



Work Situation of Cashew Factories in South Salamara Mankachar District of Assam

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Abstract :

Cashew processing is a labour intensive factory. There are more than 95% women workers in these factories. Poverty and lack of alternative employment force women to enter in the factory from the backward society of the district. The status of the factory as a “seasonal factory” further emboldens the owner to keep the women workers informal, contractual and casual workers. The important objective of the study are to examine the socio-economic profile of the cashew processing worker, particularly to examine the working hours, wage payment system of the workers.

Key word: cashew factory, female worker, processing, socio-economic.

Introduction :

Cashew processing is an export oriented factory. Cashew nuts processing factory took off in India 1920s, did proper processing for commercial purpose start. In the initial period, Joseph Periera many innovations by which cashew processing changed from manual processing to semi-mechanical processing. Cashew processing is a labour intensive factory. Where majority of the worker start working at 7:00 A.M in the morning and continue till 6:00 P.M. in the evening. Poverty and lack of alternative employment force women to enter in the factories. Women take up employment after marriage. The status of the factory as a “Seasonal factory” further emboldens the employers to keep the women workers in informal, contractual and casual basis. The important objective of the study is to examine the conditions of workers in cashew factories to analysis, the income and expenditure condition at residence, health problems etc. There are only 14 cashew processing factories in my study area. The salient feature of factories in this district of Assam is the monopoly of the private sector. In fact, government of Assam has little interference in the cashew factory. The factories are typically located in the rural area of the district. Hence, the factories play a vital role in the socio-economic activities in this district.

Review of related literature:

The different aspect of cashew nuts have been covered by several scholars throughout the world under interdisciplinary umbrella. Cashew nut is widely discussed in various publications which are related to the production, processing and export of cashew nuts.

Lindberg, Anna (2005) has made an intensive study entitled “Modernization and effeminisation in India with reference to Kerala cashew workers sine 1930 shows that the women of the cashew factories in Kerala suffer from greater poverty deprivation and starvation. There has been wide gap between feminist and masculinity. It is observed from the study that women have the potential for collective power, but they continue to suffer discrimination and humiliation by their employeres.

R. S. Siva Sankar (2012) in his article entitled “A study about the wages and incentives of cashew industries in Kanya Kumari District” he analyzed that labour is one of the four factors of production. Labour is of two kinds direct and indirect. They have to pay remuneration for the services rendered by them. Generally speaking there are two basic methods of wage payment. One method is related to hours. The other method is regard to the production or output. This is known as spice rate system. In the plan of incentive wage payment both time and spice rate are blended together under the time system. But the worker are not benefited from the time.

R. Sivanesan (2013) in his study entitled “Socio-economic conditions of women workers in cashew industry of Kanya Kumari District” analyzed the socio-economic conditions of women workers and found that majority of the cashew processing industry workers are in the age group of 20 to 30 years. Maximum workers are qualified with middle class school and more over majority of the cashew processing workers are unmarried and are engaged in the peeling of cashew. It is found that they are experienced below three years. The women worker earn daily wage Rs. 150 to Rs. 180. Majority of the women workers monthly income is at the range of Rs. 4000/- to Rs. 6000/- per month the study shows that large portion of income is spent for food and skin disease. The workers only satisfaction is water facility provided by the cashew industry. The researcher found that in the overall cashew industry women workers are not satisfied with their work. And their socio-economic conditions are very poor.

Dr. H. Panda (2015) in his book entitled “The complete Book on cashew production and processing” tried to show that in India there are two method of cashew nut processing system, traditional processing system and general processing system. The traditional practice in the Southern region of India was to spread the nuts on flat rocks in the sun, to allow them to dry until the shell become brittle. The kernel could then be removed from the shell by striking the nut with a wooden betten to split the shell along the natural line of cleavage till the cashew kernel was removed Moreover, the author also explain the general processing system of cashew nut in India. Cashew nut processing methods have improved considerably over the years.

Sources of Data :

The study area is South Salmara Mankachar district of Assam. This study is based on primary data for the purpose of first hand information (primary data) structured questionnaire will be prepared and used to collect information from workers of cashew factories of different places. Simple Random sampling method will be adopted to survey the respondents.

Research Methodology:

Methodology of research is a way to systematically solve research problems. The study is exploratory in character and hence design based on the survey method. A number of issues relating to the main aspect of the researchers and the other eminent persons connected in the field, in order to get an insight into the subject prior to the collection of data. The information obtained through these has been useful in formulating a framework for the study. In this simple statistical calculations chart, diagram, frequency table, will be used. Approximately Five thousand workers are directly or indirectly engaged in this district of Assam, out of which 100 workers have been taken for collection of sample.

