

EMPLOYMENT PATTERN OF GARMENT WOMEN WORKERS IN INDIA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

India is the world's second largest producer of textiles and garments after China. It is the world's third largest producer of cotton after China and the USA and the second largest cotton consumer after China. The Indian textile industry is as diverse and complex as country itself and it combines with equal equanimity this immense diversity into a cohesive whole. India's garment industry has been rapidly growing in the last few years. It contributes substantially to India's export earnings and it is estimated that one out of every six households in the country depends on this sector, either directly or indirectly, for its livelihood. The growth of the garment sector however, is not going hand in hand with an improvement in the working conditions of the garment workers. The garment industry contributes 16.63% to the foreign earnings of India and it employs over 3.5 million workers. There are five different garment production hubs in India; all specialize in different types of garment production. Bangalore is one of the centers of production of garment and has somewhere around 1200 big, small and medium sized garment factories. A review of garment industries revealed that, it is one of the largest manufacturing sectors in India.

Keywords: FUTURE WOMEN WORKERS, GARMENT INDUSTRY

INTRODUCTION

It is one thing to assume rather conveniently that unorganized workers are poor, illiterate; least unionized, and generally engage themselves in high risk low paid poor quality manual and menial jobs. But it is entirely another thing to know exactly who these workers are. Where do they come from? How do they carry on their work in actual work situation? How do they actually cope with discrimination, deprivations of one kind or another and miscarriage of justice to mention but a few which have become an inevitable inescapable part of life of these workers. This chapter written on the basis of data collected from a sample of 2000(two thousand) garment workers in Bangalore seeks to answer some of these questions rather modestly though. It throws

light on the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the sample workers, given the acute paucity of data on garment workers.

An important aspect of socio-economic background of the sample is religious composition. Expectedly 95.8 per cent of the workers are Hindus, followed by 3 per cent of Muslims and 1.2 per cent of Christians, less than 1 per cent of Sikhs and others. Given the high proportion of unskilled and semi-skilled workers in the garment industry high percentage of Hindus is understandable. Low percentage of Muslims and Christians shows that people from these religions explore job opportunities in diverse occupations, including skilled jobs. Lack of employment in villages and adverse living conditions in the countryside push the vast mass of agricultural labourers into towns and cities. More often than not there they end up making a living in low quality, less productive, less paid jobs. Religious composition looked at this way shows higher percentage of workers belonging to Hindu religion as majority of them are rural migrants.

CASTE COMPOSITON OF THE SAMPLE WORKERS

Caste has become an indispensable reference frame-work in describing the size, structure, occupation and distribution of any occupational group and garment workers are no exception. In Indian society caste determines the social status of a person but also one's life choices and chances of success in not only profession and career but also general life situations. Frequency distribution of caste reveals that garment workers come from almost all sections of Karnataka society majority being SC, ST and Backward Castes though. Caste has also become the basis of social mobilization for common collective action. So much so, emergence of caste-based associations has threatened to supplant the secular workers oriented trade unions:

Caste distribution of sample garment workers among other things reveals the sample of workers when asked to report the name of the caste to which they belong they have mentioned a large number of castes and sub castes (for details see the Appendix II)

Karnataka Government classification of castes has been adopted to discuss caste composition of the sample. It can be found in the Table that SC/ST/Cat-I together constitute 34% per cent and Cat-IIA, Cat-IIB, Cat-IIIA and Cat-IIIB together comprises of 63.4 per cent, followed by 2.6 per cent of workers who reported to belong to 'Other' castes. This caste composition among other things reveals two things: firstly, bulk of the workers is migrant labourers who have been apparently pushed out of their villages. Secondly, majority of the Backward Castes i.e., IIA, IIB, IIIA and III B are predominantly peasants, small and marginal farmers who may have found employment in garment industry.

