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# Women workers in garment industries a sociological study in Bangalore city

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**Abstract**
A popular assumption about the benefits of globalization is that growth and its assumed redistribution helps the masses crawl out of poverty. With an intent to test this, a field survey of workers engaged in the manufacture of ready-made garments in Bangalore, a major centre for international and national manufacturing supply chains, and employing 0.75 million workers, was undertaken. Its purpose was to evaluate the nature of job tenures, working conditions, employee benefits, family income and expenditure on non-food essentials like transportation, health, education, etc. Even though the family sizes appear to be reasonably small, the overall income and expenditure balance is very precarious. Some of the noticeable facts are that the workforce is predominantly female (75 per cent) and that the working hours are long, on an average being nine hours/day. Most of the weekly holidays are observed but without any pay. The turnover of workers is also very high. Indian Society thrives on contradictions. The field of labor is a bundle of contradictions. Even since Mark Holmstrom, an Australian Sociologist of labor introduced a dichotomy between organized labor and unorganized labor it has become a persistence source of great deal of discussion, debate and discourse among Sociologists, labor economists, social anthropologists and labor activists. The former has been dubbed as "labor aristocracy" who has used labor unions to gain wide range of benefits and privileges even at the cost of their less fortunate counterpart the unorganized labor.

**Keywords:** Unorganized workers, labor creative's, migrant workers, women workers, house booming

## 1. Introduction
Indian Society thrives on contradictions. The field of labour is a bundle of contradictions. Even since Mark Holmstrom, an Australian Sociologist of labour introduced a dichotomy between organized labour and unorganized labour it has become a persistence source of great deal of discussion, debate and discourse among Sociologists, labour economists, social anthropologists and labour activists. The former has been dubbed as "labour aristocracy" who has used labour unions to gain wide range of benefits and privileges even at the cost of their less fortunate counterpart the unorganized labour. The makers of revolution have become the betrayers of revolution of the total count of the gainfully employed based on both principal and secondary workers counted by the National Sample Survey the NSS) an astounding 912 percent were in the unorganized sector in 1999-2000, increasing by rather more than a whole percentage point in 2004-20os.

A large prop onion of this informal unorganized sector employment is in agriculture, but non-agricultural activities still account for a substantial 40 percent. Over half of India's national output comes from the unorganized sector while employment in the formal sector has been stagnant in the last decade, employment creation in the informal segment of the economy has been tremendous. Broad employment trends for the organized and unorganized sector is shown in table for the years 1983, 1987-88, 1993-94 and 1999-2000 his evidence that throughout this period an overwhelmingly large portion of the workforce in India is found to be employed in the unorganized sector, out of million workers in 1999-2000, it is estimated that J712 million workers (Nearly percent) are employed in the unorganized segment of the economy whams only 278 million workmen perked are engaged in the organized sector.

The share of unorganized employment in the economy has displayed remarkable steadiness over the years. The share of informal employment has risen from 92 per cent (Nearly 276 million out of 300 million) in 1983 to 93 percent in the 1999-2000.

It is cleared that employment opportunity in the organized sector has remained more or less stagnant, showing only a marginal increase from 24 million in 1983 to 27.8 million in 1999-2000. The near stagnancy of employment opportunity in the organized sector becomes evident, where the compound annual growth rates of employment in the organized and unorganized sector are presented. Employment in the organized sector has registered a growth of 125 percent between 1983 and 1987-88 and 1.26 percent between 1983 and 1993-94 but during the decade of the 1990s, we witness a sharp decline in employment opportunities. During this period organized employment grew by only 0.34 percent overall, the decade of the 1990s in India has been characterized by slow growth in employment opportunities. This is also true for the unorganized sector of the economy.

Much has been written about the ongoing process of global restructuring that has continuously been redefining capital–labour relations for the past quarter century. It keeps expanding massively the radius of capital's organizational control. The synergetic use of financial innovations and of new information and transportation technologies decentralizes production and distribution while simultaneously integrating management and control across the globe. It keeps aggravating the asymmetric development of the production, surplus accumulation and income distribution functions.

One of the more visible regional–urban processes associated with this asymmetric development is described as the tendency for "placeless power and powerless places" to emerge. This phrase indicates the increasing subordination of populations and activities of a particular territory to activities and decisions that take place far beyond its boundaries. The dependence is not as much between geographical spaces as of particular geographical spaces upon the rootless agglomerates of capital (Castells and Henderson, 1987) [6].

## 2. State of the ready-made garment export industry

For the purpose of accounting in international trade, ready-made garments are defined as articles of apparel and accessories that are knitted or crocheted or readied by other processes. The growth pattern of RMG since 1991 and the value of exports are reflected in Tables 1-2.

The RMG constituted 7.87 and 8.37 per cent share in India's total exports during the years 2004-05 and 2005-06, respectively. India's exports of RMG—knit and woven apparel in— 2005-06, amounted to $8.5 billion, showing a growth of 29.6 per cent over the previous year, and a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 8.8 per cent during the preceding period since 2000-01 when the total exports of RMG were worth $5.569 billion.

