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FROM GROUNDWORK TO GROWTH: WELFARE BOARD'S ROLE IN CONSTRUCTION WORKER SAFETY AND WELLBEING IN TAMIL NADU

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ABSTRACT

The Tamil Nadu Construction Workers Welfare Board, established under the Tamil Nadu Manual Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Work) Act, 1982, serves as a crucial institution dedicated to improving the safety, health, and overall wellbeing of construction workers in Tamil Nadu. This sector,characterized by physically demanding labor and hazardous environments, faces many challenges, including occupational diseases unsafe working conditions, and inadequate social security. The Welfare Board plays a pivotal role in addressing these concerns through comprehensive registration, welfare cess collection, and the implementation of targeted welfare schemes. Significant recent initiatives by the Board include the Master Health Check-Up Scheme, designed to identify and treat occupational health issues such as silicosis a prevalent respiratory disease among construction workers exposed to silica dust. Further, the Board has introduced skill development programs that train workers in new construction technologies and safety practices, enhancing both their safety awareness and employability. The government has also committed substantial financial resources to establishing vocational training institutes with hostel facilities to support workers and their families. In addition to health and skills, the Welfare Board emphasizes social security by providing personal accident relief, maternity benefits, educational support, and housing loans. In 2025, accident compensation benefits were notably increased, reflecting a stronger institutional commitment to worker protection. Despite these advancements, challenges remain, particularly in reaching unregistered and transient workers, and ensuring comprehensive awareness and implementation of welfare measures.

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Nevertheless, the Tamil Nadu Construction Workers Welfare Board symbolizes a transformative approach from basic workplace safety to holistic worker welfare, thereby contributing to the sustained growth and dignity of the construction workforce. This evolution underlines Tamil Nadu dedication to fostering safe, secure, and inclusive working environments that empower the backbone of its infrastructural development.

***Keywords**: Tamil Nadu Construction Workers Welfare Board, occupational safety, silicosis, worker welfare schemes, skill development, social security, construction labor wellbeing.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The TamilNadu construction industry is a vital pillar of the state's robust economic growth, contributing significantly to its impressive 11.2% real GDP growth in 2024-25, outpacing the national average. The sector's rapid expansion reflects Tamil Nadu position as a leading industrial hub with growing infrastructure development, manufacturing activities, and urbanization driving demand for construction labor. This industry not only fuels economic progress but also provides employment to millions of manual workers who form the backbone of TamilNadu workforce.However, construction workers face numerous challenges, including hazardous working conditions, exposure to occupational diseases like silicosis, long working hours, and limited access to essential health and social security benefits. These precarious conditions impact their safety and overall wellbeing, demanding focused interventions from the government and regulatory bodies.

To address these critical issues, the Tamil Nadu Construction Workers Welfare Board was established under the Tamil Nadu Manual Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Work) Act, 1982. The Board's core mandate is to safeguard the rights and welfare of construction laborers through comprehensive registration, implementation of welfare schemes, and ensuring access to occupational safety, health services, and social security benefits. It plays a central role in improving construction worker welfare, thereby supporting the sustainable growth of the sector and enhancing the socio-economic status of the workforce who are foundational to Tamil Nadu development.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

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Prior to the 1980s, construction workers in Tamil Nadu, including those involved in building, road, and dam maintenance work, operated largely without formal protections. Most were considered part of the unorganized labor sector and were only indirectly covered by general labor laws, without specific welfare measures or regulatory oversight targeting their unique risks and needs. During this period, although the concept of welfare funds and labor welfare boards was gradually developing in India, Tamil Nadu had yet to codify formal schemes specifically for manual workers in construction and related fields.[2]

The institutionalization of worker welfare began in the early 1980s. A landmark event was the enactment of the Tamil Nadu Manual Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Work) Act in 1982, which provided a legal framework for regulating employment conditions of manual workers, including those working in construction, such as building and roadwork. This Act also empowered the government to establish welfare schemes and boards. Shortly thereafter, in 1984, the Tamil Nadu Building and Construction Workers (Conditions of Employment and Miscellaneous Provisions) Act was passed, focusing on regulating on-site working conditions, safety, and health provisions for construction workers.

In the early 1990s, specifically in 1994, Tamil Nadu operationalized the Tamil Nadu Manual Workers (Construction Workers) Welfare Scheme under the 1982 Act, offering specific benefits like creches, personal accident relief, pensions, funeral and educational assistance, marriage aid, and maternity benefits.[3] This scheme marked the first time Tamil Nadu provided targeted welfare support tailored to construction workers' needs.

