

“SOCIO ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL STATUS OF WOMEN WORKERS IN BRICK INDUSTRY: SPECIAL REFERENCE TO KAMRUP DISTRICT, ASSAM, INDIA”

Dr. Haren Ch. Kalita

Assistant Professor, Dept. Political Science
DKGirls College, Mirza, Assam, India.

Abstract:

In terms of brick production India stands second position in the world. As per data available the annual demand for clay bricks in India was over 300 billion units putting the market size at around \$25 billion. However, the largest supplier of industrially produced bricks in India has a market share of less than 0.1 per cent. This reveals the highly unorganised and fragmented status of the brick industry. In the brick industry, work is seasonal, temporary, and casual in nature, the employment relations between the employer and the employees are not permanent and all relationships remain contractual. The bulk of workers come from rural areas as migrant workers and they are illiterate, poor and work under low working conditions. The workers have no security of employment and get low amount of wages. They are not getting any welfare facilities and no government scheme is applied to them.

Keywords: Brick industry, Women, socio-political, economic, exploitation.

Introduction

The employment sectors in almost all countries are mainly divided into two categories: 1. Organised and 2. Unorganised sector. In the organized sector it is incorporated with the appropriate authority or government and follow its rules and regulations. On the otherhand, the unorganised sector can be defined as the sector, which is not incorporated with the government and thus, no rules are required to be followed. In terms of India almost 96 percentage of India's total workforce are engaged in the unorganised or informal sector. India's economic progress depends on the contributions of the informal sector workers and they constitute the bedrock of India's development in various fields. Unfortunately, despite their immense contributions, the socio-economic and political condition of India's informal sector workers remains vulnerable. This section of the workforce generally remains out of the focus of Government policies and programmes. As a result, they are deprived of legitimate benefits and are also exposed to various forms of exploitation. Unlike the organised sector workers who are entitled to various legally-sanctioned benefits, the informal sector workers in developing countries do not enjoy much legal protection and are not covered by

socio-political security schemes. The informal sector workers suffer from “low productivity and low wages” syndrome. They remain economically backward, illiterate, and poor. Political awareness among them is very low.

Statement of the Problem:

Study reveals that India has producing about 250 billion bricks annually. In terms of employment generation, it employs about 15 million workers. In India, due to the fast economic growth and urbanization demand of Bricks increasing day by day. Usually, brick industries are situated in rural or periphery of urban areas in the country. The workers of this industry are sectional and temporary in nature. Brick industry generates million of employment opportunity. Majority portions of the workers are women. They live in rural area and in poverty. Socio-political and economic conditions of these workers are very poor. They are exploited, deprived and do not get the status which the other workers enjoy.

Objectives of the Study

The major objectives of the study are:

1. To know the socio-economic and political status and working conditions of the women workers in brick industries.

2. To analyse the educational and family background of women workers engaged in the brick industries.

The objective is to examine women’s experience in employment and its impact on their status at home as well as in socio-political structure.

3. To find out if the women workers are facing any kind of exploitation and discrimination in the brick and if so, to locate their causes.

Significance of the study

As the prime objective of the study is to find out the socio-political and economic conditions of the women in brick industries, the study will help us to know the status of the women engaged in these industries. The study will also reveals in what extant government welfare policies are reached to the unorganized sectors. Moreover the study will help us to draw a road map to solve the issues related to the brick industries.

Methodology

The present work seeks to analyse variations in Brick industry by examining socio-political and economic conditions of women workers. In order to do so, in the first stage collection of data through key reporting agents, extending it with secondary sources concerning the specific areas to be researched and their corresponding indicators.

The study is mainly carried out by taking primary data collection. Primary data is collected by preparing a structured questionnaire and visiting total 6 industries randomly. A total no of 60 respondents are selected for the study purposes. The collected data are analyzed in tabular form.

Study Area

Our study area is undivided of Kamrup District, Assam. Kamrup district consists of wide plains through which the river Brahmaputra makes its way flowing a steady course from east to west. The demographic pattern of Kamrup District is a heterogeneous one. The undivided Kamrup district comprises 4345 sq.km of the area.