DISTRIBUTION OF MIGRANT GARMENT WORKERS

Having established that overwhelming majority are the rural labour, the question that can be asked is where they actually come from? Out of the 2000 sample, 1859(99.95percent) are reported to have come from within Karnataka. The proportion varies, though across districts. At least 31.1 percent of the total sample has reported to have come from Bengaluru both rural and urban, followed by the neighboring districts namely 85(4.6percent) from Chikkaballapur, 61(3.3percent) from Kolar, 318(17.7percent) from Ramanagaram and 195(10.5 percent) from Tumkur. All these districts put together would come to 35.44 percent, 88(4.7 percent) from Hassan, and 320(17.2percent) from Mandya, 50(2.7percent) from Mysore, put together would be 458 which work out to 24.63 percent (for more details see the table).

Table 3: State-wise distribution of sample workers

Name of the State	Workers	Percent
Andhra Pradesh	85	4.3
Assam	4	0.2
Jharkhand	2	0.1
Karnataka	1864	93.2
Kerala	2	0.1
Orissa	3	0.2
Rajasthan	2	0.1
Sonipura	2	0.1
Tamil Nadu	34	1.7
Uttar Pradesh	1	0.1
West Bengal	1	0.1
Total	2000	100.0

District-wise distribution of workers in Karnataka.

Name of the District	Workers	Per cent
Bagalakote	3	0.2
Bengaluru	477	31.1
Belgaum	1	0.1
Bellary	7	0.4
Bidar	2	0.1
Bijapur	1	0.1
Chamarajanagara	18	1.0
Chikkaballapura	85	4.6
Chikkamagalur	24	1.3
Chitradurga	34	1.8
Dakshina Kannada	7	0.4
Davanagere	12	0.6
Dharwad	3	0.2
Gadag	1	0.1
Gulbarga	1	0.1
Hassan	88	4.7
Kodagu	8	0.4
Kolar	61	3.3
Koppal	8	0.4
Mandya	320	17.2
Mysore	50	2.7
Raichur	5	0.3
Ramanagaram	318	17.1
Shimoga	24	1.3
Tumkur	195	10.5
Udupi	3	0.2
Uttara Kannada	2	0.1
Yadgiri	1	0.1
Total	1859	100.0

Age composition is another aspect of garment workers. Among other things age, determines the productivity of the worker. Higher the percentage of young workers greater is the productivity and economic viability of the factory. Young workers being in the age bracket of 21 to 30 years constitute majority of the sample. Young workers are generally willing and able to move out in search of work and this has been reflected in the age composition of the sample garment workers.

It can be seen in the Table-4 that a maximum of 54.5 per cent of the sample is in the age group of 21 to 30 years. Nearly 15.6 per cent is in the age group of 31 to 35 years, followed by 14.7 per cent in the age group of 16 to 20 years. On the whole garment workers represent a high proportion of young workers. This also shows that employers prefer young workers to middle aged and elder people

Table 4: Age composition of the Worker.

Age Range	Worker	Per cent
16 - 20	294	14.7
21 - 30	1088	54.5
31 - 35	311	15.6
36 - 40	189	9.5
41 -45	77	3.9
46 - 50	36	1.8
50+	5	0.3
Total	2000	100.0

Marital status is another aspect of the garment workers examined in this chapter. Expectedly, more than half of the sample i.e., as many as 54.2 per cent are married and live with their families. About 41.8 per cent is unmarried workers followed by the least 3.4 per cent being widowed workers. Divorce rate is less than 1 per cent of the sample population. This gives us the impression that divorce is almost exclusively an urban phenomenon and that it seems to be high among educated middle, upper middle class population. Lesser the education and income, lower is the rate of divorce and vice-versa. Faced with lack of alternatives women in the poor families reconcile with situations that beset them. This gives the impression that unstable families and increasing divorce rate has become essentially an urban social problem

Table 5: Marital status of the Worker.

