Livelihood Challenges among Women Brick Kiln Workers : A Sociological Study in Kataka

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Abstract: *India's economic sector is dominated by the unorganized sector. Though it has an unavoidable place in the economy, still this sector has been considered as the most vulnerable and unnoticed sector in the country. As observed, the brick kiln is becoming a hub of employment for many socially and economically backward and migrated men and women. Women pursue jobs in brick kilns since it is very easy to get entry in this sector. This sector offers a very easy source of income to the untrained and inexperienced women of our country. But the condition of women in brick kilns is the worst. This study analyses different factors among women workers for joining the brick kilns. This study examines the migration status, working conditions and the challenges faced by female workers in the kilns. The study concludes, the female workers continue to encounter a series of challenges including low wages, harmful working conditions, and lack of health and sanitation facilities etc. in the brick kilns.*

Keywords: Brick kiln, Division of Labour, Gender, Hierarchy. Informal Sector, Livelihood

INTRODUCTION

Around 90 percent of India's workforce constitute workers from the informal sector (Raveendran and Vanek, 2020). The economic progress of India depends on the contributions of the informal sector workers and they constitute the base of India's development in several fields. Unfortunately, despite their huge contributions, the socio-economic condition of the informal sector workers in India remains poor. This division of the workforce usually remains out of the focus of Government policies and programmes. Due to which, they are deprived of all legitimate benefits and are also exposed to different forms of exploitation. Unlike the formal sector workers who are authorized to various legally-sanctioned benefits, the workers of informal sector in developing countries do not have much legal protection and are not protected by social security schemes. They suffer from "low productivity and low wages" condition. They always remain economically backward, illiterate, and poor. The informal labour comprises sections of, agricultural labourers, industrial labourers, domestic workers and the self-employed. "The term unorganized sector was first used by Keith Hart in 1971 who described the unorganized sector as that part of the urban labour force, which falls outside the organized labour market. In the unorganized sector, work situations are not in official record and working conditions are not protected by law" (Banu, 2017).

Brick Kiln Industry

The brick industry is becoming a significant industry of the unorganized sector because of the growing number of buildings in urban areas. Basically, the brick kilns are situated in rural or semi- urban areas. This industry is characterized by instability, short period, or seasonal basis. This industry hires a great number of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled labourers. About half of the workers in this sector are women. Studies conducted in two brick-kiln sectors of Haryana showed that these kilns function in a mainly unregulated manner in the unorganized sector and always remain outside the realm of laws for the workplace, with these workers of kilns bound to contractors as well as owners by the advance payments system. Different committees have made their recommendations to improve the working conditions in this sector, but as a matter of fact few of these committees have been implemented properly (Gupta, 2003). A Dharmalingam (1995) conducted his study in a village of Tamilnadu, where he described the condition of brick workers as very hazardous. They are

DOI: https://doi.org/10.62656/SIJSS.v24i5.2581

underpaid, and it is very difficult for them to even get their minimum substance and they also have no better future in this sector. The growth in the number of brick industries has put a hazardous impact on the environment as a result the more suffered group of this process are poor classes. The rich brick manufacturers have destroyed customary social relations and expanded the distance between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots. Isabelle et.al (2007) in the paper **"**Labour in Brick Kilns: A Case Study in Chennai" explains the conditions of brick kiln workers in Chennai. They are living in a very "mild" situation with bondage of debt, long working hours, as well as they put their children to work in the kiln also. They get wages that are almost nearly the same as the wages fixed by the government for the unorganized sector and also advance payment system is permitted by both workers and kiln owners. The breakdown of debt bondage is only possible when the employers, trade unions, NGOs and public authorities come together in the welfare of workers.

