

SOCIO ECONOMIC STATUS OF WOMEN LABOURERS IN SALT INDUSTRY IN THOOTHUKUDI

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Abstract

Salt is very essential dietary commodity. Common salt is an article of daily necessity for human consumption. It has been important commodity for hundred years. It is used widely in the chemical industry and has various industrial uses. It is considered to be the basic as well as a highly indispensable commodity. Salt can be consumed by both rich and poor only to the limited and fixed quantity irrespective of the price or health. Salt is not found in nature. It is available in abundant quantities in sea water. Salt is a cheap and bulk commodity. It is produced in our country by the private, Co-operative and Government sectors. India now ranks third in the world in the production of salt. Salt is an important physiological necessity of life. With an enormous and growing population, the demand for salt is vital importance. Salt is used for several purposes. It is used for cooking as table salt and as a preservative in the preparation of condiments, pickles and food stuffs. It is also used to a limited extent in agriculture as an insecticide, wood killer and for stock feeding. It finds use in curing fish, meat packing, dairying and other industries to prevent deterioration. It is used in several industries such as glass, leather, soap, oil purification, dyestuffs, textiles, ceramics, refrigeration etc. The study is carried out with the objectives to find out the general socio-economic conditions of the saltpan workers, to bring out occupational diseases health hazards, if any, and to suggest policy measures to improve the conditions of workers in the salt industry.

The study reveals that the salt industry requires energetic young and middle aged people of both sexes on the labour force. Majority of the salt workers are earning income from Rs.8,000-Rs11,000 per month. Majority of the salt workers are getting weekly wages. In fact, that the whole

salt workers community living is based on their weekly wages. Majority of the salt workers' total family monthly income ranges from Rs.30,000 to 40,000. The Gini concentration ratio was estimated and the Gini concentration ratio is 0.346. This confirms that the income inequality in salt workers is low. On the whole, the data suggest that the income distribution among the income groups of households does not show wider variation.

Most of the salt workers have spent more amount of money from their income for their consumption. The study shows that, according to the universal data of high rate of expenditure, 62.02 percentage of the total income is spent on food items. The clothing accounts for 18.37 percentage of their total income. The major share of their income, nearly 80 percentage go to these items. Expenditure on education receives a meagre amount i.e. 5.60 percentage of their total income. Savings depend up on their level of income and size of the family. Majority of the respondents are having their accounts in LIC and 25.83 per cent of the salt workers have no savings at all.

The conditions of the salt workers in the Thoothukudi are poor and miserable. It is high time for the government to address the grievances of the salt workers in the Thoothukudi which in turn will help them to elevate themselves from the present dismal state of affairs.

Key words: Debt, Salt, Saltpan, Socio economic status, Thoothukudi.

INTRODUCTION

Salt is an important physiological necessity of life. With an enormous and growing population, the demand for salt is of vital importance. Salt can be consumed by rich poor only to the limited and irrespective of the price or health Salt is not found in nature. It is available in abundant qualities in sea water. Salt is used several purpose. It is used for cooking as table cooking as table salt and as a perspective in the preparation of condiments, pickles and stuffs. It is also used to a limited extent in agriculture as an insecticide, wood killer and for stock feeding. It finds use in curing fish, meat packing, dairying and other industries to prevent deterioration. It is used in several industries such as glass, leather, soap, oil, purification, dyestuffs, textiles, ceramics, refrigeration etc. Its largest use is in the manufacture of sodium components, soda ash, caustic soda, sodium sulphate, etc.

Salt Industry in Tamilnadu

With its extensive coast line along the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal, India is one of the important countries in Asia and the Far East, producing salt by solar evaporation process. The salt industry in Tamilnadu is long established one. This salt works the largest one around Thoothukudi

namely Veppalodai Salt Works and the Dharangadhara Chemical and industrial Corporation Ltd., in Salem District and Western Indian Match Company salt workers at Vedaranyam in Tanjore District. The salt produced in these large units is mostly consumed by salt based industries in and outside the state, beside there are a number of unlicensed salt works in the state with an area of less than 10 acres each and they remain scattered in all the coastal district of the state. There exists a large concentration of unlicensed. Salt works in and around Thoothukudi, Vedaranyam and Ramanathapuram. In Tamilnadu, Thoothukudi district is the major salt producing center. It contributed more than 20 per cent of the total production. The second rank goes to Nagapatnam and Ramanathapuram occupies the third place. Cuddalore gets the last place in manufacturing salt. Salt produced in Tamilnadu is sold throughout the country and it is exported to foreign countries also. By road and railways salt is being carried over the entire country.

