

## CHAPTER - IV

### THE NATURE OF JOB AND THE EMPLOYMENT PATTERN

Brick making is a simple craft and a labour-intensive industry which fits well into the existing pattern of rural life. It is estimated that the brick industry annually provides employment to over 20 lakhs workers in the whole country. Generally, the labour during the off season, when not engaged in agriculture, is employed for brick making. It provides durable construction materials to meet local needs by utilising local raw materials and labour from far off places. The creation of immovable assets - houses and buildings - also in turn contribute significantly to the employment market.

Being a seasonal industry the job of brick making is such that, it can not afford to recruit a permanent work force but before the production season starts it desires to ensure the supply of required number of work hands. The worker should have at least an acquaintance with the nature of job or be intelligent enough to pick up the necessary skill quickly. For the purpose the brick field resorts to a system of labour recruitment known as "Sardari" system. Before the system is analysed and commented upon it seems necessary to delineate the nature of job involve in brick making.

#### Nature of Job/Tasks :

On the basis of practices followed by the brick fields, the tasks involved in brick making can be classified and grouped under following categories:

- (i) Planning of the season's total work and the general supervision of all tasks performed in the brickfield. The owner-manager or his whole time employee does it. The personnel who does this supervisory work can be labelled as Supervisor.
- (ii) The tasks involved from the stage of soil excavation to the stage of loading the kiln are larger in number and covered the longest period of the brick season. The tasks of unloading the kiln after bricks are burnt is also included in this category. The entire work is supervised primarily by two persons - the Commissioned person and Contractor I (of whom will be spoken later on) under the overall guidance of Supervisor.
- (iii) The third category of task includes construction, fitting and shifting, when necessary, of the chimney. Contractor II supervises this task which is executed by the supplier of the chimney. The Supervisor keeps an eye over it when it is being executed.
- (iv) The burning of green bricks is the most important tasks which determines both the quality and quantity of final products. It demands special skill. It is crucial in the sense that profitability of the brickfield depends much on it. Contractor II in main does it. The Supervisor oversees activities of Contractor II.

(v) The burnt bricks after being unloaded by the main of the Contractor I are assorted into grades. The profitability of the brickfield largely depends on the efficiency of the graders. It is supervise by Contractor II under the general guidance of the Supervisor.

Each task group is described in the following paragraphs:

Task of the Supervisor :

Task of the Supervisor includes a variety of activities. He is generally regarded as an expert in planning of the annual production, construction of the kiln and production of bricks.

His tasks are:

- i) to prepare the annual plan for the field,
- ii) to contract for workhands for the coming production season,
- iii) to connect the siltpits with the Ganges through channel,
- iv) to make arrangements for construction of the kiln,
- v) to guide soil excavation and the process of production which is performed under the supervision of Commissioned person and Contractor I respectively,

- vi) the moulded green bricks are arranged for sundrying by the moulders under the direct supervision of Contractor I. The Supervisor is required to keep a visilant eye over the tasks.
- vii) to help the Contractor II in assessing the quality of burnt bricks and grading them,
- viii) to guide Contractor II in the process of burning in the kiln,
- ix) to execute sale and to arrange delivery to the buyer's site,
- x) to maintain accounts of the field, and
- xi) to make arrangements for the security of the assets of the field.

Task of Commissioned Person :

Aluvial soil deposited in the silt pit is the basic raw-material of the industry. Commissioned Person's task involve the excavation of the deposited alluvial silt with his men.

Task of Contractor I :

The job of Contractor I includes the supervision of the tasks related to the preparation of soil, carrying it to pugmill, making of the bricks, arranging for sundrying in a manner that eases the task of carrying them to the kiln and counting of them and unloading the kiln.

Under the supervision and instructions of the Contractor I, his men prepare the soil and add water to make the clay suitable for production. He has also the task of instructing the process of adding sand in the mould box for production of bricks and determining the degree of pressure to be exerted over the soft clay after it has been inserted into the mould box, so that the perfect brick is produced.

The moulded green bricks require sun drying. He gives suggestion about the time period for drying up of each side. Under his supervision moulders arrange the bricks in row when the drying is complete. He counts the green bricks in the presence of the Supervisor.

The sundried bricks are stack into the kiln for burning which is commonly referred to as 'Loading the kiln'.

The actual loading is carried on by labourers brought by him under his supervision. The loading process being mechanical in nature he has to be prompt in supervisory duty. A short detailed of the task seems necessary. When labourer are deployed for carrying the green bricks inside the kiln he counts the number of times each one enters into the kiln with a fixed number of bricks. A ticket is given to each labourer at the time of his/her return journey after depositing the bricks to Belders. Tickets of two different colours - one main for male and other for female workers - are used. The reason for using such a token system is necessitated by the fact that

male workers usually carry double the number of bricks than the female workers. The loaders deposit their tokens into a box kept for the purpose. Contractor I afterwards takes out the tokens and counts them to compute the number carried by each worker as well as to ascertain the total number of bricks loaded into the kiln.

