

Beyond The Needle: Exploring The Hardships of Garment Sector Women Labourers in Tiruppur's District

Mr. D. Balasubramani¹, Dr. K. Maripappan²

¹*Research Scholar & Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Government Arts College, Udumalpet,*

²*Associate Professor, Department of Economics, Government Arts College, Udumalpet,*

Abstract—This study investigates the challenges faced by womanly migrant workers in the garment industry within the Tiruppur district. Driven by factors such as economic hardship, partial agricultural land, caste-based discrimination, and not enough employment opportunities in their native regions, many workers migrate to pursue better livelihoods. Tiruppur has experienced a significant influx of these migrants, especially in its burgeoning garment sector, which, despite providing substantial employment, often fails to ensure adequate working conditions, job security, and welfare facilities. Employing Cramer's V model, the research examines the socio-economic hardships encountered by these migrant laborers, prominence the complex interplay of factors influencing their migration and occupational experiences. The findings underscore the need for targeted interventions to improve living and working standards for this open to workforce.

Index Terms—Socioeconomic factors, migration, garment industry, migrant labor, economic hardship

I. INTRODUCTION

Migration, the movement of individuals seeking improved living conditions, is a fundamental expression of human agency and survival strategy. Across the globe, and within India, migration encompasses diverse populations—from unskilled laborers to professionals—relocating internally or internationally. In many Indian states, including Tamil Nadu, the phenomenon of migrant labor remains a critical socio-economic issue. Drivers such as inadequate development, scarcity of agricultural land, entrenched caste discrimination, lack of local employment opportunities, low wages, and mounting family debts compel workers to leave their homes in pursuit of better prospects.

Tiruppur's garment sector has emerged as a significant hub attracting such migrants. While the industry offers employment opportunities, migrant workers frequently endure substandard workplace facilities, limited job security, and exploitative labor practices. Wage disparities are prevalent; migrants often receive lower pay than local employees despite longer working hours. Moreover, many migrants, lacking formal education and vocational skills, are relegated to unskilled positions and face challenges adapting to modern machinery, further limiting their earning potential.

Language barriers and cultural differences exacerbate migrants' vulnerabilities, often causing social isolation and discrimination within their living quarters. This study aims to explore the socio-economic profile of these migrant workers, their reasons for migration, and the adversities they face in the garment industry of Tiruppur. Through this, it endeavors to provide insight into the structural and systemic issues affecting this labor segment, paving the way for informed policy and development interventions.

II. REVIEW OF LITRATURE

A substantial body of research has examined the challenges faced by migrant workers in the garment sector, highlighting their socio-economic conditions and the factors influencing their migration.

Moreover, studies focusing on the working environment and migrant well-being reveal a mixed scenario. Mohanraj and Manivannan (2012) found that although many migrant workers expressed job satisfaction and optimism, issues such as overwork, workplace hostility, and limited skill development opportunities persisted.

Ram Singh Bora (2014) established that migrants often engaged in low-skilled, low-wage jobs lacking workplace safety, healthcare, and social security.

International perspectives, such as the report on migrant garment workers in Thailand (2014), highlight patterns of exploitation including wage disparities, document confiscation, and misleading charges for health benefits. In the Indian context, Arthi and Naagarajan (2018) used econometric models to assess migrant awareness of health insurance, noting that larger firms tend to offer such coverage.

Research on interstate migration patterns highlights economic distress as a significant driver. Francis Jayapathy (2016), in their survey of 730 migrant workers in Tamil Nadu, identified agricultural hardship as the primary push factor compelling workers to migrate. Similarly, Kanagaratham and Gunasekaran (2020) emphasized that male migrants predominantly engage in employment across garment factories, hotels, and shops in the Tirupur district, noting a substantial temporary labour migration rate compared to permanent migration.

Dhivya Keerthiga and Arul Selvam (2017) examined the working and living conditions of migrant garment workers, revealing limited improvements post-migration. Despite adequate working conditions, none owned housing, and migrants had restricted access to basic needs and social entitlements.

According to Business Line (2018), Tiruppur's garment industry faced low retention, with migrants often relocating between units for better shifts and pay.

Barani and Pavithra (2019) emphasized cultural barriers faced by migrants, recommending balanced work-life strategies. Furthermore, the inclusion and empowerment of female garment workers have been a focal point. Sreerika (2019) examined factors enhancing job satisfaction and productivity among migrant women, advocating for workplace environments that fulfil personal and professional needs.