Theoretical Approach:

In the present time, the work condition in the unorganized sector closely resemble the unregulated labour relations and exploitation advocated by Karl Marx. In his writings we found that proletarians who are exploited: having no access to the benefits enjoyed in the formal sectors such as social security and minimum wages, these workers constitutes a cheap source of labour for capitalist markets. Marx assumed that industrialisation would draw workers into factory labour. Capitalism generated surplus of unwanted labour. He observed that competition among the workers have undermined their union. So in the informal sector there is no collective power among the workers. Women have increased their participation in the labour force. However, women tend to earn less than men do and their economic contribution is under-recorded by official statistics. The theory of surplus value and capitalism can be attached to this topic.

The Brick Industry in Assam: An overview

One of the most important materials used by the human in construction works is Brick. Evolution of bricks goes back to the earliest times in the civilization. Ancient archaeological excavations provide information of using bricks in different times of human history. One of the oldest examples of brick use were first found in Southern Turkey. The oldest shaped bricks found date back to 7,500 B.C. They have been found in Çayönü, in the upper Tigris region, and in south east Anatolia close to Diyarbakir. Mesopotamian Sumerian place at Kish is another important evidence of using bricks in ancient time. In the 5th century B.C., burnt bricks were used in the wall of the city of Babylon. The ancient Egyptians also used Sun dried clay bricks in their numerous world famous historic monuments.

In India, brick making has an importance place since the ancient time. It is one of the age-old small-scale industries and has been the main stay of construction. One of the finest example of using bricks in ancient civilization was revealed by the excavation of. The villagers of that area have been practicing it for over 5000 years. (Mathur1995).

In Assam age-old historical monuments and other buildings are proving the practices of brick used in many years ago. The different shapes, sizes and colours of old bricks clearly proved that the different types of bricks were used in different period of time in Assam. Manufacturing of clay bricks in Assam had started in the early part of last century. However, during that period, it was produced only to fulfill the particular demand arises for specific construction. Study reveals that, in the year 1920, the Assam Bangle Railway Company manufactured clay bricks for the construction of Railways in Nagaon District at Senchowa. During pre and post-independence period, along with economic development and growth of the economy, the brick manufacturing units were increasing but the rate was very slow in Assam. Commercially the brick making in

Assam had started in mid-eighties of last century. Day by day the numbers of manufacturing units are increasing. At present only in Kamrup district more than 300 registered brick industries are established.

About the Workers of Brick Industry

The silted topography of the region (North-East) is uniquely suited for making bricks. In the past the riverine delta region of South and North Kamrup provided quality-soil as a cheap source of raw material and the in-land canals functioned as the mode of low-cost and easily accessible local transport. Thus became suitable locations for brickfields, as the city grew in size. In Kamrup district, around 500 brick-manufacturing units provide employment (officially) to more than one lakh people from the rural sector. Most of the workers engaged in brick industry are migrants and they are casually engaged. The seasonal migrant worker living in the brickfields throughout the period of 6 to 8 months of production, returns back to the village after the production season comes to a close. The brickfields are open cast and work continues from 6 a.m. in the morning to 6 p.m. in the evening. The whole process of brick making is split into a number of tasks performed sequentially in different locations within the brickfields spread over 7 to 12 acres (2.5 to 4 acres) of land.

Women Labour in Bricks Industries of Kamrup District

Activity of women workers in Brick industries involves dissemination to promote sustainable livelihood options among small brick makers. With active involvement from brick entrepreneurs in Kamrup district the income of the women labour has increased though they are not higher educated. These female workers helps in the infield transportation and other day to day activity hence reducing transportation cost and other cost because if only men are engaged here then the owner has to search again more employee for bricks industries. Now engagement of women workers are increasing due to their low wages as compared to men. Table 1 shows the number of women workers engaged in the selected brick industries.

Table 1: No of Women Workers in the Selected 6 Brick Industries

Sl no	Name of the Industry	Total workers	Male workers	Female workers
1	M K Enterprise	745	500	245
2	RBK Enterprise	680	400	280
3	BHK Enterprise	700	580	120
4	Bharat Enterprise	785	700	85
5	Kamrup Bricks	680	490	110
6	NE Bricks	850	600	250
Total		4440	3270	1170

Source: Field survey

From the table no 1, it is clear that the total number of labour of 6 bricks industries of Kamrup district is 4440, where 1170 is women labour. It shows that the women labour has a very important role in production of bricks in Kamrup district. They constitute almost 27% of total workforce.