Together USA and the European Union (EU) import 70 per cent of the RMG exported worldwide and USA, with a 27.8 per cent share, tops the importers list. USA, the biggest market for Indian RMG, registered a growth of 43.02 per cent in 2005-06 over the previous financial year. Over the said period, India became the third largest exporter to USA surpassing China (Apparel—The Clothiers Digest, 2007). EU currently accounts for nearly half of India's apparel export. Almost the entire RMG export from India is to USA and EU.

Within India, cotton garments, with 65 per cent share, lead in the market while the blended garments category follows at 35 per cent. Seventy per cent of the total production is for domestic markets, and the remaining 30 per cent for export, which is handled mainly by the organized.

**Table 1:** Indian Ready-made Garment Market Growth Rates: Past and Future.

| Year | % Growth rate |
|---|---|
| 1995-96 to 2000-01 | 18.7 |
| 2001-02 to 2005-05 | 13.2 |
| 2006-07 to 2007-10 | 10.9 |
| 2010-11 to 2013-14 | 9.3 |
| 2014-15 to 2017-18 | 8.0 |

***Source:*** Centre for Industrial and Economic Research, Industrial Techno-economic Services Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi.

**Table 2:** Export of Indian Ready-made Garments (US$)

| Year | (millions) | Relative % increase |
|---|---|---|
| 1995-2000 | 1,403 | 1 00.0 |
| 2001-2005 | 2,236 | 159.4 |
| 2006-2010 | 3,676 | 262.0 |
| 2011-2014 | 5,569 | 396.9 |
| 2015-2018 | 6,561 | 467.6 |

***Source:*** Handbook of Statistics on the Indian Economy, RBI, 2005-06.

## 3. Impact of the end of multi-fibre agreement

The Multi-fiber Agreement (MFA) governed global trade in garments from 1974 to 1994. On January 1, 1995, MFA was replaced by the WTO's Agreement on Textile and Clothing with a ten-year period for its ultimate elimination in favor of global free trade. Hence, since January 2005, the main importing countries have been free to import from any exporting country without the earlier system of quotas that were allocated to exporting nations. The quotas were meant to limit competition and protect RMG manufacturing-related jobs in many developing countries in this $350 billion industry with a 40 million workforce worldwide (ILO, 2005) [13]. In the post-MFA environment, business and workers in the textile and clothing sector are under tremendous pressure to produce the right products, at the right time, at the right price. As a result, it is likely that the RMG manufacturing will shrink further or collapse in USA, Europe, and Japan and even in Latin American countries like Mexico.

Most studies, however, indicate that in the post-quota free trade regime, there will be an expanding share for India and China. In fact, after 2005, CRISIL studies over-ambitiously indicated that India's RMG industry can attain a size of US $85 billion by 2010.

China, which was poised to capture the lion's share of the global garment market with its large-scale garment manufacturing and exporting capabilities, has a cap of 7-8 per cent growth per annum to USA and the EU until 2008, thus giving India an opportunity to increase the scale, efficiency and vertical integration in its garment supply chain. Most of the apparel manufacturing in India is still undertaken in the unorganised sector, and two-thirds of the organized sector companies have average turnovers of less than $50 million, and access to finance, new technology, and scale are generally poor. China has an advantage in that respect. The big Chinese firms have turnovers of $800 million to $1200 million each. Bangladesh, Thailand and Sri Lanka also offer stiff competition to India in RMG export.

## 4. The study

The study evaluates empirically the impact of the export-oriented growth of the garment industry of Bangalore on its workers in terms of the conditions of their employment—wages, cost of living and expenditure patterns, working hours, non-wage benefits, working conditions, and the state of their unions—in order to evaluate how the gains from trade are distributed and how labor is controlled in the new international division of labour. Further, very large sourcing of RMG is done by global retail giants like Wal-Mart and others known for their special price tactics with local producers. The sample, therefore, specially sought to identify workers in factories supplying to Wal-Mart in order to comment on the effects of monopoly capital in retail on the workers in the supply chain.

### 4.1. Methodology

Questionnaires were administered to a simple random sample of 134 garment workers outside the factory gates and at their residences (slums in the proximity of such factories). Factories were randomly chosen from three main industrial clusters of Yesvantpur industrial area (north-west periphery of Bangalore), Peenya (north-west from the centre of the city and regarded as the largest industrial estate in Asia), and Bommanahalli (to the south-east). In all, some 23 garment factories are represented in the sample. The investigation was carried out during the period February–April, 2007, in the course of which a suicide by a garment worker in the factory premises was reported by the mainstream media, and trade union leaders told us that suicides by workers were not rare but occurred in the slums where they lived and not in factory premises.

