

CHAPTER - I

I N T R O D U C T I O N

Food, cloth and shelter have been considered as the basic needs of human beings. All industrial activities of a man are concentrated on these basic needs. Food is indispensable for life, but shelter in no way be considered less important than it. Shelter refers to a place for living and which is protected by walls and roof. In other words, the idea of shelter is associated with this house. The house, in turn, is traditionally built by mud, timbers, stones and bricks. Supply of stones and timbers is relatively limited by nature and also it can not be obtained every where and in required quantity but bricks can be made available in required quantity in wider areas. In fact, the growth of brick industry has solved the problem of supply of one of the essential building materials. Brick Industry is engaged in converting the raw material clay or sand into a final product, the brick.

Brick industry is as old as civilization itself. It is paradoxical, of course, that such an old industry is still a localised small scale one even today. In modern age though there are instances of sporadic attempts to organise the industry in some developed and developing countries, in the world perspective, it is still far from an organised large scale one.

Its main materials are fine clay and little quantity of sand which are easily available from the river banks or river deltas. What is more important for the industry is the availability of cheap manual labour and fuel.

In fact, the industry employs more labour than other industries and may be, regarded as a labour-intensive industry. "Brick Industry is the biggest employer as a single industry of this state creating additional employment opportunities in construction and other allied activities depending on this industry. This industry provides jobs for 50 people as against 7 in other small scale industries and 2 in medium and large scale industries with an investment of one lakh rupees, placing the brick industry at the top of the list of the job-oriented industries. The brick industry has no parallel for generating rural employment"¹. Obviously, an indepth study of this industry would be of much important. Besides, brick industry has some peculiar features of its own relating to the source of raw materials and its market. Raw materials like silt and sand are mainly required for its production. Source of silt is rivers and in some cases good agricultural land where there is no river. This industry is seasonal in character. Because of the seasonality of the industry, labourers come from the agricultural sector, during the lean season². The brick season fits well with the agricultural cycles. In additions to the agricultural nexusness of the labour it is also migratory in character.

Though the demand for brick is of derived nature marketing posses no unusual problem. The industry is never

1 Key notes - Ramapada Bhattacharjee - Seminar '82, Bengal Brick Field Association - page - 7.

2 The need to remove constraints in Brick Industry - D.P.Chaddha, Bricks & Tiles News - 1980, page - 3.

required to take measures to stabilise or improve the demand volume like the firms operating in industrial market. However, the demand volume is directly linked with the level of economic activities in the vicinity. An upmoving economy encourages construction of houses and as there is no good substitute for brick, the industry enjoys the fruits of such an economic situation. Further, it functions in a market where replacement purchase is almost absent. Normally a brick firm caters to the need of a market centering round the firm with a radius of more or less 10 kms. and only in special cases it is sent to market beyond that limit. This character of functioning within a narrow market prevents it to assume the attributes of a national industry, not even a state industry. At the same time, the narrow market does not give rise to any complexity either, hard to solve, infact marketing problem is no hurdle.

In the process of urbanisation of the country this industry is playing no insignificant role. But no serious study of the industry has been undertaken till now. Its study is beset with problems arising out, mainly, of its localised character. Being of localised nature the industry functions in a specific socio-economic context. The socio-economic context differs from region to region; there is no national or state socio-economic context. Keeping these facts in view we decided to study the industry by using the case study method. For the present study Uttarpara Industrial area of Hooghly District of West Bengal has been selected.

In Hooghly District of West Bengal, we find that Brick industry is located in Uttarpara Industrial belt, comprising of Bhadrakali, Kotrung, Uttarpara and Makhla areas. We selected the area because this industry was located here as early as 1856 and till now is operating. When we look into the pages of history, we find that prior to year 1856, there was no brick firm in the area. The industry had its inception through the initiative of the Corporation of Calcutta. Calcutta Corporation acquired a plot of land measuring 257 Bighas on the Western side of the Ganges to manufacture brick to feed its own needs"³. The endeavour of the Calcutta Corporation gave the first fillip to remove geographic inertia to the industry.

Besides the historical factor the surrounding area from the very beginning provided a ready market for the products. Though initially the Calcutta Corporation was the main user of bricks produced in the area but soon industrial enterprises came up in a good stride in the area creating additional demand in the brick market. As the industrialisation process moved forward the urbanisation process was not far off to come. Factory and house construction activities moves hand in hand and the brick industry received great fillip. Thus from then on this area became one of the most important centres of brick making.

3 "Municipal Calcutta - Its institutions in their origin and growth" Compiled by S.W.Goode, page - 319, Edinburgh - 1916.

Furthermore, it has remained unorganised and works as a small unit. Despite of its smallness and unorganised nature, it has potentiality to contribute to the national economy in terms of employment though its contribution has low visibility. Because of this low visibility researcher's attention has not been drawn to this area of study. In this context we propose to study this industry not at the aggregate level but at a micro or area level. The problem we like to handle is stated in the following lines.

The brick producing units functioning in the area are of different sizes in terms of capital investment and employment volume and they are run as family business by people with little professional skill. This character of the industry prevents it to be mechanised and to derive the benefits of large scale mechanised industry, and compels it to remain traditional. Seasonal nature of the industry is also another factor to reckon with. Despite the exterior similarity all the units of industry functioning in the area are not equally efficient in utilising the inputs. This difference in efficiency, it is believed, is caused by certain objective factors working within each unit. As a consequence each unit experiences different outcomes. We have addressed ourselves to this differentiating efficiency and have attempted to find out the forces working behind it. The net effect of the situation has also been analysed in terms

of revenue earned by them. While doing so we have categorised the working units in terms of capital investment and volume of employment.

Methodology Used:

Basically, case study method has been used in studying the problem. All the 56 brick fields operating in the area have been thoroughly investigated by administering unstructured questionnaire. The information sought relate to volume of investment, volume of employment, source of labour supply, types of labour employed and their skill, source and method of collection of raw materials, technology used, type of tasks involved in brick making process, capacity of the kiln, annual total production volume, varieties and volume of products produced in a season, cost and revenue per 1,000 bricks of different varieties, socio economic back-grounds of the owners , housing arrangements at the field site for labourers, nature of ownership and forms of business. It was supplemented by personal interviews with owners and employees of the firms. By investigating all the operative units we have collected huge data of the industry. We suspect that information relating to production volume, cost structure and revenue are not as accurate as we desired them to be. Proverbially, Indian entrepreneurs, specially the smaller ones, hesitate to share business information with researchers as they suspect that ultimately the information would reach the Government and would

be used against their interest. In our attempt to cross check the accuracy of financial data we sought access to the books of accounts but with little success.

The investigation covers a period from 1970-71 to 1979-80. The selection of the period is not based on any specific condition experienced by the industry; rather immediacy was the reason for the selection of the particular period.

In the face of the kind of problems noted above we have made an honest endeavour to reconstruct a faithful picture of the operations and relative efficiency of the firms operating in Uttara Para Industrial belt. We are hopefully sure that a reliable statement about the industry has been made in the following pages. Simultaneously, we are aware that we are not in a position to generalise beyond the Uttara Para Brick Industry. Nonetheless this picture of the specific segment of the industry would help us to understand, explain and predict the problems the brick industry as a whole.
