

# SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF WOMEN MIGRANT LABORERS IN BRICK KILN AND IN CONSTRUCTION.

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## Abstract:

Some dream to escape the realities of life while others dream to face those realities in life. Throughout history of humanity, migration has been a fact of life. The reason people migrate are varied and often complex. Some people move to new places or countries to improve their economic situation or pursue their educations, or to escape human right such as abuse, torture, persecution, armed conflict, extreme poverty and even death, environmental crisis and etc. Indeed, their journey of migration can be full of danger. People still take the risk of migrating with lots of hope to have better reality of life. While migrating some face detentions. Many face daily racism, xenophobia, psycho-social discriminations and injustice in all possible manners. They are uniquely vulnerable, especially women, without the usual support from society and state

**Keywords:** Migration, Interstate migration, Brick kiln workers and Unorganized sector.

## 1. Introduction:

Majority of the migrants moving from rural to urban areas are employed in the informal sectors. Construction and brick kiln are the important sectors in which they work. The migrants move with the family to work in informal sectors like construction and brick kiln to support the economic activity of survival of the family. Half of the workforce working in the brick kiln is women. The women have to take the responsibility of the daily labour of more than 10 to 12 hours, responsibility of family, house, and children. They have multiple roles to execute with countering the problems of discrimination, dehumanization, poor working conditions and low wages. This paper shed light on the socio-economic struggles of the women, working in the unorganized sector, especially in construction and brick kiln with special focus to Sriperumbudur and Red hills areas of Chennai.

This paper is based on a case study of female migrants working in construction and brick kiln in Chennai-the second largest industry in India and one which employs almost 30 million people, approximately 30 percent of which are women, many of them migrants. In this paper, I extend beyond an empirical description of female migrant workers in the field of construction and brick kiln, considering the subjective and nuanced realities linked to women's lived experiences as migrants. Case studies were also conducted to explore the socio-economic status and experiences at the destination of migrant women at brick kiln at Red hills, Chennai. An in-depth, qualitative

exploration of these women's lives and perceptions captures some of the more latent risks and rewards associated with both migration and work in the informal sector.

## 2. Objective of the article:

The objectives of the article is to (1) explore the social conditions and problems faced by the women migrant workers in an construction and in brick kiln in Red hills and in Sriperumbudur, Chennai (2) study about their economic situations of migrant women.

## 3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

**Definition:** The International Organization for Migration (2011) defines migration as the movement of a person or a group of persons, either across an international border, or within a State. It is a population movement, encompassing any kind of movement of people, whatever its length, composition and causes; it includes migration of refugees, displaced persons, economic migrants, and persons moving for other purposes, including family reunification.

Interstate migration Act 1979 defines that interstate migration means any person who is recruited by or through a contractor in one state under an agreement or other arrangement for employment in an established in another state, where with or without the knowledge of the principle employer in relation to such establishment.

Global estimates reports that the number of internal migrants is four times larger than that of cross-border migrants (Human Development Report, 2009). National Commission for Rural Labour (1996) also stated that the number of decadal inter-state migration is about 11 million, 5.2 million Males and 5.8 million females.

Urban centers with new developments work requiring semi-skilled workers at as pull factors for them. Construction activities include building schools, hospitals, houses, offices, township, highways, roads, ports, airports, railways power projects and so on (AmjumShaheen et al 2016:240). About one third of the migrant households are landless and they depend on agricultural and non-agricultural wage labour. The underdeveloped agricultural economy of the state which makes its population unemployed in lean season creates a deficit household economy, which gets further accentuated due to persistent natural disasters such as droughts, low rainfall, and reduction of forest resources in tribal areas. Along with this, globalization has resulted in reduced market facilities and lack of employment opportunities for people (Bhubaneswaron 2008:6).

