

Chapter VI

Comparing Socio-Economic Status of Domestic Workers with Other Female Workers Engaged in Other Activities

- **Introduction**
- **Major Comparison**
- **Conclusion**

6.1: Introduction

In this chapter a comparison is made between female domestic helps and female construction workers in respect of socio-economic status with special reference to Cooch Behar district of the state of West Bengal.

We choose female construction workers to compare with domestic helps as there is some similarities between these two types of workers such as both are in informal sector, both are deprived of, both are oppressed, they are insecure in their job and many of the women construction workers as well as the domestic helps are the major earners in their families.

Female construction workers are seen prone to be engaged in construction industry in huge amount for the attraction of higher wages and this industry needs unskilled workers. More than 90 percent of the working women are engaged as wage labourers in informal sector in India (C.P. Rai. Working Women in India). They suffer from various types of exploitation like sexual abuse, political and cultural exploitation, psychological and economic exploitation. They suffer from temporary nature of work and they require huge physical labour to contribute. They are paid poorly and exploited by the contractors and middlemen. For the frequent change of their employer they have to change their worksites which cause mental strain. Accident and death at their place of work is observed and in most of the cases they are not given any compensation by the authorities. Throughout the year most of them do not get an assured income as during the monsoon construction work is not continuing steadily because of the rainfall. In some families women construction workers are the major earners and in dull season they must find work as casual labour in other industries or in the field of agriculture or start working as domestic help. It creates a mental stress upon them. They suffer from wage discrimination though their work load is almost same as the men folk. Sometimes it is taken for granted that women labours would be paid less than men labour for the same quantity of job. Women are paid less generally showing the grounds that they are weaker to do some work such as carrying bricks or cement full bag like men and they cannot have any specialized skills of cement mixer or measurement of brick layer. Actually it is a male dominated industry and sometimes female workers are not wanted. In reality, they have to carry earth, mortar, bricks or

crushing bricks, water, sand etc. But the contractors and mates exploit them providing fewer wages. Women construction workers do not get any paid leave (even male labourers) or maternity leave. It had been seen in our survey that women construction workers were working at the site in the advanced stage of pregnancy. If she does not work, she does not earn and her family demands her earning.

They have double burden of wage work and house work. Most of them step out for their wage work after completing their cooking, serving and doing other household chores. They are also bound to take some meals to satiate their hunger in the form of midday meal. Generally, they take rice and vegetables or sometimes they take bitter paddy or puffed rice with a piece of molasses as their meals at worksite.

Women labours are suffering for their ignorance. They are not informed of their legal rights. They do not have any union support in these areas because they suffer from lack of organised strength. Women labours are unable to do the job of a mason whereas many men labours become mason after a long experience. Most of the labours and contractors are averse to giving them recognition as a skilled worker. So both at home and at work place they are treated to be secondary status as they do not get due place.

The construction workers, who participate in the building construction in Cooch Behar, mainly come from the surrounding villages under various panchayets. Every morning they go to the Cooch Behar town by bus or by some other vehicles or on cycle. There is a market of hodmen (Construction worker) at Pancharangi cross roads. The house owners or contractors go to that particular place for recruiting the workers. We carried out a survey of 50 women construction workers in Cooch Behar. They seemed to be sceptic about our intention. After clarifying our purpose to visit this site they became co-operative with us. Soon after our interviewing three or four workers the supervisors started calling the workers back to their work. We visited several sites to carry out our survey and interviewed the women workers to study their socio-economic conditions. Almost one third of the workers were women at every place. We discussed with them during their recesses when they were at their leisure. In every place there was a supervisor or mate who looked after their works. They seemed to be annoyed with us when we wanted to exchange words with the hodwomen eye over the workers. The

workers complained that they are not expected to exchange any word with the co-workers while working. If they talk, the supervisor thinks that they are malingering their work. On the other side when we asked the manager or supervisor, he complained that the workers are very much shirker. They always try to shirk their work by nature. So he has to be fretful to get sufficient work from them.

