

CEC Working Paper

**MIGRANT LABOUR IN THE BRICK KILNS
OF PUNJAB**

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Introduction

Bricks are an indispensable component of each and every construction activity. These are made of clay and other minerals that are processed into a workable consistency, formed to standard sizes and fixed in a kiln to make them strong, durable and attractive. Bricks are inexpensive building materials. Their low cost and structural versatility have led to their wide use for walls, floors, pavements and other structures. Because of the basic characteristics of the industry, brick kilns are always observed to be located on the outskirts of cities and towns, or near places of construction activity. As the production and processing in the industry has to be done in the open, its continuance depends on climatic conditions. The work being sensitive to rainfall, the industry stops functioning during the rainy season and is, therefore, seasonal in nature.

Although the brick industry is several thousand years old, even today it is highly labour-intensive. So far as India is concerned, the industry mostly depends on the rural migrant labour.

Labour¹ Migration in India: An Overview

Migration, according to the Census of India, is determined mainly with reference to a person's place of birth. Major factors that operate on the physical mobility of a people include occupational reasons, search for better wages, academic purposes, marriage, natural and manmade calamities, and uneven socio-economic development across the country. People migrate in groups – of family, kin, caste, village, etc. – or individually.

As per the 1991 Census, an estimated 226 million persons changed places of residence within the country. Out of this, only 17.3 million or 8.8 per cent moved out for employment reasons. "The percentage share of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan in the total number of inter-state migrants was 21.6, 11.3 and 7.3, respectively... Uttar Pradesh and Bihar alone contributed one-third of the inter-state out-migration."² The percentage share of inter-state migrants for employment reasons was 29.12 for Uttar Pradesh and 15.44 for Bihar.³ Again, percentage share of short-duration out-migration for employment reasons was very high for Uttar Pradesh (20.8) and Bihar (17.7).⁴ The underestimation of short-duration or circular migration has often been cited as a limitation of Census and NSS figures on migration. The National Commission on Rural Labour (1991) estimates more than 10 million circular migrants in the rural areas. The commission notes that brick kilns provide temporary employment to around 10 lakh workers.

¹ *Unorganised Labour*, Annual Report (1999-2000), Ministry of Labour, GOI, 2000, p 106. According to the ministry of labour annual report 1999-2000, out of the 286 million (main workers), about 27 million are in the organised sector and 259 million in the unorganised sector. In relative terms, organised sector accounts for merely 9.4 per cent of the total workers, whereas unorganised labour accounts for 90.6 per cent.

² Ravi Srivastava, *Migration and Labour Market in India*, The Indian Journal of Labour Economics, Vol. 41, No. 4, 1998

³ Migration Tables, 1991 Census, as quoted in Ravi Srivastava, Table 6, *ibid*

⁴ Migration Tables, 1991 Census, as quoted in Ravi Srivastava, Table.11, *ibid*

Rationale of the Study

There is no data or estimate on the number of workers who migrate from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar to Punjab; however, these two states supply a large number of workers employed in different sectors of agriculture and industry in Punjab. According to the All-India Brick Kilns and Tiles Manufacturers Federation, New Delhi, there are about 50,000 brick kilns all over India employing, on an average, 100 workers (as per muster rolls) per unit. According to a moderate estimate given by trade unions such as Lal Jhanda Punjab Bhatta Mazdoor Union (LJPBMU), which are organising workers in the brick industry, till 1998 there were around 1,300,000 migrant workers working in 2,500 brick kilns in different districts of Punjab.

In comparison to the migrants' home states, the economy of Punjab is much better. Employment opportunities arising out of industrialisation and modern agricultural practices attract labourers mainly from industrially underdeveloped states. However, migration to Punjab in search of employment is not free from difficulties. Their problems start the moment they enter the railway station to catch the train to Punjab, as they are generally ignorant about the legal provisions meant to protect their rights – and for this, they have to pay heavily in terms of money and harassment meted out to them by police, railway police, conductors, hawkers and vendors, post office employees, etc.