The process of brick- making includes the activities like moulding the clay mud into bricks, drying it in sun, staking and burning. The working field of the brick industry is exposed to uncertainties of climate and weather conditions like rains, extreme heat, and severe cold which becomes very problematic for workers. These situations directly affect the health and psychological condition of workers and result in health deterioration of workers. They do not get any social welfare and security assistance at the workplace. There is a lack of concerns of state and central governments, and also trade unions towards the welfare of brick kiln workers. This paper analyses the brick industries situated in barpeta district of Assam. It is one of the most labor-intensive industries which gives maximum employment opportunities to local workers as well as the workers migrated from different districts or states. Both the male and female workers get involved in this brick making manufacturing process (Das, 2016). Now a day's brick manufacturing industry is expanding towards real estate business in unorganized sectors in India. It is a labour demanding industry, where many migrated as well as local men and women get employment opportunities. In this paper it is explained that due to poverty and very small land holding, they migrate and work in the kilns on a temporary basis. Women workers of the kilns are mainly illiterate. Although they are not satisfied with the working environment, they have to work there because of a lack of skills. For the welfare of women workers of these sectors statutory bodies need to be strengthened (Naik, 2017).

"The Odisha Brick Sector - A Baseline Study" (2012) is a report prepared by Development Alternatives, New Delhi, India. In which there is a detailed analysis of the current scenario of different brick sectors of Odisha, which comprises red bricks and fly-ash bricks and also their market potential, environment related issues associated with kilns. The study has taken a survey method as well as a structured questionnaire for the collection of data from 78 brick kilns of different districts in Odisha. The social issue of migration is closely associated with the growth of this sector. Intra- state migration is a form of migration seen in the kilns in which the workers from Bhadrak, Kalahandi, Mayurbhanj and Bolangir migrate to all over the state to work in the kilns. The key issues found in the brick sectors such as pollution of air, high consumption of energy, loss of fertile land etc. are mentioned in this paper. Though agriculture is the primary economy for most of the rural people, small industries like brick kilns are becoming a source of livelihood for many rural poor. Brick kilns become a livelihood option for many poor women who are excluded from mainstream occupation. By joining this sector, they became powerful in the battle against poverty and unemployment (Rahman and Islam, 2014).

Women and Brick Kiln

Women constitute half of the Indian population. They have a great role in the development of the economy of India. Most of the landless poor or laborer, who generally belong to lower or untouchable caste, tribal communities, from any economically and socially backward regions, migrate for their subsistence and constitute a major section of seasonal labour flow. For the maintenance and substance of the families many women join unorganized sectors as the working field. A large number of women work in unorganized sectors on low wages due to absence of skills, lack of education, ignorance and surplus labour and thus they found a very high level of exploitation in the workplace. The socio-economic profile of women workers is significantly affected by the natural condition of the working area where they work. Lack of adequate facilities, stressful, unhygienic and unsafe working conditions affects their social life. At the same time, insecurity in employment puts their economic standing in a very difficult situation (Kumawat, 2015). Informal sector is one of those sources of the economy where women have been actively taking the lead in employment. Women workers in the informal sector are vulnerable to the exploitation in so many ways like they witnessed discrimination, exploitation, harassment and job insecurity in the workplace. As they are not able to complete their primary education due to children or other familial problems and do not have the basic skills, they have to end up in the informal sector and no other choice with them (Saikia et al., 2021). From many unorganized sectors, brick kilns are one of the important sectors for hiring women workers. Though there is an increase of women in paid occupations, it did not guarantee the welfare of women and a better livelihood. Here the researcher conducted a case study about a brick kiln women worker named "JAYAMMA". In which the researcher investigated the work and family of the women worker. It is found that there is a form of rigidity in division of labour on the basis of sex. Basically, the skilled and semi-skilled work found in the kilns are performed by men whereas women are basically engaged in unskilled work such as carrying, head – loadings etc. As a result, women workers in the kilns get less wages in comparison to their male counterparts although their work physically is not less exhausting than male workers. Though the above explained issues present in the kilns, women depend on this sector because of the uncertainty of other jobs and employment continuity of this sector (Gulati, 1979).