The mid-1990s to 2000s saw national-level strengthening with the Building and Other Construction Workers Act, 1996, enacted by the Indian Parliament. This Act provided a wider framework for construction worker welfare across India, including mechanisms for cesscollection on construction projects and formation of Welfare Boards for enforcing safety and health regulations. Tamil Nadu adopted relevant rules in 2006, aligning its own schemes with the national framework and improving enforcement, particularly through the Directorate of Industrial Safety & Health.

[2] Tamil Nadu Labour Welfare Fund Act, 1972. Government of Tamil Nadu.
[3] *Tamil Nadu Manual Workers (Construction Workers) Welfare Scheme, 1994*. G.O. Ms No. 198, Labour & Employment, 4 Oct 1994.

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Challenges persisted in the 2010s, including inconsistent collection of welfare cess funds, delays in benefit disbursement, and difficulties in registering unorganized migrant workers. Cess rates were initially low (around 0.3%) and raised to 1% by 2013, but underutilization of funds remained a concern. Additionally, the Tamil Nadu Construction Workers Welfare Board experienced lapses in administration, with its composition not reconstituted timely between 2016 and 2021.

The 2020s have brought renewed reforms and expansion. In 2022, a housing assistance scheme was launched, providing ₹4 lakh each to eligible registered workers for home construction or purchase, initially benefiting about 10,000 workers annually. Compensation for workplace fatalities was raised to ₹8 lakh by 2025, reflecting an emphasis on improved social protection. Educational assistance now extends beyond basic schooling to include vocational courses such as nursing and catering. The government has also initiated seven Industrial Training Institutes focused on the skill development of construction workers' families. Since 2021, under the current government, registration of construction workers has surged, and disbursement of welfare benefits has increased significantly, with special provisions ensuring migrant workers' inclusion, such as transportation assistance for deceased workers' families.This progressive timeline reflects Tamil Nadu evolving commitment to building a comprehensive welfare ecosystem that safeguards the rights, health, and social security of its vast construction labor force.

3. THE TAMIL NADU CONSTRUCTION WORKERS' WELFARE BOARD: FORMATION AND OBJECTIVES

The Tamil Nadu Construction Workers Welfare Board (TNCWWB) was established on November 30, 1994, by the Government of Tamil Nadu under the powers granted by the Tamil Nadu Manual Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Work) Act, 1982. The Board was created to address the welfare needs of manual workers engaged in various construction activities across the state, including building, roadwork, dam maintenance, and bridge construction.[4] With over 25 lakh construction workers involved in these activities, the Board's formation was a significant step towards providing structured social security and welfare support to this vast labor force.

[4]Government Order No. 236, dated November 30, 1994, Labour and Employment Department, Tamil Nadu.

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The primary objective of the Board is to register construction workers and implement welfare schemes aimed at improving their quality of life. These schemes cover a wide range of services such as cre'ches for workers' children, personal accident relief, pension schemes, educational assistance, marriage aid, maternity benefits, and funeral support. The Board administers these welfare programs through the Manual Workers General Welfare Fund, which is financed by a cess levied on construction projects.To enhance accessibility and efficiency, the Board operates through 32 district offices statewide, each headed by a Labour Officer (Social Security Scheme) responsible for the registration of workers and disbursement of benefits. The Board is governed by a constitution that includes government officials and representatives of employers and employees, ensuring inclusive decision-making.

Over the years, the TNCWWB has undergone reconstitution, most recently in 2014 and again in 2021, to strengthen its administrative structure and extend its reach.[5] It has also embraced modernization, including computerization of records and the creation of monitoring committees at the district level to oversee the implementation of welfare schemes. These initiatives aim to ensure transparency, efficiency, and timely assistance for registered construction workers.

Since its inception, the Tamil Nadu Construction Workers Welfare Board has continually expanded its scope to meet the evolving needs of construction workers in the state. Beyond registering workers and disbursing welfare benefits, the Board actively promotes awareness about occupational safety and health. It conducts training programs and workshops aimed at educating workers about safe work practices, use of personal protective equipment, and hazards commonly faced on construction sites. This proactive approach helps reduce accident rates and occupational illnesses, which remain major concerns in the sector.[6]

The Board also collaborates with various government departments, non-governmental organizations, and community groups to broaden its welfare outreach. Special efforts have been made to ensure that marginalized groups such as migrant workers and women laborers receive targeted assistance, reflecting a commitment to inclusivity. For instance, recent reforms provide specific provisions for transporting deceased migrant workers' bodies to their native places, underscoring a humane approach to worker welfare.Technological

[5]Government Order No. 21, dated February 19, 2014, Tamil Nadu Construction Workers Welfare Board Reconstitution.
[6]Tamil Nadu Construction Workers Welfare Board Annual Report, 2024-25.

