



Socio-Economic Conditions Of Brick Kiln Workers In India

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ABSTRACT

Construction activity is an integral part of the country's infrastructure and industrial development. With the advent of new real estate projects in the form of malls, corporate offices, hospitals, schools, townships, highways, railways, airports, high rise apartments and commercial buildings, construction material is in great demand. Hence manufacturing units or brick kilns are in huge number in the western belt of Uttar Pradesh especially Baghpat, Muzaffarnagar and villages surrounding Meerut. Workers who are from the poor strata of our society especially the villagers prefer working in these kilns. Although the government of India, Ministry of Labour and Employment has declared 'Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-dhan Yojana for workers who work in unorganised sector' but unfortunately these workers are absolutely clueless about these schemes and how to avail their benefits. Hence workers of this unorganised sector remain one of the most overlooked and vulnerable lot. Working and living conditions are quite harsh for them. As workers usually live within the kiln, they are exposed to hazardous substances such as burnt plastic, dust and arsenic. Labourers, including children get injured quite often at work. The average working hours are 10-12 hours and majority of children do not attend school or have any play time whatsoever. The accommodation is usually overcrowded and uncomfortable, commonly with several families living together in one single room and outdoor toilets. Violence against workers, including beatings and abductions of family members, is quite common, especially when labourers seek help. Women are also particularly vulnerable to abuse and sexual harassment. To study the socio-economic conditions of these brick kiln workers, 228 workers were picked as sample from western belt of Uttar Pradesh especially from kilns of Meerut, Muzaffarnagar and Baghpat on random basis. Data was gathered through direct open ended and closed ended questionnaire and structured interview where demographic details were gathered along with the socio economic issues faced by the workers. Statistical Package for Social Sciences was used for the analysis followed by relevant suggestions which should be implemented thereof.

KEYWORDS: Brick kiln workers, socio economic conditions.

1. INTRODUCTION

Brick kilns are the unorganised sector of India. They are clustered in the western belt of Uttar Pradesh. They have lot of potential showcasing recurring demand and low skill sets. Not only brick kilns are

a source of employment to the uneducated village folk but also an excellent example of low investment business venture for small time entrepreneurs.

1.1. What are Brick kilns?

These are furnaces or kilns in which blocks of clay are baked or burned into bricks. These bricks are used in construction purposes which is the backbone of the real estate sector.

1.2. Where do brick kiln workers hail from?

Most kiln workers are either from the nearby villages or migrants coming from other states such as Chattisgarh, Bihar, Orissa, Rajasthan and North-Eastern states of our country. They are predominantly members of lower castes such as Dalits and indigenous groups that are commonly amongst the discriminated lot.

1.3. How are brick kilns helpful in the Indian economy?

It is one of the fast growing sectors in urban areas as bricks are used in all construction activities. Kiln business is performing quite well in western Uttar Pradesh. In all respects it helps in adding to the economy. It provides ample employment and income generation opportunities. Apart from all the positives, kiln workers are facing numerous issues. When villagers plan to move out of their nests to earn a living, everything looks very lucrative from a distance but in reality labour market is marked with lots of problems and disadvantages.

1.4. How are brick kiln workers exploited?

Generally, these labourers are hired by the labour contractor/employer and offered an advance against which their earnings are deducted. According to the contractors, these labourers lose control over their debt because of which they cannot leave the employment. Here is where exploitation of the weaker lot begins. The debts are supposedly passed on from generation to generation. They are not paid wages, infact their services are taken against the debt they owe and they have no idea until the end of the season how much they are entitled to receive or if they still owe the kiln owners. Even though an informal verbal agreement is usually made with the male head of household, the whole family, including young children have to work for long hours in the kilns to meet the targets. As they often take new loans to clear past debts, most workers are in perpetual bondage.

