

Reprints of Published Papers

International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention (IJHSSI)
 ISSN (Online): 2319 – 7722, ISSN (Print): 2319 – 7714
 www.ijhssi.org //Volume 8 Issue 02 Ser. II //February. 2019 // PP.01-05

Condition of Women in Construction Industry: A Study in Goalpara District, Assam

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ABSTRACT: Assam as an important state of North-East India is blessed with beautiful natural scenery, tea plantations, strong history, diverse culture and rich literature. But due to its geographic location and its connection with rest of India by a narrow rout, makes it backward and inaccessible for all kind of services. However, the position of women in the whole region is comparatively better than rest of India, though it has diverse cultural, religious and ethnic groups. But when it comes to the status of women labourers, the living and working condition is always unsatisfactory and backward despite of their enormous contributions in developmental activities. It is so much related to those women labourers who are associated in construction works particularly.

Therefore, the present is an attempt to examine the condition of women labourers in construction works including their socio-economic and working condition with special reference to Goalpara district of Assam. The present study will be done in Goalpara district by taking the district as representative because the condition of women, particularly unorganized labourers are more or less same in Assam. Another reason for choosing the district as a field of present study is that it is one of the oldest but backward kinds of district and the women labourers are not much conscious or aware of their rights and existing provisions for securing labour rights. Thus, the present study will try to reveal the status of women as labourers by exploring their condition of works and often unrecognized contribution.

KEYWORDS: Status, women labourers, condition, construction industry, contribution.

Date of Submission: 26-01-2019

Date of acceptance: 09-02-2019

I. INTRODUCTION

Women are the crucial part of any society despite the fact that they have inferior position than men and their role often have not recognized. In all the culturally and ethnically diverse states of North-East India, one of the unique features is that providing region's women better position and opportunities in comparison to other states of India. The women of Assam as an important part of the region have been sharing a vital social space and, their participation in and contribution to every aspect of life from doing household chores to the social, cultural, economic and political affairs of the state are really commendable. But they have not received proper recognition which it actually deserves. So, in case of workforce women of this region are getting chances to explore themselves as labourers, particularly in construction works.

According to the Government of India report, about 16% of India's working population depends on construction works for its livelihood and the construction industry in India employs about 31 million people with 10% skilled and 90% unskilled or semi-skilled workforce. The lack of skilled and organized labourers have contributed to the challenges, India faces in its functioning. And it is the women who are almost unskilled and unorganized labourers covering about one-third of labourforce in construction industry. Construction workers are the backbone of Indian economy because of their significant contribution in developmental activities. It is they who are building the new economy in India.

In such a significant realm of construction industry, number of female workers are increasing day by day and the labourforce with those women associated as labourers are actually the constructor of modern India. But they face various problems related to their condition of living and most importantly to their work like lower wages, wage discrimination, lack of basic facilities, unhealthy working environment, etc. And they are allowed to work only as helper of male workers because they are unable to upgrade their skills due to some socio-economic factors. Therefore, the present study is an attempt to explore the contribution of women labourers in developmental activities and in family income, and working condition reflecting their socio-economic status with special reference to Goalpara district of Assam.

Condition of Women in Construction Industry: A Study in Goalpara District, Assam

II. OBJECTIVES

The present study has the following three objectives:

- a. To examine the socio-economic condition of women labourers.
- b. To find out the problems faced by women labourers in construction works.
- c. To explore the contribution of women in developmental activities.

III. METHODOLOGY

The research methodology is an important part in any social research. The research methodology used for the present study is descriptive and explorative based on primary and secondary data. The secondary data is drawn from books, journals, official records and other printed materials available related to the study. But to acquire in-depth information structured Interview Schedule has been used by taking 40 respondents as sample size residing and working within the Goalpara municipality areas. Moreover, the application of observation technique is also used during the study.

IV. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

According to 2011 census, Goalpara district has a population of 10,08,183 of which 5,13,292 are male and 4,94,891 are female. There are 1,98,454 houses in the district. The district has 5,63,577 (67.37%) literates, of which male and female are 304,302 (71.46%) and 2,59,275 (63.13%) respectively. Another important fact is that the district is one of the oldest but most backward kinds of district in Assam. In such an industrially backward district, women working as unorganized labourers in the construction sides have to face enormous serious problems like wage discrimination, condition of work, health hazards, problems of social security, etc.