Lack of collateral limits the ability of agricultural laborers to borrow. As per the Census of India 2011, less than 40 percent of households availed banking services in large parts of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Bihar, and North East. These states have a large number of households whose members work primarily as laborers. They are landless, poor and hence tend to migrate. As is well known, these states account for a large share of short-term migrants. Financial inclusion alone will not translate into credit worthiness. If lack of access to land constrains progress in access to credit markets then it is a cause for concern since land is scarce and hence linkages with insurance and pension products as well (S.Chandrasekhar.2014:6).

Overall the causes of migration of the women are same as that of the men but the context is subsumed within the family dynamics. The identity of women is within the household's identity and the decision of migration is one that is taken by the male head of the family, usually the husband and the wife has to follow (Bhubaneswaron 2008:67).

The informal sectors operation beyond the legal and institutional framework. The characteristics of the informal sector remain unchanged: low capital, micro-enterprises with less sophisticated technologies and marked by low wages to labour who work without contracts and protection. Some of the important sectors in which migrants work include: construction, brick kiln, salt pans, carpet and embroidery, commercial and plantation agriculture and variety of jobs in urban informal sectors such as vendors, hawkers, rickshaw puller, daily wage workers and domestic work (Bhagat, 2012). The construction sector provides many employment opportunity through constructors, who pay a major role in bringing the workers. Nearly 80 per cent of the workers involved in the working of construction and unorganized sector work on contract bases (AnjumShaheen et al 2016:240).

Migration from rural to urban is more dominating than urban to urban streams (Nishikantsingh et al. 2016:177). For 93.6 per cent of the people the place of birth was rural and for 61.8 per cent of the study population, place of last residence was rural. Relatives and friends were a major factor which helped them in migrating to the present place of residence (Sheejini et al 2016:261).

In rural India migration for marriage jumped from 24.7% of the rural female population in 1993 to 43.5% in 2007-08. Census figures for 1991 and 2001 also indicated that female marriage migration rates had indeed increased in rural India. For urban areas, a similar increase in female marriage migration rates in the NSS from 12.1% in 1993 to 27.7% in 2007-08 (S.Chandrasekhar.2014:61). For 27.9 per cent females migrating for economic reasons were as compared to males. The state wise out migration for economic reasons was very high for Bihar (48.7%) followed by Orissa (41.6%). Orissa has a large number of migrant female laborers who leave their villages in search of livelihood to Tamil Nadu. More and more women are forced to migrate periodically to urban areas or to other states in search of work. They migrate with family members, relatives and friends in search of employments and livelihoods. (Bhubaneswaron 2008:6).

Highly educated women are less mobile for employment, business, education, and other related purposes. Women with low level of education who cannot compete for locally available opportunities migrate for employment (Archana.K 2011).

Migration affects women in a myriad of ways. The women migrants themselves are affected within the process of migration- economically, socially particularly in health aspect, psychologically and also in extreme instances physically and sexually. 69% of the construction migration labors have their family income below Rs.10000. Women's earnings are affected by gender prejudices, stereotyped roles and double burden in family.

The migrant woman has no scope of ownership on the value of her labour input towards the family income (Bhubaneswaron 2008:67-68).

Women particularly face discrimination, xenophobia, deception regarding contracts or conditions of work, treatment as tools and not persons, dangerous occupation (the “three D’s: dirty, dangerous, demanding), long working hours, pay lower than that citizen for the same job, poor housing or none, and non-integration into social life. (Message 1983). The health status of the migrant women is usually weak due to lack of food and low economic status. The pregnant women and small babies suffer much at the migration place. They are deprived of immunization and other nutritional benefits at the migration site (Bhubaneswaron 2008:68)

A young age migrants of below 20 years, who migrates at such a younger age, accounts to about 17.7 percent (Sheejini et al 2016:261). Migrant workers brought on the contract which includes often working 10 hours days on an average, sheltering at working sites mostly and with four days holidays in a month. Most of the migrant were paid as daily wages, regardless of the numbers of hours. Most of them work for 10 to 12 hours and usually hours fixed by the government is violated. Women were paid lesser amounting to Rs.120 per day only based on eight hours of work (AnjumShaheen et al 2016:240-243). Interstate migrant do remit their money back home mostly through bank or post office (Sheejini et al 2016:262).