Further, in Punjab, they are subjected to harassment by their employers as well as the contractors who recruit them. Most of the time, they do not get wages for the extra work they do, and often face non-payment of regular wages. The government is apathetic and does not look into the problems involved in the implementation of laws such as Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act (1979), Payment of Wages Act (1936), Workmen's Compensation Act (1923), Minimum Wages Act (1948), Equal Remuneration Act (1976), Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act (1986), Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act (1976), and Factories Act (1948), the provisions of which could be invoked to safeguard the rights of migrant workers.

Organisational efforts among the migrant workers are sporadic, inconsistent and ineffective. The poor implementation of laws leaves the migrants at the mercy of the contractors and the proprietors. Often, these workers mutely endure the worst forms of social humiliation and economic exploitation. Physical torture and mental agony are regular features of their lives. In the present era of liberalisation and globalisation, when the state is withdrawing from the social sphere, the situation for these destitute sections of the workforce is bound to deteriorate further.

The objectives of the study were to understand the status of migrant workers in Punjab and to identify the factors constraining the social, political, economic and cultural freedom of the workers.

Field Area and Methodology

A representative sample of workers in six kilns of medium size (130-150 workers), two each in the districts of Ludhiana, Sangrur and Moga, were selected for the survey. The field work was done between January 25 and February 12, 2000. Though the small sample of 60 workers may not be statistically significant, it can bring out some relevant trends. The interviews were

conducted at the kilns. The districts were selected based on the degree of concentration of brick-kiln activities. Another reason was accessibility to the kilns with the assistance of workers and members of the LJPBMU.

In the situation wherein the whole family, including children, constituted the workforce, questionnaires were administered on the adult members of the sample households. Apart from the sample of 60 households of workers, detailed interviews of trade union leaders, officials of the labour department, managers and owners of the kilns, middlemen, and office bearers of Brick Manufacturers Association were also conducted in order to capture a holistic picture of the industry.

Limitations of the Study

Owing to gender difference, researchers found it difficult to interact with female migrant workers. Researchers depended on male members for the responses of female respondents. Out of the 60 questionnaires, 55 respondents were male and five were female. Out of the five female respondents, four were *pathers* (moulders) and one was a *nikasi*.

Moreover, the survey could be conducted only in the areas where some unionisation was going on. The presence of trade unions proved to be extremely helpful in getting access to workers in the kilns, which otherwise would have been almost impossible given the time constraint.

The Growth of the Industry and the Brick Market

As brick is a major component of construction and infrastructure development, the demand of brick as well as the growth of the industry has a direct relationship with the growth of urbanisation and urban development in terms of roads, civil infrastructure and domestic construction. The increasing growth of the urbanisation process in Punjab has paved the way for the growth of the brick industry. The post-Green Revolution affluence, coupled with the dollar remittances sent by a large non-resident Punjabi community abroad, have quickened the pace of urbanisation and infrastructural development in Punjab.

In the state, the brick kilns are active generally from September to June every year. The kilns are located either in the urban periphery (around 10-15 kilometres away from the city) or in rural areas (around 25 to 30 kilometres from the town). The kilns could further be classified in terms of workforce engaged: (a) small kiln employing 80-100 workers; (b) medium-sized employing 130-150 workers; and (c) large-sized employing 1,000 to 1,200 (e.g., at Dusuwara in Hoshiarpur district).

The concentration of the brick industry across adjoining districts has resulted in intense competition. To get as many supply orders as possible, brick kiln owners go to the construction sites and run booking counters in the cities. The brick price fluctuates. Generally, the price per 1,000 bricks varies between Rs 1,300-Rs 1,400 and Rs 1,700-Rs 1,800 in the rainy season.

Brick Industry in Punjab and Labour Market

The brick industry in India is labour-intensive; and the workers are mostly migrants from rural areas. In Punjab, the workers are mostly landless agricultural labourers from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, and are entirely engaged on an informal, contractual basis. The *jamadar* (labour contractor) usually recruits workers from different villages under informal contracts.

The workers are jobless during the monsoons as the brick kilns are closed down, and many of them return to their villages, where they either work as agricultural labour or do some other casual manual work. They are forced to borrow money from the local moneylender at exorbitant rates of interest. This further forces them to go back to the brick fields in the following season to pay off their debts. Thus, the vicious circle of distress and debt-driven migration continues.

