
**Economic Condition of Migrated Brick Workers on the River
Haora, West Tripura District, Tripura**

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ABSTRACT:

The principle of this paper is to highlight the economic condition of brick workers through primary data collected from the field survey along the Haora River, West Tripura district, is economically developed region in Tripura, India. Most of the brick fields are located in this area are recent in origin. Workers in the brick kilns constitute one of the poorest and weakest sections of the rural society. As production of brick is a labour intensive sector, a large number of efficient work forces are needed for this industry. All of the brick industries in the study area employ both local and migrated laborers. Workers are done different types of works. Maximum workers are engaged as a Bojai mesturi, Patai mesturi and loading and unloading workers. Workers are getting wages by their working ability in weekly basis. The wages they got in weekly basis by an individual worker is good enough to feed his/ her stomach but in terms of family income, then it is very low to manage the family in all sorts of matter. Their diet is normal. They buy their food grains and other items according to their needs and money. The houses, they are living not well enough for human settlement as they are just workers in the eyes of the owners and the owners don't like to spend extra money to build good houses for them but the houses are electrified. The utensils they used in the houses by the family members of the workers are very ordinary. In modern gadgets, they only use mobile phone. Therefore, the economic condition of the workers in the brick fields is not well and moreover they are living in pathetic condition where Govt. should look after the matter and take necessary steps.

KEY WORDS: *economic, brick workers, wages, settlement, diet*

INTRODUCTION:

Haora River is one of the major rivers of West Tripura and is considered as the life line of Agartala. Originating from the Barmura range, the river flows westward through Sadar Subdivision of West Tripura and finally meets with river Titas in Bangladesh (De, Kumar, Sunil, et al., 2013).

The Indian brick industry is the second largest producer of bricks in the world after China. India is estimated to produce more than 14000 cores of bricks annually, mainly by adopting age-old manual traditional processes. The brick sector consumes more than 24 million tones of coals annual along with huge quantity of biomass fuels (Corporation Bank, 2010, cited from de, et al., 2013). There are 50,000 brick kilns all over India employing on an average 100 workers i.e., male workers are counted only who are on the muster rolls of the employers. The brick kiln industry, which involves the molding and firing of bricks from clay, is a significant employer of women and children as well. Brick kilns are located in small scale manufacturing units on the outskirts of urban areas. The work, which is seasonal, attracts laborers from surrounding rural areas and forms a large bulk of inter-state as well as inter-district migratory labour force. Workers in the brick kilns constitute one of the poorest and weakest sections of the rural society. The season of migration depends on the agro-climatic features of the area. The kilns shut down during the monsoon. The workers are recruited through *jamadars* (labour agents/contractors) of the kiln owners and such recruitment is accompanied by payment of advances to the workers for a specified period of employment. The entire family (excluding old, disabled dependent person) comprising husband wife and children move to the brick kilns and work as one unit for the full season of the operating kiln(PCLRA, 2013). Since this brick sector is labour intensive, it limits its capacity to produce any other type of bricks (Corporation Bank, 2010, cited from de, et al., 2013). As production of brick is a labour intensive sector, a large number of efficient work forces are needed for this industry. All of the brick industries in the study area employ both local and migrated laborers (Yeasmin, Farhana, 2012, cited from de, et al., 2013). The women accompanying the men could be the wives, sisters or widowed mothers (PCLRA, 2013). Sadar is the most economically developed subdivision of West Tripura. Several small

scale industries and manufacturing units based on available natural and cultural resources of this region have grown up in the district.

Area, people and method: The study employed in-depth structured interview schedule and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) to collect quantitative and qualitative data. Information regarding the individual workers and their economic condition were collected through in-depth interviews. The present study was conducted among the ‘brick workers on the river Haora, West Tripura district. The study area is located at 23°47’39” N and 23°50’37” N latitudes and 91°26’14.28” E to 91°30’11.49” E longitudes. The total geographical area of the river basin is 58.84 km². The study area is mostly advanced, urbanized and industrialized area in the state. To know where these brick fields are located, a location map has borrowed from a research paper named ‘Status and Impact of Brick Fields on the River Haora, West Tripura’ by De, Sunil, et al., 2013. Purposive random sampling method was adopted while evaluating the criteria such as availability, willingness and convenience of the respondents. To know their ‘Economic Condition’, in total of 100 brick workers has interviewed to acquire valuable information (data) regarding the topic of research among brick workers to reach the goal. It is an empirical study.

Location of the brick fields: There are 57 brick fields within the Haora River Basin. 50 of these are located along both sides of the River Haora, River Donaigang and NH44 (Fig.-1) between Chandrasadhubari in Champaknagar and Jirania. Of these 50 brick fields, only 4 are located along the left bank and the remaining 46 brick fields are located along the right bank of the river. Seven fields, (out of 57) located far from the main river (De, Kumar, Sunil, et al., 2013). Here, for the convenient of the study, only ten (10) brick fields has taken to study the present topic and reach its goal as it is not possible to survey the 57 brick fields and interview the workers.