They are used only for cheap labour, in this pattern of employment the burden of work on women workers gets doubled. The brick kiln sector has been considered as the most vulnerable and unnoticed sector in India. D.P Singh (2005) conducted a study on the women brick kiln workers in the state of Haryana. In this paper the researcher explained about the challenges faced by the women brick field workers and their tough life situations. While they take the responsibility to look after family, at the same time for survival they get involved in different economic activities. The women workers of the kilns are indebted, exploited as

well as unprotected from any type of social security. There is a lack of proper implementation of labour welfare laws in the brick kilns. Shanthi (2006) in her paper named "Female Labour Migration in India" analyzes the trend of employment-oriented female labour migration. Traditionally, marriage is the only cause for females, but now the trend is changing, now the women are migrating for their economic security through employment in different sectors such as garment sector, export industries, brick kilns etc. One of the ancient industries in India is brick making industry. In this sector a large number of men and women including children are working at very low wages, on a temporary or contract basis and in an unhealthy working environment. Hence in this paper the researchers tried to explain the socio-economic situation of some selected brick workers of Coimbatore district. The labour force of the brick kilns constitutes the "Migrant in general and traditional low caste" family labour in particular. Though there are different challenges faced by the brick workers, they have no trade unions or legislation to protect their rights and raise voice for them (Santha and Athena, 2013).

Brick manufacturing provides a large number of employments on a seasonal as well as permanent basis. In this sector the members of the entire family work as a unit in a deprived manner. Half of the workers of brick kilns are women. Here the women play dual roles, on one side she works to earn and on the other she takes care of the whole family and children as well. Thus, here women play two roles of "reproduction and production". The female workers of these sectors start working at very early due to poverty, lack of education and family influence. Due to their early age, they face many health and reproductive issues and their work contribution is less recognized as well as least studied (Khan and More, 2015). The conditions of women in brick kilns are the worst. They are facing problems like low wages, harmful working conditions, lack of health facilities and exploitation etc. Poverty is a multidimensional notion involving not only inadequate income, but a host of other realities such as lack of choices, powerlessness, vulnerability, and lack of resources, insecurity and social exclusion. The major concern for women workers is their socio-economic status, they always live in poor conditions, and also, they are subjugated, disadvantaged and deprived from equal status as compared to men. In this framework, an effort has been made to discover and examine the health-related difficulties encountered by the women workers who engaged in brickfields. The result found that they are mostly illiterate, and many of them migrated from rural remote areas in search of employment. They are basically engaged in unskilled work. This study focuses on the importance of health problems of women workers of brick kilns, so that the working surroundings need to be developed because of which women workers get motivation and encouragement which ultimately result in development of the brick sector (Iqbal, 2016).

This is a fact-finding report published by Prayas which basically focuses on the "Reproductive and Child Health Amongst Brick Kiln Workers" in the state of Rajasthan. This research process was carried out in some brick kilns of Ajmer and Bhilwara in October month to assess the health-related problems as well as reproductive health problems among the women workers in the kilns. The major findings of the studies were that all the female workers who were involved in the study migrated with their families. Majority of the female workers belong to scheduled caste followed by OBCs and STs. During the research it was found that 72 numbers of respondents were lactating or pregnant. Many of them have no Mamata card and even they were not registered. It also found that the working pregnant women at worksite did not get any facility of health checkups as they did not aware about the nearby health centers and as well as no ASHA worker visited to kilns .so from the above findings it can conclude that the scope of maternal, reproductive and child public health services in the brick kilns is very limited (Prayas Fact Finding: October, 2019).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In view of **Karl Marx**, the capitalist system of production has always treated women as "**Reserve Army Labor**". In developing countries like India women labour force is used as a temporary labour force which to meet the seasonal demand of labour. The brick industry is one of the significant industries, runs on a seasonal basis (from Month of October to June) which hires women as laborers. So, in this context it is viewed that women workers of kilns are a major source of reserve army labour. The term "**double burden"** or **"second shift**" is used by sociologist **Arlie Hochschild** which refers to the challenges faced by a working woman in the process of managing unpaid care work (household and child care duties) with the paid work for wages outside the home. In this milieu the women workers in the kilns are victims of double burden work as in the brick field they work for long hours with managing the all-household chores. In the patriarchal society like India, although they have their own earning, they have been labeled as caregivers or household managers, which surpasses their independent capability.