Production Process and Operation-wise Categorisation of Workforce

The main raw material required for brick production is earth. A piece of land, supposedly with suitable earth, is taken on lease by the local businessmen, generally for a period of five years. Subsequently, labour, mainly comprising migrants, is employed to mine the earth. After the desired quantity of earth is dug up, water is poured on it to make it wet. The wet soil is then mixed well to be ready to make raw bricks. This part of the brick-making process can be called the 'soil preparation stage', and is carried out by *pathers*. In this process, the main workers are assisted by helpers', who are generally family members of *pathers*. The soil-preparation process takes three to four hours. The soil is usually mixed at a lower level surface, normally in a pit that is created gradually as the plot is mined for brick making. In the second stage, a ground is prepared to lay the prepared bricks on. A very thin layer of sand is spread over it to make sure that the bricks, when laid, do not stick to the ground.

When the ground is ready, the mixed earth is lifted to the ground by means of a *rehri* (wooden cart with two long handles attached to it). Lifting it to the ground is a tough job. The helper carries loads of mixed soil, weighing about 40-50 kilograms, to the ground all alone. This is done for four to five hours every working day. Workers lay the raw bricks, usually for seven to eight hours a day. If the helper is a young boy, the main worker does the laying.

Laid-out raw bricks must be turned over at reasonable intervals to get them dried from all sides. Children are engaged to do this task as, according to them, it does not involve much exertion and their small fingers easily enter the narrow gaps of the raw bricks. The dried raw bricks are stacked in such a manner that there is space between the bricks to facilitate the process of drying, before they are ready for baking.

Loaders load dried bricks from the fields and arrange them inside the vessel; the *mistri* supervises the overall activities; the *jalaiwala* keeps the kiln burning; the *keriwala* plugs all holes in the vessel to prevent heat leakage while baking bricks; and the *nikasi* unloads the baked bricks from the kiln. Besides these groups of workers are *watchmen* and office staff (including *munshi*, or accountant).

Age Group of Workers

From moulding to the finished product, all operations have to be performed manually by the workers. This demands physical strength and endurance. More adult men than women were found to be engaged in brick production in the study area. The survey has shown that 36 per cent of the workers were in the age group of 26-35 years, 35 per cent in that of 15-25, and 25 per cent in that of 36-45. These three categories together constituted about 96 per cent of the total workforce. More specifically, 71 per cent were in the age group of 15-35 years – that is, workers in their youthful and physically agile age.

Working Hours for Different Operations in Brick Kilns

Among the brick workers, there are piece-rated as well as time-rated workers. *Pathers*, *rehriwalas* and *nikasiwalas* are the piece-rated workers; *keriwalas*, *jalaiwalas* and supervisors are the time-rated wage earners. In the latter operations, workers get monthly wages and their working hours are fixed by the owner of the kiln. The working hours for them vary from 8 to 12 hours a day, depending upon the availability of the number of workers. In one shift, at least four *jalai* and four *keri* workers are required in a medium-sized kiln. If the number of workers is less, workers have to work for 12 hours in one shift. Piece-rated workers do not have fixed working hours. Workers have to work more in a given day to increase their earning. Normally, the workers in this category work for 12 to 14 hours a day.

Kiln burning as well as *keri* work are continuous processes, which demand workers' alertness throughout the working hours as any mistake on the part of the workers may adversely affect the quality of the bricks.

Workers in the brick industry, engaged in the five main operations, have different working hours. Supervisors and *keri* workers work for 8-10 hours on an average. The *jalaiwala* works for 8-10 hours in a day. The *nikasi* workers said that they work between 10 and 12 hours a day, while moulders said their working hours ranged from 12 to 14 hours a day. *Nikasis* and *pathers* do not get any kind of allowance for working long hours since their wages are determined on a piece-rate basis.