Salt Production in Thoothukudi

Thoothukudi occupies a very important place in the history of salt industry in India because of its geographic location and other favorable factors. The coastal belt of the Gulf of Mannar is in the Rain Shadow region of the South West Monsoon and therefore, spread of summer rain that prevails over the rest of the country. The north east monsoon is comparatively weak and the average rainfall in Thoothukudi gets an interrupted manufacturing of 8 to 9 months in a year.

Salt industry is the main backbone of economic development of the district. It is the cluster group of industry of Thoothukudi district and was extended in an area of 15,700 acres with production of 17.12 Lakhs M.T. Thoothukudi district is endowed with a coastal line of about 121 Kms and territorial waters covering thousands of Hectares. During the survey it is reported that 2208 Units are engaged in salt production. The total area found viable for salt cultivation is about 40,000 Acres.

Further it is reported from the survey 126 permitted iodised salt plants and 4 refined free flow iodised manufacturing units are functioning and produce about 70,000 M.T per annum. The concentration of salt unit is centered on Thoothukudi, Srivaikundam and Tiruchendur Taluks. Also a considerable number of salt units are clustered in Vilathikulam block. There are about 2,000 small scale salt manufactures and traders in Thoothukudi district.

The climate of Thoothukudi district is fairly dry. The temperature moderate near but uses slightly further in land strong dry waterlines characteristic of the tropics, low humidity. Hence a large number of private people were engaged in salt manufacturing with their own lands. The government lands were leased out for 20 years to those people who wanted to manufacture with their own lands. The government

lands were ceased out for 20 years to those people who wanted to manufacture salt. The government was granting license to such people. These lands were known as licensed lands.

In the present article, salt industry in Thoothukudi area in Thoothukudi is covered. The salt pan in the study area is about 1,700 acres about 1,000 workers are employed in these salt-pans. The salt production of the study region is approximately two lakh tonnes per annum.

Significance of the Study

The unique character of the salt industry is that it is less capital intensive and more employment generating. It provides employment to a large number of skilled and unskilled workers. Workers are not only employed in its production directly, but also indirectly in the transport and distribution processes. It is observed that salt industry is dependent on salt workers. The salt workers are unskilled compared to other industrial workers, conservative, slavish to customs and habits and non-enthusiastic because of the downward trend in their living conditions. However, they are considered to be the backbone of the salt industry.

Objectives of the Study

The overall aim of the study is to analyse wages, employment and living standards of salt workers working in salt pans of Thoothukudi. Keeping in view this general object, an attempt has been made to fulfil the following specific objectives.

1. To find out the general socio-economic conditions of the saltpan workers.
2. To bring out the health hazards of the salt workers
3. To suggest policy measures to improve the conditions of workers in the salt industry.

Methodology

The main purpose of the study is to have a critical view of the problems of the workers in salt industry. Therefore, emphasis is laid more on the information supplied by the workers supplemented by the secondary data. Thus the present study is based on both primary and secondary data.

Area of the Study

In the Thoothukudi district 14,200 acres of land is used for salt production. The season for salt in this area is during middle January to September. Thoothukudi salt is not only sold in the local market but also sold in the neighbour states like Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Orissa and Pondichery.

Period of the Study

The survey was conducted in several stages from April 2021 to March 2022 covering a period of one year.

Sample Design

There are about 147 units engaged in the manufacture of salt in Thoothukudi. In every unit, there are on an average of four to ten seasonal permanent workers engaged in salt manufacturing process. Besides this, each unit has been one or two regular workers who are looking after watering and clerical works.

An individual worker has been considered as a unit for the study. Therefore, 120 workers engaged in these units are selected at random as sample respondents. Moreover, not more than a single worker from the sample family or house was considered. Moreover, occupational representation has been taken care of. Therefore workers doing different classes of work like watering, scraping, removing and clerical works were selected.

Sources of Data

The primary data were collected through personal interview method. For this purpose, the structured schedule was used.

Secondary data were collected from the Report of the Salt Department and other Government reports.