The migrant men and women do not have any insurance or registration, and hence on death, the owner of the construction or the government gives no compensation to the kith and kin left behind. In addition, in the changed environment, the food habits, water, sanitation and the workload badly affect the health of the migrants. They are affected by different diseases like diarrhea, dehydration and fever frequently (Bhubaneswaron 2008:68-69).

Migration is an issue that affects the dignity of individual person and society. The migrant faces lots of challenges and cries out for justice, requires solidarity, coordinated social- actions that could promote the human dignity, solidarity, and common good at national and international level. Every human person has an inalienable right to life and the activities needed to sustain and develop it (Blume-2002).

Migrant workers experience irregular wages. It tends to enhance the physical, financial and emotional burdens, food shortage, indebtedness, overwork and illness. (Bhubaneswaron 2008:67). At their destinations, 76% of all the women migrant workers (rural + urban) did not have any ration card, 16% had below poverty line (BPL) cards, less than half a per cent had Antyodaya cards and 7% had above poverty line (APL) cards (Indrani Mazumdar 2013:59)

Devoid of social security and legal protection, they work in poor conditions and face labour market discrimination. Minimum wages are often flouted and employers bear no responsibility for health, shelter and other basic requirements of migrants (UNESCO 2013). Access to several government schemes like Rashtriya Swasthya Bimayojana (RSBY) and Public Distribution System (PDS) is not possible or are not available once people are working outside of their panchayat (S.Chandrasekhar. 2014:8). 91% of the women migrant workers had never availed of any public housing scheme, 79% had no National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA)

job cards, and 96% had never been employed under any public employment programme or scheme (Indrani Mazumdar2013:59)

#### 4. Methodology:

The study employs mixed method using the qualitative and quantitative secondary data in looking into the misery for interstate migration women working in construction and brick kiln in and around Chennai area.

- ▶ Research design: Qualitative research design (Case study method is used).
- ▶ Sampling design: Two case studies
- ▶ Tool: Structured interview schedule was used with open ended questions.

#### 5. Case studies:

##### Case: 1

My name is Prabitra jal, 37 years old, we are from Bolangir District, Orissa.

We, six people stay here in this single room (which is made out of Asbestos cement sheet.10 x 8 Sqft) which includes me, my husband, my two children, and my brother in law and his new wife. This is my second year of staying and working outside of my village. My day starts at 5:30 am in the morning and the work time is till 5:30 pm in the evening. Yes I have to get up even early to finish my household works and cook food for lunch. First I get paid with a total amount of Rs 15000/- for a period of 6 month and they I have to follow the contractors words where ever he take us for work. This is the agreement that I have to give my work without a daily wages till 6 months. For the daily expenses I get paid of Rs 250 per week. By this Rs.250 I have to bear the daily expenses. These days we are paid Rs.350 to 400, it deepens on our production of brick kilns.

##### Case : 2

I am Umesha Pekera. I am living with my husband and child in this room, which is made of asbestos cement sheet.my boy child is four years old and stays with us now. We came here with the help of our family relative. My husband is very sickly and thus I have to work day and night to support my family. We are getting Rs.250 per day. I am not able to work daily due to my back pain.in this brick kiln company we ought carry things and frequently bend and carry bricks and its raw material. I like to go back home as early as possible but we don't have any livelihood over there. Here we have our relatives and friends are there and they are very helpful to us than. The local people don't relate with us and we don't get much time to see them and talk to them.

