



## **Victims of circumstances: A case study to explore the socio economic problems of bounded labor working at brick kiln in Pakistan**

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**Abstract**—In this study, an effort has been made to explore the socio economic problems of bonded labor working at brick kiln in Gujranwala, in Pakistan. The purpose of this study was to find out the problems faced by bounded labor at brick kilns, so the only best technique of data collection was in-depth interviews with respondents. Interview guide was tool of data collection. In depth interviews were conducted with the respondents for a period of two months. During research, it was observed that respondents were illiterate and there were not even primary school education facilities available to workers. They were unaware of their basic rights and therefore were facing a lot of problems in their daily working life in general and whole life in particular. The findings show that economic, social and legal vulnerabilities of both females and males working in brick kiln. In the broader context both females and males were identified as victims in their own right but analysis of their interpersonal relations indicated more victimization of female workers. This article also gives recommendations for policy, practice and future research in this area.

**Keywords**— Socio economic, bonded labor, brick kiln, primary education, case study approach

### I. INTRODUCTION

The present paper is a case study of workers working in brick kiln in Gujranwala, Pakistan. This paper presented the narratives of female and male workers working on brick kiln. The narratives are also analyzed through gendered lens and the problems such as social, economic and political and legal faced by these worker were indicated and pointed.

Brick making is one of the most ancient industries, the craft is as old as that of the Indus Valley Civilization (2500-1500 BC). Fired bricks were also used by the ancient people of the civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia for building tombs and temples. Although the design, shape and weight of bricks have undergone numerous historical changes, the production technology has experienced very limited changes. Bricks are prepared, processed and baked at the brick kiln. Being situated in the remote country side, the brick kiln industry portrays a

unique model of industrial relations. Generally poor in nature, all categories of kiln labor, both salaried workers such as “jail Wales” and piece-rated labor take substantial advances, both at the time of joining a kiln as well as subsequently.(Bales ,1999 United nations 2000)

Advances (peshgi, a local term used) are offered to the poor families working on high interest rates which are mounted to such a high amount that becomes un-returnable. The families become virtual prisoners of the owner and are subject to physical, economic and social exploitation. The clutches of debt are so severe that the families cannot get themselves out of the debt for generations in spite of the hard work they put in by even engaging their women and children. (Atkinson,1996) [2]. The peshgi system of debt bondage is hundreds of years old in Pakistan. Rooted in the feudal relationship of landlords and peasants it blends some of the worker-owner relations of feudalism with the economics of modern capitalism to create a kind of bondage, halfway between the old and the new. Along with the brick kilns, the system is generally in vogue in agriculture, fisheries, mining, glass bangle-making, and carpet weaving. The present government in collaboration with the ILO is pooling significant resources for the elimination and rehabilitation of bonded labor from all those sectors. Bonded labor” refers to workers who render services under conditions of bondage arising from economic considerations, notably through a loan or advance. Where debt is the root cause of bondage, the implication is that the worker (and their dependents or heirs) is tied to a particular creditor for a specified or unspecified period until the loan is repaid (ILO 2001) [1].

It is a systemized feature prevailing in certain sectors of society wherein advances are common and no work can be done without advance or peshgi. The women brick makers are working with their owners and landlords without any written agreement and the working hours of these women workers are not fixed and they have to start their work very early in the morning till late night. The salary which is given is very low and below to poverty line. There is no overtime allowance for them. There is no specific law, rules, and regulations for their job and no labor unions exit to fight for their rights.

### II. PRIOR RESEARCH ON THE SUBJECT

The problems faced by workers working on brick kiln are widely covered by print and electronic media. There are a lot

of articles are written and dramas, movies has been pasteurized to highlight the problems, hardships and difficulties faced by these laborers. Even we can Google and see the miserable photos of these poor workers. Another source of information about the problems of these workers is the reports and documents produced by some of NGOs working in this area. Most of these organizations are working on improving health conditions and for educations of the children of these workers. The organizations' reports indicate a high profile of women and children working in this area and their health and educational status.

