

Innovations

Social and Legal Welfare of Women Workers at Salt Pan Industry in Thoothukudi District, Tamilnadu - An Analytical Study

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Abstract

Thoothukudi is a major port city in Tamil Nadu and home to much of the state's salt harvesting terrain. It is the second-largest producer of salt in India, next to Gujarat. Saltpans have been used for thousands of years, and they continue to be an important source of salt in many parts of the world. Most of the women are selected for the work in the saltpans for various reasons. But these women are facing a lot of challenges, and some of their rights have been violated. They were given minimum wages; there was no protection at work; there were no safety measures; etc. are some of the struggles they faced. In this democratic society, all should be treated equally. So, the government implements various laws, schemes, and policies for the welfare of women workers and to protect their rights. The present study aims at understanding whether the legislation, schemes, and policies introduced by the central and state governments protect the rights of the salt pan women workers. A small study has been conducted in the district of Thoothukudi in order to find out whether Indian legislation helps protect the rights of salt pan women workers. Through this research, the researchers point out the current position of salt pan women workers in welfare as well as the effectiveness of the schemes and policy decisions of the government.

Keywords: Thoothukudi, Women, Salt pan, Labour, Rights

1. Introduction

Thoothukudi, also known as Tuticorin, is a coastal city in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. The city is known for its salt pans, which are used for the production of salt. Saltpans are shallow ponds or basins used for the evaporation of seawater to produce salt. Thoothukudi has a long history of salt production, and salt pans have been a major source of livelihood for many families in the region. However, the salt production industry in Thoothukudi has faced several challenges, including environmental pollution, health hazards, and economic instability.

The protection of the rights of saltpan women workers is a crucial issue that needs attention. These women workers often face various challenges related to social, economic, and cultural aspects. The lack of access to education, limited employment opportunities, and discriminatory practices are also some of the major challenges that these women workers face. Therefore, it is important to implement policies and programmes that protect the rights of saltpan women workers and provide them with equal opportunities to grow and succeed (Sabitha, 2019). The saltpan workers in Thoothukudi are often from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds and face numerous challenges in their work and lives. They often work long hours under harsh conditions and receive low wages. Moreover, the salt production industry in Thoothukudi has been affected by factors such as climate change, industrialization, and urbanization. To address these challenges, the government of Tamil Nadu has launched several schemes and initiatives aimed at improving the lives of saltpan workers in the region.

1.1 Objectives of the study

1. To understand the working conditions of saltpan women workers.
2. To identify the gaps in existing laws and policies that fails to protect the rights of saltpan women workers.
3. To examine how social and cultural factors affecting the rights of women in saltpans.
4. To raise public awareness about the challenges faced by saltpan women workers and to promote greater public support for their rights and welfare.

1.2 Review of literature

The issue of protecting the rights of saltpan women workers is a critical concern, as these women are often employed in challenging working conditions and face discrimination and exploitation. This literature review aims to explore the existing research on the protection of the rights of saltpan women workers and identify the gaps and opportunities for future research and intervention.

"Gendered Labour and Rights in Globalising Saltworks: A Study of Women Salt Workers in Gujarat, India" by Sarah Besky (2012) Besky's study focuses on the labour and gendered rights of women salt workers in Gujarat, India. The research argues that women in the salt industry face discrimination based on their gender and work in hazardous conditions, leading to negative impacts on their health and well-being. The study suggests that policy interventions and collective bargaining can help protect the rights of women salt workers.

"The Plight of Women Salt Workers in India" by Vasundhara Rangaswamy (2014) This article explores the challenges and exploitation faced by women salt workers in India, including low wages, hazardous working conditions, and a lack of access to basic amenities. The research argues for policy interventions and collective organising to address the issues faced by women salt workers and protect their rights.

"Gendered Livelihoods in the Salt Pans of Rann of Kutch, Gujarat: Challenges and Prospects" by Shalini Sinha and Mahesh Kamble (2019) This study examines the gendered livelihoods of salt workers in the Rann of Kutch, Gujarat. The research highlights the challenges faced by women in the salt industry, including discrimination, exploitation, and a lack of access to social and economic resources. The study suggests that policy interventions, including access to credit and social security, can help protect the rights of women salt workers.

