

Living Standard of Salt Workers Community in Southern Districts of Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

Salt workers are engaged in salt production spending eight months of a year in remote locations devoid of any infrastructure for housing, health and education. Due to lack of other opportunities and less accessibility, most continue the salt work. They are the victims of low wages, seasonal unemployment, low incomes, poverty and indebtedness. The low access to information and illiteracy limits them from thinking about alternative livelihood options. In this paper, the researchers analyse the living standards of salt workers from the southern districts of Tamil Nadu. This paper gives a comprehensive picture of the socio economic status and standard of living of the salt workers in terms of their earnings, indebtedness and possession of household facilities. A sample size of six hundred and ninety four respondents is selected for the research from Thoothukudi, Ramanathapuram and Kanyakumari districts. The study quantitatively analyses the salt workers' demographic profile, income, expenditure, earnings, indebtedness and possession of household facilities using primary data. Appropriate findings and suggestions are given in the paper.

I. INTRODUCTION

Salt workers are the bottommost part of the flourishing and revenue earning salt industry in India, living under highly exploitative and sub-human conditions. They are engaged in salt production spending eight months of a year in remote locations devoid of any infrastructure for housing, health, education and drinking water (Shah, 2008)¹. Most workers are from the socially disadvantaged sections of the society. For salt workers and

their families, their primary source of income is salt work. Salt workers cannot ordinarily have multiple sources of income as salt work demands a lot of time leaving them with little time to pursue any other occupation. Due to lack of other opportunities and less accessibility, most continue the salt work. However, due to lower education levels, particularly among SC communities, the employment potential is low and are unable to get out of this business (Ragunathan, 2007)².

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

- Shashikala⁶ (2006) in his PhD thesis 'A Study on Nutritional and Health Status of Salt Workers' stated that agarias are the poor class people and salt production in the only source of their livelihood. Due to death of modern and latest mechanical devices in the salt industries, the production of salt is slow and minimum and the old process of producing salt is still prevalent. As such, agarias do not have any interest in diversion of business to other field and also their living standard continues to be lower.
- Sornaraj et al.⁷ (2007) in their article 'Occupational health problems observed among the salt pan workers of Thoothukudi district, South East coast of India' published in the book Environment: New Challenges pointed that salt industry in Thoothukudi district provides large scale employment to labourers. Every year during January and February the salt pans are prepared for the salt production i.e. mending of bunds, desilting of channels and preparation of crystallizer bed. All the salt manufacture related works are attended manually and as they are tough, child labourers are not employed in the salt field.
- Jaiswal⁸ (2015) in her online article titled 'Solar Pumps help Indian Women Salt Workers Escape from Poverty' explained that today India is the third largest producer of salt in the world, with 75 per cent of Indian production coming from Gujarat. Yet the salt workers, many of them being women produce salt still live in poverty. They have to borrow money from salt traders to buy diesel, food and drinking water for the salt production season and they live in tough desert conditions from October to May.
- Joseph⁹ (2016) in The Hindu for the article 'Salt workers seek relief' reported that salt workers of Thoothukudi had lost their houses as well as livelihood in the wake of heavy rains in November and December. Around 200 houses of the workers had been fully damaged and over 500 houses suffered partial damage in the rains. Around 50,000 workers had been relying on 22,000 acres of salt pans in the district. He concluded that to enhance their socio economic conditions and protect their rights, the Central government should form salt workers' cooperative societies here.

III. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The salt workers are employed on contract basis and are paid very low remuneration, not sufficient for leading quality of life (Saiyed et al., 2000)³. The economical and physical exploitation by money lenders and traders makes their condition worst. In order to meet

the off season cash requirements the salt workers have to borrow money from any organised credit facility or money lenders in the area. Salt producers also pay advance to workers during the beginning of the season (Raghunathan, 2007)⁴. The environmental condition in their working place is very poor. The job causes lot of stress and unhappiness to the workers. As the salt workers do painful work constantly exposed to salt and salt pan environment, defects in their physical and mental health is inevitable (Sornaraj et al., 2007)⁵. In this study, the researchers have made an attempt to find out the socio economic status and standard of living of the salt workers in the southern districts of Tamil Nadu.

IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following are the objectives of the study

1. To analyse the demographic profile of the salt workers and its importance in explaining the socio economic status of the salt workers
2. To identify the living standard of salt workers in terms of their income, expenditure, savings and indebtedness.
3. To determine the living standard of salt workers with regard to the type of facilities available in their household.