### 4.2. Characteristics of Sample Population

The most noticeable aspect of the garment workers is a very high proportion of youth among them—85 per cent. The average age of the respondents is not more than 28 years. A majority of the respondents (75 per cent) are women. The younger workers have higher entry level education/skill than their older counterparts (Table 3). The younger female workers are distinctly better educated than their older counterparts (Table 4). A closer analysis shows that the young female workers entering these factories are better educated than their older counterparts. Among the respondents, 78 per cent in the age group of 18-25 years are class ten graduates (matriculates).

**Table 3:** Distribution Age Group vs. Education Level

| Age | Under VIII | VIII | X | XII | Graduate | Tech-Dip | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 18-25 | 2 | 9 | 23 | 13 | 2 | 1 | 50 |
| 26-30 | 6 | 8 | 16 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 33 |
| 31-35 | 6 | 11 | 10 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 31 |
| 35-45 | 8 | 6 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 20 |
| Total | 22 | 34 | 55 | 17 | 4 | 2 | 134 |
| % | 16.4 | 25.4 | 41.0 | 12.7 | 3.0 | 1.5 | |

(***Source:*** Primary Data)

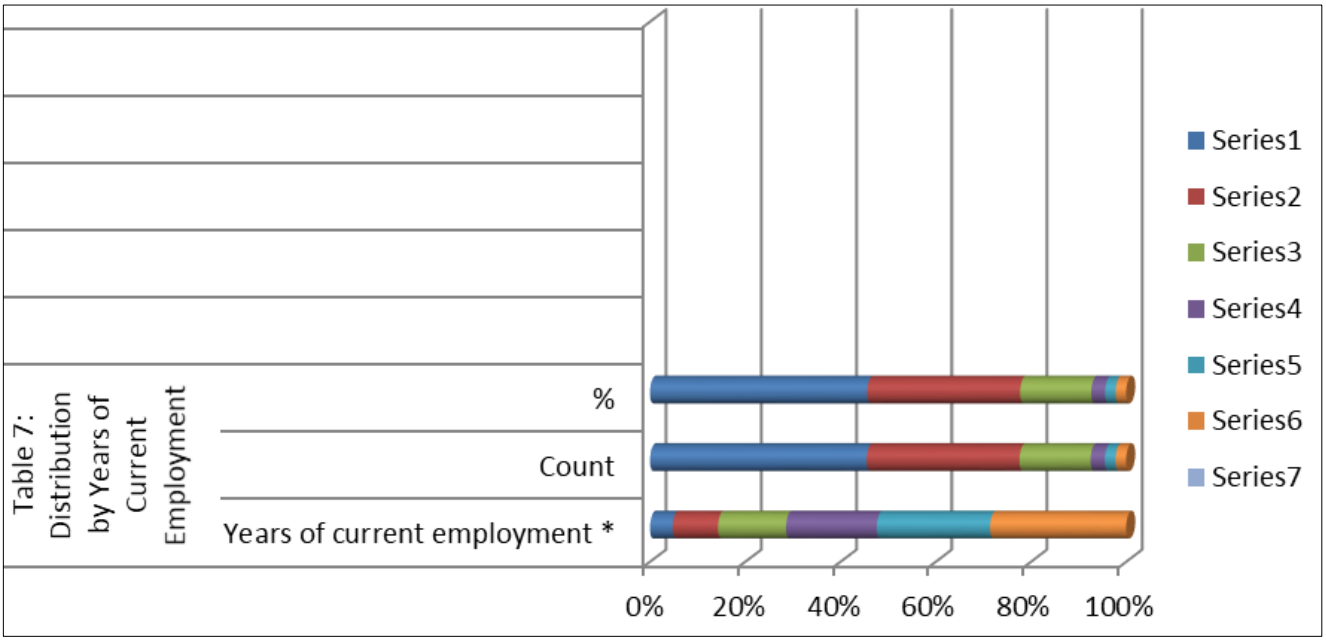
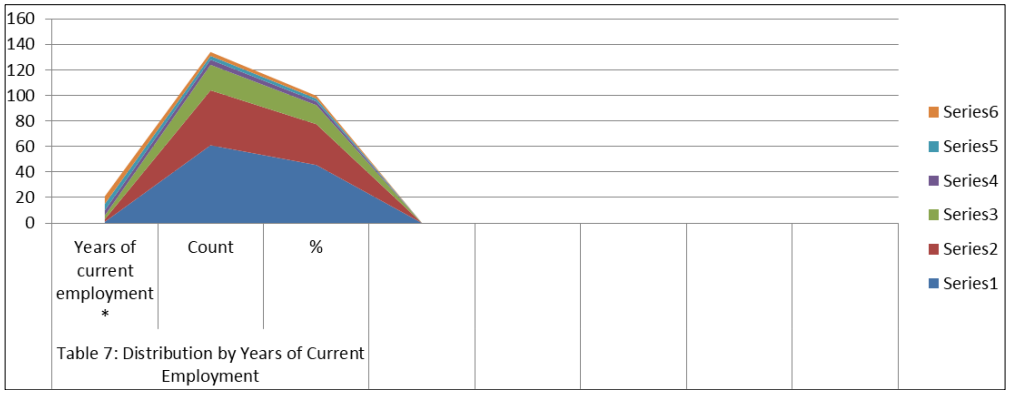