Marital status	Worker	Per cent
Married	1083	54.2
Unmarried	835	41.8
Divorced	14	0.7
Widowed	68	3.4
Total	2000	100.0

Education is another aspect of the garment workers examined here. The majority workers are illiterate in the unorganised sector though less education coupled with lack of technical skills inevitably pushes them into low-paid poor quality jobs - the characteristic feature of labour in the unorganised sector. Over the years, however, education has been extended to weaker sections as a means of their empowerment. As a result, literacy rate has increased among those sections of population who have traditionally been denied access to education- the SC's and ST's and other backward classes. This has got reflected in the education compositions of the sample population. It can be seen in the Table-6, that the percentage of illiterates is 6.8 per cent. The percentage of workers who have studied upto 9th standard is as many as 39.5 per cent and about 43 per cent have completed SSLC, followed by a far less 18.5 per cent have studied PUC and the least 2.2 per cent are graduates. On the whole it shows that 50 per cent are educated beyond SSLC. The fact that there is a least percentage of illiterates goes to show that the majority of garment workers are able to read, write and understand things that happen around them. Being educated is one thing and having technical knowledge and skills is another thing. The latter enhances their chances of getting a good job. Skill development and capacity building in workers of the unorganised sector would go along with in improving their life standards.

Table 6: Educational Composition of the Workers.

Level of Education	Workers	Per cent
Non-Literate	136	6.8
Up to 4th Std	78	3.9
5th-9th Std	513	25.7
SSLC	860	43.0
Pre-University	369	18.5
Under Graduate	44	2.2
Total	2000	100.0

It can be found from the Table-7 that as many as 82.1 per cent of the sample reported to be having their family members less than 3 but not more than 5. Rising cost of living is generally not accompanied by corresponding increase in the wages and other benefits of the unorganised labour. Expectedly, small family has become predominant. An increase in the wage depends upon and is determined by the bargaining capacity of workers. With no unions to support, garment workers are at the mercy of the employers. The average size -of the family of the garment worker is 2 to 3 members, mostly wife and husband with one or two children.

Table 7: Size of the household.

Family size	Frequency	Per cent
1 - 2	202	10.1
3 - 5	1642	82.1
6 - 8	156	7.8
Total	2000	100.0

The other aspect closely connected with family life of the worker is the number of dependents. More dependents would make the life of the workers miserable. The limited income does not allow them to look after the dependents. As a result, the number of dependents ranges between 1-5 members, though as many as 66.5 per cent reported 2 members while as few as 14.7 per cent reported no dependents. Keeping with the requirements of urban life not only the

size of the family is small but the number of dependents is less. This goes to show that garment workers do their best to adjust to the kind of life that exists in the city.

Table 8: No of dependants of the Worker.

No of dependents	Workers	Per cent
No dependents	294	14.7
1 - 2	1330	66.5
3 - 5	374	18.7
6+	2	0.1
Total	2000	100.0