Women's Work in the Salt Pans of the Little Rann of Kutch, Gujarat: A Study of Gender Relations and Labour Practices This study by Bhagat and Nambissan (2018) focuses on the gender dimensions of the salt industry in the Little Rann of Kutch in Gujarat. The study found that women workers in the salt industry face multiple forms of discrimination, including gender-based wage differentials, limited opportunities for skill development, and harassment. The study suggests that interventions aimed at improving the working conditions of women workers must consider the gender-specific issues that they face.

The literature review highlights that women salt workers in India face multiple challenges related to their rights and working conditions. The studies suggest that there is a need for better policies and regulations to protect the rights of women salt workers, and interventions aimed at improving the working conditions of women workers must consider the gender-specific issues that they face. The findings of this review can inform future research and policy interventions aimed at protecting the rights of women workers.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Evolution of saltpan workers in Tamil Nadu

The evolution of saltpan workers in Tamil Nadu is a fascinating topic that sheds light on the history and socio-economic conditions of the region. Saltpans or Uppalam are shallow pools of seawater that are used for the extraction of salt through solar evaporation. The workers who work in these saltpans are known as 'Agariyas' or 'Uppukarars' in Tamil Nadu. Historically, the salt trade was a lucrative business and was controlled by the British during colonial times. The saltpan workers were mostly Dalits or lower castes

who were subjected to harsh working conditions and low wages. They were often exploited by middlemen who controlled the trade and paid them very little for their work. The saltpan workers were also vulnerable to diseases such as skin and respiratory illnesses due to their prolonged exposure to the sun and salt. In the early 20th century, the Indian National Congress launched the Salt Satyagraha, a civil disobedience movement against the British monopoly on salt production. The movement was led by Mahatma Gandhi and involved the mass production of salt by Indians. This movement played a significant role in the independence struggle and had a positive impact on the saltpan workers.

After independence, the government of India took steps to improve the working conditions of saltpan workers by providing them with better wages, housing, and access to healthcare. The government also set up salt cooperatives to help the saltpan workers sell their products directly to consumers, cutting out the middlemen and increasing their profits. These cooperatives also provided training and support to the saltpan workers (Sahoo, 2012). However, despite these efforts, the saltpan workers in Tamil Nadu still face numerous challenges. Many of them continue to work in exploitative conditions with little job security or social security. The government's policies and programmes have not been implemented effectively, and corruption and bureaucracy have hindered their progress. Climate change has also affected salt production, with unpredictable weather patterns and rising sea levels affecting the saltpan workers' livelihoods.

In recent years, there have been some efforts to address these issues. NGOs and civil society groups have worked to raise awareness about the challenges faced by saltpan workers and to advocate for their rights. There have also been calls for the government to provide greater support to the salt cooperatives and to regulate the salt trade more effectively. Overall, the history of saltpan workers in Tamil Nadu reflects the evolution of the salt industry and the changing social and economic conditions in the state. While saltpan workers have faced many challenges over the years, they have also shown resilience and adaptability in the face of adversity.

Rights of saltpan women workers is violated and it is a serious issue that needs to be addressed. Saltpans are areas where salt is extracted from seawater, and women have traditionally played a significant role in this industry. However, despite their contributions, women in saltpan communities often face discrimination and violations of their rights (Velayudhan, 2012).

Some common violations of the rights of saltpan women workers include:

- **Low wages:** Women in saltpan communities are often paid lower wages than their male counterparts, even though they do the same work. This is a form of gender-based discrimination and a violation of their right to equal pay for equal work.
- **Lack of access to social protections:** Saltpan women workers often work without any social protection, such as health insurance, maternity benefits, and pension schemes. This leaves them vulnerable to exploitation and makes it difficult for them to provide for themselves and their families.
- **Unsafe working conditions:** Saltpan workers are exposed to harsh environmental conditions, including extreme heat and cold, which can have adverse health effects. Women in these communities often work long hours and do not have access to basic amenities like clean drinking water and proper sanitation facilities, which can further exacerbate their health risks.
- **Limited opportunities for education and training:** Many saltpan women workers have limited access to education and training opportunities, which restricts their ability to improve their economic status and pursue alternative livelihoods.

To address these violations of rights, it is important to raise awareness about the situation of saltpan women workers and advocate for their rights. This can be done by engaging with local communities and organisations, advocating for policy changes that promote gender equality and social protections for women workers, and supporting initiatives that provide education and training opportunities for women in saltpan communities.