Review of literature

Kamalraj (2021) conducted a study on “salt industry in Tamil Nadu trends and prospects”. The study shows that the production of salt in India increased from 8311.50 thousand tonnes in 1988 to 11964.40 thousand tonnes in 1998. The production of salt in Tamilnadu in 1988 was about 1277.0 thousand tones. It increased to 2532.9 thousand tonnes in 1977. The average incremental production of salt was 5.23 lakh tones. The rising trend in the production was mainly due to the fact that the total area of salt production has been increased. The uncultivated areas were under cultivation increased year by year.

Jeyaranjan (2019) in his article narrated that the Thoothukudi district is one of the major salt producing centers in Tamilnadu. It contributed more than 20 percentage of the total salt production of Tamilnadu. Thoothukudi salt has been exported to foreign countries. He examined the problem of salt industry in Thoothukudi. He suggested the Government to fix a supporting price to salt. This will help the industry to be free from depression.

Jeemol Unni (2018) state that, diametrically opposed to the Indian thrust for exploiting the employment potential of labour intensive technique in the rural industries sector, in China the accent is one the “modernization of those very techniques in a capital intensive direction”.

Krishnamurthi (2016) in his article reveals that with more than 20,000 acres of salt pans across Tuticorin district, the production was being done to meet requirements of domestic market as well as international buyers. More than 55,000 workers from Kayalpatnam to Vembar hamlets located along the coastline in the district were being involved in salt production. Unfortunately, no effort was made to implement the much awaited welfare board for workers involved in salt production, through which India continued to get heavy foreign exchange. Unlike Gujarat, edible salt production in Thoothukudi was contributing more to meet consumption demands in India.

Vigneshwara Varmudy (2014) in his article reveals that India is the third largest salt-producing country in the world. Despite this, recent rumours of shortage have triggered panic buying and selling of salt, especially in states of West Bengal, Bihar and Meghalaya. Rumours about the shortage of the most essential item in the kitchen of every household have made the way for an increase in its price.

Results and Discussion

Age Structure of the Respondents

Table 1 shows the age structure of the sample respondents. Out of 120 respondents 66 respondents are in the age group of below 40 constituting the highest percentage. Only 54 respondents are in the age group of above 40.

Table 1
Age Description of Sample Respondents

Type of Work	Age Group					Total
	20 - 30	31- 40	41 – 50	51 - 60	60&above	
Watering	11	11	13	4	0	39(12.00)
Scraping	7	15	11	2	6	41(12.00)
Removing	7	11	9	2	0	29(12.00)
Others	2	2	7	0	0	11(12.00)
Total	27	39	40	8	6	120(100.00)

Source: Primary Data

Table 1 shows that the salt industry requires energetic young and middle aged people of both sexes on the labour force. The reason is that much physical strength is essential for all category of work-except clerical job.

Monthly Income by Respondents

The income of the salt workers is also an important indicator of their economic condition. Income level reveals the economic status of the family. As the hours of work increase, the income also increases. Distribution of sample households in different income groups is presented in the following Table.

Table 2
Monthly Income by Respondents

Monthly Income (in Rs.)	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Below 5,000	31	25.83
5,000 - 8,000	28	23.33
8,000 - 11,000	35	29.17
11,000 – 13,000	14	11.67
Above 13,000	12	10.00
Total	120	100.00

Source: Primary Data

From the above table, it is found that 29.17 percentage of salt workers are getting income from Rs.8,000 to 11,000, 25.83 percentage below Rs.5,000, 23.33 percentage get Rs.5,000-8,000, 11.67 percentage of salt workers are getting income from Rs.11,000-13,000 and 12 percentage of them are getting above Rs.9,000. Hence, majority of the salt workers are getting income from Rs.5,000-11,000 per month.

Periodicity of Wage Payment

The payment structures generally comprise of daily wage and seasonal contract. The fixation of minimum wage in the saltpans is challenging issues as majority of workers are paid in a piece-rate basis and not on daily fixed wage basis. The following table reveals the wage payment period of salt workers.

Table 3
Periodicity of Wage Payment

Mode of Payment	No. of Respondents	Percentage

Daily	20	16.66
Weekly	59	49.17
Fortnightly	23	19.17
Monthly	18	15.00
Total	120	100.00

Source: Primary Data

From the above table, it is keenly observed that 49.17 percentage of salt workers are getting wages weekly, 19.17 percentage are getting wages fortnightly, 16.66 percentage are getting daily and 15 percentage of them are getting monthly. Hence, majority of the salt workers are getting weekly wages. This shows the fact that the whole salt workers community living is based on their weekly wages.

