

CHAPTER 9

Chapter - 9

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTION

The unorganised sector is suffering from various drawbacks in terms of addressing the problems of its workers. With the advent of changes in the organised sector, there is a considerable shift of organised labour from organised to unorganised or informal sector. Women are the worst sufferers of the whole process which is manifested in casualisation and feminisation of women labour force.

Viewed from the above angles, the labour situation in brick kiln industry in India appears to be an ideal case to study. Not only one notices in the brick kiln industry a relatively high percentage of women in workforce, but the inequality of wages between men and women. However, what seems to be a paradox is that in the brick kilns the high workforce participation rate of women and their attainment of wage equality have not brought commensurate rise in women's status either in work place or within their families. The available evidences in the context of brick kiln industry indicate women workers continued subordination to men and their deprivation in a variety of forms.

Review of literature in the unorganised sector in India

The finding of the various studies have been presented in the chapter conducted in the fields of unorganised sector namely agriculture labour, handloom workers, workers in salt industry, construction industry, leather tanning industry, migrant labour etc.

These studies focused the macro level policies and its implication on the micro level labour force and highlighted the socio-economic and working condition of labour force in unorganised sector. These studies revealed the prevalence of hazardous working conditions which is manifested in long hours of work, work in hazardous employment, low wages, work in unhealthy environments etc.

The studies covered various aspects of unorganised labour in general and brick kiln labour in particular.

Studies conducted on Brick Kiln Industry

Brick kiln industry is part of unorganised sector. Various studies had explored the brick kiln industry in terms of the working condition of brick kiln workers in general and women in particular. It was found that these kilns operate in a largely unregulated manner in the informal sector and remain outside the purview of workplace laws, with workers bound to contractors and owners by the system of advance payments. There is debt bondage appears to be the fruit of numerous factors coming both from the supply (employers' constraints and motivations) and from the demand (workers' constraints and motivations). Workers are in a "mild" situation of debt bondage, have to work for long, and very often put their children to work as well. The labour force in brick kiln is comprising mostly of lower caste.

The study showed that half of the total numbers of workers were women. Women in the brick kiln industry found that women are employed exclusively for carrying head loads, where as skilled and semi-skilled work such as moulding, shaping and stocking is done by men only. As a result, women's wages, for work which is not physically less exhausting than men's, are only about half the wages earned by men. Nevertheless, women cling to the brick industry because of uncertain work opportunities elsewhere and the continuity of employment that this industry offers. Though child labour was not observed working in any of the units, children were noticed helping their parents in the process of brick-making and adolescents are seen engaged in different jobs like moulding, loading, unloading etc.

Working conditions were far from satisfactory with unsanitary surroundings, dusty environment, excessive temperature. The basic facilities like washing and bathing facility, rest shelters, crèches, medical facilities were not provided to the workers engaged in the brick kilns. There were no fixed hours of work as such. Most of the workers, being piece-rated, worked according to their convenience. They usually started work early in the morning and after taking rest in the noon hours again come to work

sites in the afternoon and continued working till dusk. There are no security provisions for them. The owners do not implement labour welfare legislations very effectively.

The studies conducted in other countries like Pakistan documented the working conditions in brick-kilns, has noted that national laws on bonded labour were widely violated. Debt-bondage, restrictions on freedom of movement, physical abuse, sexual harassment including rape, low wages, and a lack of medical and educational facilities are widespread and endemic in the brick-making industry. The vast majority of workers at brick-kilns are children, most of whom receive no compensation for their labour. Many started working before the age of thirteen, indicating that they were either the children or grand children of those initially given a loan. Prevalence of child labour was seen. The child brick makers suffered from chronic illness, especially chest infections. Moreover, children who work in brick-kilns are often psychologically traumatised, as they live in fear and witness a consistent pattern of physical violence against family members from a young age.

Studies from China also indicated that workers in kilns were treated worse than slaves, forced to handle hot bricks, beaten if they did not work as expected, and reportedly even buried alive to remove the bodies. The labourers were enticed with promises of a good job, they were beaten upon arrival, starved and forced to work 14-16 hours a day without pay.

From the above studies it is clear that the most of the studies focused on the working conditions of the brick kiln workers. The studies highlighted the scenario of the work place. The present study focused both the working conditions at place of work and the related problems associated with the domestic responsibilities of the women. It explored the paid and unpaid labour and its impact on the health of women engaged in brick kiln industry in Barak Valley of Assam.

Health, Work place and family are the three important components, which play a significant role in the life of a woman. Each sector of the industry has its own characteristics which has its impact on the above three components. It is necessary to study these components and condition of women brick kiln labourers. The present study attempted to explore the problems faced by the women both at house and at place of work in a regional context.

Objectives of the study:

1. To study the division of labour by sex in the organisation of work in the brick kiln industry,
2. To investigate the push and pull factors for women engaged in brick kiln and migration pattern,
3. To understand the impact of work environment and unpaid work on the health of women labourers,
4. To study the extent of awareness among women labourers regarding their rights and legislative provisions,
5. To understand the role played by the brick kiln owners and NGOs in improving the conditions of women labourers and Social Work Intervention.

An exploratory design was adopted to study the problem in three districts of Barak Valley. 30 selected brick kilns were studied with a sample of 300 respondents (i.e. 10 women respondents from each brick kiln industry) from Barak Valley. The brick kilns were selected on the basis that the industry should engage a significant number of women labourers.

The data were collected by personally interviewing the respondents and through observation technique. The researcher spent long hours in the brick kilns in order to observe and understand the phenomena going in and around both the brick kilns and the households to make a realistic and in-depth analysis of the situation. The brick kiln owners were interacted with the help of interview guide.