1.5. What is the contribution of the unorganised labour force?

The term 'unorganised labour' encompasses in itself those workers who have not been able to organise themselves in pursuit of their common interest due to certain constraints like casual nature of employment, illiteracy, ignorance, small and scattered size of establishment and like. As per the survey carried out by the National Sample Survey Organisation the total employment in unorganised sectors in the country is more than 90% of the total labour work force. The need was therefore felt to lay focus on the problems faced by the workers in unorganised sector with special reference to the workers in brick manufacturing industry.

1.6. What are the new developments in the brick kiln sector?

Disposal of agricultural waste is a major cause of concern in many areas of western Uttar Pradesh. Baghpat district has come up with many zigzag brick kilns and have started using agricultural waste as fuel along with coal. This can be a saviour from the farmers' perspective. Tudi (crop residue of mustard) and Maily (organic waste from sugarcane factories) are used as fuel along with coal for brick production resulting in drastic fall in coal consumption. This change has been brought not only because kiln owners are using agricultural waste with coal in their kilns, but also because of conversion of most fixed chimney bull trench kiln (FCBTKs) into zigzag technology as per the directive from Environmental Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority (EPCA). The EPCA had given a deadline to all FCBTKs to be converted to zigzag latest by September 30, 2018. As per the EPCA, out of around 425 functional brick kilns in Baghpat district, some 300 kilns (which constitutes almost 70.6%) have converted to zigzag technology so far, and almost all of them are using agricultural waste along with coal as fuel. Use of less coal meant huge saving on fuel expenses which would result in improved quality of bricks and depleted pollution levels. This actually helps the 'kiln owners' and not the 'workmen'.

2. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The present research on the Socio-Economic conditions of brick kiln workers is one of its kind which needs the attention of government authorities. It is a unique study wherein the social and economic conditions are analysed which are drastically impacted by the overall working conditions of this exploited labour class. This sector involves practically nil technology, very low skill sets, infact manual methods of preparation of bricks in these kilns. Construction sector is quite sluggish in rainy season i.e. July to September, otherwise it provides round the year employment to these workers.

This particular research is done to analyse the alarming problems of Kiln workers like low wages, uncertain or temporary work, degraded social status, lack of economic and social security and exploitation from contractors. It is also to throw light on future prospects of this particular industry which has extremely high potential in contributing to employment and also revenue generation. Adequate usage of agricultural waste can be of great help in reducing fuel consumption, make better quality bricks as well as lowering the pollution level.

3. PROBLEMS FACED BY KILN WORKERS

- Brick kiln sector is an unorganised one
- Victims of exploitation
- Permanent poverty
- Ignorance
- Illiteracy
- Lack of required skill sets
- Lack of job security
- Uncertain working hours
- Unhygienic and unsafe working conditions
- Vulnerability to diseases
- Injuries at work
- Absence of proper medical assistance
- Lack of social security and improper implementation of labour laws

- Lack of labour welfare activities
- Practically no holidays
- Adoption of various ill habits
- Double burden on women
- Suffer from psychosocial disorders
- Future of workers' children is uncertain

4. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This research was decided after the deep study and findings of the previous researches related to construction field. This study is to try and find the gap area where still research needs to be carried out.

J. S. Mill (1869) performed a study wherein he argued for equality between genders in giving employment. He made a case for the principle of perfect equality between men and women in making availability the employment opportunities and also mentioned that no occupation shall be considered as inadmissible for women. The so-called inability or lesser ability of women in his opinion, was also a result of male domination and the intention of men to keep women in the sub-ordinate position even in the house. Marxist economists only criticized the capitalism for not allowing the women to participate in work outside the house.

Engels (1884) had stated that unless socialism is brought into practice liberation of women was not possible. Engels also stated later on that emancipation of women may only be possible when women take part in production on large scale and domestic work no longer claims anything but an insignificant amount of her time.

Choudhari et al (1984) had published a paper based on the research on the problem of home based piece rate women workers. It discussed the concepts and types of piece rate women worker and also examines their socio-economic problems. Some support schemes had been suggested.

Anita Dighe (1985) studied and showed that large percentage of women are concentrate in informal sector of urban economy in low-paid, low-skilled jobs. In home based production a large number of women workers are invisible since they work at home in informal manner.