Total Family Monthly Income

All the households are grouped under five income classes according to their annual total income. The variation in the income levels is due to the differences in the sources of income. The following table reveals the total household monthly income of salt workers.

Table 4

Total Family Monthly Income

Total Household Monthly Income	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Below Rs.20,000	16	13.33
Rs.20,000 to 30,000	30	25.00
Rs.30,000 to 40,000	34	28.33
Rs.40,000 – 50,000	28	23.33
Above Rs.50,000	12	10.00
Total	120	100.00

Source: Primary Data

From the table 4, it is noted that 28.33 percentage of salt workers are having household monthly income between Rs.30,000 to 40,000, 25 percentage of them are having household monthly income between Rs.20,000 to 30,000, 23.33 percentage are having household monthly income between Rs.40,000 to 50,000, 10 percentage of them are having household monthly income above Rs.50,000 and the remaining four per cent of the salt workers are having household monthly income below

Rs.20,000. Hence, majority of the salt workers are having household monthly income Rs.30,000 to 40,000.

Gini Co-efficient

Gini ratio co-efficient is estimated with the help of the Lorenz curve. Gini ratio is the ratio of the area between the observed cumulative frequency curve and the line of equality and the area below 45° line. The Gini ratio-nearing zero indicates less inequality and the ratio approaching unity implies greater inequality. The following form formula was computed for measuring Gini co-efficient.

$$G = 1 + \frac{1}{n} - \frac{2}{n^2 y} (ny_1 + (n - 1) y_2 + \dots + 2y_{n-1} + y_{n-1} + y_{n-1})$$

Where,

G = Gini co-efficient

n = number of individuals

y₁ = Income of individual rank (y₁ <= y₂ <= y_{n-1} <= y_n)

y = mean income

The Gini concentration ratio was estimated and the Gini concentration ratio is 0.295. This confirms that the income inequality in the study area is low. On the whole, the data suggest that the income distribution among the income groups of households does not show wider variation.

Pattern of Expenditure

The consumption expenditure of the households of the salt workers is also considered in this study. People who are having low income spend a larger part of their income on the consumption goods items. The pattern of consumption determines the standard of living of the salt workers. Most of the salt workers spend more amount of money from their income for their consumption. The following table depicts the pattern of consumption expenditure.

Table 5
Pattern of Expenditure

Items of Consumption	Amount	Percentage
Food	17,72,400	62.02
Clothing	5,25,000	18.37
Rent	24,000	0.84
Education	1,59,900	5.60
Fuel & lighting	1,12,500	3.94

Social & Religious	81,000	2.83
Medicine	90,000	3.15
Others	93,000	3.25
Total	28,57,800	100.00

Source: Primary Data

The above table shows that, according to the universal data of high rate of expenditure, 62.02 percentage of the total income is spent on food items. The clothing accounts for 18.37 percentage of their total income. The major share of their income, nearly 80 percentage go to these items. Expenditure on education receives a meagre amount i.e. 5.60 percentage of their total income. The other expenditure items like rent, fuel and lighting, social and religious, medicine and others constitute 0.84 percentages, 3.94 percentage, 2.83 percentage, 3.15 percentage and 3.25 percentage respectively. The reason is that most of the salt workers spend more amount of money from their income for their consumption.

Pattern of Savings

Savings mean part of the income remaining after consumption. Saving is undertaken mainly for the sake of security for the future, to fulfill the future needs, to enhance the standard of living.

Savings depend up on their level of income and size of the family. Level of income depends upon the nature of employment. Higher income people can save more. The saving pattern of the respondents on the basis of the mode of savings is given in the following

Table 6
Pattern of Savings

Mode of Saving	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Chit Funds	21	17.50
Post office	22	18.33
Banks	14	11.67
LIC	32	26.67
No Savings	31	25.83
Total	120	100.00

Source: Primary Data

The table 6 shows the mode of savings and to what extent they save in this area. About 17.50 per cent of the respondents in this village save their money in chit funds. About 18.33 per cent of the

respondents are having their accounts in the post office. Of them 14 families save their money in banks which constitute 11.67 per cent. Only 26.67 per cent of the respondents are having their accounts in LIC. The remaining 25.83 per cent of the salt worker have no savings at all.