The data were collected during the years November 2006 to March 2007. One month was spent for informal discussions with the proposed respondents. Two months were spent for collecting quantitative and qualitative data from the respondents. One month spent with the owners and the contractors for qualitative data regarding the industry structure and operation.

The primary and secondary data collected from the different sources were feed to the computer and processed by SPSS package. Chi-square Goodness of fit techniques was used to find out the statistical difference between the variable under the preview. The inferences drawn from the study are compared with the inferences drawn by other

researchers who had conducted similar studies in India and in different parts of the world.

Brick Kiln Industry in *Barak Valley*

Brick kilns in Barak Valley is a major employer of unskilled and semiskilled labour. There are around 150 brick kilns are running in the three districts of Barak Valley (viz. Cachar, Hailakandi and Karimgunj) employing on an average 70 to 80 Workers. The process of brick production is largely requires both skilled and unskilled labour. The work at Brick kilns is a seasonal activity occurring largely between October and May. The work in brick kiln industry attracts migrant labourers from surrounding rural areas and forms a large bulk of inter-state as well as intra state migratory labour force. Due to the lack of opportunities for work in agriculture, labourers migrate through brokers to work in brick kilns.

The labourers for brick kiln industry are recruited through *sardars* (labour agents/contractors) which is accompanied by payment of advances to the workers for a specified period of employment. The advance is paid during *Puja* festival when they are in need of money. This is crucial time for the labourers as well as for the owners. The labourers also available and in need of work and the owners also require huge number of labour for the running of industry. They migrate along with other family members and works there for the entire season i.e. from October up to the beginning of monsoon season.

The labourers are accountable to *sardars* directly. The advance paid to the workers is deducted from the beginning of the season, the amount of deductions depends upon the understanding between the worker and the labour agent. If the worker wishes to leave mid-term, he has to return the balance advance.

The structure of brick kiln industry is pyramidal in nature and composed of four levels. At the head of the pyramid are the owners, and on the second level there are the managers (accountants). On the third level, there are the brokers, who have a special function in this industry. Finally, at the bottom of the pyramid, there are workers composed of five main groups (moulders, loaders, un-loaders, wooden cart drivers and firemen). This hierarchical structure exists in brick kilns of large size. However, a

smaller brick kiln has to resort less to managers and to middlemen. It was found that in case of small kilns the existence of brokers is less compared to the big kilns.

Brick-making is characterised by distinct division of labour. Starting from moulding till extraction of the baked bricks from the kiln, the division of labour based on the nature of work is seen. Though only men are involved in molding, stacking, firing, where as women are involved in carrying bricks from one place to the other. However, the study revealed that women are also involved in moulding. These women are mostly the migrant. Men also involved in transporting bricks from one place to the other. Men carry bricks by wooden carts or cycles where as women carry the bricks over their head.

Payment to the workers is made once in a week and that is not considered as payment but advances towards their running cost of living (*Khurakhi*). These amounts do not match up to the value of their work and wages due to them in accordance with what they have produced. The money given to them towards expenses and the advance that they have taken are both deducted at the end of the season when the final payment is made to the workers. In a way, the workers are held back by the owners and the contractors till they have earned enough to pay back the advance and the amount that they have been given as expenses although the expense money comes from the workers labour and from his unpaid wages. It is not easy for the workers to leave the kiln as and when they wish to look for better or alternative work opportunities.

Brief profile of women engaged in brick kiln industry in Barak Valley:

A clear picture of the type of women who enter brick kiln industries in Barak Valley emerges from this study. Workers in the Brick kiln industry predominantly comprise of one of the poorest and weakest segment of the society i.e. other backward castes, followed by the respondents belongs to Schedule Caste. Very little portion of the labour belongs to Scheduled Tribe while the negligible per cent respondents belongs to general category (mostly the upper caste).

An overwhelming majority fall in the age group 26-30 years followed by the age group 19-25 years. Though children are not found working as labourers but adolescents were found engaged in brick kiln industry both in moulding bricks and transporting

bricks. Same type of findings were reported by the Labour Bureau, Government of India in its survey (1982) on brick kilns in the Union Territory of Chandigarh, Haryana and Punjab.

Regarding marital status, the largest proportion of respondents are married. The proportion of widow, Separated and Divorcee are 7.3 per cent, 1.7 per cent and 1.0 per cent respectively.

Regarding educational status of the women brick kiln labourers, a large majority of the respondents have never gone to school. Very negligible portion of labour force could reach up to high school. The reason to this may be attributed to the fact that these small portion of the respondents who have studied are the first generation literates. Poverty coupled with illiteracy makes them vulnerable and receiving end of exploitation.

The present study clearly revealed that a substantial labour force in brick kiln industry in Barak Valley belongs to landless category. Rest of the respondents belongs to small farmers depending up on the agricultural sector for 6 months a year. Landlessness is an imperative factor making the women to enter into brick kiln work.

Occupational pattern of the head of the household of respondents shows that they are largely seen to be employed in the informal sector both migrants and non-migrants. Occupation pattern of them indicate the incidence of men in the family in brick kilns is predominant (63 per cent). They are largely employed as casual labourers in the activities of drainage works, loading and unloading, watchmen, construction works, road building, etc.

The information regarding the past work profile of the women labourers in brick kiln reveals that a predominant majority of them have entered in to work on payment basis at the age between 15 to 18. One fifth of the respondents had taken up the work when they were at the age between 10 to 15 years. This is an indication that parents often take the help of children to supplement their own earnings, and this is a major reason for the widespread prevalence of child labour in the brick kiln industry. This fact is hidden by not including them in the muster rolls or perhaps by increasing their age on record. With the record on age of joining and who had introduced them to the brick kiln,

and the job category they had entered with it appears that there is a large section of child workers work in the brick kilns.