6.2: Major Comparisons

Now we compare the condition of women construction workers with the situation of women domestic workers in Cooch Behar Municipality in terms of age, income, education, housing, sanitation, saving habit, working hours, poverty and health condition etc.

6.2.1: Age distribution

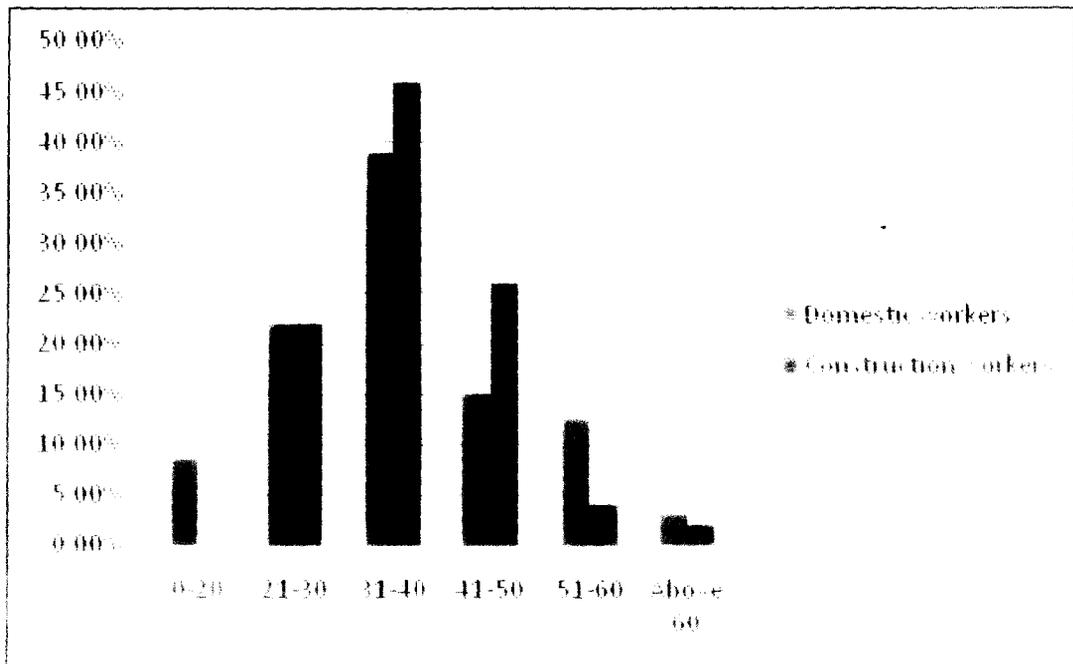
It was our queries that most of the female workers come from what age groups? We segregated all the workers in six age groups and get the following numbers of women workers in those groups.

Table-6.1: Age Composition of women workers

| Category | Age | 0-20 | 21-30 | 31-40 | 41-50 | 51-60 | Above 60 |
|----------------------|-----|--------|-------|-------|-------|---------|----------|
| Domestic workers | | 17 | 44 | 78 | 30 | 25 | 6 (3%) |
| | | (8.5%) | (22%) | (39%) | (15%) | (12.5%) | |
| Construction workers | | 00 | 11 | 23 | 13 | 2(4%) | 1(2%) |
| | | (0%) | (22%) | (46%) | (26%) | | |

Source: Field survey, 2010

Figure - 6.1 Age Composition of Women workers in Cooch Behar Municipality



Source: field survey, 2010

Table 6.1 and figure 6.1 show that the main concentration of female domestic workers and female construction workers are in the age group of 31-40 (39% and 46% respectively). At the same time it is revealed that 8.5 percent women domestic workers are in the age group 0-20 whereas this age group is not found in construction works i.e. there is no underage labour in construction works. In the age group 51-60 there are 12.5 percent women domestic workers whereas only four percent construction workers are found in this age group. There are three percent women domestic workers and two percent construction workers are found in the age group above 60. Usually old female workers, young women and children do not engage in construction works as this work needs strength and vigour and they do not know how to work hard. Thus, only middle aged workers are found to involve in this work. Most of the women domestic workers are between the age group 21-40 whereas most of the women construction workers are in the age group 31-50.