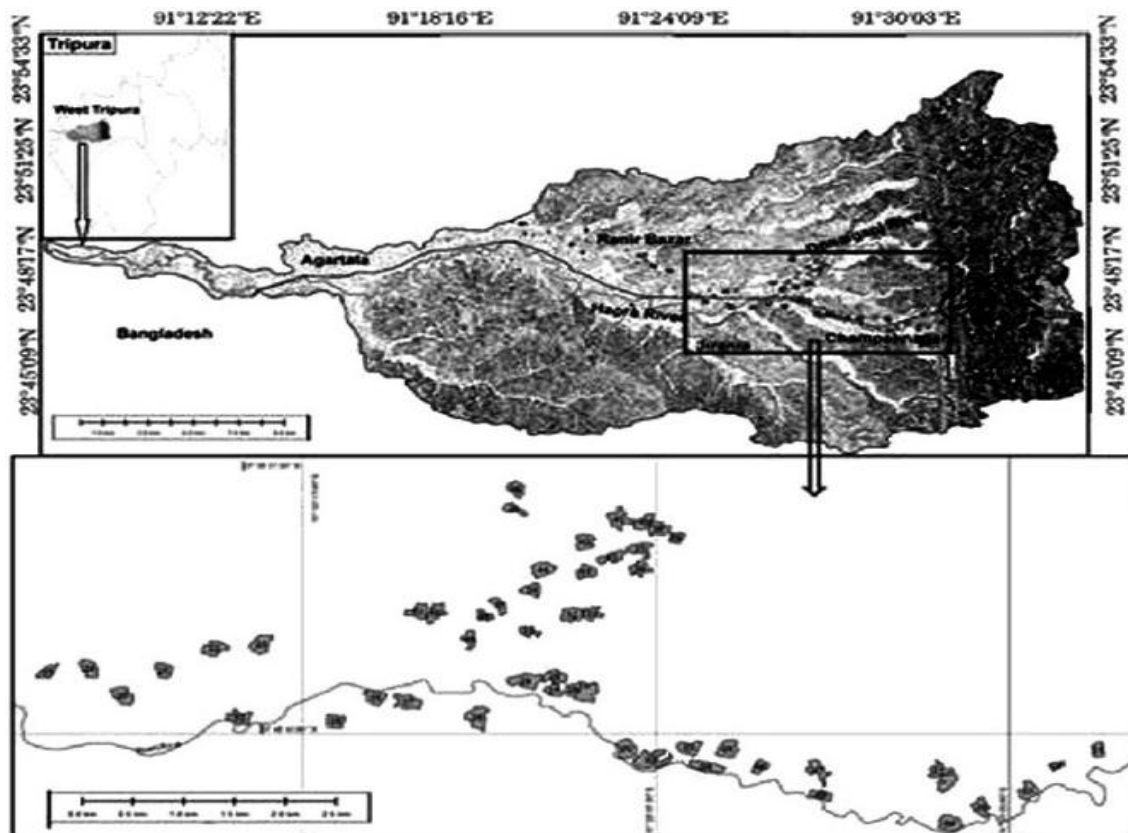


Fig: Location Map of the study area; Source: De, Kumar, Sunil, et al., 2013

Status of brick fields in the study area: The first brick field in the study area, namely Jyoti Brick Industry was established at Nowabadi, Jirania in 1978. On the other side Bihar Brick Field located near Champaknagar West Khamarbari, is the latest one and was established in 2009. Before 1991 there were only 8 brick fields within the whole basin. 20 new brick fields were constructed between 1991 and 2000 and the total number has reached to 50 by the year 2010. The status of these brick fields can be understood with the help of the labour they employ, the raw material they use and their production levels (De, Kumar, Sunil, et al., 2013).

Labour employed in brick fields: As production of brick is a labour intensive sector, a large number of efficient work forces are needed for this industry. All of the brick industries in the study area employ both local and migrated laborers (Yeasmin, Farhana, 2012; cited from De, Sunil, et al., 2013). All the brick fields employed local as well as migrated labor from outside

the state. The number of workers ranges from 70 to 320 in the brick fields. On an average, 80 to 140 workers are employed in the brick fields and considered as medium scale industry.

Raw material: The raw materials, mainly used for brick production are local mud, sand and fuel material (Technical note on Brick Construction, 2006). All of the brickfields within the Haora River Basin use coal as fuel for burning which is imported mostly from Meghalaya. They collect sand from the river bed and mud from the *tilla* lands along the roads, especially along the National Highway 44. It is also found that top soils of agricultural land are extensively used in production of bricks (De, Kumar, Sunil, et al., 2013).