The work experience of the respondents for the first time revealed that a predominant number of respondents (40 per cent) have entered in to work in brick kiln industry. That is a considerable number of respondents had a first hand experience in brick kilns. Followed by a significant number (31.33 per cent) had an experience of working in Tea Gardens. The nature of work was mostly as casual labour or daily wage labour. Discussion with the respondents revealed that under furious conditions they have started working to supplement their family. Poverty was cited as main reason for working in brick kilns by nearly 88 per cent respondents.

Push and Pull Factors for Women to engage in Brick Kiln Industry:

The poor migrants are either pushed out by economic and social deprivation, or pulled into urban life with the attraction of employment and better wages. Migration is a voluntary decision motivated by economic factors but many of time, migration is forced under various circumstances and some time due to social and biological factors. Migration acts as an equilibrium force for supplying labour from labour surplus to labour deficient areas as last surviving strategy. Indebtedness due to deprivation put them under the clutches of moneylenders from generations, and eventually leads to migration under debt bondage. Numerous instances can be evidence of migration under debt bondage of people from lowest rung of the society from chronic poverty stricken belt of country to various brick-kilns stone quarry, coal- mines and in several labour intensive low paid jobs.

Migration Pattern in Brick Kiln Industry:

It was found that the nearly half of the labour force in brick kilns is comprising of migrants. Although migration is both from inter-state and inter-district, it was found that women are resorting to inter-district migration in comparison with the inter-state migration. Thus, women in migration revealed that like men tend to move to places nearby but not the far off places. Migrants are predominantly from Muslims community

dominate the migration stream in Barak Valley. Caste wise study of women migrants shows that most of them are from backward castes. The migrants are predominantly from the age group 26 to 30 years followed by the age group 19 to 25 years. Comparatively greater participation of women from migrated families was found due to the fact that these groups have no access to employment and are landless labourers. The women in migration work with their male-folk at the farm and at brick kilns and other construction works and are the bread earners for the family either directly or indirectly.

The review of source villages of the migrants revealed that the migration is arising out of poverty stricken districts. These migrants come from two districts of Assam, namely Dubri and Kokrajhar of Assam. These districts are considered as the most economically backward districts of the state and the worst hit districts of the state in terms of poverty, thereby contributing largely to the migration of population to other districts of the state. Inter state migration is mostly resorted by the men. Although principle force of migration is economic motive, but women tend to move to nearby places than to far off places.

Occupational pattern of women during off season revealed that the large number of respondents work in tea gardens to earn their livelihood. Overall participation of women in the economic spare is mostly in casual and insecure jobs.

Overview of Labour Legislations

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 in general and women in particular are far away from the corridor of power and rights. They are vulnerable to exploitation, health hazards.

The problems associated with the brick kilns is that the brick kiln 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 question as to whether brick kilns can be registered as factories under the Factories 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.

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.

The provisions of Payment of Bonus 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.

Brick kiln was added as a scheduled industry within the purview of the Employment Provident Fund and Miscellaneous Provisions Act. 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.

Inter-State migrant workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service Act). 1979 applies to every establishment in which 5 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.

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

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.

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.

Illiteracy is also 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 both 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. The discussion with the respondents revealed that they are not aware about legislations and are not aware about their rights. The ignorance among these workers make them more vulnerable to exploitation. However, for the brick kiln workers the main concern is increase in wage rates and better living conditions. The fact that the 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. 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.

Work and Work Conditions of Women Brick Kiln Labourers

Within the occupational structure, participation of women in brick-making process is mostly confined to the unskilled job i.e. an overwhelming majority of the respondents are engaged in loading and unloading work which is performed by the labourers from the local areas. Little above 15 per cent of the respondents are engaged in moulding bricks, which is performed by the migrants. Migrants are preferred for the work of moulding. In observation, I noticed that the continuity of work solely depends

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

At the aggregate level the weight carried on the head, a majority of the respondents (66.3) carry weight ranging from 31 to 40 on their heads. 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 revealed that women often bear a greater load of the labour-intensive tasks than do men.

Though the working hours are not rigid and the payment of wages are made based on the piece rate, an overwhelming half of the women respondents are working for 9 hours a day followed by respondents one-third respondents working for eight hours a day. In contrast, a significant portion of workers i.e. nearly one fifth of the respondents are working for 12 hours a day. This category of workers is comprising of women bread earners. 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 staying at the site are giving more time as they are in proximity to their work place.

Although, on an average this industry provides continuous employment for five to six months in a year, but there is a variation in the availability of work. Nearly half of the respondents had worked up to 5 months in a year in the brick kiln industry. Another significant number of respondents (43.67 per cent) have worked in the brick kiln industry up to four months period.

With regards to work satisfaction, it was found that 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. In the absence of any other gainful employment respondents felt that working in brick kilns is the only source of survival strategy.

Though the system of advance is an important factor which attracts the labourers to work in brick kilns, it was found that nearly 40 per cent (39.6 percent) of the respondents have not received any advance from the brick kiln owner. One third 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.

An average weekly income from the brick kiln industry reveals 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.

Monthly income of the family from the brick kilns also reveals that more than half of the respondents have total monthly income ranging between 1001-3000, more than one fifth of the respondents earn below Rs. 1000. Another one-fifth of the respondents have monthly income ranging between 3001-5000, only a negligible portion of the respondents could earn a monthly income which is above Rs. 5000. Overall earnings of the families engaged in brick kiln industry is not attracting. The earnings of the family is not in consonance with the amount of time and labour they are putting in. The earnings are meager even to fulfill their basic necessities of life.