Muhammad Javaid Iqbal (2006) has conducted a research on bounded labor of the brick kiln in Pakistan industry [3]. The main purpose of this research is to ameliorate the concerns of bounded families and ways to eradicate the menace from the industry. Muhammad Iqbal argued that bounded labor is a dominant feature of the brick kiln industry of the country. This research shows that the extent of bounded labor in the brick kiln sector and its repercussions on children and bounded families.

Eric Neumayer and Indra de Soya (2007) has conducted a research on women's right and forced bounded labor in Norwegian University, Norway [4]. According to the writer countries become more open and competition nitrifies, discrimination against any group, including women becomes more difficult to sustain and is therefore to likely to recede. According to him the extent of economy penetration by foreign direct investment by and large no statistical significant impact. The research shows that countries that are more open to trade provide better economic rights to women and have a lower incidence of forced labor.

Niaz Muhammad (2010) et. al has conducted a research on the problem of debt bondage at brick kilns in the university of Peshawar Pakistan [5]. The study mainly focused on the nature of work, socio economic causes and effects of bounded labor. Niaz Muhammad argued that work at brick kilns was hard, detrimental to human health and duration was more than internationally defined limit. This research shows that lack of social contacts with friends, no mobility in social status, no access to health and no improvement in economic status.

Aiwan -I -jamhoor (2011) has conducted a research on bounded labors in new garden town in Lahore. The main objective of this study is that the whole family of a worker, including Old man, women and small children, renders services to a brick-kiln owner or landlord for extremely low wages that are grossly inadequate for meeting its modest need. According to this study brick-kiln workers also need loans during the rainy season when brick-making is suspended for months on endless needs. Since wages are low the workers are obliged to borrow money from the employers to cover day-to-day expenses or to meet emergencies such as sickness, death or marriage in the family. The study shows that majority of brick-kiln workers are Christians and in agriculture in Sind they mostly belong to the backward non-Muslim castes.

Deepak Kumar Sharma (2013) et al. as has conducted research on social problems of brick kiln workers in Gujarat [6]. The writer argue that the seasonal nature of the work attracts migrant labor many of them landless farmer. The main purpose of this study was a view to know the clinic social problems of the families. According to this study it was found that the condition of these migrant brick kilns workers is very pathetic on account of number of condition. All the workers were migrant and marginal workers with migration duration of 8 month every year and than they are going back to native place.

Vikash Aga et.al (2013) has conducted research on Musculoskeletal Disorders among Workers of Brick Kilns Industry in India [7]. The main objective of this study to musculoskeletal disorders in different muscles of human body was obtained and is optimized by using artificial neural network and genetic algorithm. The study shows that the relationship between Occupational Health Hazard and Expected Earnings. According to their study rest break, working hours, switching over for alternate job and working hours between two consecutive breaks were considered.

### III. METHOD AND PURPOSE OF PRESENT STUDY

The author recently conducted a study to understand the severity of problems and hardships faced by the workers (especially women workers) working on brick kiln. In all, 30 respondents were interviewed for this study. These respondents included female. From the pool of 30 respondents, the author selected some more detailed interviews for this study. These interviews were conducted over a period of two months. Each interview was conducted for almost one hour and each correspondent was interviewed for four sessions. The interviews were open ended and correspondents were asked to narrate their childhood, education, marriage life and especially their working environment. All the interviews were conducted in Punjabi, a local provisional language, and were audio taped. Each of the interviews was transcribed and translated back into English:

In the present research the researcher has use the following indicators to measure the concepts and to know the condition and working environments of the workers. All indicators will include in interview guide to get detailed response from respondents. The researcher describes the indicators.