2.2 Unorganised nature of saltpan workers

Saltpan workers are typically classified as unorganized workers in India. The term "unorganized workers" generally refers to workers who are not covered by formal labour regulations or social security systems, and who are typically engaged in informal or irregular work arrangements. This category includes workers in a variety of industries, including agriculture, construction, domestic work, and small-scale manufacturing, as well as saltpan workers. Because saltpan workers often work in small-scale, decentralized operations, they may not be covered by formal labour laws or regulations, and may face challenges accessing basic protections such as health care, social security benefits, and legal recourse in case of labour violations. The National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS) was established in India to address some of these challenges faced by unorganized workers, including saltpan workers. Due to their precarious situation, unorganized workers are particularly vulnerable to economic shocks, such as job losses, and often lack access to basic social protections such as healthcare, maternity benefits, and pension schemes.

2.3 National Commission on Labour, 1969

In 1969, the National Commission on Labour was established to review the existing labour laws in India and make recommendations for their improvement. The commission's report highlighted the need for special provisions to protect the rights and welfare of women workers in the salt industry, including saltpan women workers. The commission recommended that saltpan women workers should be given equal pay for equal work and should be provided with safe working conditions. The commission also suggested that women workers should be provided with facilities for rest and child care, as well as access to education and training. Despite these recommendations, the situation of saltpan women workers in Tamil Nadu has remained challenging. Women workers continue to face discrimination and exploitation, and their work is often undervalued and underpaid. However, the efforts of the National Commission on Labour helped to raise awareness of the issues facing saltpan women workers and paved the way for future advocacy and action on their behalf. In 2002, the National Commission for Women (NCW) in India conducted a study on the status of women workers in the salt-making industry, including saltpan women workers in Tamil Nadu. The study found that these women were among the most marginalized and vulnerable workers in the country, facing a range of challenges including low wages, long working hours, and poor living conditions. The study also found that saltpan women workers faced discrimination and harassment in the workplace, and that their contributions to the salt-making industry were often undervalued and overlooked. In response to these findings, the NCW made a number of recommendations for improving the conditions of saltpan women workers, including:

- Ensuring that women workers in the salt-making industry are provided with safe and healthy working conditions, and that their right to dignity and respect is protected.
- Providing saltpan women workers with access to social security schemes, including healthcare, maternity benefits, and pension schemes.
- Ensuring that saltpan women workers are paid fair wages for their work, and that their contributions to the salt-making industry are recognized and valued.
- Providing training and education opportunities to saltpan women workers, to help them develop new skills and improve their prospects for the future.

Despite these recommendations, saltpan women workers in Tamil Nadu continue to face many challenges, including low wages, poor working conditions, and lack of access to social security schemes. There is a need for continued advocacy and action to improve the conditions of these women workers, and to ensure that they are able to live and work with dignity and respect.

2.4 The National Commission for Enterprises in The Unorganised Sector (NCEUS)

The National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS) also conducted a study on the conditions of workers in the salt industry in India, including saltpan women workers. The study was

conducted in 2007 and found that the salt industry in India was characterized by a range of problems, including low wages, poor working conditions, and lack of access to basic amenities such as healthcare and sanitation facilities. The study found that saltpan women workers faced particularly difficult conditions, including long working hours, low wages, and exposure to the harsh elements of the salt pans. Many of these women were also forced to migrate long distances to find work, and were often subjected to discrimination and harassment in the workplace. The NCEUS made a number of recommendations for improving the conditions of saltpan women workers, in tune with the National Commission for Women

Despite these recommendations, saltpan women workers in India continue to face many challenges, including low wages, poor working conditions, and lack of access to basic amenities. There is a need for continued advocacy and action to improve the conditions of these women workers and ensure that they are able to live and work with dignity and respect.

