PART- 2: UNORGANIZED SECTOR

CHAPTER- I: BRICK KILNS
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BRICK KILNS

Burnt clay bricks have been used in India for the last 6000 years. Presently, 60,000 active brick kilns are estimated to be operating all over India. Approximately 100 billion bricks are manufactured each year providing employment to more than 12 million persons (Srivastava et al, 2002).

The present work culture of our brick kilns is no different than the one that existed in Europe during the mid 19th century. Majority of the units still employ primitive hard-moulding, sun-drying and clamp or moving chimney kilns burning methods. Globally there are more than 200,000 brick kilns using obsolete and inefficient methods leading to large-scale pollution (Srivastava et al, 2002).

Traditionally manufactured clay bricks form the basic building block in majority of dwelling units in the country. The traditional brick kilns are still non-mechanized, labour intensive and seasonal operation employing unskilled workers of both sexes. Such units exist in almost all parts of the country. In West Bengal also similar brick kilns are present in all the districts as well as on the outskirts and suburban areas of Kolkata. The present study was conducted in brick kilns situated in remote places in the districts of Murshidabad and South 24 Parganas. The process of brick making is similar in all the kilns.

The best bricks are made of the top soil that is very fertile. This layer of soil is dug from surrounding fields and is found to exist from surface to a depth of 6 feet. After the clay has been dug, it is mixed with water and shaped into bricks using wooden
moulds. These bricks are then dried in the sun. About 30% of the total workers in the brick kiln are involved in this process.

The dried unbaked bricks are then carried manually to the furnace. They are stacked into the furnace. About 20% of all workers are engaged in this process. These bricks are then baked in large closed furnaces fired by coal. Unbaked bricks are loaded from one end of the furnace and the fire is moved from one segment to the other through use of segmental supplementation of coal. Depending on the environmental temperature, the bricks are baked in 4-6 days and can be taken out another 3-4 days later only after that segment of the furnace has cooled down sufficiently.

The baked bricks are taken out from the furnace and stacking is done by workers. The stacking and transportation to the storage site is done manually. Almost 50% of the workers are employed for the manual handling of bricks and they can be classified as MMH workers.

With the steady growth in the country's population as well as economy, the requirements of bricks have also increased exponentially. Moreover the seasonal nature of the brick kilns together with non-mechanization has lead to the migration of predominantly unskilled and illiterate workers. The work force is completely unprotected with no fixed wages, no social security and not even minimal medical benefits.