Across these studies, the complexity of migration, characterized by economic, social, and institutional factors, emerges clearly. Migration remains a survival strategy in the face of structural inequalities and limited regional development, underscoring the urgent need for policy reforms that safeguard

migrant rights and promote equitable working conditions. Policies must focus on reducing vulnerabilities faced by migrant workers rather than restricting migration itself.

Migration occurs either temporarily or permanently and is typically driven by social, economic, political, or demographic factors. It profoundly influences population distributions and workforce compositions, thereby affecting socioeconomic transformations globally. The right to migrate for livelihood is vital in regions lacking opportunities. Many migrants from developing countries move due to necessity rather than choice. Accelerated globalization is a key driver, alongside poverty, unemployment, political instability, and environmental challenges. Women comprise nearly half of global migrants (95 million), with 191 million people living outside their countries.

Tiruppur, responsible for 90% of India's cotton knitwear exports, has sustained the garment industry's growth for over 30 years, contributing significantly to foreign exchange and employing around 400,000 people. Migrant workers from Assam, Bihar, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, and Nepal have surged from approximately 5,000 four years ago to over 40,000. The garment sector recruits skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled laborers, driving extensive interstate migration and diverse economic participation.

III. OBJECTIVES

1. To delineate the demographic and socioeconomic profile of migrant workers in the garment sector.
2. To examine the working and living conditions of these migrant laborers.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

- Does migration impact workers' employment status, wages, and living conditions?
- Do perceptions of work-related problems vary among respondents?

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

This research aims to guide migrant workers towards maximizing job satisfaction, highlighting trends in migrant inflows to the garment sector. It identifies benefits and challenges faced by migrants, a study dimension rarely explored. The findings intend to assist the garment industry in understanding migrant

workers' needs and guide regulatory reforms. Data were primarily collected from Tiruppur District migrants through interviews, posing limitations in time and depth.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A mixed-method approach using primary and secondary data underpins this research. Primary data were obtained through structured interviews with migrant workers, while secondary sources supplemented background and context.

SAMPLING DESIGN

Data were collected by personally interviewing 250 migrant workers across urban, semi-urban, and rural areas in Tiruppur District. Locals also aided in identifying worker residences and workplaces. The interview schedule captured demographics, migration reasons, working conditions, earnings, consumption, savings, and remittances. It was

developed in consultation with industry officials and tested via a pilot study.

IV. METHODOLOGY

Primary research was conducted in 2025 among 250 randomly selected migrant garment workers (men and women) across Tiruppur. A structured interview schedule was administered, collecting data on:

- Demographic details (gender, age, state, religion, language)
- Education and skills
- Experience as migrants
- Causes and patterns of migration
- Living and working conditions
- Self-reported workplace problems

Quantitative tools included cross-tabulation, Cramer's V statistic for association (age $\times$ cause of migration, age $\times$ experience), and mean scores/rankings for reported hardships.

TABLE 1: DEMOGRAPHIC & SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE

S.NO	PARTICULARS	NUMBER	PERCENT
1	GENDER		
	Female	250	100%
2	AGE GROUP		
	18–20	56	22.4%
	21–30	133	53.2%
	31–50	26	10.4%
	Above 50	35	14.0%
3	MOTHER TONGUE		
	Hindi	151	60.4%
	Oriya	26	10.4%
	Bhojpuri	73	29.2%
4	RELIGION		
	Hindu	193	77.2%
	Muslim	34	13.6%
	Christian	23	9.2%
5	MARITAL STATUS		
	Married	80	32.0%
	Unmarried	170	68.0%
6	STATE OF ORIGIN		
	Orissa	79	31.6%
	Uttar Pradesh	76	30.4%
	Bihar	51	20.4%
	Jharkhand	32	12.8%
	Chhattisgarh	12	4.8%
7	EDUCATION LEVEL		

	Basic School	175	70.0%
	Technical High School	49	19.6%
	No Formal Education	26	10.4%
8	EXPERIENCE AS MIGRANTS		
	Less than one year	26	10.4%
	1–3 years	101	40.4%
	3–5 years	98	39.2%
	Above 5 years	25	10.0%
9	TAMIL PROFICIENCY		
	Conversational	26	10.4%
	Basic	24	9.6%
	Very Little	116	46.4%
	None	84	33.6%