The burnt bricks are brought out by the men of Contractor I. Unloaded bricks are again counted and the method of counting is the same as that adopted at the time of loading. The task of Contractor I ends at this point.

#### Task of Contractor II :

Contractor II performs several supervisory tasks under the overall guidance and instructions of the supervisor.

The chimney fitted to the kiln is a crucial instrument in the brick making process. This instrument needs to be constructed in such a manner that smoke passes out properly through it; if for some reasons smoke stays in the chimney. The fire quality will deteriorate. This job not only requires special skill but also keen observing ability. He supervises the tasks associated with fitting of the chimney.

The chimney construction under goes a few stages :

a) Manufactured chimney is received at the field from the manufacturer in a knock-down condition in three parts;

b) According to the specific need of the kiln, the height of the chimney is determined and the three knock-down parts are assembled with the help of special plates and rivets;

c) Wrapwool is put along the inner wall of the chimney to stop the absorption of corrosive super heated water vapour leaking out through the joints of the chimney, that causes immense damage to the outer wall of the chimney.

A single field for a single season requires four chimneys.

The price of the finished bricks depends much upon the degree of burning and shape. The fireman works under the direct guidance and instruction of Contractor II.

After unloading the burnt bricks they are graded into five categories, namely, class I, class II, class III, Jhama (overburnt) and Amha (underburnt & broken). This task is significant from the marketing point of view. The grading task is done by labourers brought by Contractor I under the supervision of Contractor II. For grading there is no Universly agreed upon set of criteria, Contractor II on the basis of long personal experience does it.

#### Tasks of the Operatives :

The rank and file workers may be divided into eight main classes (i) 'Bundh' Makers, (ii) Soil Excavator, (iii) Green Brick Producer, (iv) Loaders, (v) Belders, (vi) Chimney Workers, (vii) Firemen and (viii) Unloaders.

Before the manufacturing season starts in autumn some preliminary tasks are to be performed. The bricks in Uttarpara Industrial belt are manufactured from alluvial soil of the Ganges (Bhaghirathi). For the regular supply of this basic input of the Brick Industry of the belt, one important preliminary task involves connecting the silt pits with the Ganges through a channel. Through this channel with the high ebb and tide of the river, the water mixed with silt enters into the pit and slowly settle. During rains, necessary works are undertaken to keep the channel operative. Just before the brick manufacturing season the channel is disconnected by a 'bundh' and the water of the pit is siphoned out. For repairing, cleaning and keeping the channel between the silt pit and the river in operative condition and for disconnecting the channel casual labourers are engaged. These labourers are called Bundh makers, unlike earlier period, the labourers for the work are engaged from the neighbouring areas and do not come through any Sardar or Commissioned person.

The brick manufacturing season actually starts as soon as the labourers are engaged to excavate the deposited alluvial soil of the silt pit. In fact, after disconnecting the channel by a bundh the deposited water is pumped out of the pit, if natural decantation does not help and a few days elapse after which the water contents of the silt diminishes and the clay is ready for excavation. For excavating soil from the pit labourers are engaged

The excavated soil is carried and deposited near the pugmill. It may be pointed out here that these workers, being base line workers, are engaged in advance of the season. Usually, the excavators are drawn from two districts of the state - South 24 Parganas and Midnapore. They come through the commissioned person. After fixation of the excavators the facilities like loading etc., for them are made at the site.

In order to get good bricks the clay is required to be prepared well with Spade and shovel the soil is preliminarily prepared and then is introduced into the pugmill for the final preparation. After the clay is finally prepared, it is carried to the ground where bricks are produced with the help of moulds. The moulded green bricks are sun dried. The workers engaged in this aspect of brick making are called green Brick Makers. The work of the Green Brick producer is complete with the completion of drying.

After Sun drying green bricks from the field are carried to the 'Bhata' (kiln) for further processing. In this course of action some workers are deployed who are generally known as 'Loaders'. They carry the bricks to the 'Bhata' (kiln) and hand it over to 'Belders' for arranging them in the 'Bhata'(kiln). Here one thing may be pointed out that during carrying the kachcha bricks to the Bhata (kiln) care is most important, otherwise the number of broken bricks may be very high. Generally special attention is also given to the selection of the right type of loaders.