Debt of the Respondents

Indebtedness is a position under which a person owes some money to another person. Indebtedness has deteriorating effects on the life in rural area. It has a demoralizing effect on social life. The major causes of their indebtedness are low income and seasonal work. The indebtedness of households is explained in the following Table.

Table 7
Debt of the Respondents

Sources of Borrowing	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Bank	14	11.67
Co-operative Society	20	16.67
Self - Help Group	51	42.50
Employer	35	29.16
Total	120	100.00

Source: Primary Data

The above table shows the total amount of loan incurred by the salt workers in Thoothukudi. It is found that out of 120 respondents, 11.67 per cent of the respondents have borrowed loan from the bank. About 16.67 per cent of the respondents have availed loan from co-operative society. Self Help Group is one of the sources of borrowing in which 42.50 respondents are getting loan. Salt industry owners are another source of borrowing in which 35 respondents are getting loan which account for 29.16 per cent.

Hence in Thoothukudi all the salt workers have come under indebtedness. Most of the salt workers are borrowing heaving loans from the Self Help Group.

Problems Faced by Salt Workers with Employers

Majority of salt workers belong to SC community. They are mostly landless or own marginal lands, which are primarily unproductive and without irrigation. The salt workers are engaged in salt work due to unavailability of alternative employment opportunities. They are trapped in the vicious cycle of debts and suffer from occupational health hazards. Since income from salt industries is not enough to

sustain the family, they also depend on some other works. They are mainly involved as casual labourers. They also migrate to earn their livelihood.

The major problem faced by salt workers is wage. The wage rate of the workers varies between Rs.150 to Rs.250 according to the location and gender. During the study it has been found that, on an average, wage rates are very poor in Thoothukudi when compared to Maharashtra and Gujarat where the wage rate is somewhat high. Presently, a trend of employing migrated labourers from other places of the state is getting strong. These migrated workers get lower wages compared to traditional workers of Thoothukudi. They are considered as non-skilled and primarily employed in non-technical works, like carrying, digging etc. However, this can affect the work availability and wage rate of the traditional workers in the recent days.

An important feature of the salt industries is that workers are employed on “no work no pay” basis. Barring few, the workers are not entitled for pay during holidays or other leave facilities. The payment structures generally comprise of daily wage and seasonal contract. For non-technical works, the salt workers are employed on a daily basis while for technical works; workers are contracted on a seasonal basis though their wage may be calculated on a daily basis. Generally, the labour contractor, who has a seasonal contract with the leaseholder, employs the salt workers.

On the structure of wage rate, the Minimum Wage Act, 1948 is implemented in all the salt producing states. Leaseholders observed that the workers are getting more than minimum wages. However, workers think that they are earning less compared to their work. The fixation of minimum wage in the saltpans is challenging issues as majority of workers are paid in a piece-rate basis and not on daily fixed wage basis.

The workers generally earn at least as much as an agriculture worker. However, the workers are found to get a daily earning as low as Rs.140.

The manufacturers do not know labour laws related to labour management or administration. They are not aware of minimum wages acts and not even migrant workers law while employing these salt workers who work barefoot from dawn to dusk in knee-deep brines. Most salt workers work seven days a week, nine months a year and live in the midst of saltpans.

Majority of the manufacturers do not know the latest technology of manufacturing salt and even they do not have the basic idea about the recent trends in salt manufacturing. They follow traditional method of salt manufacturing. They keep their saltpans with some lower end motors for bringing the salt water into their saltpans.

In Thoothukudi district, there were too many saltpans after independence. But in recent days, the saltpans are converted into plain lands and sold to the large scale carriage forward and inward industries. They fill the saltpans with sand and keep their containers and wood materials. Due to this, many salt workers are migrated to some other place of Thoothukudi district as construction labourers, fishing etc.

In some saltpans, the female salt workers face sexual problems with the employers. Even the supervisor category of employees also disturbs the female salt workers. In 2007, there were about 15 to 20 cases filed in this regard. Police officials arrested and imprisoned the employers or supervisors. Majority of the salt workers do not like such type of action against them due to the unwanted threatening from the employer side. So, while facing these problems, some of female salt workers stop the work with the employer and migrate to somewhere else in the district.

