

Brick Kiln Work: Labour Migration for a Seasonal Work

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Abstract-

“Labour migration into informal sector has become an alternative livelihood strategy of searching livelihood for fulfillment of survival needs. Neo-liberal free market policy displaces workforces from their natural resources and livelihood and commodification of labour power occurs by the rapid growth of global capitalist market structure. In a specific case of brick kiln worker in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Tamil Nadu there is an interesting domain of labor activity which witnesses seasonal labour as a key source of income for poor agrarian sections and socio-economically marginalized populations. Shrinking of agrarian work and lack of job opportunities in local areas force people to migrates into urban and semi-urban areas for finding a job. Thus, this paper has focused brick Kiln work is a seasonal work which extracts agrarian laour forces for seasonal working activities. It has highlighted the brick kiln migrant workers from KBK region (undivided Kalahandi, Bolangir and Koraput districts known as KBK) of Odisha to southern states like, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Tamil Nadu, and analyzed the process of labour transition into informal sector.

Key Words: Informal Sector, Seasonal Work, Neoliberalism, Brick Kiln Work, Seasonal Migration

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Introduction

Migration denotes geographic mobility of populations. There are various types of migration in which migration for searching of job in informal sector is a concerned phenomenon in recent time where poor marginalized population move from one place to another place for searching of an alternative livelihood strategy. Rapid changes in rural livelihood because of technological intervention in agrarian production and deskilling of agrarian workforce led a large scale of unemployed population in rural areas. Thus, these poor sections of agrarian populations without any job opportunities in their locality force to join hands in various informal labour activities in cities (Bremans 1985; Sherhill, Sharma & Tiwana: 2015). In this situation, occupational dualism between rural agrarian work and urban non-agrarian sector has become a part of life (Bremans: 2006).

Informal sector is an unregulated working sector in which labourers enter into the labour market without any restriction and legal guideline by the state. Neoliberal free market policy led to rapid change in the market structure in which the traditional occupational structure of Indian society and labour relation undergone changes. Private entrepreneurship grew and capitalist's production process increased under the influence new market structure. Informal sector labour activities emerged as a major working sector where a large section of working population relies for their livelihood. According to ILO report (2018), there is 81 percent population in India work in informal sector.

KBK means undivided Kalahandi, Bolangir and Koraput districts which locate in the South-West part of Odisha. This region has been facing a high degree of poverty and livelihood crisis since along past where working section of its population relies on inter-state migration for their livelihood. These are agrarian workers who migrate to various informal sector works including brick kiln sector for wage activities.

Brick kiln work which is a seasonal working activity in informal sector which happens for five to seven months in a year, in which these workforces keep their foothold for earning during the off-season of agrarian work. Kiln side is owned by private entrepreneurs as it is a small sized industrial business activity where labours are hired through the process of labour sub-

contract. Brick kiln workers are contractual workers considered as seasonal wage labourers who are mobilized to the kiln work due to the collapse of their traditional livelihood in local areas (Ghosh: 2004; Malankal: 2011; Nauman: 2004). Lack of job opportunities makes them vulnerable where they work under the semi-bonded form under the feudal structure of labour relations.

Brick kiln Work

The art of brick making has a historical significance of more than 5,000 years. It started in Western Asia and then spread throughout the Western side of Egypt. In similar manner, Eastern part of India and China indulge in brick kiln work. According to Indian government, the reorganization of industries is done through number of population involved in the work. According to that the brick kiln industry falls under rural economy, but in present time it became a major informal working sector in urban and semi-urban areas. Industries that have less than 20,000 individuals who are employed and less than 3 crore of investment can be considered as rural industries. In this way, brick kiln industry comes under rural industry as well (Mandal 2005: 43-44).

Brick work functions in different forms of operational ways in which different kind of ownerships take responsibility of different tasks. In the beginning, it was mostly traditional landlord who invested in kiln activities as his side business. But, presently it can be seen that people from different backgrounds are interested in kiln activities. Politically well connected people, ex-service men and other persons from influential backgrounds are investors in brick kiln work. In this way, brick kiln entrepreneurial activity is a new way of wage accumulation for the entrepreneur (Nauman: 2004).

There are also a number of brickfields across the country which are mainly situated in the rural areas and urban outskirts. Although there is no absolute government data on brick kiln labour as well as number of brick kiln sites, but according to the All India Brick and Tile Manufacturer's Association around 50,000 brick kiln sites function all over the India. In each kiln site the strength of labourers is around 100. Thus, brick kiln sector is one of the prominent working sectors where a large scale of marginalised workforce relies for seasonal work. This

indicates that the brick kiln sector is an important source of livelihood for rural migrants. However, brick kiln sector is the second largest unorganised working sector next to the construction sector where mainly rural weaker sections of population are recruited under the contractual process (Ghosh 2004:10-13).

Kiln work is very hard and low paying, but poverty and economic marginalisation in rural areas force people to work. Molankal in his work on brick kiln labourers in Barak valley shows that around 88 percent of respondents have migrated to the brickfield due to poverty (Molankal 2011:99). In this context Gupta (2003) notices that people who work in this sector are not only socio-economically backward but also have no any alternative earning sources, so they are forced to work on kiln site which offers less income (Gupta: 2003). In fact, brick kiln labourers are mostly from poorest sections of society who depend upon daily wage activity.

