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SOCIO-CULTURAL STATUS OF MIGRATED BRICK WORKERS IN WEST TRIPURA DISTRICT, TRIPURA, INDIA

Suman Das¹ & Akram Hossain²

¹ M.Phil. Student, Department of Geography, Gauhati University, Guwahati, Assam, India.

² Research Scholar, Department of Bengali, Gauhati University, Guwahati, Assam, India.



ABSTRACT

The intention of this study is to highlight the socio - cultural condition of the brick workers through structured interview schedule method in West Tripura district, Tripura, India. The Indian brick industry is the second largest producer of bricks in the world after China. There are 50,000 brick kilns all over India employing on an average 100 workers. Brick kilns are located in small scale manufacturing units on the outskirts of urban areas. Brick industry is a labor intensive industry. In the study area, the maximum brick workers were migrated from other states as they know well about the brick making techniques which is also their traditional work. Their occupational patterns vary within the brick fields as everyone used to different kind of works. Among the migrated brick workers, maximum workers and family members belonged to middle age group (15 - 29 and 30 - 44) and males are more than females as migration is age selective and sex selective too. The literacy rate among the brick workers and their family members are also not well (specially the females and aged persons) except children. Their culture is different from the local people. Their dressing, language, religious festivals, food habits are different. But now they are trying to cope up with the culture of local people. They used to wear dresses as same as local people; they used to go to the local religious festivals and tried to enjoy those festivals as much as possible. Their traditional food habits also changed due to non availability of their traditional food items. They used to eat those food items which are easily available in the market on cheap rate as economic condition also matter a lot but still they are adjusting.

KEY WORDS: Socio-cultural, brick workers, age-group, dressing, language, food habits, religion

INTRODUCTION

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). 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). 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). The women accompanying the men could be the wives, sisters or widowed mothers (PCLRA, 2013). West Tripura district is the most economically developed and urbanized region in Tripura. Several small scale industries and manufacturing units based on available natural and cultural resources of this region have grown up in the district. The brick workers generally migrate in this region to have a better social and cultural life and would try to mix up with the local social and cultural situation. The social and cultural aspects are the important aspects of life as without them, people can't imagine themselves and moreover these aspects are helped to move forward in their individuals lives.

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 their socio - cultural status was collected from through in-depth interviews from the workers (male and female) and also from households. The present study was carried out on the workers of brick fields, 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 West Tripura district is 58.84 km². The study area is mostly advanced, urbanized and industrialized region among other districts in the state. At first, 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, Kumar, Sunil, et al., 2013. Purposive random sampling method was adopted while evaluating the socio - cultural status of the migrated brick workers. To know their socio - cultural status, in total of 100 brick workers has

interviewed along with forty (40) households has surveyed to acquire valuable information (data) regarding their socio – cultural status and moreover it is an empirical study.

POPULATION

Since the last century, the world has experienced important changes in demographic parameters. Better health care and social improvements have decreased infant mortality and have expanded longevity. As a consequence, world population had increased constantly since 1800 up to approximate 1970 but more recently that annual growth rate has been declining at a high pace, showing a visible demographic transition. Different countries and regions show different stages of this demographic transition. Many developing countries in East and Southeast Asia and Central and Eastern Europe will experience significant aging from about 2020. In other developing countries, however, the demographic transition is less advanced, and working-age populations will increase in the coming decades (IMF, 2004). Population is the key factor of any kind of study whether geographical or others. Man is responsible for all sorts of issues and problems made by human himself. The main approach of any kind of study is for the betterment of human beings, without highlighting the human beings no study is satisfactory and up to the mark. Every research is done on this earth, only for giving more and more comfort and sophisticated quality of life. In this present study, 12 brick fields have surveyed. The total population was 1022. Out of total population, 55.77% are male and 44.23% are female which is very low in the eyes of national as well as regional level. The sex ratio is 793 (per '000 male) which is very low and more over it is also very low in the eyes of state (961) as well as national level (940). The child sex ratio is 667 (per '000 boy) which