RESEARCH GAP

After going through literature, it is found that most of the researches have been conducted in states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and Haryana in India. However, studies on the brick kilns of Odisha are relatively less in number. Further, the existing studies on brick kiln workers view things from the point of view of migrant workers, not from women's perspective. There has been a very limited number of studies regarding the challenges and issues faced by women brick kiln workers particularly. Besides, one fails to notice any research pertaining to the women brick kiln workers of Kataka district. The challenges faced by women workers of brick kilns are multidimensional. This calls for a holistic approach covering all the aspects including social, economic, livelihood, health and working conditions.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study focuses on the factors responsible for taking brick kilns as livelihood options by women. It also seeks to explore the working conditions and challenges faced by women in the brick kilns. The study adopts exploratory research design to examine the issues mentioned. The research was conducted in 10 selected brick kilns of Baranga block, Kataka. A **S**imple random sampling method was employed to select 50 female respondents. Both primary and secondary sources were utilized for the collection of data. Regarding the primary source, the researcher used the Interview schedule as a tool to elicit data from the respondents of the study area. Besides, books, journals, government reports etc were consulted for the collection of secondary information.

There are around 10,000 brick kilns situated in Kataka district. In spite of the restriction of Odisha State Pollution Control Board (OSPCB) regarding the violation of environmental norms, they are still continuing their production (Indian Express, 2021). The brick kilns that are situated in Kataka are basically composed of migrated men and women from the district like Bhadrak, Baleshwar, Boudha, Mayurbhanj, Jajpur, Kalahandi etc. They work on a seasonal basis from the month of October to June for the production of bricks.

There are around 20-30 brick kilns situated in the block of Barang. The ten brick kilns adopted for the study are as follows.

Sl. No.	Name of the kiln	Place
1	Utkal Bricks	Naraj
2	KBS bricks	Arilo
3	Singh bricks	Ratagada
4	Durga bricks	Arilo
5	Maa bricks	Ratagada
6	Satyam traders (fly ash bricks)	Bramhanigaon
7	Konarka fly ash bricks777	Barsinga
8	Sun fly ash bricks	Bramhanigaon
9	RKB Bricks	Godisahi
10	Gopal Fly Ash Bricks	Trisulia

The study area was selected because of its close relevance to the themes of research. The selected place has a significant presence of brick kilns where a large number of women are actively participating in the process of brick making. Hence, it makes the area convenient to examine the factor and nature of engagement in this sector. Additionally, the accessibility of the study area and availability of respondents further facilitated effective data collection, making it an appropriate choice for the present study.

The present study also has also got its own limitations. It was conducted in one specific block, with a limited number of brick kilns and the size of the sample was relatively small; therefore, the findings of the study may not be generalized for all the workers of brick kilns. Time constraints emerged as a challenge in the process of data collection as the respondents had long working hours with a small break. In addition, some respondents were hesitant to openly discuss the working conditions, challenges they faced owing to perceived threats from the employer.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

In line with the objective of the study the researcher has collected data to analyze the major reasons among the respondents to choose the brick kiln sector as the work place, the kind activities they perform in this employment, the wages they get, livelihood sufficiency, the availability of facilities in the workplace, and lastly about the challenges they confront in this sector. Accordingly, the collected data are briefly explained here.

I. Reasons for Choosing Brick Kiln Occupation.

Sl. No.	Reasons for choosing brick kiln occupation	Frequency	%
1	Unavailability of work at place of origin	39	78%
2	Indebtedness	21	42%
3	Illness of family member	9	18%
4	Others	16	32%
	Total	**N=50 in each**	

Note: Multiple responses

Evidently, there are many factors due to which women choose brick kilns as their working field. Field experience reveals that, brick kiln occupation is seasonal in nature due to which many women migrate from their original place with family to work in the kiln. To begin with, the respondents chose the brick field as a working place because of the unavailability of work in their place of origin. Lack of work makes them poverty ridden and pushes them to indebtedness. Many respondents said that they join this work to make themselves free from the bondage of debt. The illness of family members is another cause for women to work in this sector. While interacting, a respondent named 'Muni' (16) said that "*her father is a kidney patient. He is not able to work anymore. So, she and her brother come to this kiln and earn money to fulfil their family expenses*". Other reasons like irregular work, low education, lack of skills etc. forces women to join in the brick kilns.