Brick kiln work occurs seasonally, so labourers in this sector are recruited for a particular period of time. Kiln labourers work in particular time period because they have to finish their work in a limited time period before monsoon comes. They also want to earn something during this period to manage during the monsoon. In this way, number of kiln works is very large and need a steady workforce during the working period. Kiln management hires the workers once they are freed from agrarian work and are correspondingly recruited to do kiln work (Ghosh 2004:13).

Contractual agreement between Labour Sub-contractor and Workers

Labour migration into the brickfield happens through the labour contractual agreement between labour sub-contractor and labourers. Labour sub-contractor or contractor is popularly known as *Sardar* who manages the labour requirement process. Thus, labour contractor plays a middleman role between labourers and kiln owner (Dharmalingam: 1995; Molankal 2011: 128). Central to the labour recruitment in the informal sector is concerned, off course the social network play a very important role in the process of labour recruitment. According to Bourdieu (1990) conception, it is called 'social capital' through which labourers use their social networks on the basis of their kinship and family relations and migrate. The friendship networks of labourers have its social value as the labourers form a collective social group.

The labour contractor is mostly a local person who has the ability to motivate the labourers in brick kiln work. The labour contractor engages with different works in their locality so that people believe him. *Sardar* is also very much close to the brick kiln owner, he gives advance money to the labourers and supervises them. However, *Sardar* also plays a dominant role in managing payment, work supervision etc. (Mandal 2005: 54-55). According to Kara, *Sardar* (labour contractor) is like the security person of kiln owner. *Jamadar/Sardar* counts every brick before making the payment to the labourers and money is not paid when the ready bricks are damaged (Kara 2012: 81). It is however, these kiln workers are docile in nature because of their indebtedness and binding labour relation. Tathagat Sengupta and G. Vijaya (2015) report in the specific case of brick kiln migrant labourers from KBK districts of Odisha to Medhak district and Ranga Reddy district of Telengana region point out that there is a network of kinship relationship which provides a source and information to labourers. The report also highlights that this is a chain migration where *Sardar* is a key man who often belongs to local area or kinship member of labourers.

Labour recruitment is neither regulated by any government authority or any legal procedures but it is happened through an informal agreement. Agrarian workers take advance money from labour contractor during the crisis period in agricultural work. The labour contractor gives money through the contractual agreement in which labourers become 'debt bonded'. Labourers take money from labour contractor on various occasions, like during daughter's marriage, for health care expenditure. This contractual agreement is basically about labour agreement to work in the brickfield after the completion of agrarian work (Ghosh 2004: 13). However, there are no rules or regulations in the labour recruitment process.

Kiln Work during Brick Making

Brick making is a lengthy process and requires a gang of workers to make the bricks. Kiln workers are known by different names according to their work activities in the brickfield. *Pathera* or moulder who does major work like Earth digging, sprinkling water in the soil and shaping the bricks. He also does the moulding work which is a key part of brick making. The second one is called the *Prajapati* or *kumhar* or the loader who carries bricks. Thirdly, *Beldar* or stacker whose work is stacking bricks for firing. Fourthly, *Rapaswale* who does similar work like

stacking and making ready the kiln for burning. Fifthly, *Jalaiwala* or fireman, who performs the fire making work during the brick baking process. Sixthly, *Nikasiwala* or unloader, who basically does unload work after the brick is baked. Than *Munshis* looks after the management system and another man called loader help while loading and unloading bricks in the market (Ghosh 2014: 11).

Brick making is also a lengthy process which comprises various stages of work. It is composed of different units of work where each unit has its own specificity. These units are different forms of work which require a functioning body of activities in different stages. Each unit of work has interconnection with another unit because brick making requires that interlink. These different forms of work are preparing the Earth, digging the Earth, soil preparing, moulding, brick making, brick shaking, then burning it (Dharmalingam: 1995). These activities happen stage wise in brick making.

In the brickfield, family members of the brick worker contribute in working process according to their skills. Women and children are the main contributors to this work where they are assigned a lot of work like clay making, water fetching, soil moulding, brick shaking. Similarly, young men and women engage in hard labouring activities like Earth digging, brick making, bricks carrying. In this way, kiln work is performed in a certain order. At the beginning, the workers do field setting which is the arrangement of the work field and cleaning it. Secondly, they dig the Earth for clay making, followed by making a proper size of soil. After that brick is moulded in a proper size by the use of a wooden basket. It is followed by drying in the Sun ray (Dharmalingam: 1995). The second part of work is done after drying of the bricks which are burnt under the fire. Raw bricks are stacked in a particular vertical shape and burnt under fire. There are specially skilled labourers for this work who are male and are known as *Jalaiwala*. It takes 7-9 days to bake these bricks under fire.