Result and Discussions

Socio-political and Economic Status of the Women Workers of Brick Industries

Socio-political and economic status of women in every society plays an important role in both developed and developing countries. The brick industry in India and Assam is confined mostly to rural and semi-urban areas. Socio-political and economic status of women employee in these industries shows that they are generally come from marginalized section of the society.

Social Status

Most of the women employees are either from the scheduled castes or backward castes or minority section earning a meager amount, which is not enough to support their families. Most of the women workers are under the age group of 25-35 years. Almost all of them are married. It indicates that early marriage or child marriage is still prevailing in these societies where they come from. Table 2 reflects the social status of the women working in the selected Brick industries

Table 2: Social Status

Sl no	Religion	Caste	Status	Total No
1	Hindu	General	Migrants	05
		SC	Migrants	08
		ST	Migrants	10
		Others	Migrants	02
2	Muslim	General	Migrants	10
		Minority	Migrants	25
3	Others		Migrants	0
Total				60

Source: Field Survey

Thus from the table 2 it seems that almost all the workers are coming from other areas. They are migrant workers coming for this area in searching of inhabitants and residing in slum areas or at the premise of the industry. Survey also reveals that almost 50% workers are minority groups. Only 25% general category form both Hindu and Muslim are engaged in the brick production. Remaining 25% are the combination of Schedule tribe and Schedule caste. During the study it comes to know that demand of the Muslim minority and tribal workers are high in the industry due to their capability of work in extreme conditions. Now let us have a look at their age composition.

Table No 3: Age Composition & Marital status of the Sample Workers in the Brick Industries

Sl No	Age Group	No of Workers	No of Married Workers
1	Below 20	20	08
2	20-30	20	15
3	30-40	15	15
4	40-50	03	03
5	50-60	02	02
Total		60	43

Source: Field Survey

In India women and children participate in the labour force at an early age with a view to supplementing to the family income. Child labour and child marriage is found everywhere. This table reveals that most of the workers belong to the 20 to 40 age group and 71% of the workers are married. Persons below 20 years of age are regarded as teenagers; 20 to 40 years of age as middle aged and those above 40 years are regarded as old. This table reveals that 33 percentages are found to be children or teen aged, and 13% of them are married. It reveals though Indian government implements strict laws against Child marriage, still in many society child marriage is prevailed. 58 percentage are from the age group of 20 to 40 and all are married. Significantly the over aged persons are not so much employed in the brick industry, only 0.3 percentage are found from the study. Age category is significant in getting employment opportunities in brick industry. The work in the brick industry requires more physical strength so the employers prefer young people. But from the study it is clear that there is no upper or lower age limit for a worker in the brick industry. If a person has a physical strength then he or she can engage in the brick industry. However a few women more than 60 years are compelled to involve in the brick industry because either she may not be looked after by her children or there may not be other family members who can earn money.

Economic Status

Women constitute almost half of the workers in the selected brick industries contribute much economic development. In spite of this fact, they are most excluded group and extract much from women and contribute less to them. During the study it reveals that economic status of the women workers is not good enough. In the following table we will see the monthly income of them.

Table No 4: Monthly Income of the Women Workers in Brick Industries

Sl no	Monthly income	No of respondents
1	Below 5000	02
2	5000-6000	40
3	6000-7000	15
4	Above 7000	03

Source- Field Survey

It reveals that 66 percentages of women workers get 5000 to 6000 rupees. In short they are paid 200-250 rupees of wages per day. 25 percentages get 6000-7000 rupees, and 0.3 percentages get below 5000 rupees while only 5 percentages get above 7000 rupees. The women workers get maximum 260 rupees which is very less in today's world for running a family and also lower than male workers. Now the rates of every essential commodity have gone up. For purchasing one kg rice and potato only, the workers have to expand more than 50 rupees per day. So, with their little income they cannot think to deposit money for the future. Their little incomes compel them to think for the present only, not beyond that.