Women's contribution in terms of running the family is very much visible in terms of her share in the family income. It was found that a majority of the respondents (i.e. 78 percent) contribute 25 to 50 percent of the family income. This shows women have shouldered fifty percent of the family income. Unpaid work of women is ignored and not recognized.

Irrespective of the respondents equal contribution to family income, it was found 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.

Regarding the sharing pattern of rights enjoyed by the two genders, it was found that the share of rights enjoyed by women workers in their familial domains was lower than that enjoyed by their male counterparts. Firstly, male domination in the families of women workers with regard to decision making was found. That is, women workers were found as not participating equally with their male counterparts in the decision-making process within the families. Secondly, it was found that women workers share in the right to spend in the sample area was not at par with men's share in the right to spend. Thirdly, with regard to savings, it was found that predominant women engaged in brick kilns hardly could save anything out of their earnings. Their earnings are exhausted to manage their day to day consumptions. This shows that the women are leading a hand to mouth life.

Thus, the working condition of women workers in the sample brick kilns was also found to be wanting in many respects. Unable to entitle various essential facilities in work place like crèche facility had created additional hardships for women.

Household chores performed by Women Brick Kiln Women:

Work burden and domestic burden are compounding determinants for developing various illness for women. The brick kiln labourers do tedious work in a given whole day which affect their physical wellbeing as well as their mental health. As a result, they are more prone to various health related disorders.

Sanitary facilities are not properly taken care of by the brick kiln owners. It is noteworthy that with the lack of potable water, the burden of fetching water becomes the additional strain of work for women which affect their health.

The major responsibilities that women carryout are household maintenance, management i.e. they have the responsibility of cooking food, collecting water, cleaning the house regularly, maintenance of family etc. also have the responsibility of taking special care of the aged and disabled persons in the family.

Certain trends are evident from the data regarding women's household work and assistance received from the other members of the family. Majority of the respondents are not receiving help for the household work from their family members. Among the family members who contribute to the household work and childcare, daughter is the most prominent member of the family who helps in taking care of children. In very negligible cases the help is extended by the husband. This shows that the social tradition of daughter-in-laws compulsorily carries out domestic duties of the household prevails.

The un-substitutable function of child bearing is mostly entrusted to women alone. Absence of childcare facilities like crèche is a source of anxiety for the respondents affecting their work efficiency. This is always a source of anxiety and tension to the mothers. It also affects the health of the child. Apart from the question of health is lack of pre-school education, which these children are being deprived of.

It is clear from the above that the core household works which are to be discharged daily are mainly performed by the women members in their respective families. They get up early in the morning and attend household assignments. In addition to eight to ten hours of strenuous manual work in the brick kiln, all the respondents have to discharge various household works which require both time and labour.

Thus, the study after analyzing the sharing pattern of responsibilities and rights among the two genders in the realm of families of the women brick kiln labourers could observe that an asymmetrical gendered division of labour in favour of men prevailing in the families of brick kiln labourers of Barak Valley. Thus, women have larger share of responsibilities and lesser share of rights. This unequal gender relation in turn reflects the ongoing gender specific deprivation of women workers in their familial domains.

Health Status of Women Labourers in Brick Kiln Industry:

Their health status of workers depends upon their indefinite working condition and term of services – this includes their working hours, rest of intervals, holidays and payments. Incongruous living conditions i.e. access to basic facilities like sanitation, safe drinking water and other welfare amenities. Their access to health system and education including for their children plays a pivotal role in deciding their health status.

The nature of brick kiln work is tedious and continues exposure to sunlight and severe heat and extreme working conditions has lead to numerous health related problems. Women in brick kiln industry are susceptible to muscle strain, injuries from long periods of lifting head loads. They normally suffer from the ailments like stomach ache, head ache, body ache and fatigue ness. It is also due to lack of proper rest. Apart from fatigue ness they are prone for respiratory problems due to inhalation of dust and to stress-related conditions as a result of target-oriented work, long working hours.

The relationship between the age of the respondents and the weights they carry as part of the assigned works reveals that more weight being carried by the respondents from the age group of 26 to 30 years, followed by the age group 19 to 25 years, which shows a significant percent of the respondents who carries a weight above 30 kg. The discussions with the respondents thrown light of the information that increase age help to the person to adjust with the hard ship and manage to carry more weight on their head. Use of hardship would help to the respondents to carry above 30 kg. weight on their head. That is why increasing age of the respondents considered as able to carry more weight on their head.

The common health related ailments were reported by the respondents like fatigue, body ache, head ache, backaches, eye strain, stomach ache and anemia.

It clearly shows that the respondents are suffering from physical pain in upper part of the body i.e. headache, pain in upper limbs, shoulder pain and neck pain. The probable reason of these ailments could be their nature of work at work place. Carry weight on head and lifting the weight to carry it would affect the upper part of the body. Secondly when the person does hard work without taking proper intake makes them more vulnerable.

It was found that the respondents avoid consulting the doctors as they feel it is expensive and not affordable. Under extreme situations only they consult the doctor. This is due to non availability of healthcare facilities within an accessible distance. It is also noted that the government hospitals timing and procedures of availing healthcare services are reported to be not feasible for the respondents if they approach to the government hospital they have to leave a days' work or spend money on transportation

and on medicine. Thus poor state of affordability could not allow the women to avail treatment facilities.

Health care expenditure incurred by the respondents towards their treatment. Lack of gainful income they borrow money either from the relatives or the money lenders for the treatment.

