

Women's Employment in India

by

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*The Government of India has recently carried out the first detailed inquiry ever attempted into the position of women workers in India. The inquiry was undertaken on a suggestion of the Indian National Trade Union Congress that the subject of the economic and social status of women workers should be placed on the agenda of the Indian Labour Conference and that the Ministry of Labour should prepare a report on the subject, to be used as a basis for discussion.*¹

*The moment therefore appeared opportune to invite Mr. Adyanthaya, the director of the department responsible for the report, to prepare for the Review an article on trends in the employment of women in India, the vocational distribution of women workers, their wages and other conditions of work and the legislation adopted for their protection.*²

RIGHT from the dawn of history when Adam delved and Eve span, women have played a significant role in the domestic economy. In the early nomadic economy as well as in the agricultural economy that followed, women played a passive role as partners of their menfolk, assisting them in agriculture, cooking their food, taking care of the children and managing the household. In the agricultural economy that preceded the Industrial Revolution the domestic duties of women included the brewing of ale, preserving of fruit and spinning and weaving for the family.

The advent of women workers in industry can be traced to the Industrial Revolution, which necessitated significant changes in

¹ A note on the report appears on p. 113.

² For an article on "Women's Employment in Asian Countries", see *International Labour Review*, Vol. LXVIII, No. 3, Sep. 1953, p. 303.

the character of women's work. Women had to abandon their traditional role and venture out to seek employment outside the home.

As a result of the Industrial Revolution many of the tasks previously done in the home were removed to the factory. The family income now had to be drawn on for the purchase of goods formerly made in the home. When the increased cost of living necessitated earnings supplementary to those of the chief wage earner, the daughters and young children in families began to work for wages. At the same time industry, seeking to keep down costs of production in order to keep up profits, offered them only just the supplementary wages that the family needed. On the other hand, the wages of men were reduced to a level that made it necessary for the daughters to work. Women thus came to occupy the position of marginal workers in the new economy.

With the consolidation of British rule in India in the middle of the last century and its inevitable effect on the economic structure of the country, similar changes occurred in India also. The large-scale imports of consumer goods into the country had broken up the self-sufficient village economy. The unemployed or under-employed village artisan and the landless agricultural labourer had to migrate to the towns in search of employment. In the factories hours were long and wages were low. A wage earner could not maintain his family with his own earnings. Hence women had to seek employment to supplement the men's income. The employment of women and children in factories in India gave rise to many abuses and much exploitation. This necessitated protective legislation to improve their working conditions. For three decades of factory legislation, from the first Factories Act of 1881 to the Act of 1911, the labour law mainly dealt with their hours and conditions of work. This was gradually followed by other legislation to provide amenities and a measure of social security for women workers.

In recent years, with the gradual spread of education among women, fresh avenues of employment have opened up for them. A rapidly increasing number of women today occupy positions of varied types and skills, such as clerks, typists, teachers, lawyers, administrators, nurses, physicians and surgeons. Some are members of legislatures and some are guiding the destinies of the nation as Ministers of the central and state governments.

The purpose of this article is to discuss briefly the extent and trends of women's employment in India, their wages and working conditions, the legislative measures adopted by the central and state governments for the protection of women workers and their effect on women's employment and other connected problems.

EMPLOYMENT

The population census of 1951 provided some much needed information on the economic status of women in India. According to the published results of this census the total population of India, excluding the state of Jammu and Kashmir, was 356.6 million. Out of this total the female population formed 173.4 million. About 70 per cent. of the total population depended on agriculture for a livelihood. The proportion of female population in agricultural families to the total female population in the country was also about 70 per cent. Table I shows the distribution of the female population in India according to earning status, together with the corresponding figures for males.

TABLE I. DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION BY EARNING STATUS
AND ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

(Millions)

| Group | Agricultural | | Non-Agricultural | | Total | |
|------------------------------|--------------|--------|------------------|--------|-------|--------|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| Self-supporting . | 58.5 | 12.5 | 28.7 | 4.7 | 87.2 | 17.2 |
| Earning dependants | 10.5 | 20.6 | 2.9 | 3.9 | 13.4 | 24.5 |
| Non-earning dependants . . . | 57.2 | 89.8 | 25.4 | 41.9 | 82.6 | 131.7 |
| Total | 126.2 | 122.9 | 57.0 | 50.5 | 183.2 | 173.4 |

It may be noted in this connection that out of the total female population about 65.6 million were below the age of 15 and about 14.4 million were aged 55 or above ; this leaves 93 million women in the age-groups between 15 and 55 who may be considered as employable. The proportion of self-supporting women is about 18.5 per cent. of this total and that of earning dependants 26.3 per cent.

Of the women who were included in the agricultural population, about two-thirds were members of families cultivating land wholly or mainly owned by them, and about one-eighth were from families cultivating land not wholly or mainly owned. About 18 per cent. were either cultivating labourers or their dependants, and about 2 per cent. were non-cultivating owners of land, agricultural rent receivers or their dependants.

So far as the non-agricultural classes are concerned, there is some more interesting information. A classification of the self-supporting persons in non-agricultural activities is given in table II.¹

TABLE II. CLASSIFICATION OF SELF-SUPPORTING MEN AND WOMEN IN NON-AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES BY ECONOMIC DIVISIONS AND STATUS

| Division of economic activity | Employers | | Employees | | Independent workers | |
|---|-----------|--------|------------|-----------|---------------------|-----------|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| Primary industries | 42,066 | 4,962 | 849,437 | 403,850 | 953,152 | 147,481 |
| Mining and quarrying . | 5,510 | 426 | 362,823 | 82,290 | 96,634 | 19,187 |
| Manufacturing | 281,937 | 21,198 | 3,164,216 | 315,775 | 4,632,120 | 761,022 |
| Construction and utilities | 29,488 | 2,072 | 598,545 | 114,658 | 687,882 | 153,081 |
| Commerce . . | 472,943 | 30,732 | 1,086,598 | 48,288 | 3,779,802 | 482,955 |
| Transport, storage and communications | 33,690 | 3,606 | 1,254,416 | 36,557 | 550,901 | 22,801 |
| Health, education and public administration . | 20,100 | 2,608 | 2,798,285 | 234,129 | 199,459 | 35,746 |
| Other | 139,806 | 13,755 | 2,801,264 | 644,870 | 3,151,127 | 792,903 |
| Total | 1,025,540 | 79,089 | 12,915,584 | 1,880,417 | 14,051,077 | 2,415,176 |