Operation-wise Average Income and Savings of the Workers

Among the time-rated workers in the brick kilns studied, the *jalaiwala* reported a monthly earning of Rs 2,342; the *keriwala*, Rs 2,411; and the supervisor, Rs 2,800. Despite the low levels of income, these workers tend to save more than a third of their income for it to be remitted back home. As reported by the workers, on an average per month, *jalaiwalas* save Rs 914.29 (39.02 %); *keriwalas*, Rs 920 (38.15 %); and supervisors, Rs 1,800.00 (64.28 %).

The case of piece-rated workers, in particular of *pathers* and *nikasiwalas*, is different. It should be kept in mind that unlike the time-rated workers mentioned above, *pathers* work as family units. In the sample, more than half of the workers (51.67 %) migrated with families, and all of them were *pathers*. The official wage rate in Punjab for brick moulding is Rs 156.60 per 1,000

bricks. The survey shows that in the case of *pathers* (see tables below), the number of working members in the families varied from two to seven, and accordingly, the daily income of the family varied from Rs 175 to Rs 1,000. However, the average daily income of working members in a family ranged between Rs 46.43 and Rs 175 – the latter in a family of four, where only the parents worked, and the former in a family of seven, where five children in the age group of 5-14 years worked along with the adults. Since *pathers* work in groups, mostly as family units including children, the wages are paid according to the quantity of bricks finished by a group rather than to individuals in the group. Within a family set-up, income is influenced by the age of the individual members. In the case of *nikasiwalas*, the daily income varied from Rs 70 to Rs 100.

Table 1. Income Characteristics of *Pathers* in the Brick Kilns of Punjab

SI No.	No. of working members in family	No. of members engaged in brick kiln	No. of children engaged (5-14)	No. of bricks made by the family in a day	Reported daily earning of family from brick kiln (Rs)	Average daily income of working members (Rs)
1	2	2		1,000	175	87.50
2	2	2		1,000	175	87.50
3	2	2		1,500	200	100.00
4	2	2		1,500	225	112.50
5	2	2		1,500	225	112.50
6	2	2		1,800	250	125.00
7	2	2		1,500	250	125.00
8	2	2		2,000	300	150.00
9	2	2		2,000	300	150.00
10	2	2		2,500	350	175.00
11	3	3		2,200	300	100.00
12	3	3		2,000	325	108.33
13	3	3		2,500	400	133.33
14	4	4	1	2,000	300	75.00
15	4	4	2	2,000	300	75.00
16	4	4	2	2,000	300	75.00
17	4	4	2	2,000	300	75.00
18	4	4	2	3,000	400	100.00
19	4	4	2	4,000	600	150.00
20	4	4		2,000	300	75.00
21	5	5	1	2,000	300	60.00
22	5	5	1	3,000	400	80.00
23	5	5	3	2,000	300	60.00
24	5	5	4	2,500	350	70.00
25	6	6	4	2,500	350	58.33
26	7	7	1	7,000	1,000	142.86
27	7	7	1	7,000	1,000	142.86

<i>Sl No.</i>	<i>No. of working members in family</i>	<i>No. of members engaged in brick kiln</i>	<i>No. of children engaged (5-14)</i>	<i>No. of bricks made by the family in a day</i>	<i>Reported daily earning of family from brick kiln (Rs)</i>	<i>Average daily income of working members (Rs)</i>
28	7	7	2	4,000	600	85.71
29	7	7	2	4,000	600	85.71
30	7	7	5	2,000	325	46.43

Source: Field Survey

Table 2. Monthly Earnings of Time-rated Workers	
<i>Operation category</i>	<i>Amount (Rs)</i>
Jalaiwala	2,342.00
Keriwala	2,411.00
Supervisor	2,800.00

Source: Field Survey

Child Labour

Child labour has been reported from moulding, a trade carried out by workers as families. Majority of the *pathers* (53.33 %) said that their children work with them from the early age of five years. Even children below the age of five years were found to be with their parents, even though they were not involved in productive work. It was also observed that the duration of the children's stay with the parents at the worksite was equivalent to the time the parents worked. Among the adult workers, 38.46 per cent said that their children worked with them for 10 hours on an average, and 23.08 per cent said that their children worked for 12 hours daily. In one case, we were told that a child was helping his father for 14 hours daily.