V. HYPOTHESES

The following are the null hypotheses to be tested in the study

1. Household income of the salt workers does not influence the amount of debt borrowed by them.
2. Household size of the salt workers does not influence their amount of saving.
3. There is no significant difference between the salt workers opinion with regard to the type of facilities available in their household.

VI. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

6.1 Research Design

A study concerned with obtaining information by interviewing or administering a questionnaire to a sample of respondents is a descriptive survey. This underscores the choice of a descriptive survey design in conducting the present study.

6.2 Sampling Design

By adopting convenience sampling method respondents were selected from various parts of Thoothukudi, Ramanathapuram and Kanyakumari district. The sample size of this study is 694. Structured interview schedule was used to collect the relevant data among the salt workers.

6.3 Source of Data

The present study is based on both primary data and secondary data. Primary data were collected through interview schedules. Secondary data were collected through websites, articles, books, journals and annual reports of the Salt Department.

6.4 Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted among 90 respondents. A draft of the interview schedule was prepared and pre-tested on the sample population. Then, the final format of the interview schedule was finalised and multiple copies were taken after incorporating necessary modifications.

6.5 Framework of Analysis

In order to derive results from the obtained data, the following statistical tools were fixed to fulfil the objectives of the study. The collected data was processed by using IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 20. The tools include Percentage analysis, Sign test, Chi-square test and Multiple regression.

VII. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the study, percentage analysis depicts the demographic profile, income and expenditure of the salt workers. Chi-square test has been used to find out the relationship between demographic profile and indebtedness and savings of the salt workers. Sign test is used to analyse the opinion of the salt workers on their possession of household facilities. Multiple regression analysis has been used to find out the non-availability of credit to the salt workers with their available sources of debt.

Table 1 - Demographic profile of salt workers

| S.No. | Factors | Classification | Male | | Female | | Total | |
|-------|--------------------|----------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|--------------|
| | | | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| 1. | District | Thoothukudi | 99 | 40.6 | 207 | 46.0 | 306 | 44.1 |
| | | Kanyakumari | 42 | 17.2 | 42 | 9.3 | 84 | 12.1 |
| | | Ramanathapuram | 103 | 42.2 | 201 | 44.7 | 304 | 43.8 |
| | | Total | 244 | 35.2 | 450 | 64.8 | 694 | 100.0 |
| 2. | Age | Upto 30 years | 37 | 15.2 | 74 | 16.4 | 111 | 16.0 |
| | | 31-40 years | 65 | 26.6 | 194 | 43.1 | 259 | 37.3 |
| | | 41-50 years | 60 | 24.6 | 117 | 26.0 | 177 | 25.5 |
| | | Above 50 years | 82 | 33.6 | 65 | 14.4 | 147 | 21.2 |
| | | Total | 244 | 35.2 | 450 | 64.8 | 694 | 100.0 |
| 3. | Religion | Hindu | 197 | 80.7 | 384 | 85.3 | 581 | 83.7 |
| | | Christian | 40 | 16.4 | 59 | 13.1 | 99 | 14.3 |
| | | Muslim | 7 | 2.9 | 7 | 1.6 | 14 | 2.0 |
| | | Total | 244 | 35.2 | 450 | 64.8 | 694 | 100.0 |
| 4. | Community | OC | 3 | 1.2 | 1 | 0.2 | 4 | 0.6 |
| | | BC | 97 | 39.8 | 152 | 33.8 | 249 | 35.9 |
| | | MBC | 42 | 17.2 | 100 | 22.2 | 142 | 20.5 |
| | | SC/ST | 102 | 41.8 | 197 | 43.8 | 299 | 43.1 |
| | | Total | 244 | 35.2 | 450 | 64.8 | 694 | 100.0 |
| 5. | Marital Status | Married | 217 | 88.9 | 400 | 88.9 | 617 | 88.9 |
| | | Unmarried | 23 | 9.4 | 17 | 3.8 | 40 | 5.8 |
| | | Widow | 4 | 1.6 | 33 | 7.3 | 37 | 5.3 |
| | | Total | 244 | 35.2 | 450 | 64.8 | 694 | 100.0 |
| 6. | Level of education | Illiterate | 74 | 30.3 | 244 | 54.2 | 318 | 45.8 |
| | | Primary | 115 | 47.1 | 135 | 30.0 | 250 | 36.0 |