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advancements have further enhanced the Board's efficiency. The digitization of worker registration and benefit disbursement has improved transparency, reduced delays, and minimized paperwork. The introduction of online portals enables workers to apply for benefits and track their application status from anywhere, increasing accessibility particularly for those in remote areas.[7]

Financially, the Board is supported through a welfare cess collected from construction projects, ensuring a sustainable funding source for ongoing and future welfare schemes. The government periodically revises the cess rate and benefit amounts to align with inflation and the growing needs of workers.

In recent years, under the leadership of successive government regimes, the Board has seen renewed focus and investment. The launch of large-scale housing assistance schemes, skill development initiatives, and expanded educational scholarships reflect a broader vision to uplift the socio-economic status of construction workers and their families. This holistic approach positions the Tamil Nadu Construction Workers Welfare Board not just as a welfare provider but as a key facilitator of worker empowerment and social security.[8]

4. BUILDING AND OTHER CONSTRUCTION WORKERS (REGULATION OF EMPLOYMENT AND CONDITIONS OF SERVICE) ACT, 1996

The **BOCW Act, 1996** was enacted by the Parliament of India to regulate the employment and conditions of service of building and construction workers and to provide for their safety, health, and welfare.[9] It recognizes the high risks faced by workers engaged in construction activities such as building, road, bridge, dam, and canal works, and seeks to extend comprehensive welfare and social security to them. The Act came into force along with the **Building and Other Construction Workers' Welfare Cess Act, 1996**, which provides for the collection of a dedicated welfare cess to finance worker welfare schemes.[10]

Composition of the Welfare Boards

[7]Government Order on Digital Initiatives, Labour and Employment Department, Tamil Nadu, 2023
[8]Tamil Nadu Housing Scheme for Construction Workers, Government of Tamil Nadu, 2022.
[9]Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, No. 27 of 1996, Statement of Objects and Reasons.
[10] Building and Other Construction Workers' Welfare Cess Act, 1996, No. 28 of 1996

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Under the Act, every State Government is required to constitute a Building and Other Construction Workers' Welfare Board.

- The Board is a legal entity that enjoys an ongoing existence regardless of changes in its personnel, and it possesses an official seal used to authenticate its documents and actions.It consists of:
  - A Chairperson nominated by the State Government.
  - Members representing employers, workers, and government officials.
  - The Secretary (generally the Labour Commissioner or an officer nominated by the State Government) who acts as the Chief Executive Officer of the Board.
- The composition ensures tripartite representation (government, employers, and employees), promoting balanced decision-making.

Registration of Workers

Eligibility for registration under the Act extends to any construction or building worker aged between 18 and 60 years who has worked for at least 90 days in the past year. Workers seeking to register must submit their applications to the Welfare Board via district or local labor offices. The application requires submission of documents including proof of age, an employment certificate, and payment of a small registration fee, usually around ₹20. After verification, registered workers are issued an identity card that formally recognizes them as beneficiaries.

The Ministry of Labour & Employment's data for 2022, approximately 54 million construction workers have been registered throughout India. Tamil Nadu alone accounts for more than 2.5 million registered workers under its state-level Construction Workers Welfare Board.

Cess Collection And Fund Management Under The Tamil Nadu Construction Workers Welfare Board

The financial foundation of the Tamil Nadu Construction Workers Welfare Board (TNCWWB) rests upon the levy and collection of a labour welfare cess, as provided under the Building and Other Construction Workers' Welfare Cess Act, 1996 **and its accompanying**

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Rules of 1998. The **cess**, imposed at the rate of **one percent of the total cost of construction**, is collected from employers undertaking construction projects valued above the prescribed threshold. The amount is calculated on the basis of the total incurred or estimated construction cost, excluding the cost of land and any compensation paid to workers.

