



RESEARCH ARTICLE

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF WOMEN WORKERS IN BRICK KILNS : A CASE STUDY ON
DAVANGERE DISTRICT IN KARNATAKA

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ABSTRACT

Brick Industry is one of the informal/unorganized industries in India. This industry is booming with the expansion of real estate business. It is a labour intensive industry. The industry employs millions of workers. Sizable portions of the workers are women. They live in rural area and in poverty. At work place, they are exploited, deprived and do not get the status which the men workers enjoy. There are varied natures of problems the women workers are facing now. Their socio-economic conditions cause concerns. In this backdrop, an attempt has been made to ascertain and examine the socio-economic conditions of women workers engaged in brick kiln factories. The data collected in this regard have been interpreted through percentage analysis. The entire gamut of discussion reveals that women workers live in poverty and as a consequence they come to work in brick kilns. They and their children are mostly illiterate. Most of them are migrants and their land holdings are minimal. Their annual incomes are very small. They are not given the scope of doing skilled work. Very often they express dissatisfaction on working environments. Working environment needs to be improved so that working women get motivated and enthused that may result in development of the kilns. Statutory benefits need to be given for their welfare.

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INTRODUCTION

Brick-making is one of the most ancient industries. The craft is as old as the Indus Valley Civilization (2500 – 1500 BC). Brick kilns in India produce around 300 billion bricks and it is the second largest brick producing country after China. According to Indian Brick Manufacturer Association, approximately one lakh brick kilns are operating in India which employs more than four million workers. Most of the workers are migrants who belong to economically backward and underdeveloped regions of the country and normally hail from low income and socially disadvantaged section of the society. Though one of the oldest industries in the history of mankind, brick industry in India still remains unorganized and no official authentic data is available regarding its status. The National Commission on Rural Labour estimated that there were about one million workers. But according to the All India Brick Kiln Manufacturer's Association, its membership extends up to 22000 units with about 3 million workers. The entire process of recruitment, transit, working and living conditions in the brick kiln is a testimony and indication of existence of severe form of human bondage. The organization

of work is highly influenced by socio-cultural factors. Migrant in general and traditional 'low – caste' family labour in particular, continue to characterize labour in the brick kilns. The pattern of labour recruitment in the brick kilns and the mechanisms of deployment, payment of advances and wages bear a striking similarity across the country. As the kilns are operating in the remote areas they mostly remain unregulated and wages paid are very often less than the statutory minimum wages. The wage payment systems are different for different processes and the labour contractors are usually paid a commission through an informal deduction from the labourer's wages. There are varied natures of problems the brick workers are facing now. They have no unions or legislation to protect them. There are no proper drinking water or sanitation facilities. They are also exposed to health hazards like water-borne and skin diseases and even respiratory disorders. Good, favorable socioeconomic condition of the workers may act as a booster, which, in turn, may establish congenial industrial relations. In this backdrop, an attempt has been made with the following objectives:

Objectives of the Study

1. To discuss about the Brick Industry in Karnataka and also in the Study Area, Harihar, Davangere.

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2. To ascertain and examine the socio-economic conditions of women workers engaged in brick kilns.
3. To make concluding remarks for improving the deprived women status in the study area.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The article titled "Socio-economic Conditions of Women Workers in Brick Kilns: A case study on Davangere District in Karnataka" has been based on primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data/information has been collected through interview with the owners and selected women workers of the sampled brick kilns throughout about three and half of the year. These apart, related books, journals, newspapers, Report of Brick Association and also different websites have been consulted to make the study an effective one. The period of study is confined to about two years i.e. from 2015-16 to 2016-17 Percentage analysis has been used for interpretation of the data collected from field survey.

