

CHAPTER 6

Chapter – 6

WORK AND WORK CONDITIONS OF WOMEN LABOURERS IN BRICK KILN INDUSTRY

In India, several legislations have been formulated for securing the rights of the working class. The care has been taken to safeguard their fundamental rights and to provide them with welfare and security provisions. Still, there is a large gap between the policy framework and the grass root reality. The unorganised workers are far away from the corridor of power and rights. They are vulnerable to exploitation, health hazards. They are toiled to the extent of unbearable pains.

Illiteracy is an important factor which puts them in the state of helplessness and bear the burnt of exploitation. With the lack of employment opportunities these labour entered in to the unorganised sector. Among these labour women are most affected because they bear two fold burdens of paid work in the kiln and unpaid domestic work at home. This condition makes them more vulnerable to ill health (both physical and mental health).

I

The different Labour Laws applicable to the Brick Kiln Industry

“Despite the existence of various constitutional and legal provisions safeguarding women's employment, a large number of women workers particularly in the unorganised sector suffer from various disadvantages relating to their working life as well as in their homes. The coverage of labour laws has not benefited these women workers in many crucial areas especially health, maternity and social security. With the changing social and economic conditions, women's productive roles have assumed new significance but without back-up support and services a healthy combination of women's productive and reproductive roles cannot be sustained" National Commission on Self-Employed Women (1987).

The following text gives a brief account of various labour legislations that are applicable to brick kiln labourers.

Factories Act, 1948

The question as to whether brick kilns can be registered as factories under the Factories Act had been examined. It has been established that the process of manufacturing bricks comes within the definition of the manufacturing process as defined under the Factories Act and that the premises where the process is carried on, is covered by the expression "Premises" used in the definition of factory in the Act.

Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972

The provisions of this Act apply to all establishments which are factories within the definition of the factory in the Factories Act, 1948. The brick kiln workers come within the purview of the Payment of Gratuity Act wherever the brick kilns are factories and are entitled to all benefits under that Act subject to the condition regarding completion of a specified period as stipulates in the Payment of Gratuity Act.

Payment of Bonus Act, 1965

The provisions of this Act apply to every factory within the definition of the Factories Act and every other establishment in which twenty or more persons are employed on any day during the accompanying year. Brick kiln workers working in such factories or establishments are entitled to the benefits under this act.

Employment Provident Fund and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952

Brick kiln was added as a scheduled industry within the purview of the E.P.F and M.P. act with effect from 27.11.80 vide notification No S.85 35016(5)/76-PF. II. By this brick kilns that employ 20 persons and above would therefore covered as establishments whom the provisions of the Act and the schemes framed there under would apply. Workmen as are employed in a brick kiln establishment and render 60 days of work within a total employment period of 90 days would be enrolled as members of Provident Fund, family pension fund and employees deposit link insurance fund.

Employees State Insurance Act, 1950

The provisions of this Act are extended area-wise and was applicable to 471 areas when the tripartite committee met.

Inter-State migrant workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service Act). 1979

The Act applies to every establishment in which five per cent or more interstate migrant workmen are employed or were employed on any day of the preceding 12 months. Since most of the brick kiln establishments employ inter-state migrant workers, i.e., workmen who are recruited through agents/sub-agents of the owners numbering 5 and above, they will come within the purview of the Act. The workmen so recruited will be entitled to all the welfare measures and statutory benefits. They are as follows: journey allowance; payment of wages for the period of journey as if such period was on duty; displacement allowance @50 per cent of he monthly wage payable or Rs75/- whichever is higher, (this is a one time payment); residential accommodation as may be prescribed; and, medical aid including hospitalisation, as may be prescribed, reporting of cases of accident causing injury etc. have been provided under the Act.

Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970 with Central Rules, 1971

Such of the brick kilns as are getting certain jobs, processes or operations in the establishment performed by or through contractors who are employing 20 and above workmen will come within the purview of the Act. The brick kiln owners will be required to obtain registration certificate U/S 7 of the Act. The contractors will be required to obtain license U/S 12 of this Act.

Minimum Wages Act, 1948

Employment in brick kilns has been notified as a scheduled employment under the Minimum Wages Act by most of the State Governments and after issue of the notification, minimum rates of wages (both daily and piece rated) have also been notified.

Implementation of labour legislations and associated problems:

The biggest lacunae in this framework is that the brick kilns themselves have not been considered as factories and as part of the formal sector and therefore its owners are not entitled to any benefits as industrialists.

The system of advance payment and the verbal commitment to work and return the advance has left much room for dispute between the labourers, labour agents and the owner of the kiln. Interventions by the government, the NGO's, and the unions, in the tensions involved in the process of adjustments and disputes, have focused less on factors such as low wages, inhuman living conditions, lack of social security and health facilities, and unsafe working conditions. Ever since the introduction of the Abolition of the Bonded Labour Act in 1976 most of the disputes of the nature mentioned above have been dealt with by applying the Bonded Labour Abolition Act. The basic characteristics of bondage are: element of force; below minimum wages (a state that arises from the worker being forced to work at such wages in the absence of an alternative source of livelihood); long hours of work – on an average 12-16 hours a day; immobility. Consequences of bondage are: loss of freedom of movement; loss of right to sell labour at prevailing market rates; loss of human dignity.

The state of bondage varies, it is either partial or total, seasonal or all the year round, intergenerational or individual. The owners of kilns when asked about their suggestions to improve the state of affairs of the brick kilns be it technological, economic, and the status of the industry, pointed out at the Abolition of the Bonded Labour Act as the main deterrent to the efficient operation of the brick kilns. Their request to the government, NGO's and other actors who intervene on behalf of the workers, is that the system of advance payment should not be confused with credit and conditions of bondage accompanying against those advances.