Land Cleaning and Expenses during the Period

The leased-in land should be prepared for making bricks. All *pathers*, responsible for this task, said that it took 10-15 days to clean and prepare the land, depending upon the quality and size of the land. This work is *begar*, as workers engaged in this work are not paid any wages. Owners do not consider that this work should be paid wage for. During *begar*, workers depend on loan for subsistence. Among *pathers*, 73.30 per cent said they took loan from middlemen. A few (16.70 %) said they took loan from friends or relatives, in which case the workers might not have to pay interest. If the loan is taken from middlemen, they have to either pay interest on the loan or oblige them with some other favour such as extra work without commensurate wages. It should be noted that the money received during this period is not considered as *peshgi*, because *peshgi* is wages received in advance.

Landlessness, Indebtedness, *Begar*, *Peshgi*, Caste and Trade

The system of *peshgi* is highly prevalent in the brick kiln industry. According to the survey, over 53 per cent of workers were found to have taken *peshgi*. Broadly, two reasons were given for taking *peshgi*. Among those who had taken *peshgi*, a majority (56.25 %) said that it was for repaying debt taken at the native place, while the remaining said they took it for daily expenses such as food and medicines, as also for expenses during birth, marriage and death.

There seems to be a high correlation between *peshgi* and indebtedness. Among the surveyed workers, 51.60 per cent said that they were indebted before arriving in Punjab. The amount they borrowed ranged from Rs 2,000 to Rs 40,000, and 71 per cent of those who were indebted accepted *peshgi*. Among those who had taken *peshgi*, 90.60 per cent were Scheduled Castes; 68.75 per cent, *pathers*; and 28.9 per cent, *nikasis*.

Among the workers who were indebted before arriving in Punjab, 90.32 per cent were Scheduled Castes; trade-wise, 61.29 per cent were *pathers*; 25.80 per cent, *nikasiwalas*; and 12 per cent, *keriwalas*.

Landlessness among migrant workers in the brick kiln industry was quite high. An estimated 61.66 per cent of the surveyed workers did not own land, while 86.88 per cent of the Scheduled Caste workers in the surveyed brick kilns were found to be landless as well.

The foregoing analysis indicates that the indebted workers tend to accept *peshgi*, and that they are mostly landless Scheduled Caste workers. It further indicates that *pathers* are overwhelmingly Scheduled Caste and landless workers who are vulnerable to debt, *peshgi* and *begar*.

Winter Closure of the Kilns

During field work, it was found that a new trend of kiln closure has been set by the owners. Every winter, owners close down the kilns for a certain period – say, for one month or one-and-a-half months during the months of December and January. According to the owners, this period of severe cold, when there is hardly any sunshine, is not conducive for brick production as the bricks do not get dried and cannot be sold in the market. Workers and trade union leaders strongly contested this viewpoint. They said that the poor visibility during the period is just a matter of a few days. According to them, owners actually use the sun invisibility as an excuse to close down the kilns and create an artificial supply crisis in the market.

In this, the migrant workers are the worst sufferers. Certain conditions are created which force the migrant workers to stay back without work and without any alternative source of income. In this period of forced idleness, workers are bound to borrow money from either the local moneylenders or other sources at a high interest rate.

Immediately after the kilns are reopened by the owners, following the artificially created off-season and having ensured a shortage in the market, workers are heavily pressurised and their work is intensified to increase production.

Health-related Issues at Brick Kilns

Eye injury is one of the major work-related accidents at brick kilns in the surveyed area. Generally, workers in the brick kilns work for 8-12 hours every day amid improper lighting conditions, high temperature and surroundings full of dust.

Improper lighting: The brick kiln industry in India does not have power-driven machines or technology-intensive work processes. In Punjab, too, electricity is not essentially required for any production process. However, proper light is required at every stage of the work. The production continues round-the-clock. *Pathers* often have to work late into the night, and sometimes they work in early morning before sunrise to prepare the clay for moulding. *Jalaiwalas* and *keriwalas* have to work in the night. In the absence of proper lighting, workers are always exposed to the possibilities of accidents.