The total number of self-supporting women in non-agricultural occupations was thus about 4.4 million as against 28 million self-supporting men. Women thus form roughly about one-eighth of the total self-supporting population engaged in non-agricultural activities. While a majority of them are independent workers and about 43 per cent. are employees, it is interesting to note that no fewer than 79,000 women are registered as employers, most of them in commerce and manufacturing industry. Of the nearly 1.9 million women employees, about a third are classified in the miscellaneous group. Next in importance is the primary industries group (which includes plantations), followed by manufacturing. Large numbers of women are also employed in health services, education and public administration. In the primary industries group they form nearly a third of the total number of employees, in mining and quarrying nearly a fifth and in construction and

¹ It appears that no analysis by employment status is available in respect of some 700,000 men and 300,000 women classified as self-supporting.

utilities about a seventh. Among the independent women workers, again, nearly a third are classified in the miscellaneous group, the next largest number being in manufacturing. The number of women who work as independent workers exceeds the number employed in manufacturing, construction and utilities, commerce and miscellaneous activities. In commerce, in particular, the number of independent workers is about ten times the number of women employed by others.

Regular statistics of a detailed nature on the employment of men and women are available on an annual basis in respect of factories covered by the Factories Act and mines covered by the Mines Act. Although such information is not available in respect of other sectors it is possible to make some estimates in respect of plantations, which employ a large number of women. Some useful data are also available in respect of municipalities and public works. Compared with the global figures based on census reports given above, the coverage of these figures is very small. Nevertheless these statistics are of great interest as revealing the trends of employment in the organised sectors of the economy.

Factories

Factories subject to the Factories Act, 1948, employ, according to the latest available information, about 2,474,000 adult workers. Of these about 282,000 are women.¹ Women thus form about 11.4 per cent. of the total number of adult workers employed in registered factories. The largest concentration of women workers is in the textile group of industries (cotton, jute, woollen and silk mills, hosiery factories, etc.), which account for the employment of about 100,000, more than a third of the total number of women employed in factories. Next in order of importance is the food group of industries, in which about 57,000 women workers are employed. This group includes rice and flour mills, tea factories, oil mills, etc. Factories engaged in cotton ginning and pressing, wool baling, jute pressing, etc.; employ nearly 37,000 women, while tobacco factories, including factories engaged in the manufacture of cigars, cigarettes and *bidis*², employ about 42,000 women. Other industry groups that employ women in large numbers are non-metallic mineral products, chemicals and chemical products and basic metal industries. The proportion of women in the total adult labour force is highest in gins and presses (41.4 per cent.) and tobacco (36.3 per cent.) ; the percentage is about 17.7 per cent.

¹ These statistics relate to the nine "Part A" states, six out of the eight "Part B" states and three out of the ten "Part C" states. There is very little factory employment in the other states.

² Inexpensive cigarette made by rolling tobacco in dried leaves.

in food industries, 13.7 in chemicals, 16.9 in non-metallic mineral products and 9.7 in textiles. In the other industries the percentage of women to total adult labour is less than 8. Table III shows the extent of women's employment in the various factory industries and their percentage to the total adult labour force in each case.

TABLE III. EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN IN FACTORIES, 1951

| Industry | Total adult labour employed | No. of women employed | Percentage of women to total |
|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| Gins and presses | 88,899 | 36,822 | 41.4 |
| Food, except beverages . . . | 318,458 | 56,516 | 17.7 |
| Beverages | 5,850 | 92 | 1.6 |
| Tobacco | 116,149 | 42,199 | 36.3 |
| Textiles | 1,036,249 | 100,097 | 9.7 |
| Footwear, apparel, etc. . . | 9,800 | 74 | 0.8 |
| Wood and cork | 23,293 | 1,716 | 7.4 |
| Furniture and fixtures . . . | 6,146 | 86 | 1.4 |
| Paper and paper products . . | 22,721 | 1,224 | 5.4 |
| Printing, publishing, etc. . . | 68,640 | 231 | 0.3 |
| Leather and leather products | 14,830 | 754 | 5.1 |
| Rubber and rubber products | 22,353 | 504 | 2.3 |
| Chemicals and chemical products | 74,590 | 10,228 | 13.7 |
| Products of petroleum and coal | 10,900 | 623 | 5.7 |
| Non-metallic mineral products | 105,187 | 17,785 | 16.9 |
| Basic metal industries . . . | 94,486 | 6,420 | 6.8 |
| Metal products | 53,944 | 881 | 1.6 |
| Machinery | 96,279 | 937 | 1.0 |
| Electrical machinery, apparatus and appliances . . . | 28,744 | 655 | 2.3 |
| Transport equipment . . . | 182,730 | 361 | 0.2 |
| Miscellaneous manufacturing industries | 62,237 | 3,113 | 5.0 |
| Electricity, gas and steam . . | 21,654 | 184 | 0.8 |
| Other establishments subject to Factories Act | 9,539 | 217 | 2.3 |
| Total . . . | 24,741,151 | 281,719 | 11.4 |

Women in Indian industry are employed usually in occupations that do not call for any particular skill or those for which they have shown special aptitude. In the textile industries, for example, the employment of women has been confined for a long time to certain departments such as winding and reeling in the cotton textile industry and feeding and receiving in the roving department in jute mills. By long usage these occupations have come to be known as "women's jobs", and men often consider it below their dignity to work on them. In the cotton mills in Ahmedabad 54 per cent.

of the workers in the winding department and 77 per cent. of those in the reeling department are women. At Indore the percentages are higher (93 and 80 respectively), and at Trichur the labour employed in these departments consists entirely of women. In Bombay 61 per cent. of the workers in the winding department are women. In the reeling department, however, they form only 25 per cent. In the jute mill industry, women are employed in the batching, preparing and finishing departments also. In West Bengal, where the jute mill industry is concentrated, 80 to 100 per cent. of the workers employed in these departments are women. In the silk industry women are mostly employed in the winding department.