6.2.2: Scheduled caste and scheduled tribe workers in this sector

Table-6.2: SC, ST and general category workers

| Category | Total families | Scheduled caste | Scheduled Tribe | General |
|----------------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------|
| Domestic workers | 200 | 115 (57.5%) | 0 (0%) | 85 (42.5%) |
| Construction workers | 50 | 35 (70%) | 0 (0%) | 15 (30%) |

Source: Field survey, 2010.

Table 6.2 indicates that 57.5 percent domestic workers and 70 percent construction workers belong to scheduled caste category and remaining 42.5 percent of domestic workers and 30 percent of construction workers belong to general category. We did not get a single worker who is in scheduled tribe category. Therefore the scheduled caste category dominates both the sectors and more scheduled caste women are working as construction workers than that of domestic workers.

6.2.3: Structure of Monthly family income

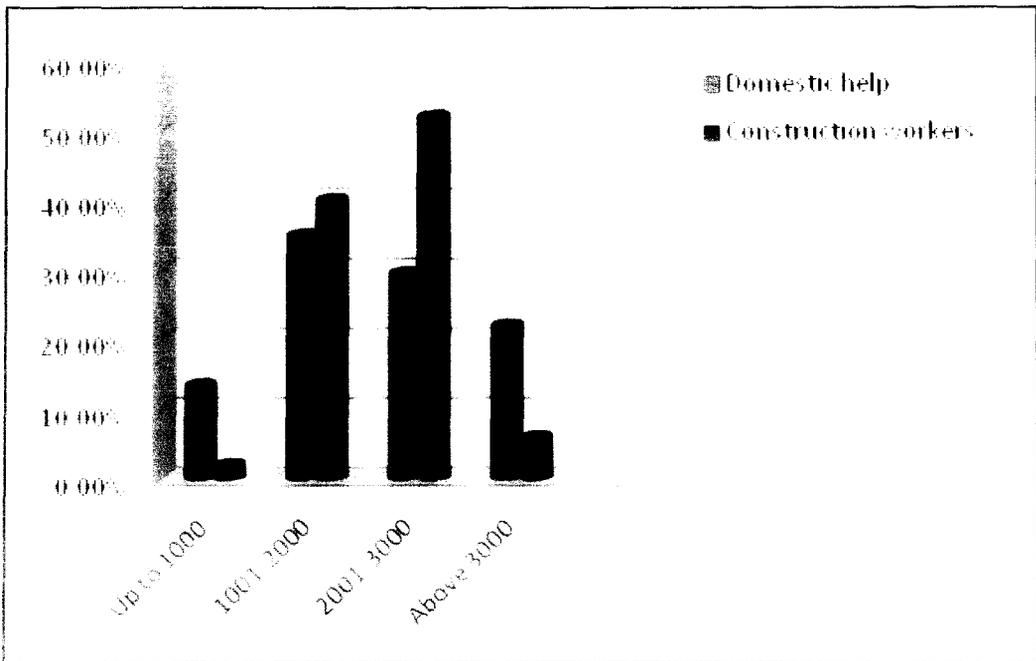
To compare the family income of the female domestic workers and the female construction workers we get the result as follows.

Table-6.3 : Monthly Family income of women Domestic workers and women construction workers

| Category/income group | Up to 1000 | 1001-2000 | 2001-3000 | Above 3000 |
|-----------------------|------------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Domestic help | 27 (13.5%) | 70 (35%) | 59(29.5%) | 44 (22%) |
| Construction workers | 1 (2%) | 20 (40%) | 26 (52%) | 3 (6%) |

Source: Field survey, 2010.