Perceived Mental Health:

Women in brick kiln work have developed some problems relating to their mental health due to strenuous nature of work i.e. mental exhaustion, irritation in day to day life, loss of control, conflict with others etc.

Even with the exhaustive nature of work, a significant number of the respondents gave negative responses. This shows that most of the women workers could not express their problems. They have become so socialised to their life situations that difficult situations are not seen as problems.

Role of Employers, NGOs towards improving the condition of women labourers:

Brick kiln labourers took up the work in brick kilns as a last resort. When no other options left with them, they opted work in brick kilns. This situation keeps always at the lower bargaining position. The owners of the brick kiln industry seems to be reluctant to take any proactive measures in terms of better working conditions and better facilities at work place. They want to maximize their profit with less investment. The role of NGOs working in Barak Valley is also not encouraging in terms of addressing the problems of the brick kiln labourers. With the lack of proper mandate, this sector is neglected by the NGOs. The reasons may be attributed that the scattered nature of work, seasonality of work. The problems associate with brick kiln industry is with regards to its status. The brick kiln industry has not gained the status of an industry and still fall under the category of cottage industries. The experience of owners also reveals that there is also the fear of being cheated and duped by the workers. Though they are accountable to the *sardars* who often come from their own village also had an experience of workers running away after taking the advance from the *sardar*.

SUGGESTIONS:

The conclusions drawn from the findings summarized in the preceding paragraphs lead to several gender and social-issues in brick kiln work and house-hold work and suggests far reaching policy, development and research implications for integrating unorganised women's concern in general and women in brick kilns in particular into development process.

1. Ensure basic rights:

There is a need to provide protection of the basic rights, health and safety of workers and the progressive improvement of overall working conditions. Strengthening of efforts towards facilitating the role of Government in improving health policies that reduce, with a view to eliminating, environmental health hazards and provide for occupational health and safety, in conformity with the relevant Conventions. Provide brick kiln owners and all workers with accessible information and guidance on how to enhance occupational safety and reduce health risks. The state should recognize and act upon their obligation to provide childcare facilities to working women. Specifically governments should launch nation-wide efforts for the provision of crèches, nurseries and child-care facilities, with location and time tables convenient for home and work, and responsible to the schedules of workers with family responsibilities, both in urban and rural environments.

2. Formalisation of the unorganised labour:

Ideally, all these rights should also be available to unorganised workers. But there is a major problem in winning them so long as these workers have no proof of employment and are not even registered as workers. So, there should be compulsion regarding registration of the kilns by the government, identity cards, attendance diaries and pay slips, etc. There should be a record of who works for whom and for how long, no matter how temporary, seasonal or casual the employment is. For contract workers, there is an additional complication, because the labour contractor acts as a middleman between worker and employer without taking on the responsibilities of an employer. In principle, whoever pays the

worker's wages should be regarded as the employer i.e., there should be no intermediary between employer and worker. In most cases, the contractor should be registered only as a recruitment agent and paid a commission by the employer, who should then pay the workers directly. Formalization of the unorganised labour would facilitate to introduce additional measures to ensure a maximum amount of regularisation of employment. For example, the Contract Labour Act in India makes it illegal to employ contract workers for permanent or perennial jobs; if instead of attempting to 'reform' this law into nothingness the government were to extend it to all forms of irregular employment (e.g., temporary, casual and seasonal as well as contract labour) and enforce it, this would regularise large sections of the labour force including brick kiln labour. This does not mean that there should be job security in some absolute sense, only that so long as a job remains in existence, the same worker should be employed to do it, unless incompetence or wrong-doing can be proved. With a record of all employment being kept, it would become much more obvious when unfair labour practices are being used, such as creating artificial breaks in employment, terminating one worker and employing another simply in order not to make the first worker permanent, or moving production to another location when workers unionise. If, in addition, it is stipulated that irregular workers have to be paid the same wages as permanent workers doing comparable work, with pro rata facilities (like paid off-days, holidays and crèches) and benefits (health care, retirement benefits, bonus, etc), the temptation for employers to use irregular workers in the place of regular ones would be much reduced. Their argument for using irregular workers is flexibility, and if this is the real reason, there should be no objection to spending as much on these workers as on permanent ones.

3. Sensitisation and conscientisation:

The findings show that the women are the subsistence contributors in unorganised sector in addition to managing their homes. This picture of the brick kiln women should be recognised by the policy makers, planners, administrators, change agents and scientists. Simultaneously, the poor women should be made aware of their local resource base, benefits of various development/ welfare programmes being carried out for them. This calls for sensitising and conscientising both the

parties i.e. the policy makers, planners, administrators and change agents as well as the women in unorganised sector through well planned educational programmes and mass media.

4. Empowering women:

Substantial amount of women labour is engaged in unorganised sector. But their participation in decision-making pertaining to spending money is still lower than the male heads of the family. Therefore, for enhancing their participation in decision-making massive educational programmes should be launched for both the sexes. The male-heads of families should also be given proper opportunities to participate in such educational programmes so that they could bring about changes in their attitudes in enabling women to enhance their decision-making power at home, economic sectors.

5. Targeting women as beneficiaries:

It has been observed that the women labourers have little access to credit and marketing facilities. For increasing the access to such services, organisational efforts should be made through Mahila Mandals, cooperative societies, etc. to provide integrated package of supply and services. The control of these organisations should also be in the hands of women. The support of voluntary agencies should be sought for organising Mahila Mandals, Co-operative Societies and other organisations exclusively for women.