**Table 4:** Distribution Gender vs. Education Levels

| Age | Under VIII | VIII | X | XII | Graduate | Tech-Dip | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Female | 21 | 27 | 35 | 13 | 3 | 1 | 100 |
| | (21%) | (27%) | (35%) | | | | |
| Male | 1 | 7 | 20 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 34 |
| | (3 %) | (20%) | (58%) | | | | |
| Total | 22 | 34 | 55 | 17 | 4 | 2 | 134 |

(***Source:*** Primary Data)




Above in terms of basic education. On the whole, however, the female worker is likely to be lesser educated than her male counterpart, with the respective ratios of matriculates for females and males being 38 per cent and 58 per cent. Of the total number of workers, 69 per cent are Kannada-speaking, indicating that they are natives of the state. However, most of them have strong rural roots and many are first generation immigrants. The second largest linguistic group is the Tamil-speaking one (16 per cent), and the Telugu-speaking group is the third (10 per cent), while the remaining are Marathi, Urdu and Malayalam-speaking, indicating that most of the inter-state migration takes place from the neighboring states. There are no Hindi-speaking workers in the sample. By their social category, an overwhelming majority belong to the lower castes. There is not a single Hindu upper caste worker in the sample. Of the total number of workers, 73 per cent belong to the category of Other Backward Castes (OBCs), 16 per cent are Scheduled Castes (SCs) and 4.5 per cent Scheduled Tribes (STs). Others, Muslims and Christians account for the rest.

## 5. Survey Results

### 5.1. Work Process

The work process in the factories supplying to Indian and foreign corporate/large retailers is organized in relatively large modern factories, usually employing not less than 600–700 workers each, and using a range of tools like computers for designing, and machinery for cutting, sewing, interlocking, buttonholing, embroidery, ironing, and so on. A factory of that size does not take more than three months to start up. The process, however, is labour-intensive by modern industry standards, wherein an investment of 0.1 million generates about 6-8 jobs (Apparel Export Promotion Council, 2007) [1].

Even the very large RMG companies in Bangalore like Gokuldas (comprising 54 units employing approximately 40,000 workers), Leela (comprising 14 units with 15,000 workers), Texport (comprising 12 units with 15,000 workers), Sai (comprising 16 units with 20,000 workers), and Texport Syndicate (comprising 8 units employing 10,000 workers), usually have multiple units spread over the city rather than huge Chinese style plants.

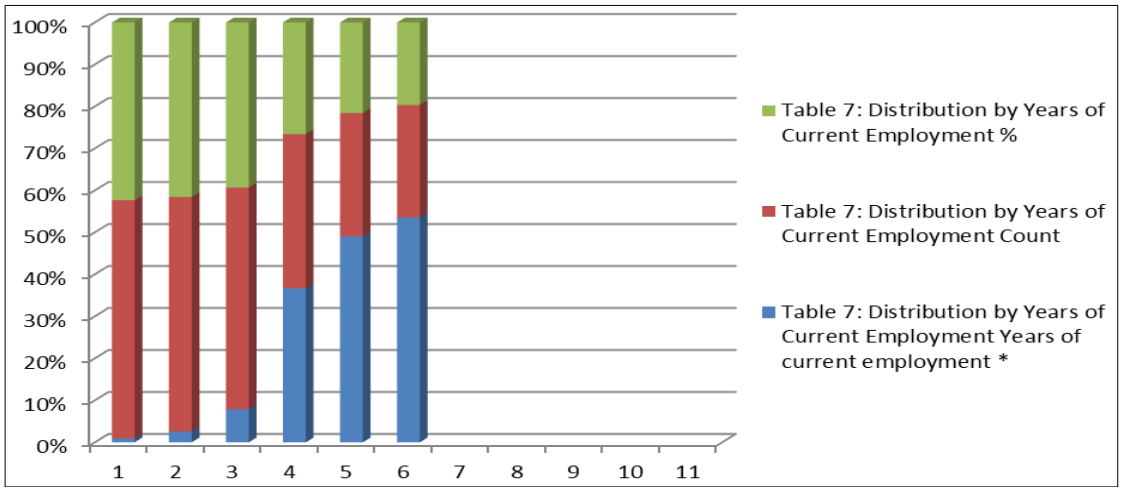
Within each factory establishment, employees are organized in a hierarchy of jobs below the management category. Designing is at the top end followed by cutting, sample-making and quality control. On the factory floor are the production manager, floor-in-charge, supervisors, finishing checkers, quality controllers, feeding helpers, mechanics, tailors, trimmers, helpers, and packers (Table 5).

Production is usually organized around two systems—the individual piece flow system, and the parts and assembly system. In the former system, individual pieces flow along a line.