Figure-6.2: Monthly family income of women domestic workers and women construction workers



Source: field survey, 2010

Table-6.3 and figure-6.2 indicate that the percentage of women domestic workers whose family income is “up to 1000” (13.5%) is higher than the percentage of women construction workers (2%). On the other hand in the income group “1001-2000” the percentage of women domestic workers (35%) is lower than that of the women construction workers (40%). The percentage of women construction workers (52%) is significantly higher than the percentage of women domestic workers (29.5%) in the income group 2001-3000. Again in the highest income group of our survey i.e. “above 3000”, 22 percent of women domestic workers are prevailing where only 6 percent of women construction workers are there in this group. The mean monthly consolidated family income of the domestic workers and the construction workers are Rs 2100.5 and Rs 2120.5, respectively. So here it is clear that the domestic workers’ families are lagging behind in terms of consolidated family income.

6.2.4: Structure of workers' own income

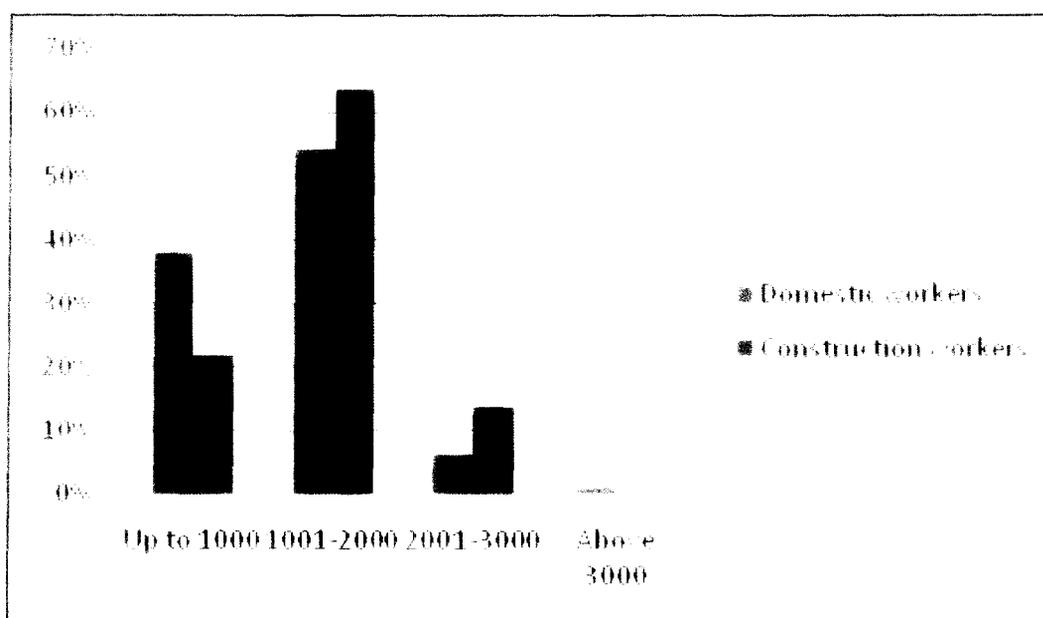
We have tried to compare the income of both the two types of women workers and so we make the following table from the information which we get from them about their own income.

Figure-6.3: Structure of workers' own income

| Workers | Number of workers | Up to 1000 | 1001-2000 | 2001-3000 | Above 3000 |
|----------------------|-------------------|------------|-------------|-----------|------------|
| Domestic Workers | 200 | 76 (38%) | 109 (54.5%) | 13 (6.5%) | 2 (1%) |
| Construction Workers | 50 | 11 (22%) | 32 (64%) | 7 (14%) | 0 |

Source: field survey, 2010

Figure-6.3: Structure of workers' own income



Source: field survey, 2010

Table-6 4 and figure 6.3 point out the comparative monthly income of the women domestic workers and the construction workers. Here it is found that in higher income groups the concentration of construction workers is higher compared to domestic workers. But in the highest income group 'above 3000' there are one percent domestic worker and no construction workers. Besides, if we calculate the mean monthly income of the domestic workers and construction workers, it is Rs 1205.50 for women domestic workers and Rs 1420.50 for construction workers. Thus, we can conclude that the monthly income of domestic workers is lower than that of the construction workers.