- Education
- Marriage
- Sexual Harassment
- Health disorder
- Economic and working condition

### IV. DATA ANALYSIS

The researcher has analyzed and discussed the results under different themes which were selected through the process of coding. As the objective of the present research was to explore the experiences of workers, so, researcher has

divided all themes into different categories. These themes had covered many areas of the life.

#### A. Demographic and Socio-economic Profile of the Respondents

Demographic and socio-economic profile is very important to measure social class of the bounded labor. It gives a holistic understanding about the characteristics of population of a specific area under study. Weber identified and defines social class as a large group of people who rank closely to one another in wealth, power and prestige (Henslin 1997). These three elements separate people into different lifestyles. Give them different chances in life, and provide them with distinct ways of looking at the self and the world (Henslin 1997). In the present research the researcher has included different questions in this regard like education, age, occupation, marital status, and monthly income.

#### B. Age, education and occupation

Findings showed that the average age of the respondents was 25-30 years. Majority of the respondents were illiterate. There was no significant difference in the occupation of the respondents. All were manual workers on weekly wages. All were working with some brick kilns in the city.

#### C. Monthly income

All respondents were earning almost same amount per month. As all belonged to the same occupation that's why they got almost the same amount. In Gujranwala they can earn RS. 300-400 per day and manual worker but it depend on the average days of their work. Some time they were unable to do work as they were not hired for work. However, it was estimated that an average person was getting almost 8000 per month.

#### D. Marital status

Majority of the respondents were married. At average all respondents have 5-7 children. It shows that they have responsibility to look after a reasonable number of dependents. Some respondents told that their children are school going, however, respondents were worried about their income and they said that they are not satisfied with their income.

#### E. Education

Researchers asked that question from respondents because all people illiterate at brick kiln. The researchers want to know why people illiterate. Education is an important theme in

every field. Some respondent responded that they wanted to get education but could not get education. Some respondent had no interest in education.

The respondent said:

*I wanted to study but due to lack of money, I couldn't continue my study.*

As respondent said:

*I have 7 children. When I sent my youngest daughter to school from home, she used to bunk school and sit in crops until school is off and come back home.*

#### F. Economic condition

Economic condition is important in every society. Therefore the researcher wanted to know the income or economic condition of the workers to understand how they fulfill their basic needs of life.

As respondent said:

*Sadly.....One week we earn 2000 or 2500.*

*And when we make one thousand bricks we earn 550 rupee's. Government gives 750 rates of one thousand bricks but they give us only 550.*

As another respondent said:

*Our economic condition is very bad we cannot full fill our basic needs*

As another respondent said:

*We earn money 300-400 per day in this we manage our food with difficulty.*

#### G. large families Size

During the research we find theme of large family size. The all respondent have more than five children. Some respondent have 9 children. Females have no knowledge about family planning.

As respondent said:

*I have six children. I work for my children and provide them food. No one go to school.*

As another respondent said:

*I have 8 children. I can't properly manage utilities for my children. We live in joint family.*

As another respondent said:

*I cannot provide proper food to my children. Children also work on kiln and help us.*

#### H. Health Facilities

The researcher wanted to know that how respondent maintain and manage their health problems. The owners do not help for medical. They just give advance money to workers. There is no qualified doctor where labors live. For better treatment they have to go to the city on their own.

As respondent said:

*We get up in the very early morning and work until evening. Our gents work till night. Due to hard working conditions our health is affected badly. During rest at night our bodies are filled with pain.*

The other respondent argues that:

*Our owner doesn't help us when our health is down. There are no good facilities in civil hospital. Here is a doctor named is chirra (sparrow), he give us some sweat pills when we feel fever and he gives the same medicine to everyone whether he/she has pain or fever.*

#### I. Migration

Most of the respondents were migrated from their house. They are not native people here. Owners provide them shelter. The owners can take back their houses when they want. Females

work on kiln under pressure. They migrate in their whole life for work.