1.1. Age Composition

Women workers are divided into six age groups which are showed in table 1. The table depicts that out of 40 samples, the majority women workers belongs to 40-45 age group followed by 30% in the 45-50 age group. It is revealed from the table that 20% women labourers are in the 35-40 age group and, only 7.5% and 5% labourers are belongs to 30-35 and 50-55 age groups respectively. But from the total sample respondents, none of them belongs to the age group of 25-30.

Table 1. Distributed on the basis of age

Age Group	No of Respondents	Percentage (%)
25-30	0	0
30-35	3	7.5
35-40	8	20
40-45	15	37.5
45-50	12	30
50-55	2	5
Total	40	100

Source: Primary Data

1.2. Educational Status

Education is the most important criteria to determine the socio-economic status of any individual. The table 2 has tried to depict the educational status of women unskilled labourers which reveals that majority of women i.e., 57.5% are literate but up to the primary level. Whereas 27.5% women labourers are illiterate and only 15% women labourers had attained up to secondary level. As the marital status is concerned, out of 40 sample women, 38% workers are separated or divorced, 12% labourers are the widow and majority of 50% women workers are living with their husband but they have to work as labourers to support their family due to idleness, alcoholism or gambling nature of their husband.

Table 2. Educational Status of Respondents

Education	No of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Illiterate	11	27.5
Primary	23	57.5
Secondary	6	15
Graduate	0	0
Total	40	100

Source: Primary Data

1.3. Housing Condition

Most of the women labourers are living in rented poor housing condition. The table 3 shows the nature of houses in which 47.5% labourers are living in the houses of bamboo walls with tin roof. It also reveals that

Condition of Women in Construction Industry: A Study in Goalpara District, Assam

20% are in the houses of bamboo mud walls, 17.5% are in the Assam type brick walls and 15% are living in the houses of tin walls with tin roof. Moreover, majority of respondent's rented houses hardly have more than one room with kitchen and toilet facilities.

Table 3. Housing Condition of Respondents

Nature of House	No of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Bamboo mud walls with straw roof	8	20
Bamboo walls with tin roof	19	47.5
Bamboo tin walls with tin roof	6	15
Assam type with brick walls	7	17.5
Total	40	100

Source: Primary Data

1.4. Occupational Status

Women labourers in the construction industry are only works as helper of male workers. But they have different series of works to do in the construction sites like carrying bricks, sand, cement, stone, water, concrete, mixing cement, breaking stones, etc. The following table reveals the five categories of sample respondents on the basis of their work and shows that 32.5% women labourers are employed for carrying sand followed by 27.5% for carrying concrete. The lowest percent women are engaged as stone work (7.5%) followed by brick work with 10%. It is about 22.5% women engaged in all types of works. Further, the women labourers find it very difficult in carrying the heavy weightage of stone, bricks, concrete, etc. which causes health problems.

Table 4. Types of female construction workers

Type of work	No of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Sand	13	32.5
Brick	4	10
Stone	3	7.5
Concrete	11	27.5
All the above	9	22.5
Total	40	100

Source: Primary Data

1.5. Health Problems

It is very risky and insecure to work in the unhealthy construction sites for women. And as a result, women labourers have to face health problems which are divided into four categories as shown in the table 5. It is revealed from the table that 67.5% women construction labourers are facing the problem of muscle pain for carrying out heavy weight. It is also revealed from the table that 17.5% have the asthma and breathing problems, 10% have the problem of cough and only 5% have the problem of allergy due to their polluted working environment. In the matter of treatments, majority i.e., 82.5% labourers have preferred government hospitals due to the facilities of free checkups and medicines.

Table 5. Health Problems of Respondents

Health Problem	No of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Muscle pain	27	67.5
Allergy	2	5
Asthma and Breathing	7	17.5
Cough	4	10
Total	40	100

Source: Primary Data

1.6. Time of Work

Each work has a time schedule and generally eight hours of work is regarded as maximum time but in the unorganized sectors, it has no fixed time schedule for work. Therefore, time of work is divided into three categories. The following table shows that 57.5% women labourers are working for 8 hours while 30% workers are doing over time i.e., above 8 hours and only 12.5% labourers are working below the 8 hours.