As mentioned earlier, the work of arranging the bricks in Bhata (kiln) requires some special attention and special skill. The reason for such special attention is that the bricks in Bhata (kiln) should get the optimum amount of heat from the fire place. This job is done by 'Belders' who arrange the bricks into the 'Bhata' (Kiln) after they have been brought in by the loaders. Unless the 'Belders' maintain the speed in arranging the bricks in the Bhata (kiln) with that in which the loaders bring the bricks the rythm of the work will be broken. As the number of Belders is less than that of the loaders the former is required to work with faster speed and promptness. The jobs of the Belders demand not only promptitude but also attention and skill and without these personal qualities the Belders, can not assure high quality of the finished products.

In the construction of the Bhata (kiln) the chimney plays the crucial role. The chimney, manufactured by outsiders is brought to the worksite in knocked down condition and assembled and installed. The assembling and installation involved shaping of the blades and riveting of them. The casual workers engaged for this particular job are called chimney workers.

The fire man, another type of rank and file worker, is responsible for burning the bricks. The profitability of the Brick field largely depends upon the quality of burning. Usually, skilled Firemen come from Uttar Pradesh. Their job

involves a few task, viz. putting slack coal inside the 'Bhata' (kiln) firing the coal with wood-fuel and putting extra coal when and where necessary. The most trying part of the job is putting additional coal in the Bhata for maintaining the continuity of burning for which they are required to walk upon the most heated part of the Bhata. To ensure the continuity of burning they have to work day and night without break. Usually, four firemen in two groups work in two shifts of twelve hours duration. They should possess a special skill to understand whether the burning of the bricks is completed by seeing the colour of the fire and to decide whether any further amount of coal is to be added for the completion of burning.

The job of unloaders, the last type of workers, is associated with unloading the burnt bricks from the Bhata. After the burnt bricks are graded them unloaders arrange them in accordance with their grades. These unloaders usually come from Bihar. Now the bricks are ready for marketing.

#### Employment Pattern :

Now the Sardar system is described in following paragraphs:

(a) Sardar of Bihar : Sardar of Bihar himself is a tribal and is involved in recruiting people from the tribal majority area of Bihar. The Sardar enters into two set of - One Contracts with the people and another with the brick-fields. Thus the mediates between labour force and brick field owners. He is

in sole charge of the people he brings in. He brings them at end of October or in the month of November when the season begins and guides them throughout the season and works with them as a fellow worker and returns with them when the season of the 'Bhata' ends usually on the onset of the rainy season. The workers whom the Sardar brings are of tribal origin. The men and women in most of the gangs are equal in numbers and almost all of them are married couples. All the men and women are very stout and possess robust physique. The nature of their work demands the possession of well-built body. Their jobs include preparation of clay through pugmill, taking the prepared clay to the moulding area, moulding of bricks, arranging the green bricks for sundrying, loading and unloading the Bhata (kiln). This Sardar be labelled as Contractor I.

(b) Sardar of Uttar Pradesh : The other 'Sardar' is a person of Uttar Pradesh. He brings workers specialised in burning the 'Bhata' (kiln). Generally the Sardar brings a set of four workers for each field. Their skill is of vital importance so far as the burning of bricks in the 'Bhata' is concerned. Their skill lies in their understanding of the completion of roasting by observing the colour of the fire in the 'Bhata'. The Sardar of Uttar Pradesh like their counterparts from Bihar enters into two sets of contracts - One with the workers they will be bringing and the other with the brick field owners. They also work for a number of fields for a long number of years.

In addition to supervisory work the themselves also work as fireman. But unlike Sardars from Bihar they do not bring coolies and the hands they bring are not tribal. This Sardar be called as Contractor II.

(c) The Commissioned Person from West Bengal : During the last three decades or so people of the state are being engaged in one phase brick making. Usually, a person known as Commissioned Person enters into a contract with more than one brick-field owners to supply the soil excavators for a season. The Commissioned Person previously used to hail from South 24 Parganas in West Bengal. Recently, people from district of Midnapore are entering into contract for supplying excavators. The Commissioned Person through a contract engages excavators drawn from their own area of residence. They also contract with a number of fields for supplying excavators. The excavators belong to schedule caste and are skilled and experienced in excavating soil. The Commissioned Person brings a number of gangs, each consisting of about 50 people, and one gang is placed under the disposal of a brickfield. He supervises the work of each gang working in brick fields spread over the area. This work-force is brought by the end of February or at the beginning of March.

In conclusion, it may be said that though the employment in the industry is seasonal, the same set of people works in a brick field year after year and employ the same kind of

traditional skill. As the Production technology is used in the industry remains the same over the last hundred years or so the workers are not required to acquire any new skill. Further, even the deterioration in employment opportunity within the state has not necessitated the replacement of the out state workers by the insiders.