Source: Primary data

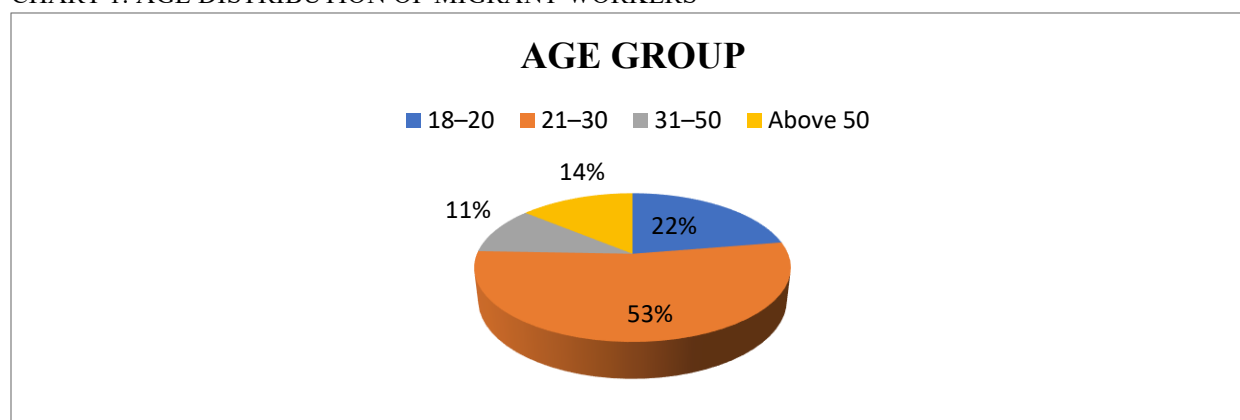
(i) Gender of the Migrants

As shown in Table 1.1, out of 250 migrant workers taken to survey, 250 (100%) are female.

(ii) Age of the Migrants

Table 1 presents the age distribution of migrant workers. The majority, 133 (53.2%), are between 21–30 years, followed by 56 (22.4%) in the 18–20 age group, 35 (14.0%) above 50 years, and 26 (10.4%) between 31–50 years. It is evident that the largest proportion of workers belongs to the 21–30 age groups, with an average age at migration ranging between 24–26 years. Most migrants arrive at their destinations in their late teens or early twenties.

CHART 1: AGE DISTRIBUTION OF MIGRANT WORKERS



(iii) Mother Tongue

According to Table 1, the majority of workers, 151 (60.4%), report Hindi as their mother tongue, followed by Bhojpuri with 73 (29.2%) workers, and Oriya with 26 (10.4%). Thus, Hindi emerges as the predominant native language. However, the lack of proficiency in the local language (Tamil) poses a significant challenge for migrant workers.

(iv) Languages Known

All migrants reported knowing Hindi. Some of them are also able to read and write in the language.

(v) Religion

Out of 250 migrant workers, 193 (77.2%) follow Hinduism, 34 (13.6%) are Muslims, and 23 (9.2%) are Christians. The data clearly shows that Hinduism is the predominant religion among migrants.

(vi) Marital Status

The data reveals that 170 (68%) of the migrant workers are unmarried, while 80 (32%) are married. Hence, the majority of the workforce is unmarried.

(vii) District and State

As shown in Table 1, most of the migrants, 79 (31.6%), come from Odisha, followed by 76 (30.4%) from Uttar Pradesh, 51 (20.4%) from Bihar, 32 (12.8%) from Jharkhand, and 12 (4.8%) from Chhattisgarh. This indicates that Odisha is the single largest source state for migrant workers.

(viii) Educational Qualification

Out of 250 migrants, the majority, 175 (70%), have completed only basic schooling, 49 (19.6%) possess technical education, and 26 (10.4%) have no formal

education. The predominance of basic education limits their access to skilled and higher-paying jobs in the garment sector.