Critical Analysis of Labour Relation in Informal Sector

Commercialisation of agriculture led to the growth of market-oriented cash crops production where agrarian labour relations become more contractual and impersonal. Breman holds that in earlier times, land lords had power to control the labourers through their socio-

economic status. This power relation changed because of new opportunities in non-agrarian sectors. Breman quotes here “The unfreedom of workers who were neither bonded nor completely free to choose their employer took different forms, their freedom to choose employers was circumscribed in different ways and in different degrees. The most common manifestation of this of this kind of unfreedom was what has been called the right to first call of employers over works” (Breman 2010: 190).

However, there has been a process of labour transition from agrarian to non-agrarian work where the labour relation also change from traditional bonded labour (*Hali*) to casual wage labour . These casual labourers are unlike traditional bonded labourers who basically work through the contractual or sub-contractual agreement (Breman: 1974). However, there is a long debate in academia that whether these labourers are free or unfree under the capitalist agrarian production. According to Tom Brass, labourer is unfree, because the means of production are owned by the capitalist. Labourers are certainly free from traditional bonded system but remain unfree (because they do not own means of production) and they are forced to sell their labour power for their survival. Their labour power gets recommodified and are poorly engaged. Labourers move towards non-agrarian sector due to their debt which creates ‘De-proletarianization’. Thus, the casual labourers are considered as bonded labourers or debt-bonded because of their dependency on capitalists (Brass: 1990).

Marx (1967) holds that unfreedom of labour relation occurs in the precapitalist stage of production where not only feudal lord control the production process but also the nature labour relation is unfreedom. However, dualism of labour in agrarian and non-agrarian sector and its freedom suggests that still it is in the process to reach free labour relation as it happens in the capitalist mode of production. Harvey (2005) suggests that commodification of labour power and resources under the neoliberal free market system grow the commercial market activities and capital ‘accumulation by dispossession’ of resources. Neo-liberal project of privatisation leads to displacement of labour from natural resources like land and water and commodification of resources and labour-power. Dispossession of resources makes people jobless where they

migrate to the urban areas for searching jobs. However, in this context, informal sector and growth contractual labour activities suggest a similar context commodification of labour and commercial activity in the context of brick kiln industry and its labour relation.

Brick kiln workers face difficult situation in their working field. They migrate into the kiln work through labour subcontractor, although it is illegal. Women labourers are more vulnerable to sexual exploitation, lower wage payment and work burden. Similarly, child labour is common practice in the kiln sector (Nuamen: 2004). In some cases, whole family members migrate to the kiln side where all of the members engage in working activities according to their own capacity (Bremar 2010: 4).

Kiln workers remain captive inside the brick kiln site during the brick making period. Some time violence occurs when workers protest for their wage and rise voice against labour exploitation. During the course of field work, the researcher was part of a rescue work led jointly by human rights group and students from Hyderabad University, which provides a clear understanding about how difficult situation these workers face. There are some basic observations made during the course of field work. Those are;

- (1) Lack of job opportunity for better income in the local place force them to migrate other states for searching jobs.
- (2) Agrarian sector is a seasonal work which creates five to six months unemployment. This led to circular migration between rural to urban.
- (3) Joblessness and poverty force people to work in bonded and semi-bonded form of work.
- (4) Lack of government mechanism to track child labour practice and labour exploitation in the work sites.
- (5) Lack of social policy for job creation in the local level is major concern where a welfare state fails to provide livelihood security and social protection to poor section of its population.

(6) Illiteracy and unawareness keep these workers in vulnerable condition as many of them are unaware about labour rights, minimum wage and lack of bargaining power.

Conclusion

Rapid changes in agrarian relation and in rural structure through the labour transition in informal sector bring a new phenomenon of labour relation where livelihood insecurity and social protection marks central question of enabling basic livelihood for citizen of the state. Crisis in rural livelihood because of commercialization of agrarian production and lack of job opportunities led to mass migration from rural to urban for searching of job which end up with precarious work and hazardous lives in urban and semi-urban areas. Children of these migrant workforces are unable to access the state's educational system because of constant movement of their parents which reproduces the same unskilled labourers and perpetuates underdevelopment and poor marginalization in our society.

Basic wage labour and livelihood security is a necessary requirement for every human being to fulfil the survival needs. Informal work does not provide basic wage security to workers. Thus, Arjun Sengupta Committee Report in 2006 stresses about legal empowerment of poor through right to work and livelihood as legal safeguard. The committee recommended that there should be an entitlement of basic livelihood through the Indian legislative process for the poor underdeveloped sections who work in various unorganized sectors. Livelihood security should be focused to protect marginalized populations out of poverty and destitution. Lack of effective policies for the poor to secure livelihood is the basic concern. They are citizens of the state who need necessary protection by the government for human development and social development of a society.

Thus, in this study of brick kiln migration workers those origins from Western part of Odisha and migrate to various neighboring states for searching of jobs provides a clear understanding about crisis jobs and income opportunity in rural India. Industrialization and urban centric growth leads to large scale of labour migration across the country and create unstable life for poor working class population. Children of these workers often deprive from state's

curricular system because of unstable life of their parent and end up in working activities in their early age, which reproduces same unskilled workforce and underdevelopment.

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