Interviews with owners, labour officers as well as some of the union leaders, reveals the lapses and the lacunae in the legal and executive machinery in addressing the problems faced by the brick kiln industry in terms of labour relations in particular among other structural aspects that need to be attended to. There is an urgent need for strict enforcement of the various provisions of the Factories Act, and Acts that deal with minimum wages, prohibition of child labour in hazardous industries, unpaid labour such

as the labour of the women in the kilns, social security provisions, health care facilities even Insurance if possible, crèches, hours of work, etc., The Abolition of Bonded Labour Act in my opinion is limited in addressing the systemic problems/contradictions of the labour relations in the brick kilns and exploitation in the brick kiln industry in particular and the informal sector in general.

The problems associated with brick kiln is that this industry has not gained the status of an industry and fall under the category of cottage industries. It is a long way to go before the workers of the brick kilns can be recognised as industrial workers. The problems related to the status of the industry stemming from the production condition and production organisation of the industry has been discussed at length with the owners. The strategy framework is to work out the parameters of the industry of brick kilns, and plan the nature and form of mediating bodies between the workers and the other actors from the employers side of the structure of the industry.

The possibility of organizing the kiln workers becomes a difficult task for the union and the owners can freely hire and fire the workers. The substandard living conditions, the system of wage and the hours of work required to earn the minimum for survival – all these factors result in attracting only those who come to work in the brick kilns as their last option.

While the work that they do requires a certain degree of skill, it is one that can be picked up by assisting a senior worker and does not require industrial training to meet the requirements of the kiln. The owners agree that all their workers (moulders) are skilled in their field but officially they are recognised as unskilled workers, except the driver.

Awareness about the legislations and their rights:

While studying the awareness level of the legal provisions with respect to the women brick kiln labourers, it was found that the hundred percent respondents are not aware about the various Acts and legal provisions that are available for their protection.

The probable reason of this ignorance of the law, which directly impacts on their livelihood, could be because of their being illiterate and the fact that there is no

organisation to back them. The ignorance among these workers make them more vulnerable to exploitation. Unfortunately the mainstream political parties so far has not made any effort to address their problems or form organisations among them. The non-governmental organisations have failed to address their problems.

Although, the brick kiln workers' main concern is increase in wage rates and better living conditions, the fact that the work in brick kilns is the last option for the workers in the face of poverty and unemployment is corroborated by the workers' desire to keep their children out of the industry. They do not see it as a future for their children and therefore did not express any interest in improved method of work or training in the same industry. At the same time, interestingly the workers stated that they preferred to work in the kilns on piece rate rather than on a daily wage rate as they could take time off as they wished and work as much as they felt like. They felt that they make more money by working on piece rate rather than on a daily wage rate – there is always an opportunity for them to make up for the loss incurred in man days due to various personal reasons. There is no such opportunity in daily wage work. They also pointed out though that if they were to get employment in the village they would not make a choice of working in the kilns.

II

Work and Work Conditions of Women Labourers in Brick Kiln Industry

The process of participation by women in the labour-force here we mean working or seeking work for pay. Labour force participation coincides with each of the life cycle stages of “marriage, child bearing, child rearing presiding over an empty nest and widowhood”.

When women set out to work, they have to make various adjustments, even the family has to make a few adjustments. Gradually though major social transformation and changed aspirations have led society to accept women in a wider range of roles though the process has been slow and uneven. Even though women in general are considered the ‘secondary bread-winners’ in many homes, they are considered the ‘secondary bread-winner’ in some homes.

This section of the chapter gives a brief account of working conditions of women in brick kilns. Various aspects like type of work, working hours, rest hours, duration of annual employment in brick kilns. The living conditions are reflected in terms of income, share of income by the women respondents, saving pattern etc are discussed.

Type of Work

**Table 6.1: Distribution of respondents according to the type of work
(Percentage in Parentheses)**

Sl.No	Type of work	District			Total N = 300
		Cachar n = 100	Hilakandi n = 100	Karimganj n = 100	
1	Transporting Bricks	100 (100)	91 (91.00)	62 (62.00)	253 (84.33)
2	Moulding	0 (0.00)	9 (9.00)	38 (38.00)	47 (15.67)