*Condition of Women in Construction Industry: A Study in Goalpara District, Assam***Table 6. Time Schedule for Labourers**

Time of work	No of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Below 8 hours	5	12.5
8 hours	23	57.5
Above 8 hours	12	30
Total	40	100

Source: Primary Data

1.7.Monthly Income

Construction workers are actually the wage earners and they get their wages on daily basis which is fixed according to the nature of work. Women labourers in the construction industry are unskilled and therefore, as the helper of male workers, they are getting the lowest wages. The table 7 has depicted the monthly income of women labourers in which 40% respondents have earned 2000-4000 and 32.5% have monthly 4000-6000 of earnings. The table reveals that 17.5% labourers' earning is 6000-8000 and only 10% respondents have the earning of 8000-10000. The women labourers are also very concerned about savings and it is about 85% of women out of 40 respondents have the monthly saving habits. But they could only save Rs.100-700 monthly due to their lower income level.

Table 7. Monthly Income of Respondents

Monthly Income	No of Respondents	Percentage (%)
2000-4000	16	40
4000-6000	13	32.5
6000-8000	7	17.5
8000-10000	4	10
Above 10000	0	0
Total	40	100

Source: Primary Data

V. FINDINGS

- It is about 67.5% women labourers under the age groups of 40-45 and 45-50 are engaged as labourers which means that the poor economic conditions compels them to continue their employment at this age.
- More than half of the respondents (57.5%) are literate but up to primary level for which they have to employed themselves as unorganized labourers.
- Less than half of the women (47.5%) are residing in the houses of bamboo walls with tin roof without any toilet facility.
- As women are engaged in carrying out heavy burden in the construction sites, most of the women labourers (67.5%) have the problem of muscle pain.
- Government hospitals are their first preference for treatment due to some of its free services.
- As the women labourers are unable to improve their skills, they are only working as helper for carrying heavy load of sand, concrete, bricks, etc.
- About 30% of women do over time and more than half of labourers works for 8 hours.
- It is about 72.5% women labourers' monthly earnings are fall within the range of 2000-6000.
- Due to their lower income, they could hardly save Rs.500 per month.
- Half of the women respondents are married but have to work as only earning member of the family due to the idleness and bad habits of their husband.

VI. CONCLUSION

In a society like India where female literacy is increasing day by day, gender biasness in each stage of their life always puts them in lower status. A large number of women unskilled labourers are engaged in construction industry in order to support their family financially. As most of the women are unskilled, they fall under the unorganized sector of economy in which the North-East region is not exceptional despite of its unique feature of providing better position to women. According to National Commission on Labour (1966-69), the unorganized labourer means those workers who have not been able to organize themselves in pursuit of their common interests due to some constraints like, strength of the employer, casual nature of employment, illiteracy, scattered size of establishments and so on. It means they have to work within the insecure working environment.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the condition of women unorganized labourers in the construction industry is more or less same in the whole India even in one of the oldest districts of Assam. The scenario can only be changed by the implementation of labour welfare policies strictly. But in order to change such condition reflecting their lower status and to provide proper recognition to their contribution in family and developmental activities of society, the mind-set should be changed regarding gender.

Condition of Women in Construction Industry: A Study in Goalpara District, Assam

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Rizuwana Sultana" Condition of Women in Construction Industry: A Study in Goalpara District, Assam" International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention (IJHSSI), vol. 08, no. 2, 2019, pp. 01-05



Socio-Economic condition of informal workers: A case study of riverside areas in Goalpara district, Assam

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Abstract

Informal or unorganized sector is that part of economy which is neither taxed nor monitored by any form of government. It provides critical economic opportunities for the poor and unskilled people particularly for women. Informal sector, also known as 'working for cash', has been expanding rapidly day by day and more than 90% women workers are engaged in this sector. It is observed that most of the people living on the bank of river or the riverside people are unskilled for which informal sector is the only way for their earning.

Therefore, the present study is an attempt to explore the forms of informal workers among the riverside people of Brahmaputra and their living condition in Goalpara district. The district is situated on the South bank of Brahmaputra river and the people residing at the riverside area are basically backward and unskilled for which engaged largely in informal sector. The study will reveal the different forms of informal workers living in a backward condition with no security for their livelihood, particularly the women workers.