6.2.5: Literacy rate of domestic workers and construction workers' families

Education is an indicator of the step of development of any society and country. It was therefore necessary to us to know the literacy level of the domestic workers and construction workers' families.

Table-6.5: Educational level

| Category | Number of families | Number of family members | Literate persons |
|----------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|------------------|
| Domestic workers | 200 | 763 | 328 (43%) |
| Construction workers | 50 | 201 | 111 (55.2%) |

Source: Field survey, 2010

While comparing the literacy level, it is seen that 43 percent family members of domestic workers and 55.2 percent family members of construction workers are literate. So the data show that the literacy rate in the construction workers' family is higher compared to that of the domestic workers' family.

6.2.6: Literacy by sex

Female literacy is an important measure of the status of women. Indian Education Commission (1964-66) said that "For full development of our human resources, the improvement of homes and for moulding the character of children during the most impressionable years of infancy, the education of women is of even greater importance than that of men". So we compare the literacy among domestic and construction workers' families.

Table-6.6: Educational level of both the workers' families

| Category | Number of families | Number of family members | Total Number of literate persons | Male | Female |
|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------|------------|-----------|
| Domestic helps | 200 | 763 | 328 | 177 (54%) | 151 (46%) |
| Constructions workers | 50 | 201 | 111 | 54 (48.6%) | 57 (51%) |

Source: field Survey, 2010. Parentheses indicates percentage of total.

It is seen from table-6.6 that 46 percent female members of domestic helps' families were literate whereas 51 percent of female members of construction workers' families were literate. In case of male members it was 54 percent and 48.6 percent respectively. So it transpires that male literacy is higher in domestic workers' families and female literacy is higher in construction workers' families. So in construction workers' families the female members are more progressive than that of domestic workers' families. The sense of education is reflected in the family of construction workers better than that of domestic workers.

6.2.7: Housing provision

The living condition of these women workers is extremely bad. Whether their home was their own or they were living in a rentable house was our one of the questions to them. Their answers are mostly highlighted here.

Table-6.7 Housing provision of both types of the women workers

| Category | Number of families | Own house | Rented house | Paternal or other relative's house |
|----------------------|--------------------|-----------|--------------|------------------------------------|
| Domestic help | 200 | 134 (67%) | 36 (17.5%) | 31 (15.5%) |
| Construction workers | 50 | 43 (86%) | 3 (6%) | 4 (8%) |

Source: Field survey, 2010.

Table-6.7 shows that 67 percent of female domestic workers and 86 percent of female construction workers are living in their own houses. 17.5 percent domestic workers and 6 percent construction workers are staying at the rented house. The rent of the houses varies from Rs 100 to 500. Besides, 15.5 percent domestic workers and eight percent construction workers are sheltered at their paternal houses or other relatives' houses. It is clear from this table that the construction workers who live in their own house are far better compared to the domestic workers in terms of freedom they enjoy and amenities they derive. This is because most of the women construction workers are commuters of conveyance from their house to their worksite. So they do not have to live in the town area where they would have to take shelter in any rented house or in any relatives'

house. They are able to perform their duty from their own house even if their house is in the remote areas. But in case of domestic workers it is not possible to work from the remote areas because they find it most expensive in respect of time, distance and money. So they have to be migrated from their own house (which is in remote areas) to any of the slum within the Cooch Behar municipality wards. At first they come with any of their relatives or friends and stay with them and after their engagement with work they take rented house to stay at. Therefore the domestic workers who are staying at rented houses or other relatives' houses are greater in percentage compared to the women construction workers.

6.2.8: Sanitation Facility

During our survey we wanted to know the living conditions of all the domestic workers and construction workers individually. Their responses are reflected in the following table.

Table-6.8: Latrine facilities available

| Category | Number of families | Facility available |
|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Domestic worker | 200 | 117(58.5%) |
| Construction worker | 50 | 29(58%) |

Source: Field survey, 2010, Note Parentheses indicate percentage of total.