(ix) Experience as Migrant Workers

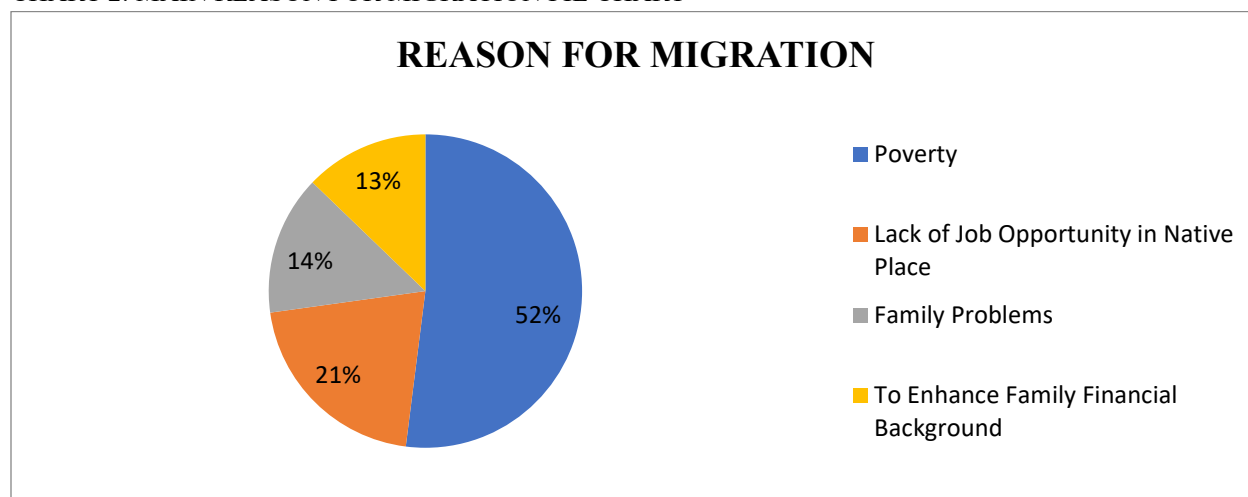
The data shows that 101 (40.4%) workers have 1–3 years of experience, 98 (39.2%) have 3–5 years of experience, 26 (10.4%) have less than one year, and 25 (10%) have more than five years of experience. It can thus be inferred that the majority of workers have been employed as migrants for 1–3 years.

TABLE 2: PRIMARY REASONS FOR MIGRATION

SL. NO	REASON FOR MIGRATION	NUMBER	PERCENT
1	Poverty	130	52.0%
2	Lack of Job Opportunity in Native Place	52	20.8%
3	Family Problems	36	14.4%
4	To Enhance Family Financial Background	32	12.8%

Source: Primary data

CHART 2: MAIN REASON FOR MIGRATION PIE CHART



A pie chart with Poverty (52%) in deep focus, then joblessness (20.8%), family issues (14.4%), and family advancement (12.8%).

TABLE 3: CROSS-TABULATION – AGE VS. EXPERIENCE AS MIGRANT WORKERS

Age Group	<1 year	1–3 yrs	3–5 yrs	>5 yrs	Total
18–20	21	35	0	0	56
21–30	0	39	77	17	133
31–50	2	11	10	3	26
Above 50	3	16	11	5	35
TOTAL	26	101	98	25	250

Source: Primary data

Statistical Note

Cramer's V = 0.377 ($p < 0.05$): Significant association; younger workers tend to have less experience and migrate earlier.

TABLE 4: AGE GROUP AND REASON FOR MIGRATION

AGE GROUP	ENHANCE FAMILY	FAMILY PROBLEMS	POVERTY	JOBLESSNESS	TOTAL
18–20	8	6	36	6	56
21–30	20	13	80	20	133
31–50	4	17	0	5	26
Above 50	0	0	14	21	35
TOTAL	32	36	130	52	250