#### 6. Understanding migration and its impacts on migrant women

- Approximately 30 percent of which are women in the construction industry in India.
- Inter-state migration is about 11 million. The total interstate migrant is about 11 million of which 5.2 million males and 5.8 million females



- Orissa (41.6%) has a large number of migrant female laborers in search of livelihood in and around Chennai. 87 per cent of the women are migrating with the major reason of marriage, economic higher educational and higher social status.
- Women with low level of education migrate more for job. Almost 69% of the construction migration labors have their family income below Rs.10000.
- The woman does not get a chance to get her part of the remittance. Usually the working hours and minimum wage fixed by the government is violated.
- The age group of 18-40 years. Women do all the household work as well work in the migration site, it brings enormous amount of physical as well as the emotional pain as result of huge stress.
- The homogeneity of the family is disturbed. The family experiences constant change due to migration. The pregnant women & small babies suffer much. They are deprived of immunization and other nutritional benefits.
- Migrant workers brought on the contract which includes often working 10 hours days on an average, sheltering at working sites mostly and with four days holidays in a month.
- Migrant workforce largely controlled by a middle man who control their lives and livelihood. They are often denied the access to health care facilities

#### 7. Gender discrimination

More than half of the migrant workforce are women. In the construction sector, more than on third are young women. Division of labor is still shows us male dominated society in all walks of life as migrants. Women do heavy and low salary jobs comparing with men. Women carry headloads of brick, sand, stone, cement and water to the masons and also sift sand. Women migrant's wages are less compared to men. Women workers loose wages and even lose employment for taking leave. Often young women are subjected to sexual harassment by words and deeds.

#### 8. Lack of safety measures at construction site

Migrants were not considered as human beings when we think about the safety measures provided to the in construction and brick kiln sites. They were not provided adequate working conditions, safety conditions and preventive measures. Safety measures is hardly met. Generally no provision for medical aid and for financial assistant in case of accident. The migrant workers must care of themselves to arrange for the treatment. There is no medical scheme for them. In the extreme cases like death, no body owns the responsibility.

#### 9. No job security

Most of the migrant workers in construction and brick kiln are most discontent and feel in secured of their job. Construction work and brick kiln works by its very nature are temporary, are the temporary nature of their living and other working conditions. Despite the workers work in hazardous condition, day and night, in all extreme temperatures but without proper compensation, mean time no secured job, since the sector is unorganized. The solution may lie in providing appropriate legal structures to protect the rights and interests of construction workers

## 10. The poor living conditions and environment

Most of the migrants are living in a pathetic and poor living conditions and environment. Migrant are not given or provided basic safe requirements and facilities. They are not given safe drinking water, facilities for washing and bathrooms. They live in 'Kutchha' house made up with plastic, asbestos cement sheet and wooden. Migrant workers used to go for open defecation and go for bathing wherever they get enough water. Women and children feel very difficult to go for their natural call during the night and their safety is being questioned always.

## 11. Condition of migrant children and family

Children of the workers used to migrate with them to different sites of work in different cities and state. No one to take care of children while parents are working. They playing here and there and mostly have taken care by the elder sibling. Most of the workers don't get leave with pay for any medical treatment. That's why children of workers are highly vulnerable with incomplete immunization and other unhygienic exposures. Due to migration children don't get opportunity for schooling and their education also suffer

## 12. Suggestions:

Actual minimum wages should be provided irrespective of gender. There should be no wage disparity on the basis of gender. Usually the working hours and minimum wage fixed by the government is violated, so state must come up new mechanism to protect these marginalized migrant women

The policy regarding the job opportunities of migrants should be such that there may not exist any **kind of bias at work place regarding gender preferences**, i.e. women migrants must also be given **equal and fair** chance as their male counterparts and proper trust should be maintained over them.

State, society and law must resolve the issues of migrations that affect women in the context of migration, such as low wages, nonpayment of wages, gender disparity in wages, forced sex work & trafficking, violence, domestic violence, exploitation of single women, lack of education & neglect of children's education, lack of health services, social exclusion, non-application of registration of birth and marriages, food insecurity, malnutrition, legal mechanism for protection and proper awareness on human rights.

Adequate measures must be taken by central and state government to protect the rights and dignity of migrant women.

## 13. Conclusion:

After having talked with the migrant women and listened to their hardships of surviving. I felt these migrant women workers have little or no knowledge of their basic rights, entitlements and bonded labour prohibitions. Being from the most vulnerable segments of society and lacking organization, bonded laborers remain "invisible" to the authorities.

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