| | | | | | | | | |
|-----|---------------------|--------------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|--------------|
| | | Higher Secondary | 47 | 19.3 | 70 | 15.6 | 117 | 16.9 |
| | | Graduate | 8 | 3.3 | 1 | 0.2 | 9 | 1.3 |
| | | Total | 244 | 35.2 | 450 | 64.8 | 694 | 100.0 |
| 7. | Household size | Upto 2 members | 30 | 12.3 | 63 | 14.0 | 93 | 13.4 |
| | | 3-5 members | 185 | 75.8 | 327 | 72.7 | 512 | 73.8 |
| | | Above 5 members | 29 | 11.9 | 60 | 13.3 | 89 | 12.8 |
| | | Total | 244 | 35.2 | 450 | 64.8 | 694 | 100.0 |
| 8. | Possession of house | Own | 204 | 83.6 | 352 | 78.2 | 556 | 80.1 |
| | | Rented | 40 | 16.4 | 95 | 21.1 | 135 | 19.5 |
| | | Lease | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0.7 | 3 | 0.4 |
| | | Total | 244 | 35.2 | 450 | 64.8 | 694 | 100.0 |
| 9. | Nature of house | Concrete | 89 | 36.5 | 124 | 27.6 | 213 | 30.7 |
| | | Tiled | 96 | 39.3 | 194 | 43.1 | 290 | 41.8 |
| | | Thatched | 54 | 22.1 | 112 | 24.9 | 166 | 23.9 |
| | | Group house | 5 | 2.0 | 20 | 4.4 | 25 | 3.6 |
| | | Total | 244 | 35.2 | 450 | 64.8 | 694 | 100.0 |
| 10. | Household income | Up to ` 5,000 | 58 | 23.8 | 204 | 45.3 | 262 | 37.8 |
| | | ` 5,001- ` 10,000 | 132 | 54.1 | 182 | 40.4 | 314 | 45.2 |
| | | ` 10,001- ` 15,000 | 40 | 16.4 | 59 | 13.1 | 99 | 14.3 |
| | | ` Above15,000 | 14 | 5.7 | 5 | 1.1 | 19 | 2.7 |
| | | Total | 244 | 35.2 | 450 | 64.8 | 694 | 100.0 |

Source: Primary data *Note: N denotes No. of respondents*
% denotes Percentage

Table 1 reveals all the basic demographic characteristics required to access the socio-economic status of the salt workers. It is classified gender wise as it could give a clear picture on the difference along with total. On the whole, among 694 workers surveyed for the study, 64.8 per cent are female and 35.2 per cent are male. In the present study, majority of the workers earning their livelihood through salt manufacture are female. The demographic profile of the salt workers is analysed to understand the present SES of salt workers in the study area. From the analysis, it is clear that the salt workers come from a very poor social background and still live below the poverty line without any other livelihood options. They are one of the most vulnerable sections in the society.

In order to study the opinion of the salt workers with regard to the type of facilities available in the household, the Sign Test has been applied and the results have been shown in Table.

Table 2 - Opinion of the Salt Workers with regard to the Type of Facilities Available in the Household - Sign Test

| S.No. | Type of Facilities | Number of '+' signs | Number of '-' signs | N | Z | Result |
|-------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-----|--------|--------|
| 1. | Water Connection | 280 | 414 | 694 | -8.01 | N.S. |
| 2. | Electricity | 649 | 45 | 694 | 23.71 | N.S. |
| 3. | Latrine | 262 | 393 | 655 | -10.50 | N.S. |

| | | | | | | |
|-----|-------------------|-----|-----|-----|---------|------|
| 4. | Mixie | 528 | 164 | 692 | 15.75 | N.S. |
| 5. | Grinder | 484 | 208 | 692 | 12.45 | N.S. |
| 6. | Fan | 607 | 87 | 694 | 21.11 | N.S. |
| 7. | Radio | 484 | 209 | 693 | 12.45 | N.S. |
| 8. | Television | 612 | 82 | 694 | 21.42 | N.S. |
| 9. | Refrigerator | 23 | 620 | 643 | -135.12 | N.S. |
| 10. | Cooler/Air Cooler | 19 | 641 | 660 | -150.50 | N.S. |
| 11. | Gas Connection | 310 | 374 | 684 | -4.20 | N.S. |
| 12. | Cycle | 375 | 304 | 679 | 2.89 | N.S. |
| 13. | Motor Cycle | 172 | 503 | 275 | -25.24 | N.S. |
| 14. | Mobile Phone | 570 | 115 | 685 | 18.68 | N.S. |

Source: Computed Research Data.