Nandini Azad (1986) examined the patterns, types, nature and constraints or petty trading in respect of working labour in the informal sector with the details of date pertaining to fourteen occupations of workers in Madras city.

Everett et al (1988) had described five kinds of works that workers performed in the informal sector from a study based on data of Mumbai city collected from Fisher Folk Co-operative, Versova, hanawalis Women's Association Bandra Past, Bometric Servants Union, Dharavi and Subcontract Workers Social Work Agency, Ghatkopar. The study stated that all the four occupations can be linked to frame based work.

Ela Bhat (1989) for SEWA had conducted a study which presented insight into the working conditions and problems of self employed women and those in the informal sector. National Commission on Self Employed women and women in the informal sector (1989) a report published by the Shram Shakti gave detail information regarding the working and living conditions of poor women, elaborated their problems and made certain recommendations.

Second National Commission on labour (2002) was appointed by the Government of India on October 15,1999 under the chairmanship of Mr. Ravidra Varma, former Minister of Labour, Government of India. The Commission submitted its recommendations in June, 2002. One of the

main task interested the Commission was for two purposes an umbrella legislation for workers in the unorganised sector to ensure at least a minimum protection and welfare to the workers in this sector. **According to 10th five year plan (2002-2007) Vol. II** Only four states had set up welfare boards under the Buildings and Construction Workers Welfare Act, 1996. These welfare boards were meant to implement schemes like immediate assistance to beneficiary in case of accident, pension at the age of 60 years, premiums for group insurance scheme for the beneficiary and medical expenses etc. In the absence of such administrative mechanism provided under the Act, resources could not be collected from construction contractors.

Silvia M. D. Mendoncae Noronha (2009) In his study of Migrant Construction Workers in Goa wrote that a significant proportion of the total migrant labour in Goa comprised of construction workers from other states who came in large numbers following the construction boom in Goa in the eighties. This paper examined the socio-economic characteristics of these workers. The causal factors (push and pull factors) leading to migration of these workers in Goa and the impact of the Goan economy.

Darshan Sing (2009) in his paper 'Working Conditions and Problems of Unorganised Sector: A Study of Construction Workers' analysed that there were more than 20 million people engaged in various construction activities. They were born with indebtedness and poverty, their bodies were weak and they were overwhelmingly literate. They were not only discriminated but also exploited by the contractors/employers by taking benefit of their poor bargaining and socio-economic conditions. They were compelled to work on lower wages and unhygienic conditions without proper facilities of housing, washing, bathing, urinals and social security measures.

K. Narindar Jetli (2011) in the book 'India : Manpower, Employment Policy and Labour Welfare 1947 to 2011' mentioned that construction is one of the most labour intensive sector. Also, there existed large unmet demand for housing in both rural and urban areas. According to the National Building Organisation, the urban housing shortage was at 8.23 million units in 1991. Similarly in rural areas too there were such shortages. A boost to this sector was necessary to meet the housing demand, which constituted one of the basic necessities. In the process significant employment opportunities could be generated at different skill level, though largely for unskilled labour.

M. Bhaskar (2015) Based on the pathetic conditions of the migrant labourers and their indebtedness, this paper emphasises on the fact that migrations are forced. The labourers remain in circulation amongst brick kilns in different locations, but are prevented from moving on because of their limited skill sets and social networks. They return home to repay a never-ending debt and again receive advance wages for the next season resulting in a renewing cycle of debt and migration for survival.

S. Premchander et al. (2019) explored the practice of giving advances to rural migrants in exchange for their work in brick production in kilns, away from their homes, for more than six months per year. Exploitative practices were studied and authors examined why the Indian government did not prosecute employers under bonded labour laws. Engaging with issues of agency and contractor 'chains', they drew attention to the factors that have produced bondage which is difficult to recognize and act against, even by non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The authors explained the need to improve workers' livelihoods by floating social protection schemes, using modern technology to help workers escape these cycles of exploitation and investing in their skill development but could not identify how this could be implemented.