Source: Primary Data

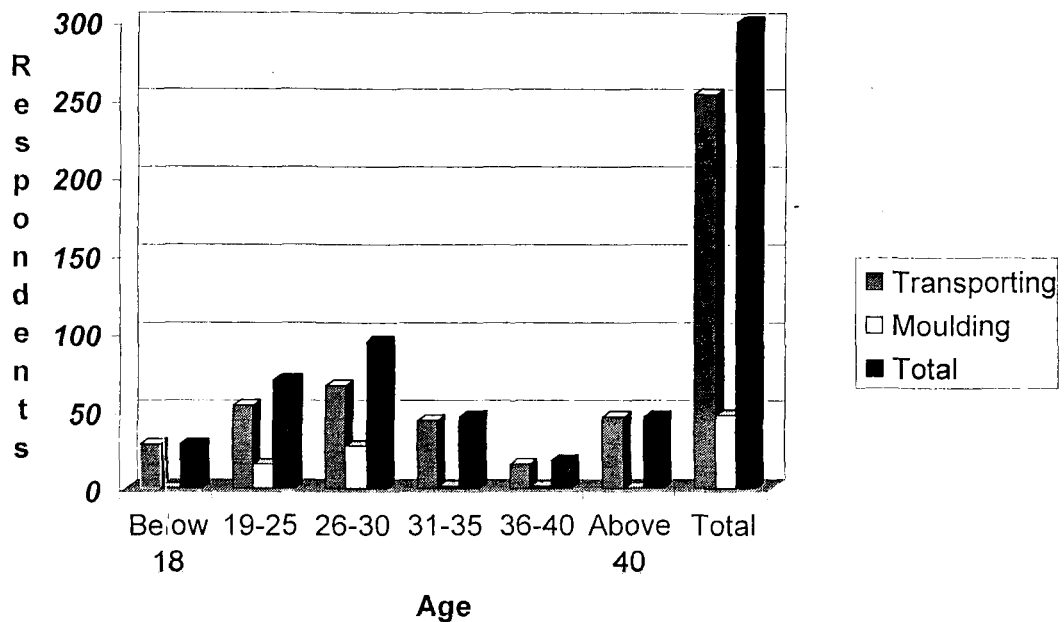
The vulnerability of migrant women largely depends upon the type of work performed by different categories of labour within the labour markets. The description of the job which is carried out by women in brick kiln industry in the sample shows that the majority of women engaged in brick-making process is mostly in the unskilled job. It was found that an overwhelming majority of the respondents (84.33 per cent) are engaged in loading and unloading work. Little above 15 per cent of the respondents are engaged in moulding bricks. Almost all of these moulders are migrants. Loading and unloading of brick is mostly done by the women from local areas.

The present findings are in line with those of the Gulati (1979), Pandey, Sarup and Prakash (1985).

According to Charien and Prasad the female who works at construction site, 'do not have a well defined role to play and absolutely no change to take up skilled tasks, their work is treated as menial, non essential and of the lowest nature in the whole process' (Cited in Vijayantha, 1998;851). The findings from the present study shows

that though women are assigned with specific tasks. There is no scope for changes in the daily work for the women brick kiln labourers. Though the work of women engaged in moulding bricks is a skilled job. However, the wages are paid based on piece rate and not recognizes women as skilled worker but as assistant to the family head who is either husband or father.

Chart 6.1 : Age and Nature of Work



**Table 6.2: Head Load carry by the respondents
(Percentage in Parentheses)**

Sl.No	Head load	District			Total N = 300
		Cachar n = 100	Hilakandi n = 100	Karimganj n = 100	
1	None	0 (0.00)	13 (13.00)	42 (42.00)	55 (18.33)
2	Up to 20Kg	5 (5.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	5 (1.67)
3	21 - 30Kg	0 (0.00)	10 (10.00)	3 (3.00)	13 (4.33)
4	Above 30 Kg	95 (95.00)	77 (77.00)	55 (55.00)	227 (75.66)

Source: Primary Data

**Table 6.3: Age and Weight of Head Load
(Percentage in Parentheses)**

Age (Years)	Weight of Head Load				Total
	None	Up to 20 Kg.	21 to 30 Kg.	Above 30 Kg.	
Below 18	2 (0.7)	1 (0.3)	3 (1)	22 (7.3)	28 (9.3)
19-25	18 (6)	2 (0.7)	–	49 (16.3)	69 (23)
26-30	27 (9)	2 (0.7)	1 (0.3)	63 (21)	93 (31)
31-35	6 (2)	–	2 (0.7)	38 (12.7)	46 (15.3)
36-40	2 (0.7)	–	–	16 (5.3)	18 (6)
Above 40	–	–	7 (2.3)	39 (13)	46 (15.3)
Total	55 (18.3)	5 (1.7)	13 (4.3)	227 (75.6)	300 (100)

Source: Primary Data

With regards to the age and nature of work, the work of moulding of bricks, loading and unloading is done by the age group 26 to 30 followed by the age group 19 to 25. The work of moulding requires lot of stamina. A negligible portion of the respondents are above the age of 35 years. The observation from the field shows that the children are involved in assisting their parents in moulding but the actual moulding is done by the adults. In some cases it was also done by adolescents. It may be because it require some skill and physical stamina. However, the work of loading and unloading of the bricks is even done both by women below 18 years and above 40 years. The task of loading and unloading is relatively less laborious than the moulding work. Same type of findings were reported by the Labour Bureau, Government of India in its survey (1988).

In a study by Suneet Chopra (1985) had shown that the element of bondage originates in the village where the worker comes from and a closer tie up between the creditor, landowner and brick-kiln owner being one and the same person establishes the relationship of bondage more clearly. But where there is a break in the chain of creditor, landlord of the village where the workers come from and the owner of the kiln where the worker is at present employed, it becomes difficult to establish the relationship of

bondage. If there is one, it is between the worker and the contractor who comes from the same village/district from where he recruits the workers. There is a great deal of debate as well as shortcoming in method of research that would and could help too reveal the element of bonded labour relations in the kilns. Only on the basis of case studies, conducted at the micro level, from analysis of cases that are registered with the district Magistrates Office and cases reported and detailed from Unions of brick-kiln workers, can such relationships be established.

The other aspect of the exploitative nature of labour relationship amounting to terms and conditions similar to that of a bonded labourer in the agrarian sector is that while the men enter into a contract against an advance taken from the contractor, the women and children are exploited as a result of that relationship, purely on the basis of dependency. The working unit on the kilns is usually the nuclear family, in addition to widowed mothers, unmarried sisters or brothers and close relatives children (sometimes). What begins as a nominally free dependent labour for the worker, slowly loses its nominal freedom over the years and declines into servitude by continuing to either work for the same contractor and /or for the same kiln – unable to change to another occupation and having to continue to combine agricultural work and work in the brick-kilns.

