be reviewed and operational guidelines be issued.
- ❖ Most of the construction workers have the risk of accidents, some of them fatal. The results of this study show that the victims do not get due compensation. Therefore, suitable legislative and administrative actions must be taken to remove hurdles and to prevent leakages.
- ❖ Finally, it is also necessary to give top priority for literacy and family welfare drives, because large families are also seen as a cause of low standard of living, especially among unskilled workers.