II. Type of Work

Type of work	Frequency	%
Mixing and moulding the dough	41	82%
Taking out baked bricks from the oven	32	64%
Transporting dried bricks to oven-site	39	78%
Loading baked bricks on vehicles	44	88%
Total	**N=50 in each case**	

Note: Multiple responses

Brick kiln is working as a major unorganized sector which provides employment to many migrant men and women as well as local men and women. It is one of those unorganized sectors where half of the workers are women. Here the women are engaged in the activities like mixing the dough and moulding it, transporting dried bricks and loading those bricks on vehicles etc.

III. Periodicity of Wages.

The field data shows, there is no fixed period to make payment to the workers. One of the major concerns affecting the workers is their payment system. As this sector is unorganized and unregulated, there is no uniformity in

the payment pattern of the brick kiln workers. It varies from kiln to kiln. Employers offer wages in accordance with their own choice; they may make payments on daily, weekly, fortnightly or monthly basis. On the fixed working hours of 8-10 hours, the workers get 300/-. On a daily basis. In times of need, they take advance payment from the employer.

IV. Livelihood Sufficiency

Sl. No.	Livelihood Sufficiency	Frequency	%
1	Sufficient	9	18%
2	Not sufficient	41	82%
	Total	**N=100**	**100%**

Almost in all unorganized sectors women are employed as the cheapest source of labour. The female workers in the unorganized sector do not have any choice of work. The restricted opportunities available to women workers are mostly low paid, low status jobs in this sector; they do the jobs which do not have any possibilities of improvement. The field experience depicts that, the majority of respondents agreed upon the insufficiency of livelihood maintenance in this sector. As this sector provides employment on a seasonal basis, the respondents get their wages only on the kiln operating months. As described above the wages are often low and irregular, which makes their earning uncertain. Due to low wages, their earned income becomes insufficient for the sustenance and maintenance of their livelihood and ties them with the debt bondage by limiting their financial independence.

V. Facilities Available at Work Place

Sl. No.	Facilities available at work place.	Frequency	%
1	Drinking water	50	100%
2	Toilets	30	60%
3	Bathroom	15	30%
	Total	**N=50 in each**	

Note: Multiple responses

Field data reveals that; half of the workers of the kilns are females. So, there is a need for some basic facilities for women workers. Meanwhile, the brick kiln as a working place lacks many basic facilities. Cent percent of women agreed that they have the drinking water facility at the workplace. But the facilities like, washroom, restroom and bathroom etc. are still undenied and unavailable to many female brick kiln workers. Their working hours are long. It is difficult for women workers to work smoothly, without these facilities. 'Kharika dehury' a respondent opines that, "*I am a 7-month conceiving lady. I go to the washroom frequently. But lack of washroom facility at the workplace forces me to open defecation which can become a major cause of infection in future*".

VI. The Challenges Faced by the Women in Brick Kilns

Sl. No.	Challenges Faced by theWomen	Frequency	%
1	Discrimination at the work place	34	68%
2	Health issues	31	62%
3	Experience of occupational hazards	19	38%
4	Face challenges in family	30	60%
Total		**N=50**	**100%**

Note: Multiple responses

As data reveals, women pursue jobs in brick kilns as they find it very easy to get entry to the sector. One need not carry prior experience, skill or training in the said work. This sector offers a very easy source of income to the untrained and inexperienced ones. The women who work in the domain usually do not shift to other occupations as they are untrained and unskilled. These women are mostly illiterate, poverty-ridden and have very small land holding size. The women working in the sector face a series of odds which is explained below.

a. Discrimination at the Workplace: In regards to nature of work, the '**Division of labour**' often turns into '**Hierarchy of work'** in this sector. The male workers of the kiln are performing all the mechanized, monitoring and supervisory work. Meanwhile, women in this sector mainly engaged in the work like preparing or mixing the clay, carrying it to moulding sites, arranging the bricks and assisting in the brick moulding process etc. There are some activities like brick moulding, carrying, drying and stacking performed by both the genders. Although, these works done by both male and female workers, but men are considered as more efficient and more productive, that is why a man get remuneration of 400 per day, while women doing the same category work get a wage of 300, one hundred rupees less than what a men get. As a respondent Jhumuri Tandi (27) raises the questions like,