All the workers interviewed pointed out that that they did not want their children to work in the brick-kilns, but the presence of large number of children, and workers present who had started their life at the kiln sites, is an indication that it is either element of direct bondage or indirect bondage in the labour relationship where the bargaining power of the labourer is so low and s/he is faced with no alternative source of employment that s/he is forced to accept below minimum wage.

Majority of the women labourers are engaged mostly in unskilled labour i.e. in transporting bricks from one place to the other. The weight of one brick is ranging from 3 Kg. (Baked bricks) to 3.5 Kg. (Dried clay bricks). It was found that the respondents carry bricks minimum 8 and maximum 10 at a time. In terms of kilogram the minimum weight is 25 kg while the maximum weight is 35 kg. Chart 6.1 and Table no. 6.3 examines the relation between the age of the respondent and the weight they carry as part of the assigned work.

At the aggregate level the weight carried on the head, a majority of the respondents (75.6) carry weight above 30 kg., a small percent of the respondents (1.67 per cent) carried weight less than 20 kg. Remaining 18.33 per cent of the respondents are not involved in head loads, they are the moulders. There is a wide spread argument that women's tasks are less physically arduous than men's; 'regardless of energy output, when a task is performed by men alone, it is always described as hard work, requiring strength, and when it is done by women it is simply taken for granted' (Mencher 1993:114). The bias that women lack physical strength is deeply internalised, although the evidence from the field is that women often bear a greater load of the labour-intensive tasks than men.

Working Hours

According to the Minimum Wages Act, the working hours for adults is eight hours in a day (including rest hours), seven hours for adolescent and for children 4.5 hours. The working hours in a week should not exceed 48 hours. Though the working hours are not rigid and the payment of wages is made based on the piece rate, the workers put on their labour ranging from 7 hours to 12 hours a day. The following table gives the details about the working hours the respondents put in their labour in a day.

**Table 6.4: Distribution of respondents by the working hours
(Percentage in Parentheses)**

Sl.No	Working Hours	District			Total N = 300
		Cachar n =100	Hilakandi n = 100	Karimganj n = 100	
1	7 Hours (10 am to 5 pm)	3 (3.00)	17 (17.00)	1 (1.00)	21 (7.00)
2	8 Hours (8 am to 4 pm)	36 (36.00)	43 (43.00)	27 (27.00)	106 (35.33)
3	9 Hours (7 am to 4 pm)	61 (61.00)	35 (35.00)	34 (34.00)	130 (43.33)
4	12 Hours (6 am to 6 pm)	0 (0.00)	5 (5.00)	38 (38.00)	43 (14.33)

Source: Primary Data

An overwhelming majority of the respondents (43.33 per cent) are working for 9 hours a day. A significant number of the respondents (35 per cent) are working for 8 hours a day. In contrast, nearly one fifth of the respondents (14.33 per cent) are working for 12 hours a day. A negligible number of (7 per cent) respondents are working for 7 hours a day.

Though there is flexibility of working hours it was found that women are devoting more time as they have to give more time than man, as they involve in transporting manually where as men involve in transporting with the help of their bicycles. Women put more labour to earn their wages.

Observation shows that many of the women are spending nearly 10 hours at the work site in a day. This is more relevant to the migrants who are in proximity go work place as they are staying at the kiln site.

Rest Hours

**Table 6.5: Distribution of respondents by rest hours
(Percentage in Parentheses)**

Sl.No	Rest Hours	District			Total N = 300
		Cachar n =100	Hilakandi n = 100	Karimganj n = 100	
1	None	1 (1.00)	0 (0.00)	3 (3.00)	4 (1.33)
2	One	99 (99.00)	95 (95.00)	74 (74.00)	268 (89.33)
3	Two	0 (0.00)	5 (5.00)	23 (23.00)	28 (9.33)

Source: Primary Data

The provision of rest intervals is usually arbitrary and takes no account of the needs of the workers. An overwhelming majority of the respondents (89.33 per cent) get rest for an hour. A negligible percent of respondents (9.33 per cent) get rest for two hours. It was revealed by less than two per cent of the respondents that they take break even less than one hour.

Although, the scheduled rest hour is of one hour duration but observation shows that in practice the respondents do not get one hour of rest. The hour of rest is given for eating lunch, which does not take more than 20 minutes. The moment the meal is over, they resume their work.

Availability and Utilization of Welfare Facilities

All the labour legislations makes it obligatory for the provision of basic welfare facilities to the workers. The Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970, has specific provisions for the welfare and health of the contract labourers. The provisions are concerned with matters relating to canteens, restrooms, latrines and urinals, washing facilities and drinking water etc. (Panda; 1999; 154)

The following table presents the information regarding the availability and utilization of welfare facilities in brick kiln industry.

Table 6.6: Availability and Utilization of the Welfare Facilities

(Percentage in Parentheses)

Welfare Facilities	Availability			Utilization		
	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total
Rest Room	130 (43.33)	160 (56.77)	300 (100)	120 (40.00)	180 (60.00)	300 (100)
Drinking Water	175 (58.33)	125 (41.67)	300 (100)	160 (56.77)	130 (43.33)	300 (100)
Latrines	131 (43.67)	169 (56.33)	300 (100)	59 (19.67)	241 (80.33)	300 (100)
Urinals	251 (83.67)	49 (16.33)	300 (100)	251 (83.67)	49 (16.33)	300 (100)
Washing Facilities	43 (14.33)	157 (85.67)	300 (100)	28 (9.33)	272 (90.67)	300 (100)
Creches	00	300	300	-	-	-

Source: Primary Data

An overwhelming majority of the respondents have mentioned that the brick kiln industry do not have rest rooms (56.77), latrines (56.33), and urinals (16.33). It was found that the owners of the brick kiln make arrangement of kaccha latrines and urinals for the workers. Hundred per cent of the respondents have mentioned that there are no crèches facilities.