The percentage analysis represented in table-6.8 shows that 58.5% domestic workers' families enjoy the sanitary facilities on their own and 58% families of construction workers have the facilities of latrine on their own. So it is clear that in respect of sanitation the standard of domestic workers and construction workers are more or less the same.

6.2.9: Electricity facility

To know the standard of living of informal sector workers we asked them if they were enjoying electricity facilities in their house or not. The following table shows their responses on this particular aspect.

Table-6.9: Electric connection facilities among the women workers' families

| Category | Number of families | Electricity Facility available |
|----------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| Domestic workers | 200 | 58(29%) |
| Construction workers | 50 | 8(16%) |

Source: Field survey, 2010.

The percentage analysis as has been shown above in table-6.9, reveals that 29 percent female domestic workers' families have electricity connection and only 16 percent female construction workers enjoy the facilities of electricity. So in respect of electricity facilities the construction workers are lagging behind the domestic workers though most of the domestic workers and construction workers are not enjoying the electric facilities.

6.2.10: Savings account

Now-a-days it has been noticed that there has been a tendency among all sections of the people to save a portion of their income for future. This is equally true for the domestic and construction workers. Most of the workers are aware of the fact that savings ensure their future security and it has become a crucial factor of revealing the economic condition and the level of their consciousness of their future necessity. To know their savings potentiality we have asked them whether they have any savings accounts or not. The following table shows the savings potentiality of women domestic workers and women construction workers.

Table-6.10: Savings potentialities

| Category | Number of families | Saving account available |
|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| Domestic worker | 200 | 74(37%) |
| Construction worker | 50 | 18 (36%) |

Source: Field survey, 2010.

From table-6.10 it is found that 37 percent of domestic workers have maintain savings account and 36 percent of construction workers have managed to generate savings account out of their meagre income. Therefore, the consciousness about savings is little

higher in case of domestic workers. So it is clear that the awareness of savings of construction workers and domestic workers do not vary largely.

6.2.11: Family indebtedness

It was our queries to the women workers about their indebtedness. They are so indigent generally that they always remain indebted. Their responses are highlighted in table 6.11.

Table-6.11: Family indebtedness of women workers

| Category | Total number of families | Number of indebted families | Loan accounts | | | Average |
|---------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|-------|--------|---------|
| | | | Private | Govt. | Total | |
| Domestic worker | 200 | 70 (35%) | 259200 | 14000 | 273200 | 3902.85 |
| Construction worker | 50 | 22 (44%) | 116700 | 00 | 116700 | 5304.5 |

Source: Field survey, 2010.

Table 6.11 indicates that 70 (35%) women domestic workers and 22 (44%) construction workers were indebted at the time of our survey. The total amount of money which was borrowed by the women domestic workers and the women construction workers were Rs 273200 and Rs 116700 respectively. From this data it is found that the average amount of loan taken by the domestic workers was Rs.3902.85 whereas the average amount of loan taken by the construction workers was Rs 5304.5. So it is clear that the construction workers are more indebted than the domestic workers in terms of percentage of loan taking families and the average amount of loan taken. We also get the information during our survey that domestic workers have taken loan from private sources and government sources both though the amount of loan taken from government source is very limited and scanty (only Rs.14000). We get only two cases where loan is taken from the Gramin bank (we have considered it as government source of finance). But in case of construction workers they have taken loan from only private sources such as Bandhan, relatives, neighbors etc. In these informal sectors, Bandhan is a popular source of loan creator who has

extending loan to its clients. They grant loan at a minimum rate of interest as per their normal terms and conditions.

6.2.12: Self-help group

Self-help group is a group formed by the poor women of a society for the economic uplift and emotional support to each other when in need. It is a financial mediator which is generally village based and composed of ten to twenty local women. These groups are registered or unregistered as micro entrepreneurs which have homogeneous economic or social circumstances. The group members come together voluntarily to save regular small quantity of money and contribute to a common fund for meeting their emergency needs on the basis of mutual help. They can take loan from the money collected by the group and make every one of them self-employed.