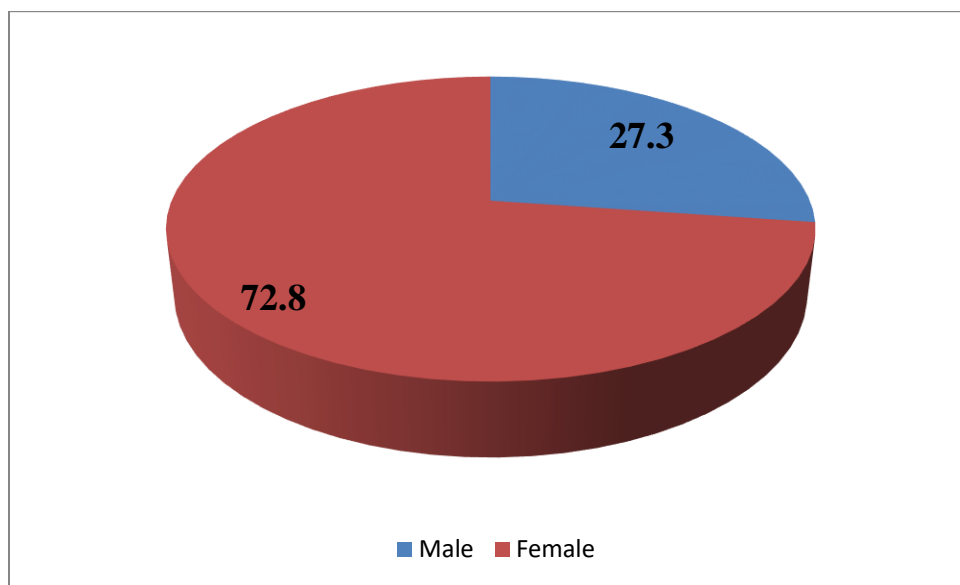
Major chunk of labour force in garment industry in particular and unorganised sector in general is female workers. Female labour participation has been an issue of extensive research. Women participation in labour force in India has been flat or even declining. It remains persistently close to 25 per cent. NSS data from 1983-2000 for both urban and rural population shows demographic variables such as age, child care responsibilities and marital status have significant negative effects on women participation. Rural women tend to face a great 'education penalty' than urban women. This means the more educated rural women are far less likely they are to work outside home. Caste-wise, women from higher classes and castes are not encouraged to work outside home. They prefer to opt out of the labour force rather than accept lower status jobs. Higher the husbands income, lower the probability of his wife participating in the workforce. Bulk of the women workers in unorganised sector come from the lower and lower middle strata of society. Naturally women are more than men in low quality and less paid jobs and this type of occupations.

An overwhelming majority 72.8 per cent of 2000 sample of garment workers is women and only 27.3 per cent are men. As already discussed being economically poor women they have become increasingly vulnerable to discrimination, ill treatment, verbal abuse and even sexual harassment.

Table 9: Gender composition.

Gender of the Worker	Workers	Per cent
Male	545	27.3
Female	1455	72.8
Total	2000	100.0

Figure 2: Distribution of Garment Workers by Gender



Another aspect of the living conditions of garment workers examined in the survey is the place in which they live. A maximum number of workers i.e., 82.9 per cent reported to have been living in and around Bengaluru city. To reach the workplace from the place of living they depend upon public transport and other means of transport like walking the distance, by bicycle, by two-wheeler etc. Given the difficulties in travelling by public transport, majority of garment workers prefer to live near the workplace. At least 16.7 per cent of the sample reported to be living outside Bengaluru and less than 1 per cent of the sample live in slums.

Table 10: Place of living.

Place of living	Frequency	Per cent
In Bengaluru	1658	82.9
Outside Bengaluru	333	16.7
In Slums	9	0.5
Total	2000	100.0

Another aspect that reflects on the economic condition of the worker is the type of house in which they live. It is widely believed that majority of garment workers being rural migrants; they tend to live in cheap rented houses. As many as 71.1 per cent of the sample reported to be living in rented houses and only 28.9 per cent reported to be living in own houses. The fact that more than 25 per cent of the sample own houses in Bengaluru city goes to show that economically garment workers are not as bad as other workers like construction workers, beedi workers, agarbathi workers to mention a few. Housing conditions form an important and integral part of economic conditions of the workers. Quality of life is often determined by and depends upon the type of house in which people live. It can be seen in the Table — 11(b) that an overwhelming majority of the sample reported to be living in pakka houses like tiled houses, R.C.0 buildings. Only as few as 13.6 per cent of the sample reported to be living in kacha houses. With regard to the toilet facilities, large majority of 91.6 per cent reported that the houses in which they live have toilet facilities and only a least of 8.4 per cent reported that they do not have toilet facilities. Safe drinking water has been a perennial problem in urban situations. Apart from steady depletion of ground water resources and many tanks in and around Bengaluru city getting increasingly dried providing safe drinking water to the rapidly growing population of Bengaluru city has become a major challenge. Lack of safe drinking water facilities often causes spread of epidemic diseases and water-borne diseases. Quality of life of people is often influenced by the access to and the availability of safe drinking water. It can be seen in the Table-12(b) that little more than half i.e., 52.7 per cent of the sample reported to have water tap connections in their house, while as many as 47.3 per cent of the sample reported to be dependent upon street taps. This goes to show that nearly 50 per cent of the sample is deprived of safe regular drinking water at home.