No. of '+' signs = No. of workers' responses 'Yes'

No. of '-' signs = No. of workers' responses 'No'

N = Number of workers' responses 'Yes' and 'No'

It is inferred from Table 2 that the Z value is not within the acceptance region of null hypothesis ($Z = 1.96$ to $Z = +1.96$) for all the statements. This indicates that there are significant differences in the responses of salt workers. These significant differences are due to a large number of 'yes' responses. Hence, it is concluded that the salt workers possess facilities in their house. Most of the salt workers' families in both urban and rural areas possess mixie, grinder, fan, television and cycle since these facilities are provided by the Tamil Nadu Government to improve the living conditions of the people. Most of the houses do not have drinking water connection and use only street taps as source of water. There are also no toilet facilities in most of the houses. In total, the standard of living of the salt workers and their family is very low. Possession of the household facilities depends on the total household income of the salt workers. A sufficient monthly income is required to improve the standard of living of the salt workers to the next higher level.

Table 3 - Pattern of expenditure of salt workers

| S.No. | Nature of expenditure | Factors | No Amount | Upto '5,000 | '5,001-'10,000 | Above '10,000 | Total |
|-------|-----------------------|-------------|-----------|-------------|----------------|---------------|-------|
| 1. | Food | Respondents | 5 | 553 | 129 | 7 | 694 |
| | | Percentage | 0.7 | 79.7 | 18.6 | 1.0 | 100.0 |
| 2. | Clothing | Respondents | 191 | 482 | 19 | 2 | 694 |
| | | Percentage | 27.5 | 69.5 | 2.7 | 0.3 | 100.0 |
| 3. | House Rent | Respondents | 516 | 170 | 7 | 1 | 694 |
| | | Percentage | 74.4 | 24.5 | 1.0 | 0.1 | 100.0 |
| 4. | Education | Respondents | 176 | 481 | 25 | 12 | 694 |
| | | Percentage | 25.4 | 69.3 | 3.6 | 1.7 | 100.0 |
| 5. | Medical Expenses | Respondents | 58 | 611 | 19 | 6 | 694 |
| | | Percentage | 8.4 | 88.0 | 2.7 | 0.9 | 100.0 |
| 6. | Water | Respondents | 146 | 532 | 14 | 2 | 694 |
| | | Percentage | 21.0 | 76.7 | 2.0 | 0.3 | 100.0 |

| | | | | | | | |
|-----|------------------|-------------|------|------|-----|-----|-------|
| 7. | Electricity | Respondents | 34 | 645 | 13 | 2 | 694 |
| | | Percentage | 4.9 | 92.9 | 1.9 | 0.3 | 100.0 |
| 8. | Household items | Respondents | 169 | 508 | 15 | 2 | 694 |
| | | Percentage | 24.4 | 73.2 | 2.2 | 0.3 | 100.0 |
| 9. | Fuel | Respondents | 182 | 498 | 11 | 3 | 694 |
| | | Percentage | 26.2 | 71.8 | 1.6 | 0.4 | 100.0 |
| 10. | Social Functions | Respondents | 223 | 454 | 15 | 2 | 694 |
| | | Percentage | 32.1 | 65.4 | 2.2 | 0.3 | 100.0 |
| 11. | Entertainment | Respondents | 354 | 337 | 3 | 0 | 694 |
| | | Percentage | 51.0 | 48.6 | 0.4 | 0 | 100.0 |

Source: Primary data

Table 3 reveals the monthly expenditure of salt workers for their basic needs such as food, clothing, house rent, education, medical expenses, water, electricity, purchase of household items, fuel, social functions and entertainment. Majority of the salt workers spend up to ` 5,000 per month for every expense including food (79.7 per cent), clothing (69.5 per cent), education (69.3 per cent), medical expenses (88 per cent), water (76.7 per cent), electricity (92.9 per cent), purchase of household items (73.2 per cent), fuel (71.8 per cent) and social functions (65.4 per cent). About, 74.4 per cent of the workers spend no amount for house rent as they live in their own houses. Most of the salt workers (51.0 per cent) do not spend any amount for entertainment activities such as family tours smoking consuming liquor and the like. Totally, a few workers spend ` 5,001- ` 10,000 and only a very few workers spend more than ` 10,000 for all their expenses. The income of salt workers is not sufficient to meet their household expenditure. Therefore, it increases their debt burden furthermore.