We have asked the women domestic workers and women construction workers whether they are associated with any self-help group or not. Comparing between construction workers and domestic workers about their membership in any self-help group, the following results are found.

Table-6.12: Member of self-help groups

| Category | Number of families | Member of self help groups |
|-----------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| Domestic workers | 200 | 12 (6%) |
| Constructions workers | 50 | 15 (30%) |

Source: Field survey, 2010.

From table-6.12, it is clear that only six percent of domestic workers and 30 percent of construction workers are the members of self-help groups i.e. the percentage of self-help group members of construction workers (30%) is higher than that of the domestic workers. So we can say that the awareness among women construction workers is much higher than that of the domestic workers.

6.2.13: Weekly working hours

Working hour is a time quantity which is measured for the workers for knowing their employment situation. If the working hours are too long, then the stress on their nerves

grows high which affects their health. They cannot get leisure time. More over childrens' care will be highly neglected by the working parents for doing work in excess. On the other hand, if the work time is too low, the society will be suffering from lack of labour and an imbalance will be seen between demand and supply of labour. According to factories' Act, 1948 (Chapter vi-Working Hours of Adults, Section 51: Weekly hours: 'No adult worker shall be required or allowed to work in a factory for more than 48 hours in any week'. So it was our query: what was the working hour of the women workers? .Were they could maintain the labour law or not? We get the following average weekly working hours for the women construction workers and women domestic workers shown in table-6.3.

Table-6.13: Weekly working hours

| Category | Hours of work in professional purpose(average) | House hold work time(average) | Weekly hours of total work(Average) |
|----------------------|--|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Domestic help | 53.5 | 11.37 | 64.87 |
| Construction workers | 58.2 | 10.50 | 68.70 |

Source: Field survey, 2010

As table-6.13 reveals, weekly average working hours for women domestic workers is 53.5 and for construction workers, it is 58.2 in respect of their professional work. These figures are more than the stipulated figure (48 hours in a week) by Factory Act. It is also clear from this table that women construction workers work for more hours (58.2 hours/week) compared to women domestic workers (53.5 hours/week).Furthermore, domestic workers can be absent from their work if it is necessary to them without making any deduction from their wages whereas the construction workers work in terms of "no work no pay". So from this point of view also construction workers have to work more than the domestic workers.

6.2.14: BPL card holders

BPL card holders should be those people who are under the poverty line .There is some particular point of income ,expenditure or possessions which indicate the poverty limit i.e. below this income a family is regarded as BPL family. Who possess the BPL card: they get some facilities provided by the Government. So to know if they receive

the facilities which they can get from government, we wanted to know the information of their possessions of the BPL card. Their responses are highlighted here under.

Table-6.14: Number of BPL card holders

| Category | Number of families | BPL card holders |
|----------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| Domestic workers | 200 | 102 (51%) |
| Construction workers | 50 | 29 (58%) |

Source: Field survey, 2010.

While comparing them on the basis of BPL card holding, we have found from table 6.14 that fifty one percent women domestic workers and fifty eight percent construction workers are the BPL card holders though it is known that all the domestic workers or construction workers are entitled to get BPL card facilities.

6.2.15: Marital status

Table-6.15: Marital status of women domestic workers and construction workers

| Category | Total families | Married | Widow | Deserted | Number of women workers whose husbands are untraced | Did not marry yet |
|----------------------|----------------|-------------|------------|-----------|---|-------------------|
| Domestic workers | 200 | 113 (56.5%) | 55 (27.5%) | 15 (7.5%) | 4 (2%) | 13 (6.5%) |
| Construction workers | 50 | 37 (74%) | 7 (14%) | 4(8%) | 2(4%) | 0 (0%) |

Source: Field survey, 2010.

As table-6.15 reveals, in case of women domestic workers married women constitute 56.5 percent. Widowed, deserted, no tracing husbands constitute 27.5 percent, 7.5 percent and 2 percent respectively. Besides, 6.5 percent domestic workers were not married yet. On the other hand, in case of construction workers married women constitute 74 percent workers. Widowed, deserted and no tracing husbands women constitute 14 percent, 8 percent and 4 percent respectively. There were no unmarried women workers in construction works in Cooch Behar municipality.