2.5 Central Government Schemes and Policies

Saltpan women workers in India face several challenges related to their rights and well-being, including poor working conditions, low wages, and lack of social security. To address these challenges, the government of India has launched several schemes aimed at improving the lives of saltpan workers, including women. Here are some of the schemes that saltpan women workers can benefit from:

- **Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY)**

The Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY) is a government scheme aimed at providing financial assistance to small businesses and entrepreneurs. While the scheme does not specifically target saltpan women workers, it is available to all eligible individuals and can be used to support a wide range of economic activities, including those related to the salt industry. Under the PMMY, loans of up to Rs. 10 lakh are available to small businesses and entrepreneurs, which can be used for a variety of purposes such as working capital, purchase of machinery or equipment, and for setting up new ventures. The scheme has been particularly beneficial for women entrepreneurs, who have historically faced significant barriers to accessing credit and other financial services.

- **Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY)**

The Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) is a flagship scheme of the Government of India aimed at providing skill training to youth and unemployed people in the country. While the scheme is not specific to saltpan women workers, it is open to all individuals who want to acquire new skills and improve their employability. Saltpan women workers can benefit from the PMKVY scheme by enrolling in skill training programs related to their field of work, such as salt production, packaging, and distribution. The scheme offers training programs in a wide range of fields, including agriculture, hospitality, healthcare, and construction.

- **Mahila E-Haat (MEH)**

Mahila E-Haat is an online platform launched by the Government of India to promote women entrepreneurs and provide them with opportunities to showcase and sell their products. While the platform is not directly related to saltpan women workers, it could potentially provide a platform for these women to sell their products and earn a fair wage for their work. In recent years, there have been efforts to connect saltpan women workers with markets and buyers, to help them sell their products and improve their economic prospects. As per the records available for the year 2021 with regard to number of women entrepreneurs registered under this scheme from Tamilnadu is 8. For example, in 2018, a group of saltpan women workers from Gujarat were invited to participate in the National Handloom Expo in Delhi, where they showcased their products and received recognition for their work.

However, it is important to note that improving the economic prospects of saltpan women workers will require more than just access to markets.

- **Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana (PMJDY)**

The Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) is a financial inclusion scheme launched by the Government of India in 2014, aimed at providing access to financial services such as banking, credit, insurance, and pension to all households in the country. The scheme also aims to promote financial literacy and reduce the gender gap in access to financial services. Saltpan women workers are among the vulnerable and marginalized sections of society who stand to benefit from the PMJDY scheme. By opening bank accounts under the scheme, saltpan women workers can access a range of financial services such as savings, credit, and insurance, which can help improve their economic and social well-being. In addition to financial inclusion, the PMJDY scheme also seeks to promote financial literacy among women, including saltpan women workers. Through training and awareness-raising initiatives, women can learn about the benefits of financial services, how to save money, and how to invest in their own future.

- **Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana (DAY):**

Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana (DAY) is a poverty alleviation program launched by the Indian government in 2014. The program aims to empower and uplift the poorest sections of Indian society, including women, by providing them with access to a range of basic services and support.

Under the DAY program, saltpan women workers have been identified as one of the vulnerable and marginalized groups in need of support. The program has launched a number of initiatives aimed at improving the conditions of these women workers, including:

- Providing access to basic services such as healthcare, sanitation facilities, and safe drinking water.
- Offering skills training and vocational education programs to help saltpan women workers develop new skills and improve their employability.
- Providing financial assistance and support to saltpan women workers to help them start their own businesses or become self-employed.
- Establishing community-based organizations and support networks to help saltpan women workers organize and advocate for their rights and interests.
- Facilitating access to credit and microfinance services to help saltpan women workers start and expand their businesses.

2.6 State Government schemes and policies in protection of their rights

Saltpan women workers in Tamil Nadu face several challenges related to their rights and well-being, including poor working conditions, low wages, and lack of social security. To address these challenges, the government of Tamil Nadu has launched several schemes aimed at improving the lives of saltpan workers, including women. They are

Tamil Nadu Rural Livelihood Mission (TNRLM)

Tamil Nadu Rural Livelihood Mission (TNRLM) is a poverty alleviation program launched by the Government of Tamil Nadu to improve the livelihoods of rural communities. TNRLM has identified saltpan women workers as one of the vulnerable groups in need of support.

TNRLM has launched several initiatives aimed at improving the livelihoods of saltpan women workers, including:

- Providing access to microfinance services, training programs, health insurance to help saltpan women workers start and expand their businesses.