High temperature: *Jalaiwalas* and *keriwalas* work on the burning kiln. They continuously refill coal in the vessel and simultaneously plug the holes with *keri*, so that heat does not leak out of the vessel. These two operations require a tremendous amount of endurance, especially during summer, when temperature goes up to 48° C. In addition to their eyes being exposed to fire particles due to the high temperature, they often suffer dehydration as well.

Nikasis also work under similar conditions. As soon as the supervisor announces that the fire has stopped burning, the *nikasis* start pulling the brick out of the vessel. In most of the cases, the fire does not completely go out under the ashes in the vessel. Yet, workers have to pull hot bricks out of the vessel. In the surveyed kilns, workers were without even basic protective gears, and in some cases, they covered their hands with rags to pull out the hot bricks.

Dust: Exposure to dust is a serious problem faced by workers in the brick kiln industry. The whole production process starts and ends with dust. Moulding of sand and soil into bricks is done in the open field. This process is dust-infested. *Keriwalas* and *jalaiwalas* work with coal and *keri* (burned coal), the dust of which they have to inhale continuously.

Workers get no compensation in the event of accidents or illnesses. In the survey, 93.3 per cent of workers said that dust is their main problem, followed by eye injuries (56.7 %), high temperature (51.7 %), and improper lighting (30 %).

Strenuous and hazardous working conditions seem to be taking a toll on the general health of the workers. In the survey, 97 per cent complained about body pain, 75 per cent of joints ache, 67 per cent of headache, 58 per cent of boils in hands, and 55 per cent of eye injuries.

Push and Pull Factors

Respondents were asked to identify factors that compelled them to move out of their native villages, in order of their preference. An overwhelming majority, 96 per cent, chose lack of employment opportunities at the place of origin. This was followed closely by poverty (90 %), caste exploitation (35 %), and debt (27 %).

As for the reasons for choosing Punjab as their destination, the order of preference was: better remuneration (93.33 %), better employment opportunities (80 %), and availability of their relatives/friends (58 %).

Patterns and Nature of Migration

In the surveyed brick kilns, a majority of the workers were migrants from certain pockets of Uttar Pradesh (40 % from western Uttar Pradesh and 50 % from eastern Uttar Pradesh), and a few were from Bihar (1.70 %) and Rajasthan (8.30 %). In Uttar Pradesh, Bagpath, Muzaffarnagar, Rai Bareilly, Sultanpur, and Banda were the districts from where they migrated. Trade union leaders and workers explained that migrants from the above mentioned districts of Uttar Pradesh have acquired skills over a period of time and kept it as their forte. The low percentage of Bihari workers in the surveyed districts was further explained by the fact that the loading and unloading that they would have preferred to do is done by the locals, as it requires investment to maintain a *rehri*.

The field survey showed that 51.67 per cent workers came to Punjab with their family members; 43.3 per cent came alone; and only 5 per cent came in groups other than their families. This variation in the nature of migration is determined mainly by the operation in which they are engaged at the kiln; for example, *keri* and *jalai* are risky operations in which workers cannot engage their women and children, whereas *pathers* work as units of families.

Jamadars wield a tight grip over the workers. Seventy per cent of the respondents said that they reached Punjab through labour contractors. It also shows that some of the workers who reached Punjab of their own or with the help of their family members could find work in the brick kilns. The *jamadars* continue to wield their control at the work site. All the workers said that it was the *jamadars'* prerogative to decide whether their 'occupations' would be changed or not. Interestingly, none of the workers said that they changed occupations after reaching Punjab. Among them were workers having more than 25 years of experience in the brick kiln. It shows that horizontal occupational mobility among workers in the brick kilns is nearly non-existent, implying that in a brick kiln, a *pathar* will remain a *pathar*, irrespective of the number of years that they have put in.

Unending Harassment

Brick kiln workers experience harassment at work as well as in their living places in Punjab. Actually, the saga of harassment of these migrant workers starts when they set foot at the bus or railway station for their journey.

