

## 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 route, 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.

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### 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.

## II. OBJECTIVES

The present study has the following three objectives:

- To examine the socio-economic condition of women labourers.
- To find out the problems faced by women labourers in construction works.
- 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

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.

**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.

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