About the Workers of Brick Industry

Brick making is a traditional industry of Karnataka. Brick is as old as civilization itself. It dates back to ancient Mesopotamia around 500 BC. The archeological ruins of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa which date back over 4000 years indicate that brick making was well developed in India in ancient times. The silted topography of the region (Karnataka) is uniquely suited for making bricks. In the past the riverine delta region of South and North Karnataka provided quality-soil as a cheap source of raw material and the in-land canals functioned as the mode of low-cost and easily accessible local transport. Thus became suitable locations for brickfields, as the city grew in size. In Karnataka, around 5500 brick-manufacturing units provide employment (officially) to more than 1.7 million people from the rural agricultural sector. Brick industry creates 50 jobs against an investment of 0.1 million rupees compared to 7 %jobs in other small-scale industries and 2% jobs in large-scale industries. Most of the workers engaged in brick industry are migrants and they are casually engaged. The brickfields in Karnataka have been set up for nearly two centuries now. Since the beginning of the colonial period in Karnataka, the structures of significance were erected from bricks. Brick production is a seasonal activity. The seasonal migrant worker living in the brickfields throughout the period of 6 to 8 months of production, returns back to the village after the production season comes to a close. The brickfields are open cast and work continues from 6 a.m. in the morning to 6 p.m. in the evening. The whole process of brick making is split into a number of tasks performed sequentially in different locations within the brickfields spread over 7 to 12 acres (2.5 to 4 acres) of land.

Table 1. Labour categorization in brick kilns of Davangere district

Categories of Labourers	No. of Labourers
Supervisor	231
Contractor	193
Manager	89
Mud Cutter	3255
Brick Maker	7265
Fire man	192
Mud & Brick Carrier & Loader	822
Beldar	92
Coalman	52
Rubbish man	52
Trolley man	424
Others	09
Total	12676

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-Economic Conditions Of Women Workers Engaged In Some Selected Brick Factories In Harihar, Davangere District
The study concentrates on the socio-economic conditions of the women workers engaged in 23 brick kilns situated in Harihar, Davangere District in Karnataka. Total sampled women workers numbering 1241 were interviewed out of 4891 working women. Side by side 23 brick kiln owners were asked to elicit some information and views on brick kiln matters and socio-economic conditions of the working women engaged in those kilns. The women workers who were interviewed and their working places are shown below (Table-2):

A.Social conditions of women workers

The marital status of the women workers engaged in the sampled brick kilns is shown in Table-2.

Table 2. Marital Status of the Targeted Women Workers

Women Workers	Marital Status				Unmarried
	Married (single)	Widow	Divorced	Married (2 or more times)	
Number	681	156	203	54	147
%	54.8	12.6	16.4	4.4	11.8
Total	1241=100%				

It is evident from the above **Table-2** that about 12% of the women workers is unmarried. 55%, 13%, 16% and 4% of the working women are married (single), widow, divorced and married (2 or more times) respectively.

Table-3 shows the age at marriage of women workers engaged in sampled brick kilns in Harihar of Davangere District of Karnataka.

Table 3. Age at Marriage of Sampled Women Workers

Women Workers	Age at Marriage(Year)			
	Bellow 16	16-18	19-21	Above 21
Number	423	537	85	49
%	38.7	49.1	7.8	4.5
Total	1094=100%			

Out of 1241-sampled women workers, 147 women workers are unmarried. So the rest i.e. 1094 women workers are either married or widow or divorced. It can be said that, at one point of time, 1094 workers were married. Out of 1094 women workers, 39% got married within the age of 16 years. 49%, 8% and about 5% got married in the age group of 16-18 years, 18-21 years and above years respectively.

Table-4 exhibits the number of children of sampled women workers.

Table 4. Number of Children of Each Woman Worker amongst the Sample

Women Workers	Number of Children				Unmarried Women Workers
	1	2	3	4& above	
Number	170	574	281	69	147
%	15.5	52.5	25.7	6.3	11.8
Total	1094(88.2%)				
Grand Total	1241=100%				

Table-4 manifests that 53% of the working women have 2 children each. 16%, 26% and 6% of the women labour force have one, three and four & more children each. Total number of sampled women workers is 1241. Here 147 women workers have not been taken into consideration, as they were unmarried.

Table 5. Family Size of the Sampled Women Workers In the Brick Kilns

Women Workers	Number of Family Member			
	1-3	3-5	5-7	7 & above
Number	487	593	144	17
%	39.2	47.8	11.6	1.4
Total	1241=100%			

Table-5 shows the family size of the women workers in the brick kilns of Harihar and Davangere District. The analysis of the above Table reveals that 48% of the women workers of the selected brick kilns have the family size ranging from 3 to 5 each. 39% of the women workers have the family members ranging from 1 to 3. 144 women workers out of 1241 have the family size ranging from 5 to 7 members each. There are only 17 families that have more than 7 members each. Educational attainment of the women workers is displayed in **Table-6**.