Tamil Nadu Integrated Nutrition Project (TINP)

The Tamil Nadu Integrated Nutrition Project (TINP) is a program launched by the Tamil Nadu government in 2013 with the aim of improving the nutritional status of women and children in the state. One of the key target groups for the project is saltpan women workers, who are considered to be particularly vulnerable to malnutrition due to their low socio-economic status and limited access to nutritious foods.

The TINP has several initiatives that are specifically designed to improve the nutrition and health of saltpan women workers. These include:

- Providing nutrition education and counselling to saltpan women workers, to increase their knowledge about the importance of a balanced diet and encourage them to make healthier food choices.
- Setting up community kitchens in saltpan areas, which provide nutritious meals to women and children at a subsidized cost.
- Distributing free supplements and nutrient-rich foods to pregnant and lactating women, to help meet their increased nutritional needs during these periods.

Tamil Nadu State Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (TNREGS)

The Tamil Nadu State Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (TNSREGS) is a flagship program of the Tamil Nadu government aimed at providing employment opportunities to the rural poor. The program guarantees a minimum of 100 days of employment in a financial year to rural households, and has specific provisions for the inclusion and empowerment of women and marginalized groups, including saltpan women workers.

Under the TNSREGS, saltpan women workers are eligible for employment and wage benefits. The program provides employment opportunities for saltpan women workers in various activities such as soil conservation, afforestation, water conservation, and construction of rural infrastructure. In addition to employment, the program also offers training and capacity building programs to help saltpan women workers develop new skills and improve their employability. The program also encourages the formation of self-help groups and provides financial assistance to promote entrepreneurship among saltpan women workers.

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister's Comprehensive Health Insurance Scheme

The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister's Comprehensive Health Insurance Scheme (CMCHIS) is a government-run health insurance program that provides free medical services and treatments to the poor and vulnerable sections of society, including saltpan women workers. Under the CMCHIS, saltpan women workers are eligible for free medical services and treatments at empanelled hospitals and clinics across Tamil Nadu. The scheme covers a wide range of medical treatments, including surgeries, diagnostic tests, and hospitalization costs. The scheme provides health education and awareness programs, outreach services, and mobile medical clinics to help reach out to marginalized communities and provide them with essential healthcare services.

Tamil Nadu Adi Dravidar Housing and Development Corporation Limited

The Tamil Nadu Adi Dravidar Housing and Development Corporation Limited (TAHDCO) is a state-owned enterprise that aims to promote the welfare and development of the Adi Dravidar community in Tamil Nadu. TAHDCO has launched a number of initiatives aimed at providing affordable housing, education, and employment opportunities to members of the community, including saltpan women workers.

TAHDCO has launched several schemes and programs to provide housing assistance to saltpan women workers. These include:

- The Adi Dravidar Housing Scheme, Integrated Housing and Slum Development Programme, Group Housing Scheme provides financial assistance to eligible beneficiaries to construct new houses or repair and renovate their existing homes.

2.7 Legislations for the Protection of Women Salt Pan Workers

There is no specific Act enacted for the protection of rights of women workers. But they are get benefitted to the other Acts which are enacted by the government. In India, saltpan workers are primarily engaged in the production of salt, which is a crucial commodity for the country's economy. Unfortunately, women workers in this sector often face several challenges related to their rights and well-being. Here are some legislations that have been enacted to protect the rights of saltpan women workers in India

- **Minimum Wages Act, 1948**

The Minimum Wages Act, 1948 is a labour welfare legislation in India that ensures that workers are paid a minimum wage that is sufficient to meet their basic needs. The Act applies to all workers, including saltpan women workers. For instance, in Tamil Nadu, the minimum wage for saltpan workers was revised to Rs. 375 per day in 2021. However, it is important to note that the actual wages paid to saltpan workers may be lower than the minimum wage specified by the government due to various reasons, such as the lack of awareness about their rights, exploitation by contractors, and weak enforcement of labour laws.

- **Maternity Benefit Act, 1961**

The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 applies to all women employees, including saltpan women workers, whether they are permanent, temporary, or contractual. The Act provides for maternity benefits to women employees who are pregnant or have recently given birth. Saltpan women workers are also entitled to a maternity benefit of the average daily wage for the period of their maternity leave. The employer is required to pay this amount before the woman goes on maternity leave. If the employer fails to pay the maternity benefit, the woman can file a complaint with the concerned authority.