Table 4 - Money borrowed by the salt workers

| <i>S.No.</i> | <i>Amount</i> | <i>No. of respondents</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|--------------|---------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. | ` Up to 10,000 | 93 | 13.4 |
| 2. | ` 10,001 - ` 50,000 | 150 | 21.6 |
| 3. | Above ` 50,000 | 325 | 46.8 |
| 4. | Nil | 126 | 18.2 |
| | Total | 694 | 100.0 |

Source: Primary data

Table 4 discloses the amount of money borrowed by the salt workers. Nearly half of the salt workers (46.8 per cent) borrow more than ` 50,000. About 21.6 per cent of the workers borrow from ` 10,001 to ` 50,000 whereas 18.2 per cent of them did not borrow any money. Only a least percentage of salt workers (13.4 per cent) borrow up to ` 10,000. Therefore, it is clear that majority of the salt workers have a heavy debt burden further complicating their low economic status.

Table 5 - Household income and amount of debt - Chi-Square test

H₀: Household income of the salt workers does not influence the amount of debt borrowed by the salt workers.

| <i>Factors</i> | <i>Value</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>Sig. value</i> |
|--------------------|--------------|-----------|-------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 6.046 | 9 | 0.735* |
| Likelihood ratio | 5.978 | 9 | 0.742 |
| N of Valid Cases | 694 | | |

***Significant at 5 per cent level**

Table 5 shows the association between salt workers' family income and the amount borrowed by them. As per the acceptance of null hypothesis with the significant value of 0.735 (greater than 0.05), family income of the workers is not associated with the amount of debt borrowed. Hence, it reveals that the salt workers' family income is not related with the borrowing of debt for their requirements from the available sources. The poor standard of living forces them to borrow money even for their day-to-day expenses.

Table 6 - Non-availability of credit to the salt workers with their available sources of debt - Multiple regression

| <i>Variables</i> | <i>Unstandardized Coefficients</i> | | <i>Standardized Coefficients</i> | <i>t value</i> | <i>Sig. value</i> |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| | <i>B</i> | <i>Std. Error</i> | <i>Beta</i> | | |
| (Constant) | 3.644 | .150 | | 24.215 | .000* |
| Salt pan owner | .191 | .047 | .152 | 4.058 | .000* |
| Money lender | -.081 | .028 | -.109 | -2.889 | .004* |
| Bank | -.068 | .027 | -.094 | -2.480 | .013* |
| SHG | -.010 | .030 | -.013 | -.336 | .737* |
| Co-operative society | -.156 | .053 | -.111 | -2.932 | .003* |
| Friends and Relatives | .016 | .036 | .017 | .450 | .653* |

***Significant at 5 per cent level**

Dependent Variable : Non-availability of credit
 Independent Variables : Salt pan owner, Money lender, Bank, SHG, Co-operative society, Friends and Relatives
 R value : 0.231
 R square value : 0.053
 Adjusted R square value : 0.045
 F statistics (6,687) : 6.441
 Sig. value of ANOVA : 0.000

Table 6 assesses the ability of the five control measures (Salt pan owner, Money lender, Bank, SHG, Co-operative society and Friends and relatives) to predict the levels of reliability on the dependant variable Non-availability of credit using multiple regression. From the above table, it is found that $R = 0.231$, $R^2 = 0.053$ and Adjusted $R^2 = 0.045$. These values indicate the explanatory power of independent variables. R^2 value (0.053) indicates the amount of variability explained by independent variables of Salt pan owner, Money lender, Bank, SHG, Co-operative society and Friends and relatives accounting for 5.3 per cent of variance in the dependant variable of basic needs. Hence, it is clear that the remaining 94.7 per cent is by some other unknown variable and the problem is not taken into account. The values of $F(6,687) = 6.441$ and significant value

with 0.000 (less than 0.05) indicates that the model is statistically significant at 5 per cent level and ensures the regression is fit. The goodness of fit of regression takes the analysis for the maximum operational depth of measuring the influence of individual independent variables. It is identified that the four control measures salt pan owner (beta = 0.152, t = 4.058, p = 0.000), money lender (beta = -0.109, t = -2.889, p = 0.004), bank (beta = -0.094, t = -2.480, p = 0.013) and Co-operative society (beta = -0.111, t = -2.932, p = 0.003) are statistically significant. Therefore, these four variables are highly conducting to determine the reason for borrowing money by the salt workers for their basic needs. The influence is also ordered on the basis of variance indicated in the standardized beta coefficients and it is quite revealing that salt pan owner is highly predominant (15.2 per cent) in explaining the non-availability of credit to salt workers.