"*Who decide this division of labour? And why the division of labour is tilted in favor of men and against women? Why the work is hierarchized on sex likes? Why our work is always undervalued and underpaid? Why there is this prejudice that exist in people's imagination that women are not as efficient as men, women are not that productive as their male counterparts, they are lesser efficient lesser productive hence they deserve lesser wages? Why one kind of work only for men and women are not allowed and another kind of work is both for men and women, but a different kind of wage discrimination perpetuates here*"?

Even though the work of women is physically demanding in the brick making process, it is often unrecognized, undervalued and receives lower wages. Thus, these occupational roles are ranked unequally in this sector, creating a gender hierarchy.

b. Having health issues: The nature of work is such that the workers work in a hazardous environment which negatively affect the health aspect of workers. There is great occurrence of respiratory illness, stomach ache, knee and joint pain, neck pain, eye irritation, skin burn etc. uniformly regardless of gender. However, there are certain problems encountered by mostly women, that is non-existence of sanitation/toilet facilities. Women owing to ardent poverty and inabilities to move to better conditions, owing to absence of requisite skill are constrained to continue the job. They are constraint to go for open deification, open urination exposing themselves to risks of various kinds including urinal infection/anal infection and sexual assault. The Risk of going for open urination or deification is not same for men and women. As a respondent Bilasi (36) narrates,

"*A man can go for open urination to any place, he doesn't have to think for any risk, but a women can't. women need some kind of enclosure. Every woman lives with that fear of assault, the fear of any uncured incidents, including snake bite while going for open deification or urination". There is a need for a sustainable approach to improve the environmental and health conditions of brick kiln workers.*

c. Occupational hazards: The working and living condition of or near the kilns is much polluted and depleted. Due to hazardous working conditions, there is more risk of accidents in the kilns. a cent percent of the respondents agreed that while working they have the risk of accidents in the kilns, meanwhile only 38% of respondents faced some kind of accidents in the brick kilns. In more details there is a risk of burning hand while putting the bricks into fire oven and taking out these bricks from fire, while loading the bricks from racks there is also risk of fall down of bricks on legs and heads, there is chance of crack on fingers due to continuous work with sharp tools and presence of glass pieces and stones in the clay. Although there is risk of injuries, there is no facilities and access to safety equipment in this sector. Tulasi Sandi, a respondent said that "*while loading the bricks in the tractor, it fell on her feet and the feet got fractured. Though the employer bears the cost of treatment, these one and half months I did not get the wages for which it became difficult for me to manage the expenses of my family".*

d. Face challenges in the family: The life of a woman worker of a brick kiln is not so simple. They have very challenging and tough life situations. They take the responsibility to look after family, meanwhile at the same time for family survival they get involved in different economic activities. With this their work burden gets doubled. They work for long hours in the kilns as well as take all the responsibility of household chores, so they face challenges to balance both family and work life. In addition to it, they face the acknowledgement issue in the family. Although they have the earnings of their own, they are not regarded as bread earners. Their income always stays as a subsidiary income. So, here the respondents face the identity crisis in their own family.

In addition to the issues mentioned above, the workers are constraint to live with a series of challenges on an everyday basis including livelihood insecurity, irregular wage payment and overwork with zero additional wage and the like.

CONCLUSION

It's a truism, the participation of women in the unorganized sector is more than that of men. Brick kilns are one of the important domains whereby women constitute almost half of the workforce. The study reveals, the female workers of brick kilns face a series of challenges. Women often get engaged in this sector not by choice but, owing to inadequacies concerning poverty and low education. They are extremely poor and they continue to go through a number of odds associated with their work such as job insecurity, discrimination of wage, absence of health care, lack of continuity etc. This calls for requisite policy reforms and institutional changes to streamline the unorganized sector in general and the issues of the female brick kiln workers in general.

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