Objectives of the study :

The main objectives of the study are as follows –

- a) To examine the socio-economic profiles of cashew processing workers.
- b) To analyse the working condition of cashew workers and particularly to examine the working hours, wage payment and health related problems, social security, welfare measures, child labour etc.

Analysis of the study :

The researchers try to analyse the female workers socio-economic condition of the cashew processing factories in various aspects of the district.

It is well known the cashew processing factories are dominated by the women workers. In the study sample, 95% of the worker is women. A striking feature of the work force is the relatively small percentage of the younger generation in the cashew factories.

Conditions at residence of the cashew workers :

A part from the work place details, I observed the condition of workers' residences, the standard of living of the workers in the cashew factories are presented in below tables :

Table – 1

Ownership and types of house is shown below table.

Ownership of the house	Types of house
Owned – 88.5	Pucca – 55.5
Rented – 5.5	Semi pucca 35.9
Rentfree – 6.0	Kutchra – 8.6

Source : primary data.

Table – 2

Living room and main cooking fuel of the workers.

Living Rooms (in percent)	Main cooking fuel (in percent)
One Room – 20	Fire wood – 80.9
Two Room – 60	LPG – 19.1
Three Room – 19	
Four or more - 1	

Source : Primary data.

Table – 3

Electric and Toilet of the cashew processing workers.

Electric Connection	Toilet facility
Yes – 97.0	Own flush Toilet – 65.5
No – 3.0	Own pit Toilet – 27.5
	Share Toilet – 3.5
	No Toilet facility – 3.5

Source : Primary data.

Table – 4

Source of drinking water :

Sl. No.	Particulars	Percentage
1	Piped water	5.0%
2	Own well	80.5%
3	Tap/well in the neighbouring house	9.4%

Source ; Primary data.

A large majority of workers live in house owned by them or their family members. Most are pucca house. Most of the houses have electric connection and toilet facilities. But fire wood is the main sources of fuel for most of the workers among the cashew processing workers. Just 19.1% use of the workers LPG as the main fuel of cooking.

Reasons for working in cashew factories :

The following table shows the classification of the respondents on the basis of the reason for working cashew factories.

Table – 5

Classification of respondents on the basis of reason for working in cashew factory:

Sl. No.	Particulars	No. of Workers	Percentage
1	To help family	40	40
2	Poverty	20	20
3	Independent	5	5
4	Interest of	15	15
5	Lack of other job	20	20

Source : Primary data

Majority of the respondents are working in the factory because they are help to the family (40 percentage). Twenty percent of them work in cashew factory because they are poor. In order to understand the poverty status of the house hold of the cashew workers, enquiry were made as to whether they have ration card which classify the house hold as living below the poverty line (BPL), lack of other job.

Health problems faced by the workers:

More than 50% of the workers have reported health related problems due to their work in the factory. The cashew workers are exposed to health risk due to the characteristics of Job. Exposure to smoke from furnaces, contact with the cashew nut shell liquid, unhealthy sitting the posture, avoidance of rest intervals to maximize output, unhygienic environment in a section of the factories and the chances of accidents make the workers in cashew sector vulnerable to health issues.

The table 6 presents proportion of worker who have reported facing health problems due to their work in the cashew sector. These figures have been arrived at solely on the basis of what the respondents have reported. Clearly, there is a high proportion of health problems reported by those engaged in certain activities like shelling, peeling, cutting and grading.

Table – 6

Proportion of workers reporting health problems due to their work in cashew nut processing factories (in percent)