The study conducted on construction workers also found that the working condition of the construction labourers with regards to the facilities, the adequate welfare and safety measures are not adopted intensely. The children who come with their parents are not protected against bad weather and occupational hazards. They play near the places, where the construction work of building is carried out (Majid; 2000;110).

Duration of Annual Employment

The duration of annual employment in brick kiln industry refers here to the number of months they work in the brick kiln in a year. Though the brick kiln work is seasonal in nature and depends upon the climatic conditions, on an average this industry provides continuous employment for five to six months in a year, but from the study it was found that there is a variation in terms of availability of work. This information is collected based on previous years work availability.

**Table 6.7: Distribution of respondents by duration of annual employment
(Percentage in Parentheses)**

Sl.No	Duration of Annual Employment	District			Total N = 300
		Cachar n =100	Hilakandi n = 100	Karimganj n = 100	
1	2 months	5 (5.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	5 (1.67)
2	3 months	5 (5.00)	4 (4.00)	2 (2.00)	11 (3.67)
3	4 months	7 (7.00)	44 (44.00)	80 (80.00)	131 (43.67)
4	Up to 5 months	83 (83.00)	52 (52.00)	14 (14.00)	149 (49.67)
5	Throughout the Year	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	4 (4.00)	4 (1.33)

Source: Primary Data

Little less than half of the respondents (49.67 per cent) have worked up to 5 months in a year in the brick kiln industry. A significant number of respondents (43.67 per cent) have worked in the brick kiln industry up to four months period. Only 3.67 per cent of the respondents worked up to three months in a year. A negligible portion of the respondents worked for just two months in a year. Remaining 1.33 per cent of the respondents worked through out the year. They are engaged in loading and unloading in the industry. The observation shows that continuity of work is available to the migrants as compared to the locals. The variation of availability of work is mainly due to either personals reasons like ill-health or other reasons like untimely rains due to which the work in brick kiln is suspended for time being.

Work Satisfaction

**Table 6.8: Distribution of respondents by level of satisfaction with the job
(Percentage in Parentheses)**

Sl.No	Work Satisfaction	District			Total N = 300
		Cachar n = 100	Hilakandi n = 100	Karimganj n = 100	
1	Highly Satisfied	1 (1.00)	7 (7.00)	9 (9.00)	17 (5.67)
2	Satisfied	42 (42.00)	31 (31.00)	26 (26.00)	99 (33.00)
3	Dissatisfied	39 (39.00)	41 (41.00)	45 (45.00)	125 (41.67)
4	Highly Dissatisfied	18 (18.00)	21 (21.00)	20 (20.00)	59 (19.67)

Source: Primary Data

An overwhelming majority of the respondents (41.67 per cent) are not satisfied with the work they do, in contrast a significant number of respondents (33 per cent) have expressed that they are satisfied being working in brick kiln industry. A negligible number of respondents (5.67 per cent) are highly satisfied with their work in contrary to (19.67 per cent) are highly dissatisfied with their work and expressed that they would like to discontinue the work if they get any other work.

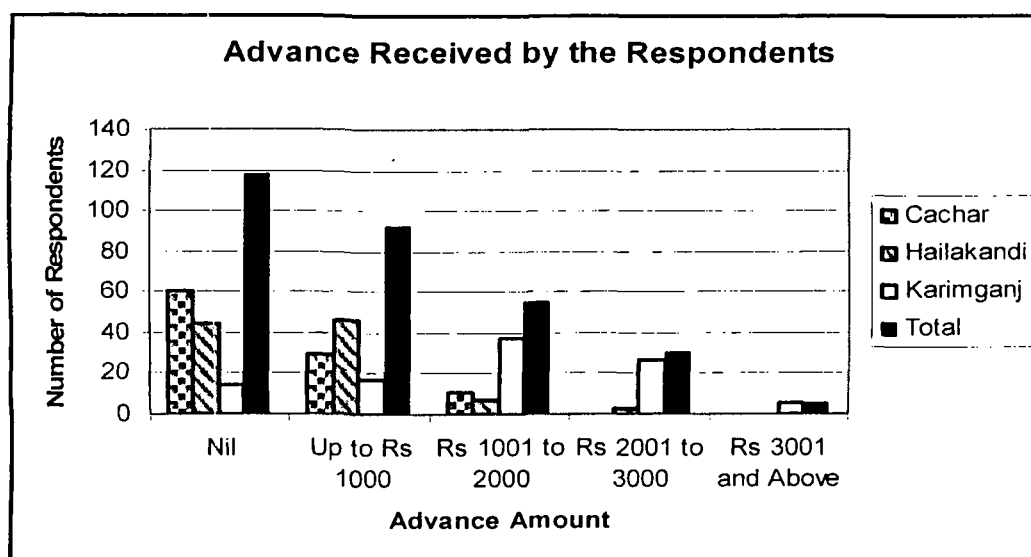
The study revealed that the large number of respondents are the landless labourers. They work in others farm during the off season. A large set of respondents i.e.

43 percent of the respondents work in tea gardens to earn their livelihood. In other words, tea garden work is primary and the brick kiln work is secondary for them. With the lack of other alternative employment avenues, they tend to feel satisfied with the work in brick kilns.