6. Advocacy for the rights of the Unorganised Labour in general and Brick Kiln Labour in particular:

The aim of advocacy is to bring about change for the benefit of the poor and those suffering injustice. It is important always to remember that the aim advocacy activity is to attain the goal do not become ends in themselves. The ILO Core Conventions – protecting freedom of association, the right to organise and bargain collectively, freedom from forced and bonded labour, the abolition of child labour, and freedom from discrimination – were made mandatory in all member states of the ILO in 1998. The right to a safe and healthy workplace can also be seen as basic human rights, although they are not included in the core conventions. Ignorance about the rights makes the unorganised labour more vulnerable to

exploitation. Lack of association and collective voice make them weaker in terms of their bargaining power. Collective bargaining can be a viable strategy in support of advocating for the rights of the vulnerable. Civil society organisations can do a lot in terms of organising them on the issues that affect their lives. Through collective representation they can have their collective voice heard. When necessary organise women's unions. This should be seen as an intermediary step towards active participation of women with men in all levels of union activities. In conjunction with the unionization of women workers, design policies and programmes to reduce the time required for household activities and transportation to and from the work place. In certain cases, women may not have time to participate in union activities without a corresponding reduction in the time required for household work transit.

We may also refer to the Unorganised Sector (Employment and Welfare) Bill that has been proposed in the Report of the Second National Commission on Labour (RNCL) and described as an Act to consolidate and amend the laws relating to the regulation of employment and welfare of workers in the unorganised sector in India and to provide protection and social security of these workers. (Government of India 2002: 766). It has the following objectives:

- i. to obtain recognition of all workers in the unorganised sector,
- ii. to ensure a minimum level of economic security,
- iii. to ensure a minimum level of social security,
- iv. to expedite removal of the poverty of these workers through their work, protecting their means of employment and income,
- v. to ensure future opportunities for children by progressive elimination of child labour,
- vi. to ensure equal opportunities of work, for men and women workers,

- vii. to encourage formation of membership-based organisations of workers, and
- viii. to ensure representation of the workers through their organisations in local and national economic decision making processes.

The newly passed legislation does foreground the core issues surrounding the informal/unorganised sector. As always, the moot question is how far and how early these concerns can be translated into concrete action. The organisations working with the unorganised labour should be involved in a larger set of activities-identification of place or location, carrying out pre-promotional activities, selection of potential entrepreneurs, providing the entrepreneurial training, and carrying out the monitoring and follow-up mechanism. This is a time consuming process and would require a higher level of dedication and commitment. It would also call for greater flexibility, which can be extended by the agencies outside the state mechanism who could play such a role. NGOs, therefore, were seen as agencies that are perfectly suited to play these roles. There is also a need for effective entrepreneurship development coupled with a conducive policy environment.

7. Keep prime mandate of working with unorganised labour by GOs and NGOs:

There is a need to strengthen the activities of the government and non government organisation to keep a prime mandate of working for the rights of the unorganised workers to build their collective bargaining. The present context necessitates that more NGOs should come forward to work with the brick kiln workers and employ the strategy for poverty alleviation. The funding organisations also should have a prime mandate of supporting the organisations working for the rights of the unorganised labour through necessary support and funding. If rural development programmes are to be targeted, it is necessary that the district centres must have at least one NGO working exclusively on unorganised labour. It requires a constant follow-up. In light of this commitment it is necessary that the budget support extended to NGOs to discharge these responsibilities should also increase. Finally,

the plan document of the government should prioritise the unorganised labour as a major programme. With the increasing trend of migration from the drought prone areas in search livelihood it becomes all the more pertinent that new avenues for employment generation be identified at the source villages. This strategy of generating adequate employment on a sustained basis should be seen as a plausible strategy to reduce poverty and distress migration.

8. Promoting Research:

The organisations need a closer interaction between scholars and activists in the women's movement and policy-makers. This has to be at two stages; one in terms of creating channels that allow policy-makers to learn about the reality of women's lives and their true expectations from the government. Researchers have to advise policy-makers about the nature and dimensions of the problem, the various possible measures that can alleviate it, the approximate cost of each kind of measure and the priorities between them. Reallocation of productive resources in favour of women and other marginalised groups through investment in socio-economic infrastructure, trade facilitation and business development services such as basic infrastructure, basic healthcare, primary education, provision of safe water, law and order and other activities that directly affect the poor and the women.

9. Poverty alleviation programmes:

The prevalence of poverty is another factor, which makes it difficult for the worker to get minimum wages. Poverty leaves the worker with little bargaining power. It is suggested that introduction of new and implementation of existing poverty alleviation and development programmes is essential. It has been pointed out that wherever NREP and IRDP have been implemented effectively it has assisted albeit indirectly in the implementation of the Minimum Wages Act. The implementation of minimum wages it is recognised can only be possible if changes are introduced in other areas as well. Among those who suggested that employment guarantee programmes which assure work for a specific number of days in the year and land reforms for distributing surplus land are essential for it. Great hopes can be put on the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) enacted on August 23,

2005. The Act is meant to guarantee employment for a minimum of 100 days a year to one member of a BPL (below the poverty line) family, who has to be paid a third of the minimum wage. Its predecessor in Maharashtra was the Employment Guarantee Act, under which the Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS) has been a source of rural employment. It was possible for rural women workers to benefit from its provisions because rural-based parties and unions made a point of organising them for this purpose. In the post-liberalisation scenario, not many efforts are being made to organise rural women. The major challenge is to bring the large number of rural women workers under the cover of the NREGA so that the rural unemployed mass will benefit from this legislation.