The tea factories also employ women in large numbers—women form about a quarter of the labour force in this industry. They are generally employed in carrying tea leaf from place to place at the various stages of production. They are also employed in separating stalk and coarse leaf from manufactured tea. In the rice milling industry, where they form about a third of the labour force, women are employed mostly in carrying rice, husk, etc., from place to place, separating stones and hay from paddy, and broken rice from whole rice, feeding the hullers and drying boiled paddy in mills engaged in the manufacture of boiled rice.

Women constitute 28 to 29 per cent. of the labour force in the bidi industry. This is essentially an unorganised industry spread throughout the length and breadth of the country. Bidis are manufactured not only in the factories but also in homes. Usually the wrapper leaves are cut by women workers in their homes and the further processing is done in factories. Though it is in the former occupation that women are mostly employed, in South India women are employed in the other processes also; in that case they generally do almost the whole work at home. Materials are supplied to them in their homes by the agents of manufacturers, and finished products are collected the next day.

One other industry that employs women in large numbers—in fact, it is the second largest employer of women—is the cashew nut industry. Concentrated largely in the southern state of Travancore-Cochin, this industry employs about 40,000 women, who form about 95 per cent. of the total labour employed. The main processes, namely, shelling, peeling and grading of cashew nuts, are all carried out by women.

A study of the statistics relating to the employment of women in factories during the last two decades reveals a steady decline in the percentage of women in the total labour employed, although there is no fall in the number of women employed, at any rate in factory industries as a whole. Table IV shows the relevant figures

for selected years in respect of all factory industries and separately for cotton and jute textiles.

The decrease in the percentage of women in the total labour employed is particularly marked in the cotton mill industry, where the percentage dropped to less than half of what it was nearly a quarter of a century ago. There was also an appreciable fall in the number of women workers employed in this industry. The fall is attributed mainly to the introduction of the multiple-shift

TABLE IV. WOMEN EMPLOYED IN FACTORIES, 1927-51: NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL LABOUR EMPLOYED¹

| Year | All industries | | Cotton | | Jute | |
|----------|----------------|------------|--------|------------|--------|------------|
| | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage |
| 1927 ... | 242,666 | 16.9 | 66,532 | 19.4 | 55,412 | 16.7 |
| 1932 ... | 215,381 | 16.2 | 67,756 | 17.1 | 41,581 | 15.8 |
| 1937 ... | 237,933 | 14.2 | 65,417 | 13.8 | 39,336 | 12.9 |
| 1942 ... | 265,509 | 11.6 | 69,927 | 11.4 | 36,859 | 11.9 |
| 1947 ... | 263,923 | 11.6 | 64,430 | 10.1 | 41,872 | 13.1 |
| 1948 ... | 268,615 | 11.4 | 61,743 | 9.6 | 41,966 | 12.7 |
| 1949 ... | 275,710 | 11.3 | 59,531 | 9.1 | 41,516 | 12.9 |
| 1950 ... | 279,916 | 11.4 | 52,628 | 8.5 | 37,531 | 12.4 |
| 1951 ... | 281,719 | 11.4 | — | — | — | — |

¹ The figures for the years prior to 1947 relate to pre-partition British India and are not strictly comparable with the subsequent figures, which relate to the Indian Union. However, so far as the percentages are concerned, the effect of the change in coverage is little. The statistics cover only the Part A states and three of the Part C states. The figures in table III have a wider coverage.

system in the cotton mills. Because of the restrictions imposed by the Factories Act on the employment of women during the night, men had to be employed in occupations usually assigned to women. The adoption in many cases of the system of change-over of shifts also made it more difficult to employ women in mills working multiple shifts. The fixing of uniform rates of wages and allowances for men and women, together with corresponding minimum work-loads, is reported to be another factor responsible for the fall in the employment of women in the cotton mill industry, where several of the less efficient women had to be discharged. In a number of mills certain miscellaneous departments, such as cotton waste and bobbin picking, were also closed, and a number of women workers were discharged.

The jute mill industry also shows a considerable drop in the employment of women. The reasons appear to be (i) statutory restrictions, such as those relating to the employment of women on night work and the lifting of weights; (ii) obligations imposed on employers, such as maternity benefits, maintenance of crèches, etc.; and (iii) rationalisation and the introduction of new machines,

which eliminated various manual processes hitherto performed by women. In West Bengal, where the industry is concentrated, the employment of women in the softener feeder section has been prohibited under the State Factories Rules in view of the recurrence of numerous serious accidents affecting women in this section.

Mines

Mines subject to the Mines Act employ about half a million workers, of whom about a fifth are women. Table V shows the statistics relating to the employment of women in mines in 1951 and 1952.

TABLE V. WOMEN EMPLOYED IN MINES : NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL LABOUR EMPLOYED

| Kind of mine | Total number of workers employed | | Women employed | | | |
|----------------|-------------------------------------|---------|----------------|---------|---------------------|-------|
| | | | Number | | Percentage of total | |
| | 1951 | 1952 | 1951 | 1952 | 1951 | 1952 |
| Coal | 351,975 | 348,663 | 55,226 | 51,468 | 15.69 | 14.76 |
| Mica | 52,196 | 41,044 | 7,188 | 4,972 | 13.77 | 12.11 |
| Manganese . . | 55,531 | 74,750 | 24,392 | 31,669 | 43.92 | 42.37 |
| Iron ore . . . | 20,223 | 26,387 | 7,724 | 9,396 | 38.19 | 35.61 |
| Others | 69,123 | 68,352 | 15,077 | 14,573 | 21.81 | 21.32 |
| Total | 549,048 | 559,196 | 109,607 | 112,078 | 19.96 | 20.04 |

Coalmines, which employ the bulk of the mining labour in India, accounted for nearly 50 per cent. of the women employed in mines in 1951 and for 46 per cent. in 1952. Women, however, formed only about a fifth of the total labour force in this industry. In mica mines they formed a very small percentage of the labour force. They formed a relatively large proportion in manganese mines (44 per cent. in 1951 and 42 per cent. in 1952) and iron ore mines.

