

State's women brick kiln workers unite for rights

Apr 18, 2016, 01.48 AM IST

Bathinda: A workers' movement that started in Punjab's Malwa region last year has started to reach out to the fairer sex too. Women brick kiln workers from across the state will assemble at Bathinda on April 22 as part of the first convention in the state that would be devoted to women workers from the unorganized sector.

Though there is no official data on brick kiln labourers, conservative estimates show that there are nearly 6 lakh workers in Punjab, and most of them are exploited by their employers. Of the 6 lakh workers, half are women and happen to suffer, if not more, as much as men. At times, a lot of the women are forced to work in hard conditions even when they are pregnant.

A Phillaur-based organization, 'Volunteers for Social Justice (VSJ)', is organizing the one-day convention and the move to hold the meeting comes a month after the families of about a dozen brick kiln labourers had protested for days at Bathinda for wages and had alleged that they were forced to work as bonded labourers. VSJ coordinator Ganga Sekhar said, "Mobilizing and uniting poor women brick kiln workers will go a long way in giving them the courage to fight for their rights. The day is being observed to recognize and celebrate women workers' contribution in the construction industry," he said.

A law graduate from Bengaluru, Sekhar said that though women made up half of the workers employed at brick kilns in Punjab, they were not even counted as workers and they did not even get the facility of Employees Provident Fund (EPF). "Through this convention, we will try to give a face to the faceless women workers," she said.