T. Tripathy et al. (2020) studied the reality of the workers of brick kilns viz. their vulnerability, migration issues, social insecurity, potential health risks and the hazardous atmosphere that they work

in. Thus, one could gauge the importance of the enactment of various acts related to the unorganized sector, social welfare schemes for this sector & the role of Non-Government Organizations for the welfare of the sector. This research addressed only three brick kilns in a large state like Uttar Pradesh. The number of stakeholders was also very less in number to represent the entire state or district. Moreover, the study was an assessment done at a primary level thus giving a glimpse of the situation of brick kilns.

T. L. Watson et al. (2020) aimed to highlight the lives of the poorest members of Indian society, and focused on working donkeys specifically as they were the only species of working equids present in the brick kilns that were visited. Following aspects were discussed viz. culture, religion, social influences, including insights into the complexities of cultural ‘blind spots through a questionnaire based welfare assessment tool, to assess the welfare of working donkeys in brick kilns in Northern India. Again, problems were highlighted but not the solution.

Note:

‘A boost to this sector is very much required to meet the housing/corporate demand and infrastructural development of the country. In this process, employment opportunities would be generated to the poor and unskilled labour class.’

5. NEED OF THE STUDY

Apart from so many reasons why brick kiln industry is of utmost importance, the workmen behind this industry are facing lot of social and economic issues which need to be taken care of. Hence the need of the study.

6. MAIN OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Main objective of this study is to highlight major socio- economic issues faced by brick kiln workers whether it is their living and working condition, their wages, their wage differentiation based on gender and skill sets and like.

Suggestions put forth should be looked into quite seriously by the government, kiln owners and contractors.

7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Study was carried out through survey method wherein a focus group of 228 respondents was picked through purposive probability sampling. These included workers working in brick kilns. There are more than 500 brick kilns in the western belt of Uttar Pradesh, especially Muzaffarnagar, Meerut and Baghpat. Data was gathered by Brick kiln union offices in these three cities. Owners’ and Contractors’ lists are available in these setups. These contractors proved to be of great help in getting primary data. Qualitative and Quantitative study was carried out. Data was gathered from brick kiln union offices in these three cities which have database of kiln owners and contractors. These contractors are the channel to reach the labourers. This area was selected for study because it is very fast developing and has a recurring demand with high economies of scale. Moreover it was operationally convenient from time and cost angle as well.

8. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

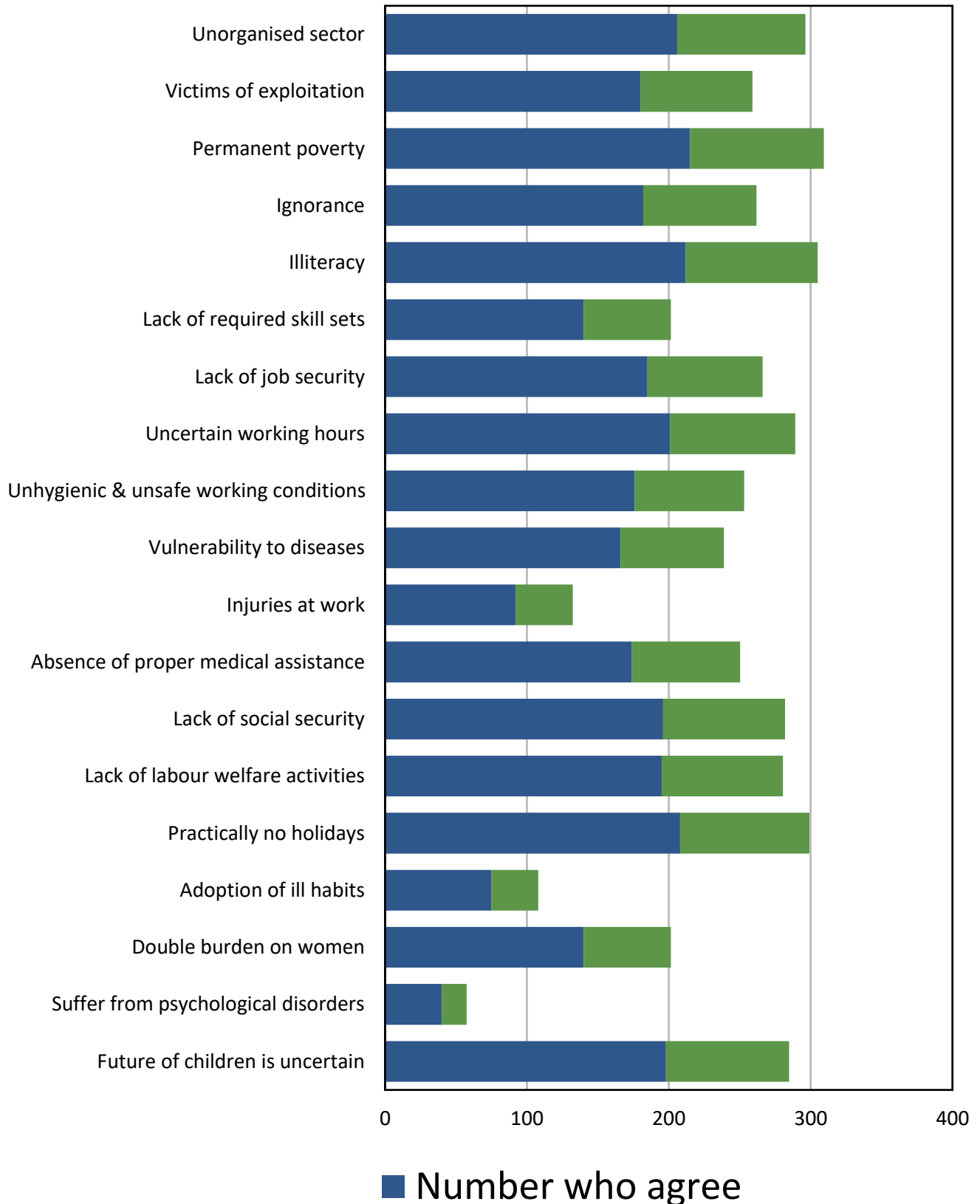
PROBLEMS FACED BY BRICK KILN WORKERS	NUMBER OF WORKERS WHO AGREE	% OF WORKERS WHO AGREE
Brick kiln sector is an unorganised one	206	90.3%
Victims of exploitation	180	78.9%
Permanent poverty	215	94.3%
Ignorance	182	79.8%
Illiteracy	212	92.9%
Lack of required skill sets	140	61.40%
Lack of job security	185	81.1%
Uncertain working hours	201	88.1%
Unhygienic and unsafe working conditions	176	77.2%
Vulnerability to diseases	166	72.8%
Injuries at work	92	40.3%
Absence of proper medical assistance	174	76.3%
Lack of social security and improper implementation of labour laws	196	86%
Lack of labour welfare activities	195	85.5%
Practically no holidays	208	91.2%
Adoption of various ill habits	75	32.9%
Double burden on women	140	61.4%
Suffer from psychological disorders	40	17.5%
Future of workers' children is uncertain	198	86.8%

Note: Sample Size = 228

9. SUGGESTIONS

- a) There should be standard central and state authorities to safeguard the interests of brick kiln workers which they can access at the time of contingencies.

BAR GRAPH REPRESENTATION OF FINDINGS



- b) As brick kiln workers are generally migrant labourers, they should always be given easy entry and exit in between state boundaries.
- c) The living and working conditions are pathetic for the kiln workers. Kiln owners and contractors should pay attention to the same.
- d) Kiln workers and their families should be made aware of the government schemes in their favour. Basic education should also be imparted to women and their children.
- e) More kilns means more workers which means more cases of injuries. In between 3-4 kilns, a small dispensary should be there to cater to any first aid medical emergencies.
- f) Brick kiln sector needs to become an organised one as there is immense potential in this unpenetrated sector, workers should be made aware of all the benefits and schemes that they are entitled to.

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