In the early stages of development of the coalmining industry in India, workers belonging to certain tribes migrated to the coalfields along with their families and worked in family groups or in pairs underground, the men cutting the coal and women loading the tubs. In 1919 women formed about 38 per cent. of the colliery labour. However, in pursuance of the policy to prohibit the employment of women underground, the Government of India ordered in 1929 that there should be a progressive reduction in the number of women employed underground. Regulations were made under the Indian Mines Act to this effect, and by about 1939 the employment of women underground was completely banned. The propor-

tion of women in the total labour force dropped to 11 per cent. during that year. The ban continued in force till 1942, by which time the Second World War was on, and shortage of labour was keenly felt in the coalmining areas. The Government had then to permit the re-employment of women underground, with the result that the number of women employed in mines and the percentage of women in the total labour force increased considerably during the period 1944-46. With the end of the war the ban was reimposed and the number of women employed in mines showed an inevitable decline. The figures relating to the employment of women in mines for certain selected years are shown in table VI.

TABLE VI. EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN IN MINES ¹

| Year | All mines | | | Coalmines | | |
|------------|-------------------------------|----------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| | Total No. of persons employed | Women employed | | Total No. of persons employed | Women employed | |
| | | Number | Percentage of total | | Number | Percentage of total |
| 1927 . . . | 269,290 | 78,593 | 29.2 | 165,213 | 47,443 | 28.7 |
| 1932 . . . | 204,658 | 38,307 | 18.7 | 148,489 | 26,847 | 18.1 |
| 1937 . . . | 267,858 | 48,283 | 18.0 | 171,149 | 22,887 | 15.4 |
| 1942 . . . | 357,646 | 68,345 | 19.1 | 215,086 | 31,614 | 14.7 |
| 1945 . . . | 386,290 | 94,978 | 24.6 | 294,902 | 72,805 | 24.7 |
| 1948 . . . | 395,865 | 81,502 | 20.6 | 308,268 | 55,971 | 18.2 |
| 1949 . . . | 421,159 | 85,170 | 20.2 | 318,354 | 54,000 | 17.0 |
| 1950 . . . | 471,761 | 95,506 | 20.5 | 349,889 | 57,390 | 16.4 |
| 1951 . . . | 549,048 | 109,607 | 19.9 | — | — | — |

¹ Figures prior to 1948 relate to pre-partition British India. The subsequent figures relate to the Indian Union. The coverage of the figures has gradually expanded since 1948, owing to the inclusion of figures relating to the former princely states. These changes, however, do not affect the percentages significantly.

Women are now employed in the open workings and on the surface only. On the surface they are employed mostly in wagon loading. Other occupations in which women are employed in coalmines are ash cleaning, pallet making, surface trimming, brick carrying and sanitary and conservancy work. Some employers feel that women are more suited for these jobs than men.

In the manganese mines women are employed in the loading of tubs and wagons and the dressing, sorting, picking, raising and selection of ores. In mica mines they are employed in the removal of dirt and earth from the pit to the mouth.

Plantations

Tea, coffee and rubber plantations in India employed on an average about 1.14 million workers per day in 1949. The exact

number of women out of this total is not known. It is estimated, however, on the basis of certain previous inquiries, that women form approximately 46 to 47 per cent. of the total, which gives a total of about 532,000 women workers in plantations.

The agricultural nature of the employment in plantations and the family basis of recruitment prevalent, especially in the north-eastern regions of the country, are the main reasons for the high proportion of women employed in this industry. Women are employed mostly on plucking leaf on tea estates and picking berries on coffee estates. They are also employed in weeding on tea, coffee, and rubber plantations. A few women also do semi-skilled jobs, such as pruning on tea estates and tapping on rubber estates. In several occupations women are considered as efficient as men; in some, such as the plucking of tea leaf, they are considered more efficient.

The proportion of women to total labour in plantations, unlike the proportion in factory and mining industries, has remained steady. In fact, during the last war, the percentage showed a slight increase, and women formed about 50 per cent. of the total adult labour force in the Assam tea plantations in 1943-44. Table VII shows the relevant figures for selected years in respect of tea plantations in Assam.

TABLE VII. WOMEN EMPLOYED ON THE ASSAM TEA PLANTATIONS

| Year ¹ | No. of adult workers on books | Women workers | |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------|------------|
| | | No. on books | Percentage |
| 1933-34 | 537,723 | 250,347 | 46.6 |
| 1938-39 | 570,888 | 271,446 | 47.5 |
| 1943-44 | 499,184 | 249,819 | 50.0 |
| 1948-49 | 482,251 | 228,928 | 47.5 |
| 1949-50 | 481,752 | 227,478 | 47.2 |

¹ Figures prior to 1948-49 include areas now in Pakistan.

When plantations were opened on virgin land far removed from settled villages, and often at high altitudes on hills in distant corners of the country, recruitment of labour for work on plantations became a problem, especially in Assam. Recourse was therefore had to the practice of recruiting labour, mostly on a family basis, from surplus labour areas in different parts of the country, through paid agents called *sardars*. The labour thus recruited was given facilities to settle on the estates, and small plots of land for private cultivation were often provided. Employment was given on a family basis to men, women and children on the plantations. This system of recruitment, however, led to

many abuses in the early stages, and the Government of India had to intervene. The result was the Tea Districts Emigrant Labour Act, 1932, under which the system of recruitment has been regulated and provision has been made for repatriation of the recruited labour. Most of the labour thus recruited has now settled on the estates. Recruitment of labour from distant places still goes on as before but on a smaller scale. In 1949-50 about 28,000 persons migrated to Assam for work on plantations as against 60,000 in 1929-30.