10. People's Participation:

The success of any legislation depends on how actively the workers themselves are able to participate in its implementation, this requires the workers to organise themselves. Workers tend to organise themselves to respond to the existing economic and political situation. With the advent of changes brought out in our industries and the legislations there is a need to initiate different type of unions, solidarity groups, associations. In India we have the most common forms of organisations at the local levels i.e. trade unions, cooperatives, self-help groups and various types of associations. The process of organisations by recognising such local member based organisations need to be strengthened by involving them in the effective implementation of the various Acts meant for the unorganised labour. Involve working women themselves in the planning of programmes to relieve their double burden women should participate in establishing priorities among the house-related task which need to be lightened or removed from the household domain. Domestic employment should not be promoted as a solution to this problem.

SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTION:

The theme and the people taken up in this study represent the most marginalised section of Indian population. Economically, socially and politically workers in the unorganised sector are the weakest segment of Indian population. An additional

dimension is gender, which is a major theme in this study since it concerns itself with the women brick kiln labourers. From the point of view of these four dimensions women working in the brick kiln industry are the most vulnerable category of Indian society.

The social work profession itself has a wide range of goals. These include removing defects in the systems as these prevent growth and liberation; promoting social justice and equality of opportunity, along with help in redistribution of societies' goods and services. Some of these goals are achieved by developing an environment which encourages "interaction" to aid social betterment and improve the quality of peoples' lives, specially of those who are vulnerable. The social systems that the profession works with are the families, large and small groups, communities, and organisations, while the situations the profession addresses itself to are developmental, facilitative, preventive and dealing with crisis situations, not essentially in any particular order.

In order to achieve the goals of the profession, the conventional strategies and methods of social work would be inappropriate with such a category of population. Traditionally much of the social work practice was with the middle class. Not only was it a category with some socio-economic assets but also it had a fixed location. In case of the women brick kiln labourers neither do they have socio-economic assets nor are their locations fixed. The need of the hour is to take up various initiatives at various levels to attain our goal of empowering these marginalised sections of the society.

Intervention in the area of implementation of facilities mentioned in the Acts- Provision of facilities at the site:

As seen in the study most of the statutory facilities such as urinals, latrines and provision of drinking water is not made available. A major reason is the non-enforcement of the provisions of the various legislative provisions; Vaidya says that the reason for non-enforcement are many. First there are very few inspectors to do the necessary inspection. Secondly the units are scattered and the inspectors do not have vehicles to undertake the work. Most of them are burdened with other kinds of work. She observed that out of various welfare laws and provisions, the least enforced are

those meant for women and children (1993; 74). This is a reflection of the low status of women in general and poor women in particular. It is also a reflection of their powerlessness.

As part of field work the schools of social work can work with the brick kiln industries and the factory inspectors and provide them with a feedback. It is also possible to work with the association of contractors and brick kiln owners to see that these provisions are provided by their members for which they can be given some concessions by the authorities. The department of social work can facilitate collective initiatives by the brick kiln owners associations.

Intervention in the area of implementation of provisions such as minimum wages, equal remunerations etc.

There is widespread flouting of important provisions related to wages and other facilities. This is mainly due to the fact that the workers in this sector are unorganised. Organisation is the essence of placing one's demand before the wider society. It creates political space and the means for achieving socio-economic goals. In its absence the workers in this sector becomes invisible and helpless. In addition to the problem of organisations are the deep-rooted patriarchal values. In this study it has been seen that the contractors on their own decide the wages for the women accompanied by men. The wife acquiesces in this because both are provided job in the same place. In certain cases the son of the women workers play this role.

Intervention in the area of literacy:

Literacy is a special area of work where social workers have substantial experience. Under the existing schemes, social work students as a part of their field-work can take special efforts to visit different brick kiln sites and motivate parents to send children to ICDS centres. Parents would be willing but the efforts must be made to improve the functioning of the centres. Local organisations can be contacted to improve the facilities of the ICDS centres.

Ensuring right to education can be an effective tool for combating the child labour in India only when we ensure convergence of national poverty eradication and

developmental programmes. Efforts should be made to institutionalise the educational facilities for the children of migrant labour. These children are to be put through a period of structured and unstructured learning and subsequently they can be integrated in the formal schooling system run by the municipal corporation. The centres can be run by non-governmental organisations with financial support by the Municipality. The programme can be successful if effective collaboration and coordination is ensured between the state sector and the voluntary sector.

Establishing a platform for stakeholder interaction (industry representatives, policy-makers, researchers, NGOs, financial institutions etc.) to expedite the adoption of efficient strategies for the workers engaged in Indian brick industry and their accompanying children. In the process there is a need to inject the significance of education and motivate community, parents and children to regard school as beneficial and worthwhile. Emphasis should be on equal access to learning opportunities by girls at all ages. Efforts should be made towards removal of all social and familial biases and discriminations against the girl child and strive towards building non-discriminatory culture in the society.

Intervention in the area of Health:

The study focused on two areas of health- physical and mental. Physical health examined the incidence of illness and work-related ailments. Mental health and work-related ailments were more than illnesses.

Intervention can be in terms of regular visits to the work-sites for a general check-up- this will be a preventive measure. This can be undertaken by the students as a part of their concurrent field-work. Presently the workers to a great extent depend on the private sector for identification and treatment. Along with the private sector steps can be taken to improve the liaisoning work with the local public health systems. There is a need to strengthen the local healthcare system more responsive to the needs of the vulnerable sections, who are not affordable to take treatment in the private health care sector.

Intervention in the area of Income enhancement:

The data of the study has shown that almost all the respondents are poor. The problem is not only of low income but also of stable incomes as a result of which savings become difficult. Income generation and habit of saving together can address the problems of the poor. One possible solution is the formation of Self Help Groups, which also gets financial help from other sources. The groups can be involved in income generation programmes with the help of government and non-government actors. Not only some savings can be undertaken but also it can meet the small loan requirements of the women labourers. The timely financial help can prevent them from borrowing money from the money lenders on heavy interest. Another intervention is an insurance scheme with the state contributing the major part of the contribution on behalf of the workers.