The salt worker is seen to migrate to other saltpans in order to earn their livelihoods, as they lack other employment opportunity. In addition to this, the salt workers also lack skills for doing any other work. Child and adolescent labour is on the rise in the saltpans as children also migrate with their parents and are engaged as salt workers.

Types of Problems with Employers

Majority of the salt workers are facing some problems such as wage, working hours etc. In some saltpans, the female salt workers face sexual problems with the employers. The types of problems with employers of salt workers are classified in the following table.

Table 8
Types of Problems with Employers

Problems	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Sexual Problems	17	14.17
Problems related to Wages	38	31.67
Working Hours Problems	22	18.33
Hazardous Work	31	25.83
Bonus Problem	12	10.00
Total	120	100.00

Source: Primary Data.

From the above table 8 it is clear that problems related to wages were the main grievance faced by the salt workers. Then hazardous work was the second major problem. Bonus problem was the least important problem faced by the salt workers.

Nature of the Occupational Diseases

The salt workers are engaged as salt workers due to unavailability of alternative employment opportunities. They are trapped in the vicious cycle of debts and suffer from occupational health hazards. Majority of the salt workers are having occupational diseases with the present job. The following table explains the nature of occupational diseases.

Table 9
Nature of Occupational Diseases

Nature of Occupational Disease	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Skin Disease	25	24.04
Eye Disease	22	21.15
Asthma	12	11.54
Headache	11	10.58
Ulcer	10	9.62
Urinary Problem	24	23.08
Total	104	100.00

Source: Primary Data.

Among the 104 workers suffering from occupational disease 24.04 percentage are affected by skin disease, 21.15 percentage have eye defects. About 11.54 percentage are suffering from asthma, 10.58 percentage of them are affected with headache, 9.62 percentage of the workers are suffering from ulcer and 23.08 percentage of the salt workers are suffering from urinary problem. Thus it can be inferred that occupational diseases attacking salt workers are found to be chronic. Only six workers are not affected by occupational disease.

Respondents Views about Medical Facility

Invariably most of the respondents suffering from occupational diseases are of the view that such diseases do affect their earning capacities. The institute/agency through which they are treated for occupational diseases is furnished in the following Table.

Table 10

Respondents views about Medical Facility

Institute/Agency	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Government Hospital	45	43.27
Private hospital	34	32.69
Local Treatment	25	24.04
Total	104	100.00

Source: Primary Data.

The above table clearly shows that out of 104 respondents, 43.27 percentage of the respondents take treatment for occupational diseases from government hospital, 32.69 percentage of the workers go to private nursing homes for treatment and 24.04 percentage of the salt workers take local treatment for occupational diseases.

It is observed that among all the salt producing unit, only five private limited companies are providing their workers medical facility. Workers employed in these units could get treatment through their company hospital. No other salt industry in the region is giving its workers medical facility. For getting treatment from government hospital, the workers will have to cut work and thus lose wages for the day staying away from the work. Also, they are incurring additional expenditure by visiting hospital. The same thing can be said of those workers who take treatment from private nursing homes and local treatments.

Findings

Following are the major findings of the study:

- The study reveals that the salt industry requires energetic young and middle aged people of both sexes on the labour force.
- Majority of the salt workers are earning income from Rs.8,000-Rs11,000 per month.
- Majority of the salt workers are getting weekly wages. In fact, that the whole salt workers community living is based on their weekly wages.
- Majority of the salt workers' total family monthly income ranges from Rs.30,000 to 40,000.
- The Gini concentration ratio was estimated and the Gini concentration ratio is 0.346. This confirms that the income inequality in salt workers is low. On the whole, the data suggest that the income distribution among the income groups of households does not show wider variation.