Advance Amount

The system of advance is an important factor which attracts the people to work in brick kilns. In this system of advance, an element of tied labour relation cannot be ruled out. Though Section 2 of the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976, any advance whether cash or kind under any agreement written or oral is illegal. In the case of brick kilns of Barak Valley, the labour relations are located within the structure of the industry, the contractor plays the proxy to the principal owner i.e., the kiln owner and it is the contractor who is perceived as the employer of the workers. Maximum number of respondents gets the information regarding the starting of brick kiln work through the Agent/Contractors. The issue of principal employer is diluted as the owners take no responsibility of the workforce in terms of breaking or making of a contract. The advance amount is received by the respondents from the brick kiln owner towards the whole family members through their contractors (*Sardars*).

Chart 6.2: Advance received by the respondents



Source: Primary Data

It was found that maximum number of respondents (39.6 percent) did not get any advance amount for their work. This category is mostly the locals who are involved in loading and unloading and from the age group up to 25 years. The availability of local for loading and unloading is not a problem. People are ready to give their labour even without getting any advance. Generally the advance amount is paid to the male member of the household. In many cases where both husband and wife are working, the advance is paid to the male worker only. As far as the amount of advance is concerned, 30 percent of the respondents received an advance amount up to Rs. 1000, where as 18 per cent have received Rs. 1001 to 2000. Very few families could get advance ranging from Rs. 2001 to 3000. A negligible percent of the respondents have received advance amount above Rs. 3000.

The contractors do not charge any interest on the advances that are made to the workers and they also bear one way cost of transportation of the workers from their home to the worksite. The contractors bring the workers from the district that they belong to and often from a radius of 15 kms, where the contractor himself is located. Even though the contractor does not charge any interest on the advances made, he makes his money from the commission that is paid to him on the wage rates paid to the workers.

The different categories of workers have different wage rates per thousand bricks and there is no interchangeability in roles at the site. The study is attempted to track down the different ways in which the contractor accrues part of the surplus value to himself. It is difficult to track this element through the system of advance and the neat calculations worked out by both the brick kiln owners and the contractor. One factor (of several others that are being worked out) that hides this extraction is the number of years that each worker has been working with the same contractor. The length of the relationship could explain the indebtedness of the worker to the contractor and a continuation of tied relationship based on interest accumulation on the advance or transactions between the contractor and the worker at the origin of their relationship. The difficulty is in differentiating the element of bondage as one that has its origin in the employment condition at the brick kiln or one that originates in the agrarian sector.

Average Weekly income from Brick Kiln work

The economic condition of the labourers who are working in brick kiln work can be adjudged through their weekly incomes. They earned their wages on every seventh day through their respective contractors.

Table 6.9: Distribution of respondents based on their average weekly income from the brick kilns
(Percentage in Parentheses)

Sl.No	Average Weekly income	District			Total N = 300
		Cachar n =100	Hilakandi n = 100	Karimganj n = 100	
1	Up to 250	71 (71.00)	63 (63.00)	22 (22.00)	156 (52.00)
2	251-500	29 (29.00)	37 (37.00)	49 (49.00)	115 (38.33)
3	501-1000	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	29 (29.00)	29 (9.67)

Source: Primary Data

The above table shows the weekly income of the respondents, both skilled and unskilled. By the table it is clear that 52 per cent of the respondents gets up to Rs. 250/- weekly i.e. payment for the work done for 6 days. It shows that the major proportion of women labour getting far less than minimum wages as fixed by the Government of India and the state government. Above 38 per cent of the respondents gets between Rs. 251/- to 500/- and 9.7 per cent of them get Rs. 501/- to Rs. 1000/- as weekly payment for their labour.

It also reflects the stark violation of Equal Remuneration Act in the brick kiln industry. It is also clear that there is no accountability of the authorities on to the fact of the vulnerability of the vulnerable.

**Table 6.10: Distribution of respondents by their monthly household income
(Percentage in Parentheses)**

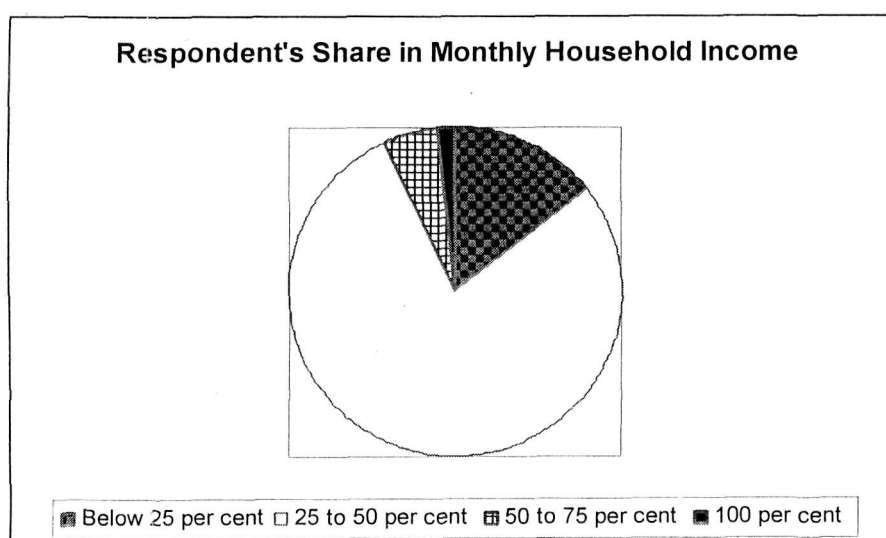
Sl.No	Monthly Household Income	District			Total N = 300
		Cachar n =100	Hilakandi n = 100	Karimganj n = 100	
1	Below Rs.1000	30 (30.00)	32 (32.00)	6 (6.00)	68 (22.67)
2	Rs. 1001-3000	57 (57.00)	48 (48.00)	46 (46.00)	151 (50.33)
3	Rs. 3001-5000	13 (13.00)	20 (20.00)	32 (32.00)	65 (21.67)
4	Rs. 5001and above	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	16 (16.00)	16 (5.33)