So, it is clear that more women construction workers are enjoying their conjugal life compared to women domestic workers. On the other hand, the percentage of widow domestic workers is higher than that of construction workers. The percentage of deserted women are more or less the same in these two sectors (7.5% and 8% respectively). Unmarried women are totally absent in construction works whereas 6.5 percent unmarried women domestic workers are found. As it needs a manual hard labour and the youngs do not know how to work hard so only married women (who are more than 20) are engaged in construction works.

6.2.16: Fatal disease

An attempt is made to find the health of the informal sector workers and on this purpose our question was that how was the health conditions of all their family members. Table-6.16 highlights the number of families in which any of the family members are suffering from fatal diseases.

Table-6.16: Number of families suffering from fatal diseases

| Category | Number of families | Numbers of families where at least one person was suffering from fatal diseases |
|----------------------|--------------------|---|
| Domestic workers | 200 | 78 (39%) |
| Construction workers | 50 | 21(42%) |

Source: Field survey, 2010.

It is evident from table-6.16 that thirty nine percent of domestic workers' families and forty two percent of construction workers' families are suffering from the problem of fatal and incurable diseases at least one in every family. So, higher percentage of fatal diseases is seen in construction workers families.

6.3: Conclusion

As the old female workers, the young women and children are weaker than middle aged women, most of the female construction workers belong to the middle age group. Construction work is a manual work which demands healthy and hearty workers and so negligible number of aged women are seen here and none of the workers are in the

age group 10-20. On the other hand, domestic workers' duration in this profession is comparatively high. In regard to the family income the mean family income of construction workers are higher than the domestic workers and in case of women workers' income alone we get the same result. But one important thing should be remembered. The income of the construction workers is not secure for the whole year. During monsoon most of the construction work is not done. Naturally, the workers (including the women workers) remain out of their employment. For this reason, annual income of the construction workers is lower than that of the domestic workers. But from our survey experience it is found that most of the construction workers choose whatever work they get at hand in the lean period for their sustenance. That construction work which is being performed under the roof can be carried out in the rainy season also. So the earning is not much affected by the seasonal obstruction. As regards as the education is concerned, literacy rate is higher for the construction workers' families than that of domestic workers families. Among the literates, female percentage is high for the construction workers and the result is seen quite different for the domestic workers. That is the sense of education and the sense of the female education is better for the construction workers than that of the domestic workers. Both types of female workers live in any of the three types of houses such as own houses, rentable houses and relatives' houses. The percentage of construction workers who live in their own houses are far greater compared to that of the domestic workers. While the sanitation facilities is concerned, almost same percentage of the domestic workers and construction workers enjoy the sanitation facilities. In respect of electricity facilities the domestic workers are more progressive than the construction workers. The awareness about savings potentiality is more or less the same among all types of workers. More self-help members are found among the construction workers than among the domestic workers. While we were analyzing the working hours per week it can be seen that women construction workers have to work for more hours compared to the domestic workers. As regard as the BPL card holders, domestic workers are lagging far behind the construction workers. In case of marital status, more women construction workers enjoy their conjugal life compared to women domestic workers though both of the workers are in the divisions of married, widow or deserted. An unusual fact is found that no construction workers are there unmarried while 5 percent of the domestic workers are unmarried yet. The main cause of this is as the unmarried

girls are of young age, they do not join in construction work .In some cases the guardians of the unmarried girls do not allow them to become a construction worker as they think that the girls may be exploited at the site or she would be condemned for doing work with male co-workers. In case of fatal diseases, higher percentage of fatal disease is seen among the construction workers. As a whole, we can say that as regard the income, education, BPL card facilities, SHG membership the construction workers are more progressive than the domestic workers. In case of sanitation facilities, savings account availabilities the domestic workers are a little advanced and an electricity facility enjoyed by domestic workers is comparatively high relative to the construction workers.