Intervention in the area of Policy- Making:

The problems of the workers of the unorganised sector are more at the level of policy-making and implementation than at the micro-level. As Vaidya says, “though India has enacted protective legislations for women, the enactments have not been able to give women workers the needed protection from exploitation. The main problem is the enforcement of these Acts. The very vastness of the country, the scattered nature of women workers, their lack of education and legal literacy, the indifferent attitude of the government, bureaucracy and the general status of women in the society, all together majority of women workers as vulnerable as they ever were. This is true not only of rural unorganised women, but to an extent of the urban women workers also. It is to be remembered here, that nearly 80 percent or more women workers in the unorganised sector, and out of them, nearly 60 percent are self employed” (1993: 2).

From the above quotation it is obvious that in spite of good legislation there are serious problems at the level of implementation. This is due to the fact that the unorganised workers have no say at the political level, which is where crucial policy decisions are taken. In addition they are not able to bring pressure at the local level for effective implementation. Strengthening of civil society interventions to promote and ensure poor centered policies and implementation.

Professional social work has kept itself away from the field of politics robbing itself of a chance to influence policies. It is essential that social workers interact with political leaders at all levels. This interaction will help in lobbying and building up a pressure group. For effective implementation of laws the role of local level political leaders is very important. The need of the hour is to integrate the rights perspective and approach to plans, policies and programmes and processes. Public awareness and education on their rights is important so that people demand their rights

Historically social work has distanced itself from politics. Doubts have been expressed, 'whether social workers as a professional group can participate in movements of social action, which raises issues of law and order. Short of this and depending upon their ingenuity and skills of mobilisation, social workers can and should represent, argue for and press the interest of the disadvantaged' (Gore, 1973:45 and 65). Gore's reservation has been about social workers taking an active role with implications for the law and order situation. But a via media is possible. Based on selected issues 'mobilisation and campaigning' can be undertaken in collaboration with political leaders and other groups in society. This will also strengthen the nature of Indian civil society.

Intervention in the area of Social Work Education:

Social work education is becoming increasingly challenged by the need to reorganize, modify and strengthen its educational curriculum in order to response to social realities. The social work curriculum needs to be changed in order to equip students with competence to deal with the client's environment. A content examination of the syllabus of Social Work with Labour Welfare and Personnel Management specialisation finds the field work aspect of the curriculum has centered on institutional settings, which not only encompassed very small segment of the population having problems but also meant that the problem was being defined narrowly. Over the last two and half decades non-institutional settings like communities and Panchayats have found a legitimate place in field-work settings.

More than two-thirds of the working population of India are in the unorganised sector. *The world of unorganised sector is a non-institutionalised setting with characteristics of its own, which has yet to find a place in the field work setting of social*

work institutions. The brick kiln industry has got its unique characteristics. It is the potentially antagonistic relationship between the contractor on the one side and the workers on the other side. It is the loose structure of the working arrangement at the brick kiln site. It is loose in the sense that a worker may have been recruited by a contractor (*Sardar*) or even by the sub contractor. The distinguish feature is the matter of the physical location.

1. Make the course more relevant to the changing needs of the vulnerable. *Updating the curriculum time to time is must both in theory and field work practice.*
2. Developing and employing the appropriate strategies to tackle the problems.
3. Empowering strategy of the marginalised need to be adopted like strengthening the local governance more answerable to people through effective implementation of the programmes meant for the people.
4. Integrating the social work knowledge in to the related professions by way of adopting inter disciplinary approach at various levels.
5. Interface with the civil society organisations at all levels from formulation of policy to implementation.
6. People Centred Advocacy can be promoted in by taking up the issues of the marginalized sections of the society.
7. Attitudinal change is the core area of importance to be incorporated at all levels

Promote Social Work Research:

One of the most pressing problems facing policy makers, social work administrators and social workers today is the paucity of authentic quantitative and qualitative data concerning various problems. Under the circumstances, it becomes extremely difficult to take decisions about the approach to be emphasized, viz.,

preventive, alleviative, curative, promotive or rehabilitative (or some combinations thereof) and the corresponding resource allocation. The need of the hour is to promote research in the core area of social work to strengthen the social work intervention to address various issues concerning to people. Schools of social work, therefore, need to come forth in developing data banks which could provide basis for realistically projecting the problems and needs of various communities. Generating this type of information base can today be carried out on a table top.

As the schools acquire more experience in creating and maintaining data banks, they can even assume a position of providers of research based services to various organisations. Once established, such a service can provide a fourfold advantage to the schools in terms of contributing in the regional development strategies, can provide learning experience to its students through their involvement in field based research.

Another area of research where schools of social work must take a lead is that of experimental design for finding appropriate solutions to various problems. The realisation of rights of the brick kiln labourers in general and women in particular is possible only when diversified initiatives at various levels by diversified actors make their efforts through proper co-ordination. Policies and legislations alone cannot achieve the goal unless the developmental goals are delivered in a manner, which will take into account the socio-economic reality. The macro policy is futile with the lack of micro level initiative. There fore, micro level initiatives should be bridged with the macro policy initiatives. The State's responsibility is to strive towards protecting and promoting the rights of the marginalised with a political will. Civil society organisations working in proximity with people can proactively involve in the process to ensure right to education through effective people's participation. The need of the hour is to establish a poor-friendly policy that enables people's participation in effective development.

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