**Table 5:** Distributions of Sample Workers by their Job Description

| Job description | Number | % |
|---|---|---|
| Helper | 22 | 16.4 |
| Tailor | 73 | 54.4 |
| Feed Helper | 13 | 9.7 |
| Packer | 3 | 2.2 |
| Batch Master | 1 | 0.7 |
| Supervisor | 3 | 2.2 |
| Floor-in-charge | 2 | 1.5 |
| Quality Control | 2 | 1.5 |
| Mechanic | 4 | 3.0 |
| Misc. | 11 | 8.2 |

(***Source:*** Primary Data)



The production cycle for the global brands has a lead time of 6-9 months and begins with predictions by fashion houses, usually in syndicate with large brands about the fashions, colors and styles that will dominate the next season. Both auditors and quality controllers patronized by global brands and their merchandisers all over the world list and rank producers on various criteria like the capacity for production, quality, and labour standards, etc. Their listing involves physical inspection of the site as also the inspection of final products. The bigger brands are also more stringent regarding quality and timely delivery. Fierce competition exists among producers in diverse geographical locations throughout Asia and Latin America, as they have to bid for these large orders from global retailers. This competition has become more intense during the post-2005 period, for the reasons mentioned above.

A survey conducted among the workers found that global competition coincided with some characteristic conditions of work for the workers employed in the factories.

### 5.2. Conditions of Work

Of the total workers, 94.5 per cent describe themselves as temporary while the remaining 4.5 per cent claim to be permanent. However, the distinction is not an official or distinct one, because almost all the sampled workers have a Provident Fund (PF) (96 per cent), and Employees State Insurance (ESI) (95 per cent), and they receive bonus payments and overtime. Among the respondents, 68 per cent said they had received some training on the job (Table 6). There also seems to be no distinction in other conditions like the eight-hour factory work, the payment of overtime, and the comfort of a lunch break. Discussions with Trade Union leaders reveal that workers close to the management are typically made to feel permanent while mechanics usually have a longer-term relation with the factory.

The human resource management practices in these factories are such that there is an unwritten understanding that dismissal without notice is a reality. All the workers are thus 'permanently temporary'. There are no strong unions to create a distinction between permanent and temporary workers. Further, there is such a poor rate of unionisation among the workers that the dismissed workers can hope to recover their PF dues from one employer to join another factory only if they do not resist the dismissal. Workers also respond to these conditions with high rates of absenteeism.

**Table 6:** Distribution of Workers by Benefits

| Type of benefit | Count | % |
|---|---|---|
| No weekly off without pay | 129 | 96.3 |
| Paid leave | 12 | 8.9 |
| Overtime | 132 | 98.5 |
| Bonus | 132 | 98.5 |
| PF | 129 | 96.3 |
| ESI | 127 | 94.8 |
| Lunch break | 134 | 100 |
| Training | 91 | 67.9 |

(***Source:*** Primary Data)

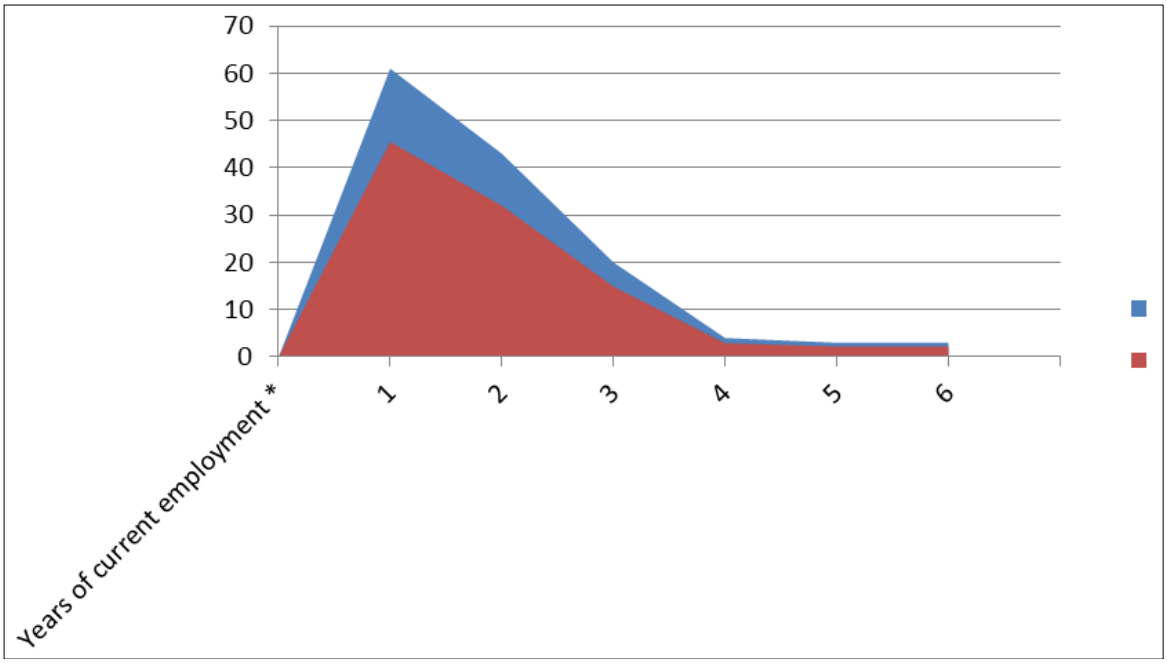
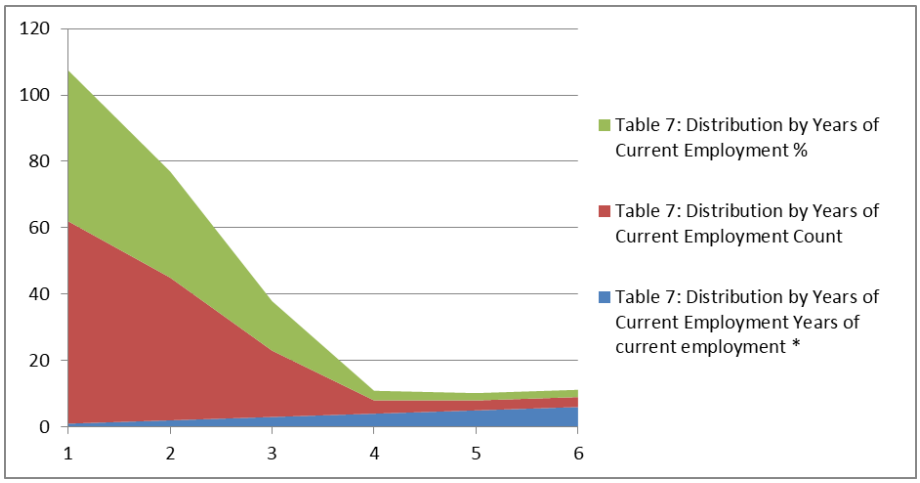