Source: Primary data

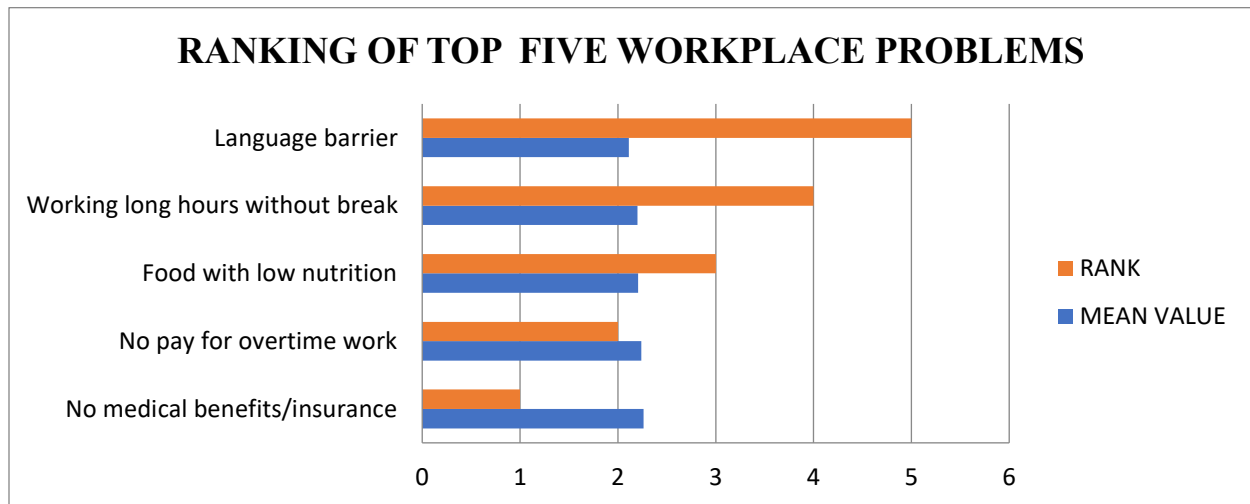
Cramer's $V = 0.380$ ($p < 0.05$): Age significantly influences the reported reason for migration.

TABLE 5: PROBLEMS OF MIGRANT WORKERS AT THE WORKPLACE

S.NO	PROBLEM	MEAN VALUE	RANK
1	No medical benefits/insurance	2.264	1
2	No pay for overtime work	2.240	2
3	Food with low nutrition	2.208	3
4	Working long hours without break	2.200	4
5	Language barrier	2.112	5
6	Psychological abuse	2.096	6
7	Inability to adapt to new technology	2.088	7
8	Inequality among employees	1.888	8
9	Feeling nervous at work	1.824	9
10	Occupational hazards	1.792	10

Source: Primary data

CHART 3: RANKING OF TOP FIVE WORKPLACE PROBLEMS



Bar chart shows “No medical benefits,” “No overtime pay,” “Poor nutrition,” “Long work hours” and “Language barrier” as top issues.

V. ANALYTICAL DISCUSSION

Gender and Age Trends

Although men dominate numerically, the unique hardships faced by women—including cultural adjustment, harassment, limited voice, and dual work

roles—demand gender-oriented responses. The majority age group (21–30) is of reproductive age, potentially affecting family formation and access to childcare.

Push-Pull Dynamics

Poverty and lack of rural jobs remain the main “push” factors. Movements are seldom “pulled” by sectoral opportunity alone. Instead, migration functions as a household survival strategy. The critical role of kinship, peer networks, and social

capital in migration decisions is underlined by the clustering of migrants by home state and dialect.

Exclusion and Vulnerability

Low Tamil proficiency (80% have little or no ability) increases social isolation and workplace misunderstanding. The lack of benefits, wage abuse, and absence of complaint mechanisms exacerbate precocity. Women's exclusion intensifies when food, health, safety, and workplace environment are ignored.

Work and Living Conditions

Ranked mean scores confirm that health and wage issues are the most severe and widespread complaints. The absence of medical and wage protections is followed closely by poor housing, lack of sanitation, and occupational hazards. These quantitative findings mirror qualitative complaints heard in the field.

STATISTICAL INSIGHTS

Youthful, less experienced migrants are at highest risk of abuse and unmet expectations.

Strong correlation between age and both experience and cause for migration suggests that as workers age/settle, their needs and vulnerabilities may change—critical for interventions.

VI. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Demographics: Migrant workforce overwhelmingly young adults predominantly aged 21-30, mostly Hindu, with basic education.

Migration Drivers: Poverty and unemployment in native states pushed migration; family financial improvement and job prospects pulled migrants to Tiruppur.

Work Challenges: Low wages, unsafe working conditions, lack of social protections, and poor living environments persist, compounded by language difficulties.

Statistical Analysis: Significant association between age and experience and between age and migration reasons.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR GARMENT INDUSTRY STAKEHOLDERS

Language and Skill Development: Implement tailored language training programs in Tamil for

migrant workers to bridge communication gaps with supervisors and peers. Facilitate vocational training and skill enhancement workshops to equip migrants with competencies aligned with modern machinery and technology.

Fair Wage Practices: Ensure adherence to the Minimum Wage Act, including appropriate remuneration for overtime work. Establish transparent wage systems and enforce legal compliance to mitigate wage exploitation.