Production level of the brick fields: According to the production, most of the brick fields within the Haora River Basin are considered as medium scale industry (De, Kumar, Sunil, et al., 2013). The average production of these 10 brick fields is 23.5 lakhs bricks/year. Among the surveyed brick fields, in the year 2013 the two brick fields recorded the lowest production (about 10 lakhs) whereas two brick fields recorded production of about 30 - 35 Lakhs. There are 6 brick fields that produced more than 20 lakhs but less than 30 lakhs/ year.

Occupational patterns of the brick workers within the brick fields: Brick industry is a labor intensive industry. Labor is the main aspect of this industry. Without labor, this industry cannot be run adequately and smoothly. Within this industry, various works are done by the workers according to the need of the industry and ability of themselves as well. Workers are done different category works like cutting soil and pour the soil to the mixing machine (named Agartop); released mixed soil from the mixing machine to the raw brick making areas (named Gurartop). In the raw brick making areas, workers are made raw bricks with help of machine or manually (named Bojai mesturi). After that, workers carry the raw bricks to the kiln and there raw bricks are arranged by the same group of workers in a systematic way (named Patai mesturi). After making the kiln, fuel has brought (coalman or fuel arranger) and put on the kiln areas and ultimately workers fire on the kiln (named fireman). After completion of the brick making tenure, fire has withdrawn and bricks are loading and unloading by the workers (loading and unloading workers) according to the words of the manager/ owner of the brick fields. The entire name used here of the brick fields workers are

local name of the workers by their working efficiency and ability. Among the surveyed brick fields workers, 11% are of Agartop workers; 12% are of Gurartop workers; 27% are of Bojai mesturi; 19% are of Patai mesturi; 8% are of firemen; 6% are of Coalmen and remaining 17% are of Loading and Unloading workers. Fig- 1 shows the graphical representation of different type of workers worked in the brick fields (sample collected in the time of survey).

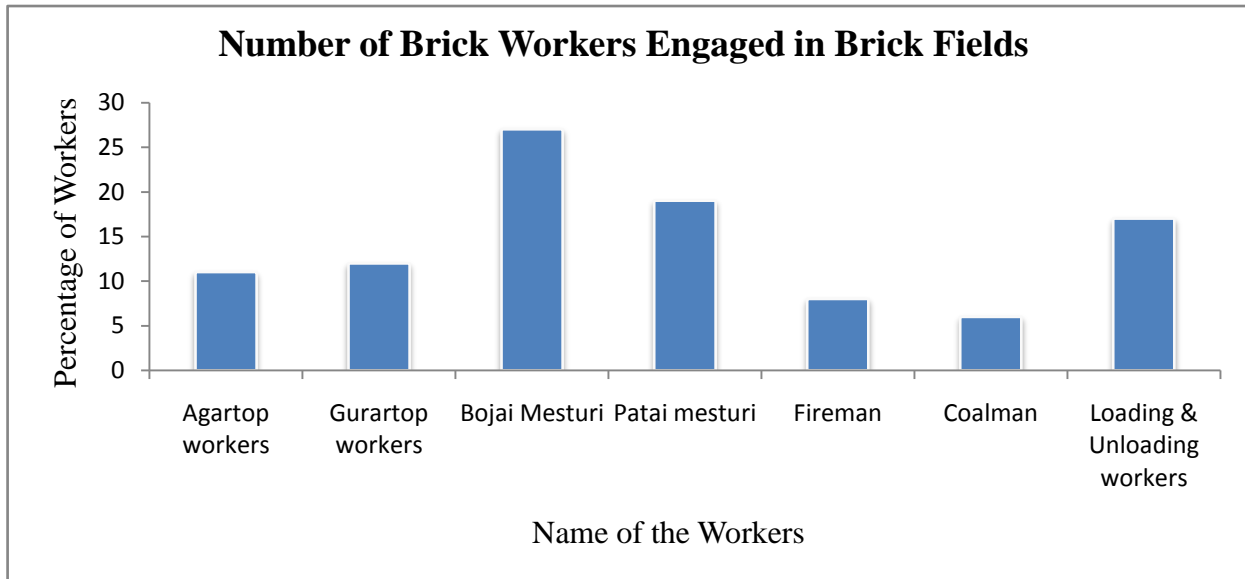


Fig- 1: Showing the percentage of brick workers engaged in brick fields, Source: Primary data

Income of the brick workers: income simply defines an individual earn money by using his/her working capacity, efficiency, skill and knowledge in a specific period of time. Workers are getting wages by their working ability in weekly basis means owner of the brick fields paid their wages once in a week. Among the surveyed workers, Agartop workers earned Rs. 1600 – Rs. 1700 per week; Gurartop workers earned as same as Agartop workers; Bojai mesturi earned Rs. 1900 – Rs. 2000 per week; Patai mesturi earned Rs. 2000 – Rs. 2100 per week; Firemen earned Rs. 8000 – Rs. 10000 per month and fireman may also take his salary in weekly basis also, it's according to his choice and want; Coalman earned Rs. 1700 – Rs. 1800 per week and the loading and unloading workers earned Rs. 2200 - Rs. 2300 per week.