Procedure for Cess Collection

The cess collection process begins at the stage of project approval. The employer or contractor is required to pay an advance cess based on the estimated project cost, typically at the time of obtaining the building plan approval or commencement certificate from local authorities such as municipal corporations or panchayats. Upon completion of the project, the final cess is calculated based on the actual cost of construction**,** verified by the local authority or assessing officer.

The collected cess is then remitted to the Tamil Nadu Construction Workers Welfare Board either directly by the employer or through the designated government agency responsible for local construction regulation. Non-payment or delay in cess remittance invites penalties under **Section 3(4)** of the Cess Act, which authorizes recovery of unpaid cess as arrears of land revenue. In cases where employers contest the cess assessment, they may appeal to the Appellate Autho**rity** constituted under the Act. **Section 3** of the Building and Other Construction Workers' Welfare Cess Act, 1996**,** empowers the Central Government to levy and collect a cess not exceeding two percent (presently fixed at one percent) of the construction cost.

Fund Management by the Welfare Board

The cess collected is credited to the Tamil Nadu Construction Workers Welfare Fund, a dedicated non-lapsable fund maintained by the TNCWWB under the supervision of the Labour Welfare and Skill Development Department of the Government of Tamil Nadu. The fund is used exclusively for welfare and administrative purposes, including:

- Disbursal of direct benefits such as **medical aid, accident compensation, maternity benefits, pension, education scholarships, and housing grants**;
- Administrative expenses of the Board, subject to the limits prescribed by the government (generally not exceeding 5% of the fund's annual income); and

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- Investment of surplus funds in approved securities to generate additional income for future welfare activities.

The Periodic financial audits are conducted by the **Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG)** to ensure transparency and accountability. According to the **CAG Report of 2023**, Tamil Nadu had collected approximately **₹823.4 crore** as cess revenue during 2021–2022, with an accumulated fund corpus exceeding **₹3,600 crore**. However, only **13 percent** of the total cessfunds had been utilized for welfare disbursal, indicating the need for more efficient fund management and improved beneficiary outreach.[11]

The Welfare Board is currently adopting **digital monitoring systems** and **Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)** mechanisms to enhance transparency, minimize delays, and ensure that the welfare benefits directly reach the registered workers without intermediaries. Strengthening fund governance and timely utilization remain critical to fulfilling the objectives of the BOCW legislations in spirit and practice.

5. WELFARE SCHEMES AND BENEFITS

1. Medical Assistance

Under the Tamil Nadu Construction Workers Welfare Board (TNCWWB), registered workers and their families are entitled to medical assistance to cover hospitalization and major illness expenses. The scheme provides financial aid up to ₹1 lakh per worker per annum for treatments in government or approved private hospitals. According to the **TNCWWB Annual Report (2022–2023)**, over **1.24 lakh workers** benefited from medical assistance, amounting to a total expenditure of **₹187 crore**. This initiative addresses the significant healthcare vulnerability of daily wage workers who lack employer-provided insurance or social health protection. The program aligns with the objectives of the BOCW Act, 1996, to secure the health and well-being of unorganized construction workers through institutional support.[12]

2. Maternity Benefit

[11]Comptroller and Auditor General of India. (2023). *Performance Audit on Implementation of Welfare Schemes for Building and Other Construction Workers in Tamil Nadu (Report No. 5 of 2023).* New Delhi: Government of India.

[12] Tamil Nadu Construction Workers Welfare Board. (2023). *Annual Report 2022–2023.* Chennai: Labour Welfare and Skill Development Department, Government of Tamil Nadu.

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Female construction workers receive maternity assistance under the Board's welfare schemes to compensate for income loss during pregnancy and postnatal care. The scheme provides a one-time payment of ₹15,000 for each delivery, subject to a limit of two deliveries. In the financial year 2021–2022, approximately 22,500 women beneficiaries received maternity benefits, with total disbursements exceeding ₹33.7 crore. This program reflects the gender-sensitive dimension of welfare legislation, promoting maternal health and economic stability during critical periods.[13]

3. Accident and Death Compensation

Construction work is inherently hazardous, and the Board extends compensation for accidents and fatalities to mitigate economic distress. Workers who sustain permanent disabilities receive up to ₹2 lakh, while in case of death, the nominee or dependent is entitled to ₹5 lakh. During 2022–2023, the Board reported 6,842 **cases** of compensation disbursal, totaling **₹294 crore** across Tamil Nadu. This provision is vital in providing immediate financial relief and ensuring dignity for families affected by occupational risks.[14]

4. Educational Assistance

To promote social upliftment, the TNCWWB offers educational scholarships to the children of registered construction workers from primary school to higher education. The assistance ranges from ₹2,500 for school students to ₹10,000 for college-level education, and ₹25,000 for professional or technical courses. The **Labour Welfare Department Report (2023)** recorded **over 2.8 lakh students** benefiting under this scheme in 2022–2023, with an expenditure exceeding ₹210 crore. This initiative directly contributes to reducing intergenerational poverty and enhancing human capital development among the working class.[15]

5. Marriage Assistance

[13] Ibid.