Occupational Health and Safety: Adopt stringent safety protocols to reduce exposure to occupational hazards. Provide personal protective equipment, regular health screenings, and onsite medical facilities to promote workers' physical wellbeing.

Improved Living Conditions: Enhance housing standards by ensuring access to clean water, sanitation, and hygienic communal spaces. Promote employer-supported accommodation schemes to alleviate overcrowding and substandard living arrangements.

Social Protection Measures: Facilitate enrolment in health insurance and social security schemes. Establish grievance redressed mechanisms and sexual harassment prevention cells to protect workers' rights and dignity.

Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusion: Provide culturally appropriate amenities such as dietary accommodations and support for religious practices. Conduct awareness sessions to sensitize local communities and landlords to foster social cohesion.

FOR GOVERNMENT AND POLICY MAKERS

Awareness and Access to Services: Promote legal literacy workshops informing migrants about their employment rights and available welfare schemes including Atmanirbhar Bharat and Pradhan Mantri Rozgar Yojana.

Digital Infrastructure: Develop a Digital Migration Hub to register migrant workers' profiles, skills, and employment history, enabling better service delivery and migration monitoring.

Interstate Collaboration: Issue standardized smart cards facilitating migrant identification and access to benefits across states to prevent exploitation and duplication.

Regulatory Oversight: Strengthen inspection and enforcement mechanisms within the garment sector to ensure compliance with labor laws and occupational safety standards.

Support for NGOs and Civil Society: Encourage partnership with non-governmental organizations to provide social support, dispute resolution, and integration assistance for migrant workers.

Through concerted multi-sectoral action encompassing industry reforms and government policies, the systemic challenges confronting migrant garment workers in Tiruppur can be effectively addressed, advancing their wellbeing and contributing to sustainable industrial growth.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This study highlights significant socioeconomic challenges encountered by unskilled and semi-skilled migrant garment workers in Tiruppur, originating mainly from Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh. Poverty and lack of local employment opportunities are primary migration drivers. Migrants continue to occupy low-skilled roles with scant job security, inadequate legal registration, and substandard living conditions. Despite working statutory eight-hour shifts, many engage in overtime to supplement low wages. Policy interventions and industry reforms focusing on skills training, workplace safety, language inclusion, and migrants' welfare are crucial to improving their livelihood and productivity.

REFERENCES

- [1] A feasibility study for a survey of migrants: questionnaire this report was commissioned in January 2009.
- [2] Anner, M., Blair, J., & Blasi, J. (2013). Towards Joint Liability in Global Supply Chains: Addressing the Root Causes of Labor Violations in International Subcontracting Networks. *Comparative Labor Law and Policy Journal* 35, pp. 1-43.
- [3] Arthi and Nagarajan (2018), Health Security of Migrant Workers in Tiruppur Garment Industry- An Econometric Analysis, *Shanlax International Journal of Economics* 27 Vol. 6 No. 2 March 2018 ISSN: 2319-961X UGC Approval No: 44192 Impact Factor: 3.104.
- [4] Barani. G and Pavithra. S (2019), Issues Faced by Migrant Workers in Garment Mills, Erode District, *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research (JETIR)* www.jetir.org, January 2019, Volume 6, Issue 1 www.jetir.org (ISSN- 2349-5162).
- [5] Bora, R.S. (2014) Migrant Informal Workers: A Study of Delhi and Satellite Towns. *Modern Economy*, 5, 562-579. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/me.2014.55053>.
- [6] Breman, J., GuÃŠrin, I., & Prakash, A. (2009). *India's unfree workforce: of bondage old and new*. Oxford University Press.
- [7] Ceresna-Chaturvedi, L., & Kumar, A. (2015). *A Study of Occupational Health and Safety in the Garment Industry in Bangalore*.
- [8] Coninck, N., Theuws, M., & Overeem, P. (2011). *Captured by Cotton: Exploited Dalit Girls Produce Garments in India for US and European Markets*. Amsterdam and Utrecht: SOMO and ICN.
- [9] Cowgill, M & Huynh, P. (2016). *Weak minimum wage compliance in Asia's garment industry*. Asia-Pacific Garment and Footwear Sector Research Notes. Bangkok: International Labour Organisation.
- [10] Dhivya Keerthiga. V and Arul Selvam. K, A study on working and living condition of migrant workers in garment industry, *International Journal for Innovative Research in Multidisciplinary Field* ISSN – 2455-0620 Volume - 3, Issue - 5, May – 2017, Page 81-87.
- [11] Dilip Saikia (2014), Economic Conditions of the Migrant Workers In Kerala: A Study In The Trivandrum District, *Journal of Indian Research* (ISSN: 2321-4155) Vol.2, No.4, October-December, 2014, 33-46.
- [12] False Promises Migrant Workers in the Global Garment Industry 2009.
- [13] Francis Jayapathy (2016) A survey on Inter State Migrant in Tamil Nadu (Kancheepuram, Thiruvallur and Chennai District). Loyola Institute of Social Science Training and Research (LISSTAR), Loyola College, Chennai and Indian Social Institute (ISI) Bangalore,
- [14] Juanita Elias "Struggles over the rights of foreign domestic workers in Malaysia: the possibilities and limitations of 'rights talk'" *Economy and Society*, Taylor & Francis Online, Volume 37, 2008 - Issue 2.
- [15] Kanagarathinam. M and Gunasekaran. B (2020), A study on migration of labours with reference to