Table 7 - Savings of the workers per month

| <i>Amount</i> | <i>No. of respondents</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|-----------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Up to ` 500 | 72 | 10.4 |
| ` 501 - ` 1,000 | 72 | 10.4 |
| Above ` 1,000 | 50 | 7.2 |
| Nil | 500 | 72.0 |
| Total | 694 | 100.0 |

Source: Primary data

Table 7 shows the monthly savings of the salt workers. Majority of the salt workers (72.0 per cent) have no savings. About 10.4 per cent of the workers save up to ` 500 and ` 501 to ` 1,000 equally. Only a least percentage of salt workers (7.2 per cent) save above ` 1,000. It is clear that majority of the salt workers do not have any saving. Therefore there are left with no option except borrowing loan for their alternate livelihood options.

Table 8 - Household size and amount of saving - Chi-Square test

H₀: Household size of the salt workers does not influence their amount of saving.

| <i>Factors</i> | <i>Value</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>Sig. value</i> |
|--------------------|--------------|-----------|-------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 2.306 | 6 | 0.889* |
| Likelihood ratio | 2.394 | 6 | 0.880 |
| N of Valid Cases | 694 | | |

**Significant at 5 per cent level*

Table 8 shows the association between salt workers' family size and the amount saved by them. As per the acceptance of null hypothesis with the significant value of 0.889 (greater than 0.05), household size of the workers is not associated with the amount of savings. Hence, it reveals that the salt workers' family size is not related with the amount saved by them. The salt workers are not able to save money irrespective of the number of members in their family.

VIII. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The following are the findings of the study

- Socio-economic status is one of the most common and important parameters used to identify the social standing of any individual or group. Majority of the workers included for the study are female (64.8 per cent) and they fall under the age group of 31 to 40 years. Most of them are Hindus (83.7 per cent). Lower community sections of the society such as SC or ST people (43.1 per cent) constitute a major part of the workers in the salt industry. Only a few of the salt workers are unmarried or widowed. Many of them are married (88.9 per cent). Majority of the salt workers live in nuclear family with 3 to 5 members. 80.1 per cent of the salt workers possess their own houses and 41.8 per cent of the nature of house is tiled. With regard to occupation, the study is confined to the salt workers community. Therefore, there is only difference in their nature of work. Next, the research clearly shows that a major proportion of the salt workers are illiterates (45.8 per cent) and the remaining work force also has only limited access to education. Further, most of the salt workers' monthly income in the study is from Rs.5,001 to Rs.10,000 (45.2 per cent). This denotes that most of them earn less which is not sufficient for their basic needs.
- Most of the salt workers families in both urban and rural areas possess mixie, grinder, fan, television and cycle since these facilities are provided by the Tamil Nadu government to improve the living conditions of the people. Most of the houses do not have drinking water connection and use only taps as source of water. There are also no toilet facilities in most of the houses. In total, the standard of living of the salt workers and their family is very low. Possession of the house hold facilities depends on the total household income of the salt workers. A sufficient monthly income is required to improve the standard of living of the salt workers to next higher level.
- A major share of the salt workers spend up to ` 5,000 for food, clothing education, medical expenses, water, electricity, house hold items, fuel and social functions whereas most of them spend no amount for house rent and entertainment. Less than one per cent of them spend more than ` 10,000 per month. Though the salt workers spend less, their income is not sufficient to meet their household expenditure.
- Majority of the salt workers (46.8 per cent) have a heavy debt burden of more than ` 50,000. They have debts irrespective of their level of monthly income. Their poor standard of living forces them to borrow money even for their day to day expenses. Salt pan owners are highly predominant in explaining the non-availability of credit to salt workers. In need of urgencies, the workers borrow money from the owner as an advance and they repay it every week or it is reduced in certain ratio from their wages.
- Majority of the salt workers (72.0 per cent) have no savings. Therefore, they are left with no option except to borrow loan for their livelihood.

IX. SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

From this paper, it is clear that the overall living conditions of the salt workers are not good and they face critical challenges for sustaining their livelihood. They basically come from a very poor social and cultural background and they are living below poverty line for years. Their income is not sufficient to meet even their basic needs and they could not even dream of a luxurious life as they find it difficult to cope with their daily living situations. They have limited household facilities and their expenses exceed the meagre income. They are under a trap of debt with leaves them with no savings. They belong to an exploited section even among the exploited unorganised sector with less attention and legal coverage. Other alternative sources for the livelihood of salt workers should be developed with their own efforts as well as the assistance from the government. Few steps such as guaranteed employment in lean days, less gender inequality, credit lines during lean period and arrangements from various NGOs could be beneficial.

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