[14] Comptroller and Auditor General of India. (2023). *Performance Audit on Implementation of Welfare Schemes for Building and Other Construction Workers in Tamil Nadu (Report No. 5 of 2023).* New Delhi: Government of India.

[15] Labour Welfare Department, Government of Tamil Nadu. (2023). *Statistical Report on Welfare Disbursements, 2022–2023.* Chennai.

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The Welfare Board provides marriage assistance of ₹10,000 for the marriage of the registered worker or their children. This is aimed at supporting low-income construction families in managing major social expenditures. In 2021–2022, nearly **19,000 beneficiaries** availed this scheme, with a total disbursement of **₹19.2 crore**. Such targeted welfare interventions not only alleviate economic burdens but also reinforce social inclusion among marginalized worker communities.[16]

6. Pension Scheme

Registered workers above the age of **60 years** are eligible for a **monthly pension of ₹1,000**, recognizing their contribution to the construction sector. As per the **CAG Audit Report (2023)**, over **1.6 lakh retired workers** in Tamil Nadu received pensions through the TNCWWB, with an annual outlay of **₹193 crore**. The pension scheme provides a vital social security safety net for aged workers who lack formal retirement benefits, thereby fulfilling the redistributive goal of the welfare fund.[17]

7. Housing Assistance

The TNCWWB extends housing assistance of up to ₹2 lakh to workers for the construction or renovation of houses. Beneficiaries are prioritized based on seniority and financial need. During **2022–2023**, **11,742 workers** received housing aid, with the total expenditure reported at **₹168 crore**. The scheme aligns with the broader government objective of promoting housing for all and improving living conditions among construction workers who often reside in temporary shelters.[18]

8. Funeral and Ex-Gratia Assistance

In the event of a worker's death, the Welfare Board grants ₹10,000 as funeral expenses to the legal heir or nominee. Additionally, a one-time ex-gratia payment is provided in special circumstances such as natural calamities or pandemics. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, the Tamil Nadu government disbursed ₹1,000 each to over **23 lakh registered**

[16]Ibid.
[17]Comptroller and Auditor General of India. (2023). *Performance Audit Report on Construction Workers' Welfare Funds in Tamil Nadu.*
[18]Tamil Nadu Construction Workers Welfare Board. (2023). *Welfare Statistics and Scheme Report.* Chennai.

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construction workers as emergency relief. This immediate cash transfer exemplified the Board's role as a responsive welfare mechanism during crises.

The array of welfare schemes administered by the Tamil Nadu Construction Workers Welfare Board under the BOCW Act, 1996, collectively ensures social protection, income stability, and human development for one of India's most vulnerable worker groups. However, while Tamil Nadu implementation record stands among the best in India, the persistent issue of underutilized welfare fundswith less than 20 percent disbursed annually calls for structural reforms in fund management, outreach, and digital governance. Effective utilization of the cess corpus can transform the welfare board into a robust instrument for inclusive growth and labour justice.

JUDICIAL INTERPRETATION

State of Tamil Nadu v. Prime Sristi Housing Pvt. Ltd. & Others,[19]

In 2014 Moulivakkam building collapse involved the under-construction Prime Trust Heights towers, *The Faith* and *The Belief*, in Porur, Chennai, which collapsed on June 28, 2014, around 5:30 PM, resulting in the deaths of 61 construction workers and injuries to 40 others, most of whom were migrant laborers from Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and odisha. The collapse, precipitated by heavy rainfall and a lightning strike, exposed pre-existing structural deficiencies**,** including substandard building materials, inadequate column and foundation design, unauthorized removal of basement columns, and lack of experienced supervision and safety protocols. Investigations and the Justice R. Regupathy Commission held the builder and chief engineers responsible for gross negligence. Nine individuals were charged for violations of safety norms. The Commission recommended mandatory builder insurance to cover worker liabilities, fixed deposit requirements for large projects to secure compensation, strengthened oversight by the Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority

[19]Justice R. Regupathy Commission Report, 2015, Madras High Court / Government of Tamil Nadu.