As respondent said:

*We live in owner house. We belong to Sakkar Sindh (another province).*

As another respondent said:

*We don't have our own house. We live in owner house. We are from Multan. (Another city 500 km away).*

As another respondent said:

*We live in owner house. We have migrated from Sargodha. (Another city 250km away)*

#### J. Sanitation Condition

A hygienic condition plays an important role to maintain the health status of a person. It was observed during field work that females were living under very miserable conditions. There was no facility of bathroom nearby in their house. During interviews majority of the respondents replied that they also use fields and they felt shame to tell.

As respondent said:

*There is no bathroom in our house.*

As another respondent said:

*There is no bathroom in our house. Therefore our health is affected.*

As another respondent said:

*There is no bathroom in our house and not clean water.*

#### V. DISCUSSION

The each narratives presented above is unique though there are some similar sentiments expressed in the four narratives. Socially and economically, both male and female workers have a lot of problems working on the brick kilns. The gendered lens provides the understanding of differences in the reality of difficulties of male and female workers. In the context of brick kiln working environment though economic realities of male and females workers may be converged at one level, though there are differences. These differences indicated additional vulnerabilities of female workers. Their struggle for survival was challenged further due to their being women in the male dominated society and working environment.

#### VI. ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT

The social and economic realities of the respondents indicated their vulnerability and miser ability. They talked about a family history of poverty and sense of deprivation. The respondents belong to the families living below the poverty line. They belongs to poor families and don't have any education or other skills except work as a laborer at kiln. Some of the respondents told that they have migrated from other provinces to win bread for their children so far. All of them belonged to the castes traditionally considered as low-caste and ill treatment and denial of basic rights was a common experience for them. They are living in extreme poverty and hunger and they are also homeless, don't even have their own home, their experience were stark. Their entry

into the labor in their childhood occurred out of their need to survive. This need was defined as "destiny" by one of respondents. All of respondents mentioned they came into this labor because of poverty.

In Pakistan, while other educated and rich people have a variety of professions and above all have a choice of a profession and destinations to choose from, the people working on kilns don't have such choices and opportunities. Given the limited options, respondents of this study entered and selected the same profession as their parents do. However life at brick kilns did not change a lot their economic and social status. They remained poor, hungry, over burden and homeless often living here sometimes there like their parents. They are doing the same struggle as they did in their early life. Basic necessities such as food, clothing and shelter were not available as to them when compared their hardships to their income.

#### VII. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLEMENTATIONS

In the present study an effort has been made to explore the socio economic problems of bonded labor at brick kiln. The population of this study consisted of female who work at brick kilns.

Conclusions have been drawn in the light of findings and data analysis. The study was about the socio-economic conditions of bounded labor faced by female at brick kiln. The researcher found that the living conditions of the brick workers are very bad and hypothetic. The researcher found that work at brick kiln was hard to human health and time duration was more. It was also observed that workers at brick kiln have lack of social contacts with relatives, workers and other working families. The working environment was not encouraging to acquire education, no mobility in social status, no improved in economic status, no facility of safe drinking water at brick kilns, no access to health facilities and some had diseases and bitter socialization and no education system for female workers. So it may be concluded that there is a great need to provide adequate housing, education facilities at the brick kilns and to improve the working and health conditions of brick kiln workers.

- It was observed that unaffordability and unavailability of housing was a main reason for working labor. So it is recommended that government must take some initiatives to start some residential schemes for this low income group. So they can afford their own residence.
- It was also observed some workers are physically and sexually tortured at work place and there was no security at work place so it is recommended that they must provide security at workplace.
- There is a need to provide some useful skills to the women like tailoring, needlecraft, Poultry rising and dairy forms which can supplement their income especially during off season.
- It was also observed that respondents were illiterate and there were no primary education facilities

provide to workers. So government must provide education facilities that every workers and their children can get benefit from education.

- To encourage female and their children to get education and government should make some policies and implement the programs.

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