Keywords: informal sector, riverside, women, unskilled and security

1. Introduction

Indian economy is characterized by the existence of vast majority of people engaged in informal sector. Informal or unorganized sector is that part of economy which is neither taxed nor monitored by any form of government. It provides economic opportunities for the poor and unskilled people particularly for women. People are engaging in this sector increasingly due to its ease of entry, illiterate and unskilled labour force, absence of proper legislative provisions, low scale of technology, unregulated and competitive markets, free from governmental control, etc. Therefore, taking into consideration the significance of informal sector in our Indian economy, the present study has attempted to explore the forms and nature of informal activities, particularly of those people living in the river bank of Brahmaputra.

The Brahmaputra is called mighty river of Assam because it connects India with China and Bangladesh, and Hinduism with Buddhism. It is one of the major rivers of Asia possessing mythological importance as the term Brahmaputra means "son of Brahma" in Sanskrit. The Brahmaputra river of Assam is nature's gift to its people for their survival. Moreover, the river is connected by several districts of Assam and provided livelihood to its people as lives of many millions of Indian citizens are dependent on the Brahmaputra. It is about 6,00,000 people live on the riverine, mainly depends on the annual normal flood for bringing moisture to their agricultural lands.

However, Goalpara district of Assam is well-connected with the mighty river of Brahmaputra as the district is situated on the South bank of the river. Most of the people living on the bank of the river are backward and unskilled, and they find it easy to settle down after migrating from different areas for different opportunities in nearby urban areas. These people basically associated with a number of different informal activities for its ease of entry.

2. Objectives

The present study has been done with the following two main objectives-

- To explore the forms and nature of informal activities engaged by riverside people.
- To study the socio-economic living conditions of riverside people of Goalpara district.

3. Methodology

The methodology is an important part in any social research. The methodology part tries to explain the methods and procedures adopted in the study concerning the source of data. The research methodology used for the present study is descriptive and explorative based on primary and secondary data. The secondary data is drawn from books, journals, official records and other printed materials available related to the study. But to acquire in-depth information structured Interview Schedule has been used by taking 40 respondents from about 400 households as sample size residing nearby riverside areas of Goalpara town. Moreover, the application of observation technique is also used during the study.

4. Results & discussion

4.1 Informal Activities

The different forms of informal activities engaged by riverside people and the nature of those activities are as

4.1.1 Forms of Informal Activities

When it comes to informal sector, it covers a numbers of different activities and the people residing nearby riverside area of Goalpara town are also associated with various informal activities. Therefore, in this study 20 male and 20 female respondents have been selected to find out the division in the forms of activities on the basis of sex also. The following two tables have shown the different informal

activities engaged by riverside people and it also reveals the differentiation in the forms of male and female activities. Out of 40 respondents, the majority respondents are engaged as labourers but the difference is that the male labourers are associated with daily-wage labourers, construction workers, carpenter, etc., and the female labourers are only associated with home-based domestic works. About 30% male are earned their livelihood by fishing from the Brahmaputra, followed by 15% handcart puller and 10% street vendors like selling fast foods or plastic products in roadsides. On the other hand, about 35% women are associated with making rice cake i.e. *pithas*, followed by 20% women selling tea as a way of earning and 5% as selling milk.

Table 1: Forms of male informal activities

Forms of Informal Activity	No of Male Respondents	Percentage
Labourers	9	45
Fishermen	6	30
Street Vendor	2	10
Handcart Puller	3	15
Total	20	100

Source: Primary Data

Table 2: Forms of female informal activities

Forms of Informal Activity	No of Female Respondents	Percentage
Domestic Worker	8	40
Rice-cake Maker (<i>Pitha</i>)	7	35
Milk-Seller	1	5
Tea Shop	4	20
Total	20	100

Source: Primary Data

4.1.2 Nature of Informal Activities

The nature of doing the informal activities is also different due to the different forms of activities. It means when it comes to regularity of informal employment, about 55% activities which are basically associated with women like domestic workers, rice-cake maker, selling tea, etc. are everyday activities and about 45% are occasional employers like labourers of construction works, fishing, etc.