Weekly expenditure of the brick workers: denotes the money we spent to buy goods from the market to meet our needs and demands in a specific period of time. Among the surveyed brick workers, 22% of workers spent Rs. 1500 – Rs. 1600 per week; 37% of workers spent Rs. 1600 - Rs. 1700 per week; 23% of workers spent Rs. 1700 - Rs. 1800 per week and

remaining 8% of workers spent Rs. 1800 - Rs. 1900 and remaining 10% of workers spent Rs. 1900 - Rs. 2000 per week.

Settlement and Housing: Settlement means where people usually settle in group over the space in a specific period of time.. The brick workers usually settled within the brick fields with their family except local workers. The owners of the brick fields built houses for the migrated workers only as local workers don't want to settle in the brick fields as they are having their own house to live or they don't want to live in the brick fields. They usually settled in cluster if we see in micro scale but in a meso or macro scale, their settlement type is compact or semi compact in nature. They usually settle in group where all the workers usually live mostly migrated workers (except local workers). The household's size of the workers differs one by one but the average size of household is 4.5. The owner of the brick field build houses for the workers who are interested to live within the brick field or who doesn't have any house to live. The walls of the houses are built with raw bricks as well as mud or bamboo. The roofs of the houses are either made of tin or with straw which is also seen in the neighboring state Assam also. The floor of the houses are not cemented in maximum cases but on the other hand in newly built brick fields, owners provide pacca or cemented houses with cemented floor and tin roof for the brick workers. In one brick fields generally there are 35 – 40 houses. Maximum houses are electrified but the size of the houses are small, hardly any space to move freely. They are used ordinary household's utensils and traditional Cholas but some of the families are using kerosene stove. Among the modern gadgets, only mobile phone are using by the every workers and only few workers are having TV.

Food habits of the brick workers: Food is the main aspect of living for all kind of animals and plants. Like all, human beings also need food to survive and work for getting that food. In the 21st century, earning bread and butter is not an easy matter as it is very difficult to get and moreover every species are fighting in this world for food. The workers of brick fields also do the same thing for earning their own bread and butter. The workers in the brick fields are combination of local and migrated people. There is huge difference between them in terms of food habits. They generally take rice, wheat, various vegetables, dal, fish, chicken

etc. though they are taking all the food items, but due to their poor economic condition, they are not properly got their diet. They buy food grains from the market at cheap rates and are also not able to buy fresh food items as fresh food items are costly in the market and they couldn't afford it. Due to not taking proper diet, their health condition is also not well enough and not healthy also.

CONCLUSION:

Brick industry is a labor intensive industry. The materials used for brick industry are mud, sand, fuel and human resource. The production of bricks in the study area characterized the highest production in the whole state. The highest numbers of brick fields are located in this area only (study area). The occupational pattern of the brick fields workers vary within the brick field itself. They engaged in different kind of works within the brick field according to their capacity, ability, efficiency and willingness. Out of the interviewed brick workers, a big portion of workers are engaged in brick making works. The wages they got in weekly basis by an individual worker is good enough to feed his/ her stomach but if we see the weekly income in terms of family income, then it is very low to manage the family in all sorts of matter. The maximum income of the workers is spent hardly they save any money or their saving is too little. They got their wages in weekly basis and also spent in weekly basis. They go for shopping in the market once or twice in a week. Usually female persons of the family went to the market and buy their essential commodities which are needed to run the family. Their diet is normal. They buy their food grains and other items according to their needs and money. They buy ordinary food items from the market. They won't go for buying something extra ordinary food items. They hardly once in a week buy chicken or meat. The houses, they are living are also not good enough for human settlement as they are just workers in the eyes of the owners and the owners don't like to spend extra money to build good houses for them but the houses are electrified as now electricity is not a matter of concern in this state although the electric charge is hiking day by day. The utensils they used in the houses by the family members of the workers are very ordinary. In modern gadgets, they only use mobile phone almost every workers but TV is used only few families. It is seen from the present study that the wages they are getting not uniform among the brick fields. The wages differ from one brick field to another. The brick field's owner doesn't follow the Govt. rate and the

workers are not getting their proper wages. Therefore, the economic condition of the workers in the brick fields is not well and moreover they are living in pathetic condition where Govt. should look after the matter and take necessary steps.

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