Miscellaneous

Among the other sectors of economic activity in which women are employed in large numbers are construction and municipal services. Reliable and complete statistical information relating to employment in these sectors is not available, but from such as is available it can be assumed that women form roughly about a quarter of the labour force employed in these sectors. Table VIII summarises the available information.

TABLE VIII. EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN IN PUBLIC WORKS AND MUNICIPALITIES

| Service ¹ | Total No. of workers employed | Women employed | |
|--|-------------------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| | | Number | Percentage of total |
| Central Public Works Department | 335,865 | 84,164 | 25 |
| State public works departments (10 states) | 1,604,868 | 348,303 | 22 |
| Major river valley projects (5) . . | 118,846 | 26,469 | 22 |
| Municipalities (105) | 118,647 | 28,269 | 24 |

¹ Figures in brackets indicate the number that reported.

While it is difficult to estimate even approximately the number of women in the many other sectors in which women, especially of the middle classes, obtain employment, employment exchange statistics of the placement of women may serve as an indicator of the employment opportunities available for them and their preferences. Table IX gives the placement figures for three years.

While there is a surplus of applicants for clerical posts, shortages are felt in filling vacancies for nurses, midwives, doctors, stenographers and trained teachers. One of the difficulties experienced by the employment exchanges in providing employment for women is the general disinclination to accept jobs away from the home. Many of the applicants, moreover, are untrained or

TABLE IX. NUMBER OF WOMEN PLACED IN EMPLOYMENT BY
EMPLOYMENT EXCHANGES

| Occupation | 1949 | 1950 | 1951 ¹ |
|--|--------|--------|-------------------|
| Telephone operators | 316 | 414 | 758 |
| Doctors, health visitors, vaccinators, nurses and midwives | 95 | 95 | 107 |
| Dispensers, compounders, dressers and hospital servants | 91 | 213 | 280 |
| Teachers, professors, lecturers and demonstrators | 337 | 297 | 259 |
| Administrative, supervisory and executive jobs | 53 | 18 | 10 |
| Clerks, typists, stenographers, secre- taries and receptionists | 1,271 | 985 | 1,533 |
| Tailors | 236 | 10 | 4 |
| Domestic servants, cooks and <i>ayahs</i> . | 165 | 207 | 200 |
| Sweepers | 217 | 789 | 1,234 |
| Reelers, winders and weavers . . . | 233 | 38 | 182 |
| Tobacco graders | — | 3,044 | 3,222 |
| Packer fillers | 23 | 53 | 42 |
| Unskilled workers | 7,378 | 16,963 | 15,414 |
| Miscellaneous | 1,205 | 1,014 | 3,172 |
| Total . . . | 11,620 | 24,140 | 26,417 |

¹ Figures for 11 months.

insufficiently trained for jobs such as teachers or nurses. Unattractive wages or salaries and conditions of service are also sometimes factors standing in the way of women accepting jobs in distant places.

Special training facilities are provided by the Ministry of Labour for women seeking jobs. Training is given in centres specially run by the Government in trades such as knitting, hand weaving, bleaching and dyeing, needlework, the manufacture of sports goods, stenography, tailoring, the manufacture of confectionery and the preservation of fruits and vegetables.

WAGES AND EARNINGS

The level of wages in particular, and the conditions of work in general, have their influence on the labour supply in any industry. In a study of the factors affecting women's employment, consideration of the position relating to wages and working conditions is, therefore, of primary importance.

The family living studies conducted by the Government of India in 1944-46 in some 20 industrial centres afford valuable information on the earning strength of women in working-class families. According to these studies the average number of adult working

women in working-class families varied from 0.01 per family in Ajmer to 0.73 in Jharia (Bihar). The percentage of the total earnings of the family earned by women ranged from 0.16 in Ajmer to 29.11 in Jharia. The relevant figures for a few important centres are given below.

TABLE X. EARNING STRENGTH OF WOMEN IN WORKING-CLASS FAMILIES

| Centre | Main industry | Total earning strength of family | Earning strength of adult women | Percentage of family earnings earned by women |
|----------------|----------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|---|
| Ahmedabad . . | Cotton | 1.56 | 0.16 | 8.06 |
| Bombay . . . | Cotton | 1.53 | 0.24 | — |
| Calcutta . . . | Jute and engineering | 1.43 | 0.09 | 2.26 |
| Delhi | Miscellaneous | 1.34 | 0.11 | 2.42 |
| Jamshedpur . | Iron and steel | 1.33 | 0.09 | — |
| Jharia | Coal | 2.02 | 0.73 | 29.11 |

The earning strength of women workers was highest in Jharia, which is the main centre for coalmining. Similar inquiries made in 1947 in the plantations revealed that the earning strength of women in an average working family in the tea plantations in Assam Valley was 0.96, the total earning strength being 2.44. In the coffee plantations in South India the earning strength of women per family was 0.98 out of a total earning strength of 2.38. In agriculture, according to an agricultural labour inquiry recently conducted by the Ministry of Labour, the earning strength of women per family in all India was 0.35 out of a total earning strength of 1.53. Conditions may have changed slightly since these inquiries were conducted, especially those relating to industrial labour, but it is difficult to make any guess regarding the direction or the extent of the change. There is little doubt, however, that women continue to play an important role as earners in working-class families.

The contribution of women workers to the family income has, however, in most cases been lower than it should be in proportion to their earning strength. There are two main reasons for this : (i) women are generally employed in less skilled jobs than men ; and (ii) even for the same job they are in many cases paid less than men. As was pointed out in a report of the International Labour Office—

... the vocational training of women is in many cases inferior to that of men, both because the available facilities are limited in the case of women and

because women are less eager than men to improve their vocational skill. This lessens the demand for female labour when demand and supply have free play in the employment market and consequently makes for a lower level of remuneration among women.¹

The principle of equal pay for men and women for work of equal value had until recently not found general acceptance in India. The Bombay Textile Labour Inquiry Committee in 1940 in fact justified differentiation and recommended lower levels of wages for women workers than for men. Of late, however, the principle of equal pay has come to be accepted as a general proposition, and there is a noticeable trend towards the abolition of distinctions in pay on the basis of sex. Important among the factors responsible for this welcome trend are (i) the fixation of statutory minimum wages under the Minimum Wages Act ; (ii) the standardisation of wages for different jobs by the industrial courts, tribunals, etc., that have adjudicated in industrial disputes ; (iii) the pressure of public opinion ; and (iv) the efforts of the I.L.O. An analysis of recent awards of adjudicators has revealed that in most cases equal rates of pay have been awarded to men and women for work of equal value, mainly on grounds of equity and justice. There are a few cases, however, even in recent years, where lower rates have been awarded for women. An important example is the recommendation of the Central Pay Commission that lower rates should be fixed for women, because while a man has to maintain a family of three, on an average, consisting of his wife and two children, a woman usually has less responsibility.