is very low and it is also very low in terms of regional as well as national level. The low sex ratio (general) and child sex ratio show the future age – sex structure along with dependent population and future social and economic growth of a region as well as country itself. The age – sex structure is highest among the age group of 15 – 29 and 30 – 44. The age – sex structure is low among the age group of 0 – 14 and above 44. The males are more in the age – sex structure as migration is sex selective and age selective too. But in the case of above 44 years age group, females are more than males as when one family migrate from one place to another, they have to take old persons along with them as aged persons don't have any other place to settle themselves and no other options except go along with their families where ever the family migrate. The literacy rate is 46.67% among the surveyed population and 53.33% of population are illiterate. The maximum literate persons are comes under the age group of 0 – 14 and 15 – 29. Most of the illiterate persons are belonged to the age group of 30 – 44 and above 44 and also belonged to the persons come under the age group of 15 – 29. The males are more literate than females. The literacy rate among males is 87.72% and females have the literacy rate of 66.37%. The educational level among the migrated brick workers families is not well enough as they usually migrate from one place to another but the children of these workers are now going to school and learning. The maximum children of migrated brick workers are going to school as education is the first step to get well established future along with a sophisticated life. The work participation rate is also not bad among the surveyed brick workers. The male workers participation is 65.22% and female workers participation is 34.78% and females are also engaged in the works of brick fields but very less in number.

The females are usually engaged in the household's works and also looking after their babies and children. So they used to busy themselves in the household's works and do it

properly. Only the females those who don't have babies and their child has also grown up, usually they used to work in the brick fields and also who earned some extra money for their families and herself too.

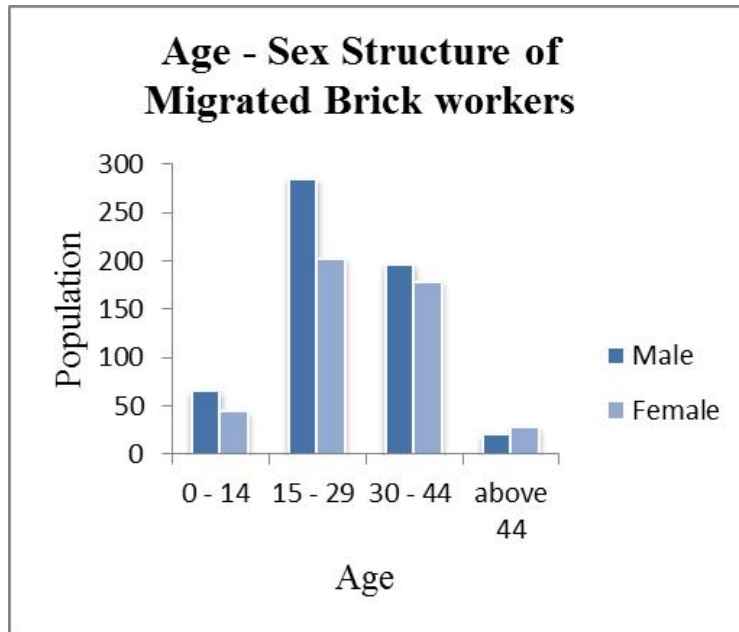


Fig-1: presenting the age-sex structure of the surveyed brick workers (source: primary data)

DRESSING

Dressing denotes the culture as well as physical environment of a region of people belongs to. Culture differs from region to region, community to community. The people wear clothes according to their own culture and climatic condition of that region only. People know what kind of clothes they should wear. People generally wear their own traditional dresses. People normally wear clothes which are socially accepted and worn by other people. In the 21st century, due to cultural globalization irrespectively, people are slightly destructed from their own cultural dressing. Now a days, people wear those clothes which are worn by maximum people, fashionable, easily available in the market, cheap and reasonable as by time being, traditional dresses are turned more costly and not available in the market and moreover, poor and middle class family can't afford these traditional dresses. Here, in the

case of brick workers, male workers usually wear gents' kurta (upper garments), pajama and dhoti (lower garments) and hat made by cotton. But, now these cotton clothes are so costly that they are not able to purchase these clothes. Henceforth, they are bound to buy reasonable clothes. They are wearing modern dresses which are cheap and easily available like shirts, t-shirts, pants etc. These modern dresses are attracted the workers to buy from the nearby market. The workers buy these modern clothes according to their money and capacity to purchase. But on the other hand, In the case of female, they are wearing same traditional type of dresses but the quality and kind of clothes has changed. They wear traditional cotton sari and blouse with different types of ornaments and jewelries but now days; they are not wearing any of these. They are wearing normal sari and blouse with minimum ornaments and jewelries

which are easily available in the market. Overall, the brick workers have changed their traditional dressing to modern dressing and moreover, they are adjusting to their new social as well as physical environment according to the need of the society and the habitats.