**Table 7:** Distribution by Years of Current Employment

| Years of current employment * | Count | % |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 61 | 45.5 |
| 2 | 43 | 32.0 |
| 3 | 20 | 14.9 |
| 4 | 4 | 2.9 |
| 5 | 3 | 2.2 |
| 6 | 3 | 2.2 |

Note: * Average years of current employment = 1.9 years.
(***Source:*** Primary Data)



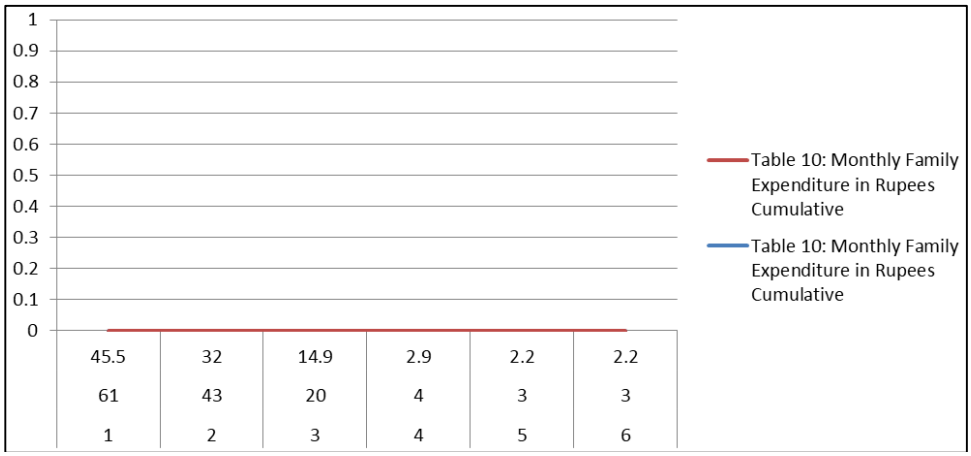

Turnover and frequent visits to their villages only to return in search of re-employment in the same or another factory. Since there is no paid leave whatsoever, seasonal journeys to the native village or illness are likely to result in a change of employer or break in service. Therefore, the average number of years of current employment was 1.9 for the sampled workers. Of the sampled workers, 45.5 per cent revealed that they had been in the current employment for less than one year, and 92 per cent of them had been in their current job for three years or less (Table 7). The permanent workers are not distinguished by their long years of service (all of them had not more than two years in the current job!). There is no relationship between the years of service or wages in the current employment. This is indicative of a very high turnover among the workers in these factories. The reasons for this are not too difficult to discern.