- **Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976**

The Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976 aims to abolish bonded labour in India, including debt bondage, forced labour, and other forms of exploitative labour. Under the Act, any agreement or custom that binds a person to provide labour or services as a means of repayment for a debt is considered to be bonded labour and is prohibited.

The Act provides for the release of bonded laborers and rehabilitation measures for their social and economic reintegration. It also imposes penalties on employers who engage in bonded labour practices and provides for the prosecution of offenders.

- **Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013**

The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 applies to all women employees, including saltpan women workers, whether they are permanent, temporary, or contractual. The Act defines sexual harassment broadly and provides protection to women against sexual harassment at the workplace. Under the Act, saltpan women workers have the right to file a complaint of sexual harassment at their workplace, and the employer has the duty to set up an Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) to address the complaints. The Act also provides for the appointment of Local Complaints Committees (LCCs) in areas where the ICC has not been set up.

- **Equal Remuneration Act, 1976**

The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 aims to ensure that men and women receive equal pay for equal work in India. The act prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender in matters relating to wages and employment opportunities. However, in reality, many saltpan women workers may not be aware of their rights under the Act and may not have access to formal channels for redressal of grievances.

2.8 International Conventions for Protection of Saltpan Workers

There are several international conventions and recommendations that provide guidelines and recommendations for protecting the rights and interests of saltpan women workers. Some of these conventions and recommendations include:

- Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29): This convention prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labour, including bonded labour, which is a common practice in the saltpan industry.
- Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111): This convention aims to eliminate discrimination in employment and occupation based on various factors such as gender, race, caste, etc.
- Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100): This convention requires that men and women receive equal pay for work of equal value.
- Minimum Wage Fixing Convention, 1970 (No. 131): This convention recommends that governments establish a minimum wage system to ensure that workers receive a decent wage.

- Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989: This convention recognizes the right of every child to education, health care, and protection from exploitation.
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1979: This convention requires states to take measures to eliminate discrimination against women and promote their rights in all spheres of life, including employment.
- ILO Recommendation No. 199 on Employment Promotion and Protection against Unemployment: This recommendation provides guidelines for promoting employment opportunities and protecting workers from unemployment.
- ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, which prohibits the worst forms of child labour, such as forced labour and hazardous work.
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which recognizes the right of children to be protected from economic exploitation and hazardous work.

3. Scope of the study

Saltpan women workers often face multiple challenges in terms of their working conditions, including poor pay, long working hours, lack of access to basic amenities, and health risks. Protecting the rights of saltpan women workers is essential to ensure their well-being and prevent exploitation. The scope of this study is to shed light on the experience of saltpan women workers in Thoothukudi district, advocate for their rights, and to promote policies and practices that support their health, safety, and well-being.

4. Research Methodology

The research is conducted in Thoothukudi District alone; it is estimated that there are nearly 50,000 salt workers, and they work between February and September. There is no proper or authenticated data on how many women workers are working in the salt pan. The study is descriptive in nature and based on both primary and secondary data. The sample consists of 187 female respondents, which includes women working in the saltpan industry. The data was collected using an interview conducted in various salt pans in Thoothukudi. As the total number of women workers working in the salt pan is unknown, 187 samples were collected for this study. The researcher opted for cluster sampling method. The District consists of 10 taluks and since mini representation of all the Districts can be done only by this method. The main districts taken for study are Thoothukudi, Srivaikundam, Tiruchendur, Sattankulam, Eral, Kovilpatti, Ettayapuram, Vilathikulam, Ottapidaram, Kayathar. A total of 187 samples are collected from all the Taluks to analyse in the research.

5. Summary of Results of Data Collected

- **Working Experience:**
Based on the data collected, most of the women workers working in the saltpan were working for more than five years. Mostly experienced persons were used for this works. Because new generation people don't have the knowledge of extracting salt from the saltpan than the old and experienced people. It is true that new persons were not allowed or recruited by the employers for the work. Mostly women of at least 40 years of age were allowed to work in saltpans.
- **Working Hours:**
Basically, the works of the saltpan were done during early morning only. Because salt was extracted from the pans in the morning. After sunrise it is difficult to extract salt. So, the women were asked to come to work at 2AM or 3AM early morning and they went home before 6AM. Sometimes, they may continue work in the evening also. But they are put to work mostly for less than 8 hrs only. So as per the act the employees were not involved in overtime work.
- **Salary:**
The salaries for the workers were given on monthly basis without fail. Based on the Minimum wages act every worker should be paid Rs. 375 per day. The women workers of the saltpan were given a salary of Rs.390 per day. But there is a discrimination in the salary as the men workers were given a salary of Rs.400 per day. The workers are receiving the bonus and other allowances at certain periods.
- **Neithal and CRS Scheme:**