Table 11(a): Type of ownership.

Type of ownership	Frequency	Per cent
Own	578	28.9
Rented	1422	71.1
Tot.1	2000	100.0

Table 11(b): Workers perception of houses in which they live.

Type of House	Frequency	Per cent
Kutcha House	271	13.6
Pakka House	594	29.7
Tiled House	261	13.1
Concrete (RCC) House	874	43.7
Total	2000	100.0

With regard to economic conditions two principal aspects have been considered namely - material possessions including consumer durables. Movable consumer durables that they use at home have been considered. It can be seen from the table that a maximum of 91.8 per cent of the sample reported to have T.V sets. Similarly, nearly 50 per cent reported to have a cooking gas connection. Barring these two facilities an overwhelming majority reported not owning other consumer durable items like D.V.D players, scooters, refrigerators, cots, furniture and gold. Seen in this way, majority of the workers maybe spending major portion of their earnings on recurring needs like food, shelter, clothing, education to their children, medical expenses etc.

Table 16: Possession of movable things.

Items	Yes		No	
	Frequency	Per cent	Frequency	Per cent
Fan	1019	51	981	49.1
TV	1836	91.8	164	8.2
DVD	341	17.1	1659	83
Bicycle	240	12	1760	88
Scooter/Bike	451	22.6	1549	77.5
Cell Phone	138	6.9	1862	93.1
Refrigerator	90	4.5	1910	95.5
Cot	724	36.2	1276	63.8
Diwan	332	16.6	1668	83.4
Sofa	110	5.5	1890	94.5
Cooking Gas	980	49	1020	51
Tailoring Machine	58	2.9	1942	97.1
Almirah	430	21.5	1570	78.5
Gold	153	7.7	1847	92.4

Another aspect with which to assess the economic condition is land. The sample is evenly divided, in the sense 50 per cent reported to own land while the other 50 per cent reported not owning any land. Of the people who reported owning land 57.8 per cent own upto 2 acres, followed by 26.7 per cent own upto 5 acres while only 10 per cent own less than 1 acre, and a least of 4 per cent own upto 10 acres. This goes to show that majority of the sample owning land are small and middle farmers. Given the irregular and erratic rainfall, lack of access to institutional credit and the steady deterioration in the quality of soil, small and middle farmers find agriculture increasingly unviable. Naturally majority of villagers coming from this section migrate to towns and cities in search of jobs. In cities they frequently do find jobs, jobs which require no skills or semi-skills and they end up working in low quality, less paid and even underpaid jobs. Migrant

population live on border lines of poverty, starvation and deprivations that go with this. Malnutrition and under-nutrition becomes an inevitable part of the lot of unorganised workers.

CONCLUSION

Mostly they end up living in slums or small ill-ventilated congested rented houses. Almost half of the sample reported to have toilet facilities at home and have cooking gas connections but cannot afford to have other consumer durables barring television sets. Majority of the workers come from small and middle farmers who generally find agriculture highly economically unviable. Majority workers come from Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Castes with less proportion of Muslims and Christians. Maximum numbers of workers are literates as they have studied upto SSLC and that young age workers are more than the middle aged and elder workers and that women are numerically predominant over men. Women workers suffer disparities in wage and are subject to sexual and verbal abuse. Bearing the brunt of the dependent children added to this is husband who is more often than not a chronic alcoholic these women have no alternative but to toil in the condition that they come to encounter.

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