LANGUAGE

Language is a medium to express one's emotion to another by making different sounds. In India there are numerous languages spoken by the Indians and within one language, there are different types of sub- languages (it means different approaches and style of speaking one language in different forms). Language is the main aspect to interact with other persons. Language reflects the culture of the persons and their origin too. The migrated brick workers belong to Indo - Aryan branch of the Indo - European language group. Their main languages are Bihari, Oriya, and Hindi. When these brick workers migrated from their own native place to somewhere else (in the new region), in the beginning they usually speak a common language, so called national language 'Hindi'. After passing few times, slightly the migrated brick workers adjusted with the new area and learned local language as they are bound to learn and speak local language as they don't have any other options and moreover, they have to learn local language as they have to reside here and work with the local people. It is their duty and responsibility to speak local language as they migrated here. But they speak their own language within themselves or with their community only. After learning the local language, they get benefit from that local language as when they went to the market, they interact with the sellers in local language and the sellers easily understand what the buyers want. The migrated brick workers speak local language with the local people and on the other hand, they speak their traditional language

within their community itself. In this way they speak two or many languages according to their benefit, need and situation.

RELIGION

India is country of diversified religious groups. In India, the main religious groups are Hindu, Muslim, Christen, Sikh, Buddha and Jain. Among these religious groups, Hindu is the highest number of followers. Among Hindu, there are different Classes, Castes and Tribes. The migrated brick workers are generally Hindu followers. In Hindu, they are belonged to Dalit community (Other Backward Classes - OBC) and Schedule Caste. They are the weakest and poorest section in the Hindu religious group. They are deprived and exploited by the upper section of the society throughout historical period. But presently, due to Govt. schemes and policies, they are coming out from their traditional condition and slightly improving which is not satisfactory in modern era. They are still practicing their religious customs and holding their heritage. They thought that, 'Hinduism is devoted to the working efficiency and ability of a person whom can do any work according to his/ her own interest and capability and which is right in the eyes of religion'.

FESTIVAL

Festival is a religious ceremony of a group of people which is celebrated by the people themselves. Festivals bring us together indiscriminately to enjoy and help us to know about the others religious customs and faiths. Festivals are the scared occasion of a particular group of people or a community and worship of the beliefs and faiths on the Gods and Goddesses. In the time of festivals, people welcomed with wholeheartedly and enthusiastically. In festivals, other groups of people are welcomed and sometimes they are not due to religious customs. Like all migrated brick workers are having their own religious

festivals like Holy, Laxmi puja (puja means worship), Diwali, Chatt puja etc. in all the festivals, they are welcomed other groups of people to come and enjoy with them in the same manner they enjoy except chatt puja. In the time of chatt puja, they are not allowed any outsiders to come and celebrate with them due to religious faiths and customs. When they migrated to the new areas, they adjust themselves with the new social environment and participated in the local religious festivals where everyone is welcomed like Durga puja, Kali puja, Kharchi puja, Biswakarma puja etc. when they are engaged in the local festivals whole heartedly they are not any more belong to other group of people, all are equal and same and everyone enjoy the same thing as enjoy by the migrated brick workers with their families too.

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 demanding industry specially the workers migrated from other Indian states like Jharkhand (Ranchi), Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, West Bengal (Koch Bihar). The migrated brick workers are generally called 'Rachi', the name given by the local people and they are also habituated with this name. These workers are usually migrated from their native place to Tripura to do work in the brick fields and moreover, it is necessary to say that without them the brick fields in Tripura can't be run. The production of bricks in the study area made this region as the highest producer of brick among the other regions. Their occupational patterns vary within the brick fields as everyone used to different kind of works. Among the total surveyed population, the male population is a bit high from the female population as they are migrated from other place and most of them didn't bring their family. Therefore, the sex ratio (general) and child sex ratio is also very low compare to the regional as well as national level ratio. The age - sex structure of the migrated brick workers and their families (those who came with them) are also not good. The maximum age groups are belonged 15 - 29 and 30 - 44 ages because family members don't have any other options. The child age group and aged group people are very less in number as migration is age selective and sex selective too especially when it comes under the light of work. The literacy rate among the brick workers and their family members are also not well as maximum members are illiterate specially the female members and workers and aged persons. The literacy rate is a bit good among the children as they used to go to the nearby Govt. schools and taking education. The working participation rate is high among the males than females as they are living in the patriarchy society and here males

are dominating. The males usually work in the fields and females used to look after the household's works and females also care the children and aged persons too. Their culture is different from the local people. Their dressing, language, religious festivals, food habits are different. But as they migrated from their native place to this region, therefore, they are trying to cope up with the culture of local people and are doing so. They used to wear dresses as same as local people; they used to go to the local religious festivals and tried to enjoy those festivals as much as possible. Their traditional food habits also changed due to non availability of traditional food items. They used to eat those food items which are easily available in the market on cheap rate as economic condition also matter a lot. Therefore, it is wise enough to state that the 'socio - cultural' status of the brick workers along with their families are different from the local people but they are trying to mix them up with the local culture as they came here to settle and it is also mandatory to any migrated people to cop up with the culture where he/ she want or wish to migrate.

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