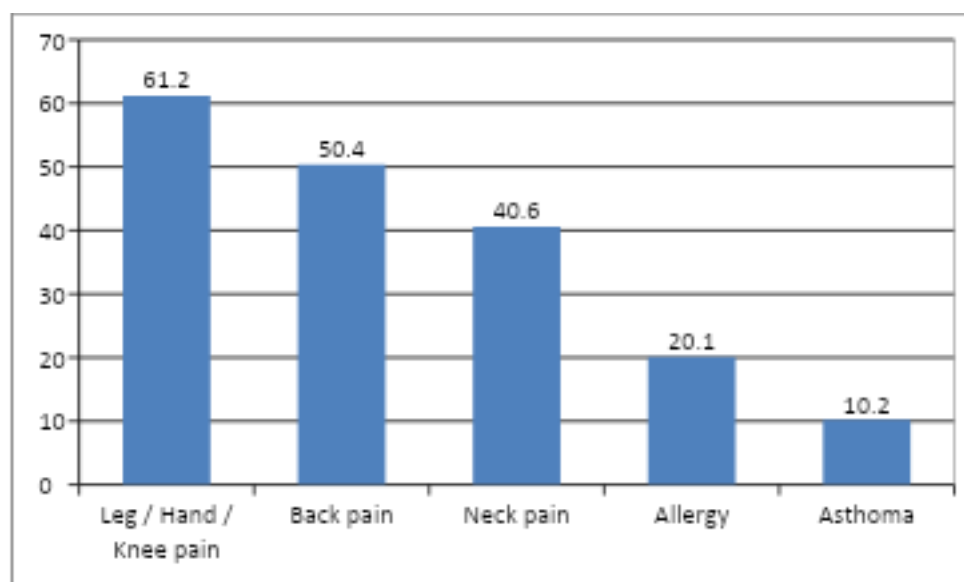
Sl. No.	Particulars	In percentage
1	Shelling	85.2
2	Peeling	76.5
3	Cutting	71.8
4	Grading	84.4
5	Office work	34.6
6	Other	67.4
7	Over all	82.2

Other inclusion roasting / steaming / packing and loading / unloading

Source : Primary data.

Pain in the leg / hand / knee / neck joint and body pain are the most reported more problems of the female than male workers. The below figure presents details about the health problem reported by the workers.

Figure 7 major health problems reported by the workers (in percentage)



Source : Primary data.

People in the neighbourhood have raised objections against cashew processing factories. “we are at our wits and” said residents. We have been suffering from time to time but the owners of the factory have turned a blind eye I am not against running of the factory, but it should be set up a safe place.

Daily wages of cashew factory workers :

Daily wage refers to the wage obtained for the daily work in the factory. A woman can process up to 8 to 10 kg a day. Majority of the cashew factory workers are women they earn daily Rs. 300/- to Rs. 400/-. A manual woman labour is paid Rs. 32/- for every kilo of raw cashew nut processing. Majority of workers in the cashew processing factory are paid wages on a piece rate basis. In this method wage payment is based on the quality processed by the workers engaged in shelling, peeling and cutting. Other job is usually done on a time rate basis.

Findings :

From this study researcher records the following findings:

The researcher found that majority of the cashew factory women worker have owned house (88.5%). Majority of the cashew factory women worker have pucca house (55.5%) and 35.9% woman worker have owned semi pucca house and 8.6% are kutcha. Majority of the cashew factory women workers main cook with firewood. Majority of cashew factory women workers have daily wages between Rs. 300/- to Rs. 400/-. Most of the workers belong to the general caste (GN) and 10% from Schedule caste (SC). Economic condition of workers seems to be poor. In over all, cashew factory women workers are not satisfied with their work. The researcher found the standards of living of the cashew factory women workers are very low and their socio-economic conditions are very poor. This is not a surprising fact that one fourth of the workers in the cashew factory are sole earner in the family.

Suggestion and recommendations :

The present study reveals about the socio-economic condition of cashew factory workers in South Salmara Mankachar Distrcit of Assam. The researcher grasped up various problems of the workers and sum up them.

The important suggestions and recommendation for the present study are as follows –

The government should fix the minimum wage system in order to cater to the needs of the women workers. To improve the working conditions the government may provide a one time grant or soft loan to the employer as an incentive to need practices and also for modernizing working sheds. There is a need to provide clean toilets and washing space to the worker. It is equally important to provide sufficient space for resting and eating. Another improvement possible in the workspace is installation of exhaust fans, uniforms, caps, masks etc. can also be introduced. Majority of the woman workers in the factory sit on the floor to perform tasks such as shelling, peeling and greading. This uncomfortable posture lead to many health problems. In view of this, there is need to provide benches / chair for the worker so as to discontinue the current unhealthy

practice. To improve the financial position of the workers in traditional factories like cashew, zero balance account facility in the bank should be extended to cashew worker as well. The government should give necessary training to the women workers to increase the efficiency of the women workers. The cashew factory may provide bonus to the women worker regularly. The factory may reduce the working hours because majority of workers feel that long working hours may lead to various health related issues and may decrease their efficiency.

Conclusion :

The rising cost of living compels the workers to take up this type of work. Unfortunately women are facing various problems in their working place. The government should take necessary steps about the factory and workers. The state and central government can formulate many policies to increase the living standard of their family. The study helps to suggest increase the socio-economic conditions of women worker of cashew factories.

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