Table 6. Educational attainment of the sampled women workers

Women Workers	Level of Education				
	Illiterate	Just Literate	Class I-II	Class II-IV	Class-IV & above
Number	532	478	154	46	31
%	42.9	38.5	12.4	3.7	2.5
Total	1241=100%				

The analysis of the above **Table-6** manifests that 43% of the women workers engaged in the brick kilns under study are illiterate. Only 39% of the women workers are just literate. 12%, 4% and 3% of the working women have studied up to Class I-II, Class II-IV and Class IV & more respectively.

B. Economic condition of women workers

Table 7. Migration among the Sampled Women Workers in the Brick Kilns

Women Workers	Migrants				Local
	Same District	Other District	Other State	Total	
Number	211	497	342	1050	191
%	17.0	40.0	27.6	84.6	15.4
Total	1241=100%				

Table 9. Sources of Family Income (Other Than Brick Kilns) of the Women Workers

Women Workers	Sources of Family Income (other than Brick Kilns)							
	Agriculture	Agriculture Labourer	Labour	Small Trade or Business	Maid	Any work	No work	
Number	214	385	508	21	28	68	17	
%	17.2	31.0	40.9	1.7	2.3	5.5	1.4	
TOTAL	1241=100%							

Our survey, as depicted in **Table-7**, indicates that out of 1241 women workers, 1050 women workers come from same district, other districts of the same State and other states. 28% of the 80 migrants come from other States like Andrapradesh, Maharashtra, etc. Only 191 women workers come daily from the nearby villages to do the work in the brick kilns.

Table-7 records the responses of women workers with regard to the earning members of their families.

Table-8 shows the monthly income of the women workers in the brick kilns of Nadia district.

Table 8. Data on monthly income of brick field labourers

Monthly Income Categories(Rs./)	No. of Labourers	% of Labourers
Bellow 1500	14	1.13
1500-3000	32	2.58
3000-4500	208	16.76
4500-6000	749	60.35
6000-7500	235	18.94
Above 7500	03	0.24
Total	1241	100.00

From **Table-8**, it comes to our notice that the monthly income of 60% of the sampled women workers attached to the brick kilns under study lie between Rs.4500 and 6000. Only 19% of the interviewed women workers earn monthly between Rs.6000 and above. **Table-9** records the sources of family income (Other than brick kilns) of the interviewed women workers in the brick kilns.

Our survey, as portrayed in **Table-9**, reveals that agriculture and agriculture labour are the major sources of livelihood of the family members of the women workers in the brick kilns. They are engaged in those activities to maintain the one square mile. They are to depend on other activities, as the brick kilns remain operative for 6 to 7 months in each year. So, all the workers cannot depend solely on the work of brick kilns round the year. During the remaining part of the year, they engage themselves either in agricultural activities or as maid, agricultural labourer etc.

Table-10 records land held by the women workers engaged in the brick kilns under study.

Table 10. Land Holdings of the Sampled Women Workers in the Brick Kilns

Women Workers	Land Holdings of Women Workers (Acre)				
	No Land	0-1	1-2	2-3	3 & above
Number	337	478	285	109	32
%	27.1	38.5	23.0	8.8	2.6
TOTAL	1241=100%				

A perusal of **Table-10** indicates that 27% of the interviewed women workers have no land at all. 39% women workers have up to 1 acre land. 23% of the women workers have 1-2 acre lands and only 3% of women workers have 3 acre and more lands.

Table 11. Types of Houses of the Sampled Women Workers

Women Workers	Types of Houses			
	Kantcha	Pucca	Semi-pucca	Total
Number	1033	02	206	1241
%	83.2	0.2	16.6	100
Total	1241=100%			

Types of houses the women workers possess are shown in Table-11.

N.B. Kuchha House: House made of mud and Pucca House: House built by bricks. As is evident from Table-11, an overwhelmingly majority of women workers (83%) lives in kuchha houses. Only 16% of the women workers have semi-pucca houses.