The Fair Wages Committee appointed by the Government of India adopted a sort of compromise in this matter. They recommended that " where employment is on piece rates and where the work done by men and women is demonstrably identical, no differentiation should be made between men and women workers regarding the wages payable. Where, however, women are employed on work exclusively done by them or where they are admittedly less efficient than men, the fair wages of women workers should be calculated on the basis of a smaller standard family than in the case of a man. " ²

Unfortunately no systematic statistics to show the relative levels of wages of women workers as compared with those of men are yet available, especially in the case of factory industries. Some data are, however, available in the case of mines and plantations, although even these do not precisely indicate the differences, if

¹ I.L.O.: *Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value*, Report V (1), 33rd Session, International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1950 (Geneva, 1949), pp. 98-99.

² *Report of the Committee on Fair Wages* (Simla, 1949) p. 33.

any, in the wage rates paid to men and women. The available information is, however, given below.

Factories

Table XI shows the average annual and hourly earnings of men and women in certain factory industries in 1949. The data are based on the Census of Manufacturing Industries in India.¹

TABLE XI. AVERAGE EARNINGS OF WORKERS IN MANUFACTURING INDUSTRIES

| Industry | Average annual earnings | | Average hourly earnings | | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|-------|-------------------------|-------|--------|-------|
| | Men | Women | Men | | Women | |
| | R. | R. | R. | A. P. | R. | A. P. |
| Cotton mills | 1,206 | 930 | 0 8 4 | | 0 6 5 | |
| Jute mills | 824 | 658 | 0 6 4 | | 0 5 0 | |
| Engineering | 923 | 549 | 0 6 5 | | 0 3 9 | |
| Iron and steel | 1,438 | 733 | 0 8 8 | | 0 4 3 | |
| Cement | 855 | 492 | 0 5 3 | | 0 3 2 | |
| Glass | 619 | 320 | 0 4 6 | | 0 2 5 | |
| Ceramics | 703 | 508 | 0 4 8 | | 0 3 3 | |
| Paper | 877 | 536 | 0 5 4 | | 0 3 6 | |
| Matches | 788 | 320 | 0 5 7 | | 0 2 4 | |
| Chemicals | 852 | 595 | 0 5 10 | | 0 3 10 | |
| Vegetable oil | 578 | 200 | 0 3 2 | | 0 1 9 | |
| Rice mills | 287 | 166 | 0 4 11 | | 0 2 2 | |

The table shows large differences in the average earnings of men and women. These differences, however, do not necessarily imply differences in the wage rates, since the average earnings depend not only on the rate but also on the occupational distribution of men and women. Since women are mostly employed in the lower and less skilled jobs, their average earnings would normally be less than those of men.

Wages in the cotton textile industry have been standardised in most of the centres by the awards of industrial courts, tribunals, etc. The minimum monthly basic wages fixed by the awards are R. 30 at Bombay and Kanpur, R. 28 at Ahmedabad, R. 26 at Sholapur, Indore, Nagpur and Madras and R. 20 in West Bengal. Dearness allowances, which are linked to cost-of-living indices, varied from R. 42 at Nagpur to about R. 75 at Ahmedabad in June 1953. In West Bengal the dearness allowance is paid at a

¹ "R.", "A." and "P." are used in the following pages for rupees, annas and pies. A rupee is equal to about 21 U.S. cents or 1s. 6d. An anna is one-sixteenth of a rupee, and a pie is one-twelfth of an anna.

flat rate of R. 30 per month. Except in West Bengal no distinction is made between men and women in the fixation of wages and dearness allowances. In West Bengal women get wages and allowances at three-fourths of the rates fixed for men. No distinction is, however, made in fixing the wages for men and women in the jute mill industry in the same state. The minimum monthly basic wage paid to the jute mill workers in West Bengal is R. 26, with an additional dearness allowance of R. 37½.

Besides the regular wages and allowances, it has become common in recent years, at any rate in the major industries such as cotton textiles, to pay an annual bonus, the rate of which varies from year to year and from centre to centre according to the profits. In the cotton textile industry in Bombay, for instance, two or three months' wages are usually paid as bonus to all workers. Bonuses are also paid to the jute mill workers in West Bengal and in many other industries.

Minimum wages payable to workers employed in certain "sweated" industries have recently been fixed by the Government under the Minimum Wages Act. In most cases, though not all, the rates fixed for men and women are the same. The rates also differ from place to place and from industry to industry. Table XII summarises the position in respect of some of the factory industries.

TABLE XII. MINIMUM WAGES FIXED UNDER THE MINIMUM WAGES ACT

| Industry | States fixing uniform rates for men and women | | States fixing different rates for men and women | | |
|---|--|---|--|----------------------|----------------------|
| | No. of states | Daily rates fixed | No. of states | Daily rates fixed | |
| | | | | Men | Women |
| Rice, flour and <i>dal</i> mills . . | 10 | R. 1 to R. 2-5-0 | 3 | A. 12 to R. 1-2-0 | A. 8 to A. 12 |
| Oil mills . . | 8 | R. 1 to R. 2-5-0 | 2 | R. 1 to R. 1-15-0 | A. 12 to R. 1-9-0 |
| Tanneries, leather g'ds. | 7 | R. 1 to R. 2-6-0 | 2 | R. 1 to R. 1-5-0 | A. 12 to R. 1-1-0 |
| Tobacco . . | 15 | (1) A. 12 to R. 2-2-0 (2) A. 10 to R. 2-8-0 ¹ | Nil — | — — | — — |
| Lac | 1 | R. 1 | 2 | A. 15 to R. 1-4-0 | A. 14 to R. 1 |

¹ Per 1,000 bidis.