- Most of the salt workers have spent more amount of money from their income for their consumption.
- The study shows that, according to the universal data of high rate of expenditure, 62.02 percentage of the total income is spent on food items. The clothing accounts for 18.37 percentage of their total income. The major share of their income, nearly 80 percentage go to these items. Expenditure on education receives a meagre amount i.e. 5.60 percentage of their total income.
- Savings depend up on their level of income and size of the family. Majority of the respondents are having their accounts in LIC and 25.83 per cent of the salt workers have no savings at all.
- The study discloses that in Thoothukudi, all the salt workers have come under indebtedness. Most of the salt workers are borrowing heaving loans from the Self Help Group.
- Out of 120 respondents, 11.67 per cent of the respondents have borrowed loan from the bank. About 16.67 per cent of the respondents have availed loan from co-operative society.
- It is clear that problems related to wages were the main grievance faced by the salt workers. Then hazardous work was the second major problem. Bonus problem was the least important problem faced by the salt workers.
- The result of the study reveals that 86.67 percent of salt workers are affected by occupational diseases. Among the salt workers who suffer from occupational diseases, 45.19 per cent of them are suffering from eye and skin diseases. It is observed that most of them are not using cooling eyeglasses and sandals supplied by the employer to every worker in a year are inadequate. Moreover, the owners are not providing them with gloves. Since the salt workers have been suffering for many years, the occupational disease is found to be chronic.
- Out of 104 respondents, 43.27 percentage of the respondents take treatment for occupational diseases from government hospital, 32.69 percentage of the workers go to private nursing homes for treatment and 24.04 percentage of the salt workers take local treatment for occupational diseases.

Suggestions

Few suggestions are offered to improve the status of the salt labourers.

- As the salt workers are unemployed in salt pans for eight to nine months and they also do not get other alternative works in the off season, subsistence allowance and retaining fee may be given to the salt workers during off-seasons.
- Vast majority of the salt workers are prone to occupational diseases, thus a separate hospital with all facilities should be established for their benefit in Thoothukudi / Thoothukudi.
- Canvas shoes and gloves should be supplied to the workers working in the salt pans as it is a basic necessity.
- The Minimum Wages Act 1948 enables the Government to fix and enforce the minimum rates of wages to the salt workers. The rules regarding minimum wages should be more effectively implemented. The prevailing minimum wage rate should be immediately revised to cope up with the rising prices. The act should ensure equal pay for 'equal work' and thus avoid discrimination in payment of wages on the basis of sex.
- The Bonus Act 1965 should be more effectively implemented to prevent discrimination in payment of bonus on the basis of sex.
- The programme for provision of free house sites for construction of houses has to be implemented with a sense of urgency. The housing schemes of various agencies like the Housing Board, HUDCO etc, can also be applied for the salt workers. Further, employers may be statutorily asked to provide better housing accommodation with sanitation facilities to the salt workers.
- Employers may be encouraged to supply subsidised food, coffee etc., to the workers at their work place.
- The salt workers should be provided with a suitable lunchroom with provision for safe drinking water.
- The employers should be statutorily asked to make provision for medical facilities. Such medical facilities should be available to the salt workers at a nearby place.
- There should be a mutual, friendly and cordial relationship between the owners and the salt workers.
- The salt workers must be provided with the necessary equipments to work inside the saltpan like footwear etc.
- Employers should be encouraged to give adequate monthly advances to the workers. Such advances should bear no interest.

- Separate latrines and urinals for male and female workers respectively should be provided in the salt pans.
- The owner of the saltpan must provide several credit facilities to the workers to construct their own house and to minimize workers' private borrowings.
- Most of the workers are residing far away from the salt industry. Hence transport fare must be provided by the saltpan owner.
- The NGOs should educate the workers about legal aids and provisions available in the constitution, so that the workers can claim their rights. If they meet with any accidents, compensation and other required assistance could be provided.
- The state government should also make provisions to compensate salt workers against natural disasters like heavy rains, floods, cyclone and fires, etc.
- Government should provide some subsidies or alternative work for the salt workers during the off-season.

Conclusion

Salt industry is labour intensive sector in Thoothukudi. It provides employment for the coastal rural area people. However, the working conditions of the salt workers in this area not by fair. Wage paid is not proportionate to the working hours. The job security is of paramount importance but there is no job security to the salt workers. It should be taken into account by the labour welfare department. Other welfare measures are also not up to the workers' expectation. The conditions of the salt workers in the Thoothukudi are poor and miserable. It is high time for the government to address the grievances of the salt workers in the Thoothukudi which in turn will help them to elevate themselves from the present dismal state of affairs.

Thoothukudi salt industry is on the springboard of accelerated development in the near future. With its strategic location, availability of land for future expansion, availability of large number of workers, the salt industry is destined to carve a rich for it-self in the real maritime trade. It is expected that if the suggestions are implemented, it would solve the problems of salt workers of Thoothukudi and improve their living standards.

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