Source: Primary Data

Total monthly family income of the respondents from the brick kiln reveals that 50.3 percent of the respondents have total monthly income ranging between 1001 to 3000, 22.7 percent below of the respondents have an income below 1000, 21.7 percent have monthly income ranging between 3001-5000. Only 5.3 percent have their monthly income above Rs.5000

Workers share to Household Income

Chart 6.3: Respondent's Share in Monthly Household Income



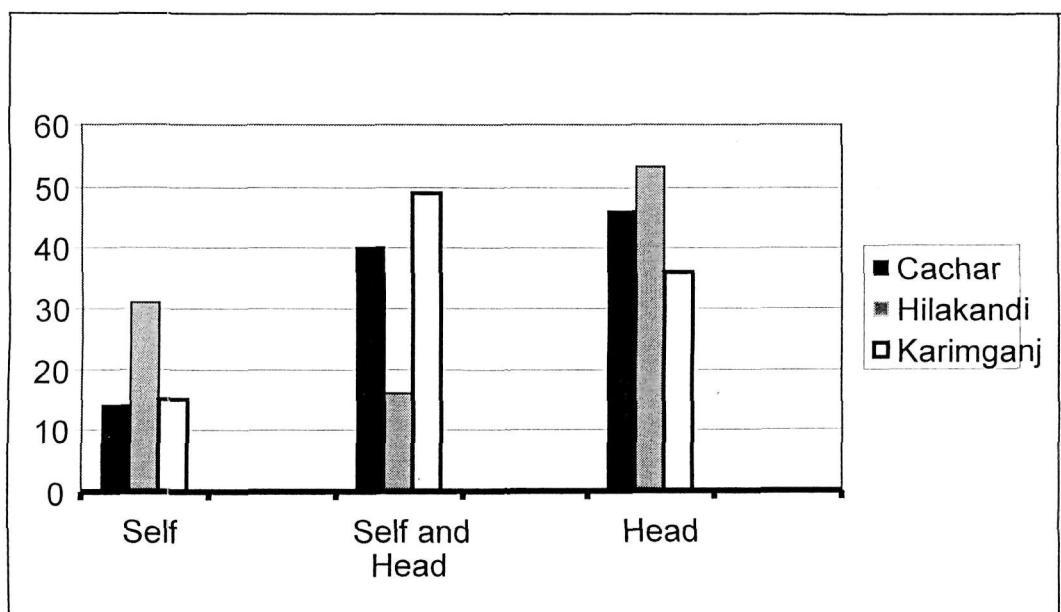
Source: Primary Data

In terms of respondents share to total family income it was found that a majority of the respondents (i.e. more than 78 percent) are contributing 25 to 50 per cent of the household income. Another 14.33 per cent of the respondents are contributing less than 25 per cent of the household income. Only 5.33 per cent of the respondents are sharing 50 to 75 per cent of the household income. Remaining less than two per cent of the respondents (1.67) are contributing hundred per cent of the household income. These respondents are the only bread earners of the family. These families are the women headed families.

Pattern of Spending

To assess the extent to which women workers have the right to retain their earning and spend according to their own choice, relevant information from the respondents were collected through interview schedules.

Chart 6.4: Distribution of respondents by their pattern of spending



Source: Primary Data

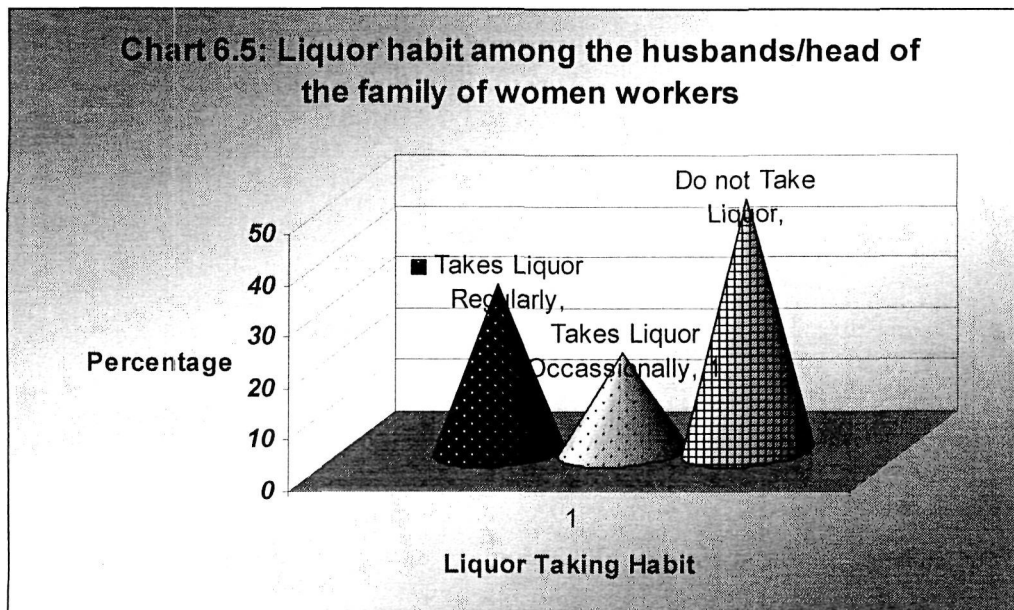
It is evident from the above table that 20 per cent of the respondents taking all the sample together could retain their weekly earning in their own hands and thereby enjoy the freedom of spending the money according to their felt needs and wishes (This number is including the female headed house holds). About 35 per cent of the

respondents reported that they could keep a portion of their income in their hands and spend the money according to their own choices. They further revealed that they had to hand over the rest to their respective husbands. Those respondents could enjoy the freedom of spending to some extent. About 45 percent of the respondent reported that they had to hand over their entire weekly earnings to their respective husbands or other senior male members of the family. They did not enjoy any right on their own earnings as they could not spend the money when they felt it necessary.