The average wage income of the sampled workers is Rs. 3284 per month. The standard practice in the factories is to pay the legal minimum wage rate for unskilled labour as applicable. In Karnataka, this is Rs. 90 per day for unskilled workers; it is calculated and paid monthly but for 26 days. Wages for the weekly holiday (Sunday) are duly deducted for temporary workers. Some annual increments are added every year but 61 per cent of the workers said that wages had not increased since they started working on their current job. Given that the workers do not/cannot stay in their jobs long enough to avail of any raise, the average wages remain low and close to the statutory minimum wage. Of the total number of workers, 92 per cent are in the category of those earning wages less than or equal to Rs. 4500. Since the bulk of the workers are tailors (54 per cent), which constitute a skilled category, this is indeed a low-wage industry. The average wages are even lower (Rs. 3207) in factories supplying to Wal-Mart, which is a global bulk buyer, as compared to the average wages of workers in companies not supplying to Wal-Mart (Rs. 3880).

Wages are also not linked directly to the basic entry skill level like secondary or higher secondary school level education, but the possibility of higher wages increases somewhat with higher education levels (Table 8). In the sample, no graduate and diploma holder gets an income of less than Rs. 4500 per month. On the other hand, no non-matriculate has an income of more than Rs. 4500. The workers with technical diplomas have the highest probability of earning higher wages.

| Education level | Wage category (Rs.) | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1500 | 2000 | 2500 | 3000 | 3500 | 4500 | 74500 | Total |
| Under VIII | 2 | 9 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 8 | 0 | 22 |
| VIII | 3 | 7 | 2 | 6 | 1 | 15 | 0 | 34 |
| X | 3 | 6 | 6 | 7 | 4 | 23 | 5 | 55 |
| XII | 0 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 7 | 0 | 17 |
| Graduate | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| Technical Diploma | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | 2 |

(***Source:*** Primary Data)



Regarding the duration of working hours, only 56 per cent of the sample workers reported working for eight hours per day, while the remaining worked for ten or more hours. Although most of the workers said that they received overtime (calculated at double the rate of the normal hourly wage rate), there were also widespread complaints of unpaid work extracted after working hours and work intensification, and speeding up during working hours. Over 53 per cent respondents said that their working hours had increased since they started work and the remaining said that the workday remained the same in their current jobs. Considering that the average length of service per worker is short (less than two years), there is reason to believe that the workday is lengthened after the induction of workers into the factory. Once again, this is more common among companies supplying to Wal-Mart than those not supplying to Wal-Mart.

### 5.3. Impact of Robust Growth on Conditions of Work

There is evidence of robust growth in the garment industry over a 15-year period. As predicted by the comparative cost advantage theory of trade, low-skill, low-wage manufacturing jobs have shifted to the labour-surplus regions of the world and indeed, within each country as well, they are moving out to the low- wage regions—in this case, the outskirts of the city of Bangalore. Over such a long period of time, the increasing employment of such low-skill labour in an industry located even in a low-wage region should tighten the local labour market, albeit gradually and an upward pressure on wages in these regions should be expected as a trickle – down, redistributive effect of growth induced by globalization.

Production managers also claim that high turnover is a significant problem. So why have the wages and lock-in incentives like attractive wage increments and pension funds not been introduced? Instead, there are reports of industry representations demanding more flexibility in the labour laws and a longer work week (Business Standard, 2006) [5]. Is this a case of a sub-optimal equilibrium in the industry that can only be corrected by regulatory intervention?

### 5.4. Cost of Living

What the RMG export boom has meant to the workers of the industry in the city cannot be estimated from the wage structure alone; low as it is. The cost of living in the city, travelling to work, and the larger cost of the social reproduction of labour, in general, need to be factored in. This becomes particularly important as public services are simply allowed to deteriorate or are privatized in the guise of public- private partnerships that have blossomed in the post-liberalization period. The user cost of public services like transport has risen sharply in the past few years, and so has the cost of public health services. New public housing is non-existent and a majority of the workers live in slums, which have not been re-developed or regularized for a long time. With new rural migrants arriving and competing for urban space, slum rents have gone up sharply. Water and electricity charges are also steep, if one considers the cost per unit of consumption.

**Table 9:** Cost of Living (April 2007)

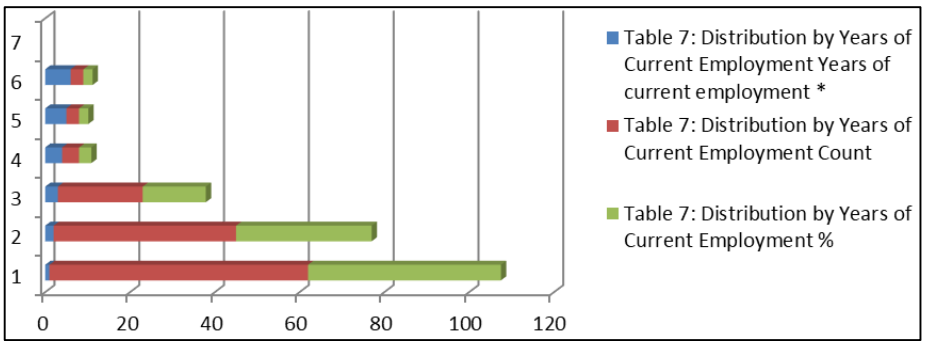
| | |
|---|---|
| Sample families (No.) | 33 |
| Average family size (persons) | 4.3 person |
| Average earners per family | 2.2 |
| Average non-earning dependents per family | 2.1 |
| Families with school-going children | 18 |
| Average school-going children for such families | 1.8 |
| Average school-going children for the sample | 1 |
| Average income from other family members | Rs. 3961/ month |
| Average own income of workers | Rs. 3284/ month |
| Total average family income | Rs. 7245/ month |