Mines

The average daily earnings of men and women employed in open workings and on the surface in coal and other mines in December 1951 are shown in table XIII.

TABLE XIII. AVERAGE DAILY CASH EARNINGS OF MEN AND WOMEN EMPLOYED IN MINES, DECEMBER 1951

| Mines | Open workings | | Surface | |
|--------------------------|---------------|-------|---------|-------|
| | Men | Women | Men | Women |
| | R. A. | R. A. | R. A. | R. A. |
| <i>Coal :</i> | | | | |
| Bihar | 1 10 | 1 4 | 1 14 | 1 2 |
| West Bengal. | 1 8 | 1 10 | 1 15 | 1 3 |
| <i>Mica :</i> | | | | |
| Bihar | 1 7 | 1 6 | 1 11 | 1 8 |
| Andhra | 1 5 | 1 0 | 1 7 | 1 5 |
| <i>Manganese :</i> | | | | |
| Madhya Pradesh | 1 7 | 1 4 | 1 5 | 1 3 |
| <i>Iron ore :</i> | | | | |
| Bihar | 1 4 | 1 2 | 1 8 | 1 2 |
| <i>Gold :</i> | | | | |
| Mysore | — | — | 3 4 | 2 7 |

Wages in most of the coalfields have now been standardised. There is no difference between the piece rates payable to men and women. In regard to time rates, however, while in Bihar and West Bengal a minimum of A. 8 per day applies to both men and women alike, differential rates are fixed for men and women in other areas; the rates are A. 8 and A. 6 in Madhya Pradesh, A. 8 and A. 7 in Assam and A. 10 and A. 9 in Hyderabad. Besides the above basic wages, dearness allowances, bonuses and food concessions are also given to the colliery workers. Bonuses linked with attendance are paid at one-third of the basic wage, subject to certain conditions of eligibility. The average amount earned by a woman worker as bonus during 1951 worked out approximately at R. 10 per quarter. Food concessions given to colliery workers are evaluated at R. 1-15-0 a worker per week.

Mica workers in Bihar, both men and women, are entitled to the same minimum wage, namely, A. 6 per day, plus a dearness allowance amounting to 150 per cent. of the basic wage. In Andhra, unskilled surface workers in mica mines get a basic wage of R. 1 a day, plus a dearness allowance of R. 19 per month irrespective of sex. In the manganese mines in Madhya Pradesh the minimum

daily wage for women workers is A.14 as against R.1-2-0 for men. In the gold mines in Mysore unskilled women are paid A.9 a day as against A.13 paid to men employed on the surface. A monthly dearness allowance of A.2¼ per point of rise above 100 in the local cost-of-living index is also paid to all labour on daily rates.

Plantations

Minimum wages payable to plantation workers have now been fixed under the Minimum Wages Act in most of the states. In all cases differential rates are fixed for men and women on time rates. In Assam, for instance, where the bulk of the tea is grown, the minimum rates for women vary from A.14 to R.1 and for men from A.15 to R.1-2-0. In Madras women are paid R.1 a day as against R.1-5-0 paid to men. Women in plantations are, however, employed mostly on piece rates, which are the same for men and women, and it is not uncommon for women to earn more than men in piece-rate jobs. In work connected with cultivation, such as forking, weeding, etc., the rates paid to women are stated to be less because the tasks assigned are lighter.

Statistics relating to the average earnings of men and women employed in plantations are not available in all cases. The data available in respect of Assam show that in 1949-50 the average monthly earnings of women in the Assam Valley amounted to R.15-15-0 as against the corresponding figure of R.21-12-0 for men. Eliminating the effect of absenteeism in these figures, it is estimated that the average monthly potential wage of women workers would be R.19-8-0 as against a corresponding wage of R.24-9-0 for men.

Municipalities and Public Works

In municipalities women are employed mostly as sweepers and are generally paid at monthly rates of pay which vary from city to city. In the larger cities the monthly pay of a sweeper, including dearness and other allowances, is found to vary from R.34 in Cuttack (Orissa) to R.80 in Delhi. In Bombay it is R.77, in Calcutta R.55 and in Madras R.39.

Monthly rated workers of the Central Public Works Department get wages at the standard rates prescribed by the central government. Workers in the lowest category get a basic wage of R.30 and a dearness allowance of R.40 per month. Wages paid to workers on daily rates have been fixed under the Minimum Wages Act. These rates vary from place to place and are lower for women than for men. In Madhya Pradesh, where wages are lowest, women are paid A.10 a day while men get A.13 to R.1

a day. In Bombay, where the rates are highest, women get R.1-7-0 to R.1-12-0 per day as against R.2 to R.2-2-0 a day for men. The rates paid in the state public works departments and the river valley projects are similar.

Agriculture

Wages of agricultural workers vary widely from place to place. According to the agricultural labour inquiry recently conducted by the Ministry of Labour, the daily rates of wages paid to women workers for harvesting, for instance, varied from about A. 8½ in Vindhya Pradesh to R. 3-11-0 in the Punjab. The corresponding rates for men ranged from A.9 in Vindhya Pradesh to R.4-4-0 in the Punjab. The rates are about the same in other occupations and are generally lower in the southern than in the northern states. The inquiry also showed that it was fairly common to pay a part of the wage, if not the whole, in kind. Thus in about 52 per cent. of the wage quotations wages were entirely paid in cash, in 38 per cent. entirely in kind and in 10 per cent. partly in cash and partly in kind. Cash wages were sometimes supplemented by perquisites, such as cooked food, tobacco, buttermilk, etc.