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(CMDA) including technical experts, and improved compensation and welfare measures for affected workers.

The case underscored the critical need for accountability, strict enforcement of In ***Chinnaval v. Secretary, Tamil Nadu Construction Workers Welfare Board (2020)***[20], the petitioner sought relief for the delayed disbursal of compensation following the death of a registered construction worker under the TNCWWB. Despite fulfilling all formalities, the Welfare Board had not processed the claim in a timely manner, prompting the petitioner to approach the Madras High Court**.** The Court held that once a claim is submitted, the Board is legally obligated to consider and dispose of it within a reasonable period**,** and it cannot arbitrarily deny or delay benefits once eligibility is established under the BOCW Act, 1996**.** The Court directed the Board to promptly process and release the compensation**,** reinforcing that welfare boards are accountable for transparency, efficiency, and timely relief. This case underscores the judiciary's role in ensuring worker welfare and enforcing statutory obligations in Tamil Nadusafety regulations, and robust welfare mechanisms for construction workers in Tamil Nadu.

National Campaign Committee for Central Legislation on Construction Labour v. Union of India (2018) 5 SCC 607

In this landmark case, the Supreme Court expressed serious concern over the non-utilization and mismanagement of welfare funds collected under the Cess Act. The Court observed that despite the collection of over ₹37,400 crore nationwide, a meagre ₹9,500 crore had been spent on welfare schemes. The Bench, headed by Justice Madan B. Lokur, directed all States and Union Territories to ensure proper registration of construction workers, efficient cess collection, and timely disbursal of welfare benefits. The Court declared that the failure of the authorities amounted to a **"violation of fundamental rights under Article 21"**, which guarantees the right to life with dignity.[21]This judgment marked a turning point by transforming welfare implementation from administrative discretion into a **constitutional obligation**. It reinforced the idea that welfare funds cannot remain idle and must directly serve the purpose for which they are collected.

[20] W.P. No. 15390 of 2020, Madras High Court.
[21] (2018) 5 SCC 607.

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People's Union for Democratic Rights v. Union of India (1982) 3 SCC 235 (Asiad Workers' Case)

Though preceding the BOCW Act, this case laid the jurisprudential foundation for the protection of construction workers. The Supreme Court, through Justice P.N. Bhagwati, held that non-payment of minimum wages and poor working conditions amounted to forced labour prohibited under **Article 23** of the Constitution. The Court emphasized that the State is bound to ensure humane working conditions, particularly in public construction projects.[22]This early judgment highlighted the need for a specialized legal framework to protect construction labourers, ultimately leading to the enactment of the BOCW Act, 1996.

6. ROLE IN PROMOTING OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY

The construction industry is inherently high-risk, with workers frequently exposed to accidents, falls, and occupational diseases. Recognizing these dangers, the Tamil Nadu Construction Workers Welfare Board (TNCWWB), in collaboration with the Labour Department and the Inspector of Factories, has implemented comprehensive safety measures aimed at protecting construction workers and enhancing their well-being.

Distribution of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

To reduce injuries on construction sites, the TNCWWB has prioritized the provision of personal protective equipment (PPE), including helmets, gloves, safety shoes, and reflective jackets. These items protect workers from falls, sharp objects, and machinery-related hazards. Distribution is often accompanied by guidance on proper use, ensuring that workers understand how PPE mitigates risks and enhances safety.

Safety Training Programs

The Board conducts regular safety training sessions to educate workers on occupational safety protocols, such as proper scaffolding practices, machinery handling, and emergency responses. These programs empower workers to identify hazards proactively, respond to emergencies effectively, and foster a culture of vigilance and safety at worksites.

Health Camps and Awareness Drives

[22] (1982) 3 SCC 235.

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In addition to physical safety, the TNCWWB organizes health camps and awareness drives at construction sites to promote hygiene, preventive healthcare, and medical check-ups. These initiatives reduce occupational health risks, encourage healthy practices among workers, and improve productivity by maintaining a healthier workforce.

