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PLIGHT OF LABOURERS IN THE BRICK INDUSTRY IN MADURAI DISTRICT
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Abstract

Bricks are obtained by moulding clay in rectangular block of uniform size. Brick-making work is carried out by unskilled labourers in rural and semi-urban areas. The demand for bricks has been ever increasing caused by urbanization. Housing needs of people ever expand and this results in mass production of bricks. Brick industry is considered as a small scale industry. The medieval people had the practice of using wood. But wood is risky to use as it may be destroyed by fire. The great fire of London in 1666 changed it from being a city of wood to one of bricks. So in construction, bricks replaced the wood over the years. There are many monuments of hand-made bricks which can be seen even today. For instance, the Greatest Wall of China was built by both burnt and sun-dried bricks. There were so many places where the use of bricks could be seen in Rome and other places. At present bricks are used all over world as raw material from thatched sheds to multi-storied buildings.

Keywords: Bricks, unskilled labourers, Chamber units, brokers, commission, Small Scale Industry

Introduction

Brick industry provides employment opportunities to uneducated men and women in rural areas. In rural areas, the agricultural labourers are engaged in field work during the season not exceeding 6 months and for the rest of the year they have no agricultural work. Hence they are engaged in brick work for about 5 to 6 months for continued employment. Brick units also provide a profitable business to the agro-based rural investors.

Brick Industry in Madurai

Brick units in Madurai are set up at Virahanur and nearby villages which are situated 10 kms. away from the city. There is a concentration of brick units in and around Virahanur. These units include both chamber and small clamp units. Many chamber and clamp units are found on the banks of the Vaigai river. In this area suitable clay and sand are available in bulk for making bricks. The availability of water and economical labour force also are the favourable attributes. Natural clay is found in abundance roughly about 6 inches high besides the banks of Vaigai river. Such clay is mixed with 1/10th tank silt (Karambai Soil). When 1/3rd silt is added with clay this will increase the percentage of breakages in bricks. Water is found at a depth to 5 feet along the banks of the Vaigai and

hence a large number of brick units are located in this area. The standard size of bricks in these units is 19 cm x 9 cm x 9 cm and the normal weight is 3 kgs to 4 kgs per brick.

Chamber units sell bricks in Madurai, and other places upto the radius of 60 kms namely Dindigul, Sivagangai, Thirumangalam, Melur, Paramakudi and Aruppukottai. Builders place order for bricks directly with chamber units and clamp units. Bricks ordered are directly sent to the construction site. Owners of the building, masons, engineering contractors make direct purchases. There are a number of brokers who are not allowed to handle the deal directly. Every purchaser pays some commission to the brokers at the time of the first purchase. Later, they directly contact the brick units and place their orders. Thus the role of brokers does not occur in further transactions. Owing to the increase in extension of dwelling areas, there is still a good market for bricks here.

The brick units do not have any brand name or trade mark. All the brick units maintain their standard for segregating the different grades. In general, they make 60% I grade bricks costing about Rs 25000 to 27000 per 3000 bricks, 30% II grade bricks costing around Rs.13,000 to Rs.15,000, and 10% III grade bricks for which price is fixed arbitrarily. Price is increased during rainy season. Out of 15 study units surveyed, 10 brick units sell bricks only for cash and the remaining 5 brick units sell their bricks on cash or credit basis. They allow a maximum credit period of 3 months for making payment. In all these units, price is fixed based on the cost involved.

This paper makes an attempt to present the socio-economic conditions of labourers in the brick industry in Madurai District. Brick industry is considered as a small scale industry.

It was planned to collect data from 200 labourers. But primary data were collected only from 120 labourers in the brick units in Madurai District due to some reasons. With the help of research assistants, data were gathered through an interview schedule.

Profile of labourers

- Out of 120 labourers, 90 (75%) have education below high school level.
- Out of the sample respondents, 72 (60%) are married and 48 (40%) are unmarried.
- The size of the family with “upto 3 members” in the case of 45 (37.5%) respondents and in the case of a 75(62.5%) respondents the family consists of more than 3 members.
- In the case of 96 (80%) respondents, the family income is below Rs.10,000 per month and in the case of 24 (20%) respondents the family income per month is above Rs.10,000.
- Out of 120 respondents, 84(70%) are having more than 5 year experience in the work and 36(30%) are having less than 5 year experience

Problems of Labourers in Brick Industry

From the primary data collected, it is observed that the following are the problems faced by workers in brick industry.

- Brick workers had no time in their life time for education
- There is no time for them for recreation
- The respondents feel that their children are neglected of their affection
- About 96 (80%) worker respondents do not have any house. They live in rented house only
- Most of them found their income insufficient for their food and clothes
- Most of them are unable to get medical treatment for their health problems.
- Every worker is given only upto 15 days leave in a year.
- Poor wages is the major problem of both men and women workers in brick units.
- All owners of bricks units extract heavy work daily and exploit the unorganized labourers.
- There is no public vehicle facility for workers and most of them go by foot to the brick units.

Conclusion

This paper presents a general profile of brick industry in Madurai City in Tamil Nadu. The social, economical and working condition is very poor in the brick industry. Though all the brick units are members of Small Scale Industries Association, they do not get much help from the association. As brick industry is chiefly a labour intensive one, the Government should try to provide easy loan facilities to the brick units, and provide the utmost needed welfare facilities to the men and women workers from rural areas.

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