WORKING CONDITIONS

The conditions of work of industrial workers in India are regulated to a large extent by legislation enacted by the central and state governments. The hours of work, holidays and leave, environmental conditions at the place of work and other matters relating to employment, in factories, mines and plantations in particular, are governed by the Factories Act, the Mines Act and the Plantations Labour Act. The maximum weekly limit on hours of work permissible under these Acts is 48 in factories and mines and 54 in plantations. The maximum daily hours are fixed at 9 for work in factories and on the surface in mines, with a spread-over of 10½ hours in factories and 12 in mines. Although the permissible daily hours for work on plantations are not prescribed, the maximum spread-over is fixed at 12 hours. Provision is made for a rest interval of at least half an hour after five hours of work in factories and on the surface in mines. The employment of women between 7 p.m. and 6 a.m. is prohibited in factories, mines and plantations.

There is provision for compulsory weekly holidays under all three Acts. Workers who have been denied weekly holidays for any unavoidable reason are entitled to compensatory holidays. Annual leave with pay is allowed at the rate of one day for every 20 days of work in factories and plantations (subject to a minimum of 10

days in factories) and at 14 days for monthly paid employees and 7 days for weekly paid employees for every 12 months of service in mines.

Both the Factories Act and the Mines Act authorise the appropriate government to fix the maximum load that may be lifted by women. The maximum fixed in most cases for adult women is 65 lb. The state governments in the case of factories, and the central government in the case of mines, are also empowered to prohibit, restrict or regulate the employment of women in dangerous operations.

Under the Factories Act, the Mines Act and the Plantations Labour Act the provision of separate lavatories for women is compulsory. Separate washing facilities must be provided for women in factories, and separate pithead baths and locker rooms in mines.

The maintenance of crèches for the use of the children of women working in factories and plantations where 50 or more women are employed is obligatory under the Factories Act and the Plantations Labour Act. The supply of at least half a pint of milk to each child attending the crèche is also a statutory requirement. The central government is authorised under the Mines Act to frame rules regarding crèches in mines.

Legislation exists in most of the major states providing for compulsory maternity benefits to women workers employed in factories. A central Act is also in force providing maternity benefits for women employed in mines. Plantation workers are covered by state legislation in Assam, West Bengal and Travancore-Cochin. The Plantations Labour Act recently passed, however, covers this field on an all-India basis. The benefits provided for under these laws include special leave, cash benefits, medical help and pre-natal and post-natal care. The period of maternity leave varies from 7 weeks in Madras to 12 weeks in West Bengal, Hyderabad and Travancore-Cochin. The cash benefit payable varies from A. 8 per day upwards and is linked to the average daily earnings of the worker in some states. Free medical aid or the services of qualified midwives are required to be provided under some of the laws. Provisions exist in all the Acts for the protection of women against dismissal while they are drawing maternity benefit.

The Employees' State Insurance Act, 1948, which is now being gradually enforced, covers maternity benefits also and is expected to replace the present maternity benefit legislation so far as perennial factories are concerned. The period of benefit under this Act is 12 weeks, of which not more than 6 may precede the expected date of confinement. The benefit payable is A. 12 per day or the usual sickness benefit rate, whichever is the greater.

Inspectors of factories appointed by the state governments are required to look into the conditions of sanitation, ventilation and lighting in factories and to enforce safety precautions with a view to preventing accidents, and inspectors of mines have similar responsibilities in respect of mines. Accidents, however, still occur, though their frequency rate is very much less today than it was some years ago. In mines the fatal accident rate per 1,000 workers employed was 0.07 in open workings and 0.17 on the surface among women as against 0.27 and 0.20 respectively among men in 1950. The rate of serious accidents was also less among women than among men. The Workmen's Compensation Act, 1923, makes provision for the payment of compensation in cases of accidents resulting in death, permanent disablement or temporary disablement involving forced idleness for seven days or more. The Employees' State Insurance Act, 1948, now provides for accident compensation also so far as perennial factories are concerned.

Interviews with women workers held recently in connection with an inquiry into the economic and social status of women workers have shown that they generally feel the strain of the working life. This is natural, since working women have to shoulder the dual responsibility of work at home and work in the factory, mine or plantation, as the case may be. The bulk of the working women are married and have children. They have to look after household duties, such as the cooking of food and the care of children, and then put in a full day's work at the workplace. The work is strenuous, especially in the mines. Women who are employed mostly on the surface have to work in the open in the scorching summer heat and the monsoon rains. In the quarries they have to carry loads of 60 to 70 lb. of coal up steep inclines. In loading wagons they have to work amidst smouldering and burning heaps of soft coke. In the plantations too, most of the work has to be done in the open. In Assam, for instance, the busy season in the tea industry synchronises with the hot weather, which is followed by the rainy season. In the hot season work has to be done in the open, with little or no shade ; when it rains the ground is infested with leeches, which create trouble.

CONCLUSION

Problems relating to the economic and social status of women workers in India were discussed at a recent session of the Indian Labour Conference on the basis of a report on the subject prepared by the Labour Bureau. All sections of the Conference were unanimous in their recognition of the need for intensive and continuous study of the problems relating to women workers. Proposals are

now being considered by the Government of India for setting up an agency for making special studies of the varied problems of women in general and working women in particular.

As will be seen from the foregoing brief account of women's employment in India, the Government has always taken and is continuously taking sympathetic interest in the problems relating to women workers and has been trying its best to protect them from exploitation. One section of opinion in India, however, seems to think that protective legislation should not impede the prospects of employment of women. It is, in fact, difficult to assess precisely the effects, if any, of protective legislation on the employment opportunities of women. While the percentage of women to the total employed has no doubt diminished to a certain extent in some sectors of employment, there does not appear to be any reduction in the total number of women employed. The traditional reluctance of women in this country to seek employment unless driven to it by need and the availability of a large unemployed surplus labour force among men perhaps largely explain why there are not more women in employment.

The directive principles of the Constitution of the Republic of India emphasise equal rights and opportunities to all irrespective of religion, caste, creed or sex. Although the Equal Remuneration Convention has not yet been ratified by India, it will be seen from the above discussion of wages and earnings that there is a definite trend in this direction and it may not be long before equality even in this respect becomes an established fact.