(***Source:*** Primary Data)

**Table 10:** Monthly Family Expenditure in Rupees

| Item | Expediture | Cumulative |
|---|---|---|
| Total transport expenses per family | 1412 | 1412 |
| Average rent for rent paying families (26) | 1311 | 2723 |
| Average healthcare expenses | 667 | 3390 |
| Average school fees | 229 | 3619 |
| Average electricity bills | 100 | 3719 |
| Average water bills | 89 | 3808 |

(***Source:*** Primary Data)



High cost of urban living, and the less than living wages of their partners as well. The average family has 2.2 wage earners and the other wage earner, on an average, is in a similar low wages situation. The number of school-going children per family, at 1.8, is also low for such a young workforce, indicating perhaps the inability of the family unit to afford to send all their children in city schools.

The combined family income remaining after these overhead expenditures, for food per head, at Rs. 799 per month. The poverty line estimate, based on the Planning Commission estimates of poverty and used by the NSSO in its 55th Round (1999–2000) was Rs. 454 per month for urban India, as per the calorie norm of 2100 calories per day per person. Seven years later, given the rapid rise in food prices during the last three years alone and the collapse of the public distribution system (PDS), the RMG workers could well be hovering around the poverty line. There is hardly any scope for saving and much indebtedness. These conclusions are similar to those found in other surveys of the urban poor (Kundu, 1993) [17]. Indeed it is increasingly true of the working poor globally (Davis, 2005) [8]. The youthfulness of the RMG worker indicates that such workers are fresh entrants into the labour market. The eventual degradation of the labourer's family and the working class is inevitable. The older/worn out workers, who cannot keep up the speed of work, are dismissed from the RMG factories, and they return to the village or look for less strenuous urban employment.

## 6. Conclusion

The paper attempted to assess the local impact of manufacturing supply chains of global retailers, on the quality of employment that they generate, and the power of workers and their organizations in the circumstances. In this case, the ready-made garment hub of Bangalore, where garment manufacturing for international brands is widespread, was chosen for a survey. Since the managements, without exception, refuse to permit an on-factory survey, the sample comprised workers selected randomly outside the factories and in the slums where they reside. For this purpose, a random sample of factories was taken in the industrial estates and the surrounding slums of Bangalore, and 23 factories and 134 workers were sampled.

The survey found that the recent export boom has intensified work, and led to the use of many flexible work practices by managements, without increasing the wage. The average monthly non-food overhead expenses of the workers' family at Rs. 3808 per month are greater than the workers' average monthly wage of Rs. 3284. This less than living wage cannot even sustain the family unit.

However, rural-urban migration creates a durable supply of workers; the sector employs approximately seven and a half lakh workers cyclically. But their social backwardness and gender (75 per cent of them are women) retard attempts at organization and resistance. They remain powerless, particularly when confronted with global capital, with their decision centers being located far away and the workers being unanswerable to local authorities. The Bangalore garment industry has grown at a hectic pace for over two decades but no tightening of the labour market is noticeable. It is tough to organize unions in a hostile and aggressive export-driven environment to begin with, and particularly so among a vulnerable, feminized, unstable, semi-unskilled workforce, whose flight path between rural hinterlands and cities seems to be never-ending.

Nothing, however, may compel redistribution or stabilization of the workforce itself except the consolidation of trade unions locally and globally. The effectiveness of worker trade unions is related directly to the worker security that they can nurture. Trade unions influence both income and employment security. An insecure workforce needs the organized protection that a formal union can provide, but periods of general worker insecurity usually coincide with a weakening of the trade unions. The experience of the last 25 years has been that union membership and coverage by collective bargaining have fallen both in the OECD and developing countries, while simultaneously there has been an increase in the workers' vulnerability to assertive action by employers and exposure to hostile market forces. In Britain, for instance, the available evidence even indicates that episodes of employer de-recognition of trade unions have been followed by a decline in relative wages, greater use of contingent contracts, and the imposition of a managerial regime characterized by tighter discipline, work intensification and closer scrutiny of individual employee performance (Bacon, 1999; Freeman, 1995; Gall, 1998) [3, 10, 12]. While the decline of the unions hastens the growth of an insecure workforce, and precarious and uncertain employment, reciprocally, the resulting insecurities inhibit the regeneration, re-organization and re-orientation of the unions to effectively represent the workers' case, thereby creating a vicious cycle (Riley, 1997). Global supply chains thus pose a grim test for labor rights and the trade union movement.

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