Overall picture which is thus obtained in this regard was that only a small percentage of the respondents had the right to retain their earnings wholly and spend the same according to their own choice. Among the remaining respondent some could enjoy limited freedom in the matter of spending a portion of their own earnings, while others did not have any freedom in this regard.

Aforesaid picture, as we could notice, was in sharp contrast to the picture that was available for the male labourers. In this connection we may consider the cases when male labourers spend a considerable portion of their own income or of the income of the family on consumption of liquor.

Liquor habit among the husbands of women workers



Source: Primary Data

Liquor consumption by male member in the family has been stated by 22.6 per cent of the brick kiln labourers. They take liquor regularly. Little more than 10 per cent of the respondents stated that their husbands take liquor occasionally. The liquor shops are conveniently located nearby the brick kilns. The male members from the migrant families are more prone for liquor consumption. However, around 40 per cent of the respondents stated that the head of the family do not consume liquor.

Saving Behavior

**Table 6.11: Distribution of respondents by their saving behaviour
(Percentage in Parentheses)**

Sl.No	Saving Behaviour	District			Total N = 300
		Cachar n =100	Hilakandi n = 100	Karimganj n = 100	
1	No Savings	97 (97.00)	97 (97.00)	66 (66.00)	260 (86.67)
2	Saving Occasionally	3 (3.00)	3 (3.00)	34 (34.00)	40 (13.33)

Source: Primary Data

Savings of the earnings plays an important role in managing the household expenses in a sustainable way. It was found from the study that a large number of respondents (86.67 per cent) could not save anything from their earnings. It was because their earnings are meager and not even sufficient to sustain their hand to mouth expenditure. A negligible portion of the respondents (13.33 per cent) could save occasionally out of their earnings. The single most popular institution for savings among the workers who save occasionally was SHGs. The access to formal institutions of savings such as banks and post offices was nil. It was found that a large part of the sample are not part of any savings groups. Here the role of NGOs needs to be strengthened so that they should not be trapped under vicious circle of indebtedness.

In sum, therefore, the brick kiln workers were found to depend to a much greater extent on the informal coping mechanisms, such as borrowing, depending on relatives, friends, etc, whatever be the risk or contingency they faced. If at all they adopted mitigating strategies such as savings etc, they showed a preference for less formal

means such as SHGs. To the extent that they continued to depend on any form of borrowing, their ability to be socially and economically mobile got further restricted, pushing them deeper into debt and likeness of bondage of varying degrees. These workers were thus perceived as without much care from formal institutions, on the one hand, and the informal sources pushing them into debts and extra-economic obligations, on the other.

Consequently, it is necessary not only to identify different programmes capable of providing a sense of security to the lives of the workers and their dependents, but also design them in such a way that subscription to them becomes both meaningful and feasible. The next section discusses the workers' indebtedness.

Amount of Debt

**Table 6.12: Distribution of respondents by their debt
(Percentage in Parentheses)**

Sl.No	Amount of Debt	District			Total N = 300
		Cachar n =100	Hilakandi n = 100	Karimganj N = 100	
1	None	93 (93.00)	71 (71.00)	79 (79.00)	243 (81.00)
2	Up to 3000	6 (6.00)	17 (17.00)	12 (12.00)	35 (11.67)
3	3001 – 7000	1 (1.00)	7 (7.00)	5 (5.00)	13 (4.33)
4	7001 -10000	0 (0.00)	4 (4.00)	1 (1.00)	5 (1.67)
5	10001 & Above	0 (0.00)	1 (1.00)	3 (3.00)	4 (1.33)

Source: Primary Data

Indebtedness is also an important indicator of poverty. It was found that 19 per cent of the respondents have debt. Few of them also expressed that they are compelled to work to payoff their debt. The respondents have debt ranging from 1000 to 10,000. Among the respondents having debt, it was found that 11.67 per cent of the respondents have debt up to Rs. 3000. Another less than five per cent of the respondents (4.33 per

cent) have debt between Rs. 3001 and 7000. A negligible number of respondents (1.67 per cent) have a debt between Rs. 7001 and 10,000, and remaining less than two per cent of the respondents (1.33 per cent) have a debt even more than ten thousands.

Information relating to the purpose of borrowing money shows that 12.7 per cent of the respondents have borrowed money for the treatment of family member. 3.3 per cent of the respondents had borrowed money to meet the daily needs. 0.7 per cent of the respondents borrowed money to repair the house followed by 0.3 per cent borrowed money towards meeting marriage expenses. 2 per cent of the respondents stated that they borrowed money on unspecified works.

It is evident from the study that though women are contributing a lot by putting their labour, but they are not equally placed at the receiving end of enjoying the income. The income they earn is meager which is not sufficient to fulfill their basic necessities of life. As a result a predominant respondents could not save anything out of their earnings. Lack of proper intervention from the organization is also not evident especially for the migrant labour.

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