Findings and Concluding Observations

- Most of the women workers come from rural area Hindu family and a few from Muslim families to do in the brick kilns.
- Most of the women workers belong to scheduled caste and tribe community.
- A large amount of married women are engaged in brick kiln activities.
- The women workers engaged in the brick fields got married at the age of 16 years.
- An overwhelming majority of the women workers and their children are illiterate.
- Migrant workers are large in number. Family sizes of them are large.
- Annual and monthly family incomes of the working women are not adequate to maintain for their livelihood.
- When the brick kiln works are not available, they engage themselves in other activities like agriculture and other works.
- Land holdings of them are very much minimal.
- Most of the workers live in kuchha houses.
- Women workers work in the kilns due to severe poverty.
- Most of the workers are involved in brick carrying and brick making activities.
- Majority of the women workers clamor for wage hike as the wage they earn is not sufficient to feed the members of their families.
- Working women generally take advance from brick kiln owners.

Analysis & Interpretation

- 80 percent of the respondents were women workers and 20 percent workers were men workers.
- 57 percent of the respondents were in the age group of 21 – 40 years.
- 41 percent of the respondents had just primary school education only.
- 63 percent of the respondents do not possess the voter's identification card.
- 54 percent of the respondents do not have ration card.
- The toxic items consumed by the respondents are liquor, cigars/ Chewing tobacco and pan. 67 percent of the respondents are addicted to liquor.
- 59 percent of the respondents were having two members as earning members. 69 percent of the respondents were having family income of Rs. 6000 – 9000.
- More than 98 percent of the respondents possessed mobile phones.
- 18 percent of the respondents were saving through nearby grocery shops.

Recommendations and Suggestions

Nation develops if the women are developed. So it is the first and foremost duty of our Government to pay attention for the well-being of the women community. A number of measures have been adopted by the Government for their welfare. But in some cases, women's interest is not protected. In case of brick industry, they live in the thatched huts close to kiln, which generally do not have electricity. The electricity should be provided in those huts by the owners of the brick kilns. Separate rest room should be arranged for the women workers engaged in the brick kilns. There should have a separate neat and clean toilet for the women workers. The eligible women workers should be given maternity benefit. Very often, some of the brick kiln owners do the little care for the same. In order to provide the maternity benefits to the women workers of the brick kilns, necessary amendments are required in the Maternity Benefit Act. Adult education programme for the women workers of the brick kilns should be implemented for making them literate. Exhaustive and comprehensive legislation is urgently needed for regulating working conditions, wage structure, welfare measures of the women workers in the brick kilns. The Labour Department should come forward to prevent physical-mental torture, sexual harassment and molestation of the workingwomen engaged in the brick kiln factories. For this, the Department should introduce special wing that can supervise the matter and take necessary action against the wrongdoers. Voluntary organizations of eminent personalities of the region (where brick kilns are situated) should be involved to see whether the different provisions and welfare measures are being strictly implemented. It is necessary to enforce the "Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act" and "Contract Labour Act" to check the bungling in the recruitment procedure and working condition. The parents of the women workers married at early stage should be aware of the fact that early marriage invites a lot of problems. Such workers are affected mentally and physically. So Government as well as NGO should make an awareness programme that will discuss about the ill effects of early marriage. The co-operation of brick kiln owners is urgently needed in this regard. Workers live in poverty. In order to alleviate poverty, they should be informed about different poverty alleviation programmes adopted by the Government from time to time. Due to lack of information and ignorance, they suffer from poverty.

Conclusion

The living conditions of the brick workers are very basic and shanty-like. There is a need to provide adequate housing facilities at the brick kilns. By increasing the access to microfinance, brick workers can be empowered and their exploitation can be avoided. There is a need to provide some useful skills to the women like tailoring, needlecraft, poultry raising and dairy farming which can supplement their income especially during off season. Worker friendly technology can be introduced to reduce the hardships associated with brick work. The growth in India's economy and population, coupled with urbanization, has resulted in an increasing demand for residential, commercial, industrial and public buildings as well as other physical infrastructure. Building construction in India is estimated to grow at a rate of 6.6% per year between 2015 and 2030. The brick production process is mainly based on manual labour. One of the special features of the brick kiln workers is that they may be one of the most vulnerable and

excluded workers-communities of Indian society. Hence, there is an urgent need for social concern to frame measures to improve the living and socio economics and good working condition of brick kiln workers for inclusive growth.

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