Police, railway employees, touts and brokers, pickpockets, goons, etc., are known to harass migrant workers. During the field work for the present study, researchers collected a few evidences of such harassments. These evidences were collected by them while travelling along with the migrant workers, who were returning from Punjab to Bihar for Bakra Eid and Holi in March 2000. On the eve of Bakra Eid and Holi, the Amritsar-Howrah Express was so crowded that even the reserved sleeper class appeared to be worse than the general compartment. The passengers were huddled in every corner of the compartments like animals on their way to a

slaughter house, and the atmosphere was suffocating. Even the toilets were stuffed with luggage.

When the train left the Ludhiana station, two policemen got into the compartment and started asking for Rs 50 from each worker. According to the policemen, they were charging that money simply because they had kept the seats for the workers, and now, the passengers were expected to pay for occupying the same. Initially, the workers tried resisting that kind of extortion. However, they caved in when the duo terrorised them by suddenly slapping a few passengers. The workers let the policemen snatch Rs 20, Rs 50, and in some cases, even Rs 100. This extortion continued till the duo got down at the Ambala station. The researchers were informed by the migrants that that was not the first time it happened to them when they returned home on the occasion of festivals. Everybody knows that the migrants return home on such occasions with savings from their wages.

The problems of touts and brokers were also narrated. Illiterate and ignorant about the railway rules, these migrants routinely sought the help of touts in buying tickets. Later on, the tickets were found to be fake. Another reason behind approaching touts, workers said, is the hostile attitude of railway employees, such as ticket clerks who ask migrant workers for extra money for doing the job. Moreover, workers said, some elements among the railway porters also misguide them.

There are stations en route which are typical of the various kinds of harassment meted out to migrant workers. For example, migrant workers experience more of police harassment at Ludhiana and Ambala, and more of anti-social elements at Aligarh and Moradabad.

Summary

Brick kiln workers in the Ludhiana, Sangrur and Moga districts of Punjab are seasonal migrants, mostly from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. They migrate as individuals, families and groups other than families; however, *pathers* migrate as families. *Jamadars* bring them to brick kilns and control their work. Workers seldom change their occupation.

Migrant workers employed in the brick kilns of Punjab should have been covered under the provisions of the Inter-State Migrant Workers Act, 1979. However, in the surveyed brick kilns no worker was found availing any of the provisions of the ISMW Act. To begin with, workers did not have anything with which to establish their identity, and the contractors were neither visible nor registered with any authority.

Harassment and extortion by police, departments such as railways, anti-social elements at the workplace, and workers' residential colonies are serious problems the migrants face throughout the cycle of their migration.

When workers go to the market or in cases of sickness, they take leave and as a result, lose their wages. Nevertheless, on an average they work for 22-24 days in a month. In case of sickness, there is no medical assistance provided by the employer.

Employers do not provide the required tools and implements such as *rehri*, shovel, and spade, which workers have to buy for themselves. This further cuts into their extremely meagre earning.

Workers do not get wages for cleaning the land for setting up of the brick kiln, even though this activity consumes 10-15 days. During this period, they borrow money and thereby increase their debt burden. Workers engaged in loading and unloading work do not get wages for overtime.

Brick workers do not get wages monthly; rather, they are paid a part of their wages, which is just enough for their survival, on a fortnightly basis. The payment is settled at the end of the season, for which the employer takes 10-15 days. In such situations, workers have no option but to wait and keep borrowing money for regular expenses. In this process, their debt again increases. Moreover, *munshis* take advantage of the illiteracy and inability of the workers to keep account of production and *peshgi*.

In the event of sudden work stoppage, workers do not get any wage for the work they do; for example, when rain washes away the clay they prepare for bricks. In such situations, they rely on loan from the contractor or the owner.

Accumulative and perpetual indebtedness is a major feature of the condition of migrant workers in the brick industry of Punjab.

In most of the cases, workers decide to migrate in order to clear their local debt with the advance money that is given to them by contractors in the form of *peshgi*. The *peshgi* puts them in another kind of debt trap, which is direct and demanding in terms of work in an alien environment. Indebtedness and the resulting vulnerability is more pronounced among the Scheduled Caste workers, who also take up the least skilled and most exacting activity in the brick kiln, namely moulding. Child labour has been found to be a function of family labour, which again was reported among the *pathers*.