Political Status

Democracy implies equality for all. But against this basic notion of democracy what is normally seen is that women are excluded from different walks of life, more visibly in Politics. When asked about the political participation almost all selected workers are silent. Their participation in the mainstream politics is zero. During the survey, respondents were asked whether they had voted or not and about such behaviour as attendance at political meetings or rallies, working for a party, making a monetary contribution or seeking a public office. They were also asked about the government policies regarding women empowerment, child labour, child marriage, domestic violence, but they were unaware of all. Table 5 shows the level of political awareness/participation of respondents.

Table 5: Level of political awareness/participation in %

Participation in Voting	Participation in electoral rallies, processions etc	Member of any party	Holding party office	Knowledge about govt. scheme
80	02	00	00	05

Thus from this table it is seen that all the respondents (eligible voter) voted in the elections. When asked about how they choose the party/leader whom to vote, they said that family choice is their choice. It means they do not have the knowledge of the present political scenario and they do not bother about the party/leader. In return of their vote they got money from the party. Therefore in every election they went to their native place only for voting so that their families earn more money. In short it can be said that the level of their participation in voting is determined by the money power. So, level of voting is higher among these social groups.

Again in terms of participation in electoral rallies etc, their participation is very low. Only a few somewhere participated in such rallies. The reason behind this is that, they were all daily wage labour, if they were participated in such rallies they will miss their earnings. So they escape it and not even bother to know the political process of the country.

No one respondent is holding party office or member of any political party. It indicates that political awareness among these groups is very low. All the present political parties are failed to articulate policies to educate them politically and provide them a platform to participate actively. It is also seen that, though the

government of India implements many welfaristic policies for women empowerment and improvement of their status none of the respondents are aware of such policies. It is the failure of the Indian democratic system as the very notion of democracy is equal treatment to all will be success and meaningful if women were give equal status to that of men from the grassroots level. In India, to provide training and practice in the process of decision-making, the rural democratic institutions are the ideal structures. But access to these institutions should be evaluated.

Findings:

Throughout the study it is found that, in brick industries the women workers are not able to enjoy any kind of social security benefits. The workers do not have any paid leave, annual vacation. The women workers do not get any maternity benefits and always compel to return to the work place even after few weeks of delivery. They do not get any retirement benefits. They are not given any incentives and bonus during the festival period. They do not enjoy the regularity of work. They always have to depend on the demand of the markets. Male workers always get more payment than the female workers. They are used as helpers of the male workers. So their payment is low compared to the male workers. It is also found that, the workers are not interested to send their children to the school. They bring them to the working site for making money. Moreover, as the number of their children is more so they prefer their children to remain busy in looking after their siblings. No political and government benefits are accessed by them. They become unreached of the government schemes.

Recommendations:

In the context of our study the following suggestions should be noted

- The principle of “equal pay for equal work” must be enforced.
- Provisions should be made for skill up gradation for women workers. This will be possible through proper legislations.
- A legal literacy programme should be brought so that the workers can understand the exploitation, deprivation and oppression carried out by the employers.
- Attempts should be made to organise these women workers. Labourers should be organised for uplifting their living standards.
- Political party should organize campaign in these areas to provide political knowledge among the workers
- Government should take initiative to bring them under legal status

Conclusion

Inequalities; injustice and exploitation over women still persist. The attitudes towards women have to be altered. If we want to prosper our society, we must have to include the hitherto uncared workers in the main stream of our society. Till today women suffer from inequality of class status and power. All these

attempts will be successful if the government tries to spread the value and importance of education among all sections of people. The laws should be properly implemented.

References:

- Ashifelter. O ; 1973, Discrimination in Labour Markets. (UK: Princeton University Press)
- Bajpai A ; 1966, Symposium on Women's Right at the Workplace. Emerging Challenges and Legal Intervention. (Tata Institute of Social Science, Mumbai.)
- Banerjee .N ; 1985, Women Workers in the Unorganised Sectors, the Calcutta Experience. (SangamBooks, Hyderabad.)
- Banerjee.B ; 1986, Rural to Urban Migration and Urban Labour Market. A Case Study of Delhi. (Himalaya Publishing House, Bombay)
- Gadgil .D.R ; 1965, Women in the Working Force in India. (AsiaPublishing House, Bombay.)

