ABSTRACT

Bricks are produced at the cottage, village and rural enterprise levels with traditional production technologies which vary with the size and scale of production. Almost all operations are manual like moulding, drying, stacking, arranging and firing of the green bricks. Brick industry is labour intensive and it creates a larger number of jobs for agricultural labourers particularly during the slack agricultural season. Brick industry is generally energy intensive and bricks are fired by using various sources of fuels. These fuels include firewood, sawdust, coconut shell, etc. It is a well-known fact that clay is the basis for brick production. Local clay is used to produce bricks. Sand is sometime added to get the right properties. Clay is either dug from the owner's land or from fields or ponds or tanks or bank of the river. Fired bricks are visually sorted and graded into first, second and third class bricks. Bricks are graded according to the quality of burning and breakages and all of them stacked separately and the pricing varies per thousand bricks.

With this background, an attempt has been made for a detailed analysis and understanding of the traditional brick units in Madurai district, with the following objectives: (i) to study the socio-economic status of traditional brick unit entrepreneurs in Madurai district; (ii) to analyse the cost-function (cost-output relations) of the traditional brick units in terms of their location and production size; (iii) to examine the nature of labour employment and the wage structure in the traditional brick units; (iv) to find out the optimum production size of the traditional brick units for attaining the Break-Even Point; and (v) to identify the problems, if any, faced by the traditional brick units and suggest suitable measures for improving the operational efficiency of traditional brick units.

This study, by its very nature, is an empirical and descriptive one, confining to the traditional brick units, functioning in seven taluks, namely, Madurai South, Madurai North, Melur, Vadipatti, Usilampatti, Thirumangalam, and Peraiyur of Madurai district, Tamil Nadu, India. This study is mainly based on primary data, collected through a well-structured and pre-tested interview schedule that has been administered to elicit information and data from traditional brick unit entrepreneurs. The primary data at the traditional brick units' level collected by
interviewing 307 traditional brick unit entrepreneurs, who are involved in production of bricks in the year 2003. The researcher had adopted the well-known census method and contacted 307 traditional brick units entrepreneurs in Madurai District. Simple averages, percentages, correlation and managerial economics tool like Break Even Analysis has been used for data analysis and interpretation of the data. This kind of study could open the eyes of the governments (Local, State and Centre) which can formulate suitable policy for sustainable development of traditional brick units in the near future.

Major findings of this study are: (i) Brick industry is a male dominated industry: most of the brick unit entrepreneurs are literate and they are motivated by family members; (ii) Many of the brick units are unregistered and the location of these units are determined by the availability of raw materials and market facilities; (iii) Annual production of bricks is Rs.835.4 lakhs, of which 92% of the bricks rated as first class, 4% rated as second class. 3% as broken bricks and 1% treated as waste; (iv) The brick units burn the bricks on an average for 7 times a year; (v) The average price per 1000 bricks of first and second class bricks is Rs.1020 and Rs.490 respectively; (vi) The variable cost (93.6%). is the major cost that decide the cost of production of the bricks. Of the variable cost, the fire wood cost constitutes a major share followed by labour and raw materials cost: (vii) The cost function data show that the cost of production of thousand bricks ranges from Rs.722 to Rs.788; (viii) The labour productivity per firing is 373; (ix) The wage per worker is Rs.78 per clay; and (x) The sales value of bricks per unit is Rs.2.61 lakhs. Traditional brick unit activities are not under the purview of governments policies, rules and regulations, and therefore appropriate steps are to be taken by the governments to register all the traditional brick units under D1C.

The outcome of the study has been presented in five chapters which, covers synopthesis of the study, Science of Bricks, Review of Literature, Discussion and Results and Summary of Findings, Suggestions and Conclusion.