Table 3: Regularity of Employment

Regularity of activity	No of Respondents	Percentage
Occasional	18	45
Everyday	22	55
Total	40	100

Source: Primary Data

Another important thing is that the timing of doing such activities, whether it is occasional or not, is also different according to the forms of informal activity. For example-making rice-cake or selling it along with tea is the activity which is done before 8-9 a.m., i.e. in the early morning, whereas selling fast foods is done in the evening times. Labourers including construction workers or daily-wage Labourers works from 8a.m. to 4p.m., whereas the domestic workers works for 2-4 hours from early morning. The nature of informal activities also includes the location of doing the activities which is also different like people associated with the activity of selling tea, rice-cake or fast foods, etc., is done at footpath, for domestic works or selling milk they have to go to the employers' or customers' houses etc.

4.2 Living Condition

The living condition of riverside people will basically include housing, hygiene, social and economic conditions which are almost similar regardless of their different informal activities. They are as-

4.2.1 Housing Condition

Almost all the houses in the riverside area are mud or bamboo walled with tin roof consisting of one room with kitchen in verandah. They don't have electricity facility in the house and the main source of lightening up the house is kerosene-based lamp or sometimes in the absence of kerosene, they use candles. These people have widely used wood or cow dung for cooking as they don't have LPG facilities.

4.2.2 Hygiene Condition

The people of riverside area are living in an unhygienic condition which often causes diseases, particularly of their children. The first cause of disease is drinking water without filtration or boiling it. Another cause is that they don't have adequate toilet facilities and they often defecated in the open space. Moreover, those who hardly have toilet facility that is not well-equipped with septic tank.

4.2.3 Social Condition

When it comes to social condition of riverside people, it not only includes the social status or class based on their mode of income, but also their educational status, the culture they follow or the languages they speak. Most of the respondents in the study are found illiterate except three respondents who are literate but not completed high school. Further, these people are migrated from different char areas of the district or from nearby districts for better economic opportunities and started to settle down in the riverside areas of nearby Goalpara town. Therefore, the language they used to speak is Bengali even in their workplace too.

4.2.4 Economic Condition

The economic status of riverside people is not satisfactory, particularly of women. The following two separate tables on per day income of men and women have shown the unsatisfactory economic condition of women in comparison to men. It is inferred from the table that out of 20 male respondents, 40% are earning about Rs.250-300 per day. But out of 20 female respondents, 45% have their earning about Rs.100-150 per day which is lower than men's daily average income. Moreover, men's minimum earning is Rs.150 and maximum is up to Rs.300 or above. But in case of women, about 30% have their earning below Rs.100, 45% is about Rs.100-150, 10% is about Rs.150-200 and 15% have earned about Rs.200-250 per day as shown in the table.

Table 4: Income of Men

Per day Income	No of Male Respondents	Percentage
Below 100	0	0
100-150	0	0
150-200	3	15
200-250	6	30
250-300	8	40
Above 300	3	15
Total	20	100

Source: Primary Data

Table 5: Income of Women

Per day Income	No of Female Respondents	Percentage
Below 100	6	30
100-150	9	45
150-200	2	10
200-250	3	15
250-300	0	0
Above 300	0	0
Total	20	100

Source: Primary Data

5. Conclusion

The people residing at nearby riverside areas of Goalpara town are widely involved in the informal sector and earn their livelihood by doing a number of different informal activities. Due to their backwardness as they are basically migrated from various char areas of the district, they somehow manage to settle down in riverside areas and engaged in informal kind of activities for its ease of entry. The study have revealed the different forms of activities adopted by men and women, and the different nature of doing those informal activities including location of work, timing of doing those activity, daily or occasional. It has also revealed the unsatisfactory living condition including housing condition to economic condition. Although the riverside people are living in a poor economic condition due to their lack of skill, the study has found that the condition of women is more backward than the men. Moreover, these sections of people are more prone to diseases because of their lack of consciousness regarding hygiene condition which is also polluting the Brahmaputra.

Therefore, it can be concluded that some essential measures or policies should be taken for the migrated riverside people by the NGOs to make them aware at least about their adequate living condition including the need of education, health and hygiene so that they can provide a better future to their children. It will also help to preserve the natural quality of Brahmaputra and its surroundings by maintaining a clean environment.

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