- Tiruppur District, paripex - Indian journal of research | Volume-9 | Issue-3 | March - 2020 | PRINT ISSN No. 2250 - 1991 | DOI: 10.36106/paripex.
- [16] Laura Boudreau, (2017), Migrants, Information, and Working Conditions in Bangladeshi Garment Factories, DOI:10.13140/RG.2.2.26909.72164
- [17] Mezzadri, A and Srivastava, R. (2015). Labour regimes in the Indian garment sector: capital-labour relations, social reproduction and labour standards in the National Capital Region. London: Centre for Development Policy and Research.
- [18] Migrant Workers in Thailand's Garment Factories, 2014.
- [19] Mohanraj.P and Manivannan. L, (2012), An Economic Analysis and Satisfaction Level of Migrated Workers in Erode and Tiruppur Districts, International Journal of Application or Innovation in Engineering & Management (IJAIE), Volume 1, Issue 2, October 2012 ISSN 2319 – 4847.
- [20] Neil Howard & Roberto Forin (2019). "Migrant workers, 'modern slavery' and the politics of representation in Italian tomato production" Economy and Society, Taylor & Francis Online, Volume 48, 2019 - Issue 4.
- [21] Nguyen Thi Lan Huong (2017) Vietnamese garment and apparel industry in the context of FTA: The labour and social impacts.
- [22] Pavnesh Kumar et al., (2017) Recent Advances in Business and Economics,
- [23] Rajendran.N and Jayalakshmi.P (2015), A study on the socio-economic status of the migrants of Tiruppur District, International Journal of Business and Administration Research Review, Vol.3, Issue.9, Jan- March, 2015. Page 152.
- [24] Raunaq Puri et al., (2021) Rozgaar Survey Report A Study on The Impact of Covid-19 on Migrant Workers In India.
- [25] Robert Miles and Victor Satzewich & R. Miles "Migration, racism and 'postmodern' capitalism". Economy and Society, Taylor & Francis Online, Volume 19, 1990 - Issue 3
- [26] Sivasubramaniam. D and Mahadevan. A (2013), A Study on Migrated Workers in Garment (Apparel) Industry with Special Reference to Tiruppur District, Tamilnadu, Indian Journal of Applied Research, Volume: 3 | Issue: 6 | June 2013 | ISSN - 2249-555X.
- [27] Sreerekha. T (2019), Integration of Migrant Women Garment Employees in Tiruppur City, International Journal for Research in Engineering Application & Management (IJREAM) ISSN: 2454-9150 Vol-05, Issue-09, Dec 2019.
- [28] Sreerekha. T, (2016) "A study on gratification of migrant employees with special reference to Tiruppur garment industry" International Journal of Research – granthaalayah, vol. 4, no. 3: se (2016): 37-44.
- [29] Sundari (2005), Migration as a Livelihood Strategy A Gender Perspective, Economic and Political Weekly May 28-June 4, 2005.
- [30] Vani. U and Janani. P (2016), "Job satisfaction of garment workers in garment unit with special reference to dhikksha exports, Tiruppur", international journal of research in it & management (impact factor – 4.961), volume 6, issue 2 (February, 2016).
- [31] Worker Rights Consortium. (2013). Global Wage Trends for Apparel Workers, 2001- 2011. Washington D.C.: Centre for American Progress.
- [32] Working Conditions of Migrant Garment Workers in India A literature review 2017.