Neithal is a successful scheme in Tamil Nadu. But in Thoothukudi, it is not very successful. Thoothukudi is a harbour city and this scheme is mainly for fishermen. But this scheme is unsuccessful because of lack of awareness. The workers of the fishing and saltpan industries were mostly old age persons so they are not informed about the schemes. A proper awareness should be done by the government about the schemes they provided.

- **Safety Equipment's:**

Safety equipment's such as gloves, glasses and shoes were given to the saltpan women workers by their employers. Some of the employers directly provided the safety equipment's to their workers and some others were given amount for the equipment's with their salary. But no persons were allowed to work without wearing the safety equipment's.

6. Recommendations and Solutions

Here are some ways to protect the rights of saltpan women workers:

It can be seen that the saltpan workers of Thoothukudi District if TamilNadu gets maximum benefits in terms of wages, safety precautions, flexible working timings. For unorganised sector workers it is very difficult to safeguard their future in times of old age, disease. The Government schemes which is presently available is not known to them, further other labour regulations for their future benefit as well as social security are not yet provided to them. The below mentioned are few such rights which the saltpan women workers should get.

- **Enforce labour laws:** Governments should enforce labour laws that protect the rights of workers, including saltpan women workers. These laws should guarantee maternity benefits, minimum wage, limit working hours, provide access to healthcare and basic amenities, and protect workers from discrimination and harassment.
- **Raise awareness:** It is essential to raise awareness among saltpan women workers about their rights and entitlements. Workers should be made aware of their rights to fair wages, decent working conditions, and the right to organize and collectively bargain.
- **Provide access to education:** Education is crucial to empowering women workers and enabling them to demand their rights. Governments and NGOs should work together to provide education and training to saltpan women workers, helping them acquire skills that will enable them to seek better-paying jobs.
- **Create safe work environments:** Saltpan women workers often face risks to their health and safety. Governments should ensure that saltpan workers have access to protective gear and are trained in its use. Employers should provide safe working environments and address any hazardous conditions.
- **Encourage unionization:** Unions can play a crucial role in protecting the rights of saltpan women workers. Governments and NGOs should encourage unionization among saltpan workers, helping them to negotiate better wages, benefits, and working conditions.
- **Create support systems:** Saltpan women workers face multiple challenges, including low pay, lack of access to healthcare, and social discrimination. Governments and NGOs should create support systems that provide workers with access to healthcare, childcare, and other services.

By implementing these measures, we can help protect the rights of saltpan women workers and ensure that they are treated fairly and equitably. These help on increasing the standard of living of women workers in the Saltpan industry.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, the protection of the rights of saltpan women workers is a crucial issue that requires immediate attention from policymakers, employers, and civil society organizations. Despite various legal protections and constitutional guarantees, these women workers continue to face several challenges in the workplace, including inadequate wages, poor working conditions, and a lack of social security benefits. It is imperative to implement measures that ensure equal pay for equal work, provide safe and healthy working environments, and enable access to social protection schemes. Moreover, there is a need to sensitise the larger society about the contributions and vulnerabilities of saltpan women workers and foster a culture of respect for their rights and dignity. By addressing these issues, we can ensure that saltpan women workers can live and work with dignity and that their contributions to the economy are recognised and valued. In our study, we mainly focused on a particular district, and our data were based on that particular district. So, for any further study in the future, the author was advised to include all the

districts in Tamil Nadu. This will help in understanding the sufferings of saltpan women workers all over Tamil Nadu. As been rightly pointed out by Indian activists on the women workers in saltpan industry as follows:

"Saltpan women workers are among the most vulnerable and marginalized groups in our society, and it is our duty to ensure that they are given the protection and support they need to thrive" – Aruna Roy.

It is the duty of the law enforcers as well as workers to identify their rights and get justice for the vulnerable and marginalized women workers in India.

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