Impact on Workplace Safety Culture

Through these combined interventions, the Welfare Board has cultivated a culture of safety and responsibility within the construction sector. Workers are more aware of their rights and the importance of safety norms, while employers are incentivized to maintain safer environments. Overall, these measures contribute to reducing accidents, minimizing health hazards, and enhancing worker welfare in Tamil Nadu construction industry.[23]

7. CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTATION

Despite notable progress in enhancing the welfare and safety of construction workers, the implementation of welfare schemes in Tamil Nadu faces several persistent challenges.

Low Registration and Awareness

A significant proportion of construction workers remain unregistered under the Tamil Nadu Construction Workers Welfare Board (TNCWWB) due to low awareness, high mobility, and limited literacy levels. Many workers, particularly migrants from rural areas and neighboring states, are unaware of their eligibility for welfare benefits such as health insurance, pensions, or accident compensation. This lack of awareness prevents workers from claiming their entitlements and limits the overall effectiveness of welfare initiatives, highlighting the need for targeted awareness campaigns and simplified registration processes.

Administrative Delays

Cumbersome documentation procedures and bureaucratic delays frequently hinder timely disbursal of benefits. Workers often face difficulties in submitting proof of employment, identity, or residency, which leads to prolonged waiting periods and discourages participation.

[23]Sriram, K., & Kumar, P. (2020). Occupational safety and welfare of construction workers in Tamil Nadu. *Indian Journal of Labour Studies*, 41(2), 55–70.

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Such delays not only reduce the perceived value of welfare schemes but also undermine the trust of workers in the Board's ability to deliver benefits efficiently, emphasizing the need for streamlined processes and digital solutions.

Fund Utilization and Leakages

While substantial funds are collected through the welfare cess imposed on construction projects, the utilization of these resources remains suboptimal in certain cases due to procedural bottlenecks or administrative inefficiencies. Improper planning, delayed project approvals, or lack of monitoring mechanisms can result in underutilization or misallocation of funds. Ensuring transparent and accountable fund management is essential to maximize the impact of welfare programs and maintain credibility among beneficiaries.

Informality of Employment

The predominantly unorganized nature of construction employment makes it difficult to maintain accurate records and track workers over time. Many laborers are employed on a casual or temporary basis, often shifting between sites or contractors, which disrupts continuity in registration and benefits. This informal employment pattern complicates welfare delivery, especially for migrant workers, and underscores the importance of a flexible yet robust system that can accommodate the mobility and unpredictability of the workforce.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING THE WELFARE MECHANISM

i. **Digital Registration and Monitoring**: Simplify worker registration through online portals and mobile apps to reach migrant and rural laborers, enabling real-time tracking of claims and fund utilization.

ii. **Awareness Campaigns:** Conduct targeted outreach with NGOs, trade unions, and local bodies to inform workers about available welfare schemes and entitlements.

iii. **Transparency in Fund Utilization:** Implement regular audits and public disclosure of cess fund allocation to ensure accountability and build trust among workers.

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iv. **Integration with Other Social Security Schemes:** Link welfare benefits with programs like Ayushman Bharat, PMAY, and EPF to provide comprehensive coverage and avoid duplication.

v. **Occupational Safety Audits:** Conduct periodic inspections and mandate safety certifications for contractors to reduce accidents and enforce compliance with safety norms.

vi. **Skill Upgradation Programs:** Provide specialized training and certification programs to improve worker productivity, employability, and safety awareness.

9. CONCLUSION

The welfare and safety of construction workers in Tamil Nadu are critical components of a sustainable and humane construction industry. Over the years, the Tamil Nadu Construction Workers Welfare Board (TNCWWB) has made significant strides in providing social security, occupational safety, and skill development through comprehensive welfare schemes funded by the cess collected from construction projects. Initiatives such as digital registration, safety training, PPE distribution, health camps, and integration with other social security programs have improved accessibility, awareness, and worker well-being. Judicial interventions, including landmark cases like the 2014 Moulivakkam building collapse and Chinnaval v. TNCWWB (2020), have reinforced accountability, timely disbursal of benefits, and adherence to safety standards. However, challenges persist in the form of low registration, administrative delays, underutilization of funds, and informal employment, which hinder the full potential of welfare initiatives. Strengthening the system through digital monitoring, transparency, awareness campaigns, occupational safety audits, and skill upgradation can ensure that welfare measures effectively reach all construction workers, particularly migrants and unorganized laborers. Ultimately, a robust welfare framework not only protects workers from occupational hazards but also contributes to enhanced productivity, social equity, and sustainable growth in Tamil Nadu's construction sector.

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