ABSTRACT

The leather industry in India is a fast growing industry and occupies an important place in Indian economy. The industry has existed in traditional form from very ancient times. Marcopolo mentioned about the dressing of skins of various kinds in the State of Gujarat. The Rig Veda refers to tanners and skins of animals and manufacture of leather products by Indian artisans. The Mochies (cloggers) carried the profession of tanning and making of leather wares since ancient times.

The first attempt in India in an organized manner towards factory tanning and large-scale manufacture of leather goods was made in the United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh) in 1867. The government established a unit in Kanpur for tanning and making harness leather for the Indian army.

In 1881, another tanning and shoe-making factory was set up at Kanpur by M/s Cooper Allen. They tanned hides and skins and manufactured civilian and military footwear according to western mechanized methods. These factories in Kanpur met the demand of the military during the war for leather goods to a very large extent. As a result, the leather industry got a fillip and several tanneries equipped with machinery were started at Kanpur, Chennai and Kolkata.

In the late eighteenth century, the East India Tanning Company was the first entry into the leather trade. It started operating in South India.

The leather industry of India got a stimulus for development by the First World War. The industry which consisted of the activities of tanning and manufacture of leather goods, found a
spurt in demand for army boots and other military leather goods requirements. Agra served as one of the big headquarters for Indo British Army which needed leather for boots and sundry other items for the armed forces. This resulted in the development of Agra as a footwear industry. After the First World War the demand of leather products decreased but the outbreak of Second World War again gave a good fillip to the tanning industry.

During 1960s, a large quantity of hides and skins in the country was converted into semi-tanned leather. In the beginning of the 1970s, the government realized that the country had the capacity to manufacture finished leather. Hence, export of semi-finished leather was discouraged. The industry was encouraged to adopt the latest technology.

During the 1980s, there were many changes, viz., modernization of production processes, improvement of human skills, standardization of quality of products, these all changes proved to be turning point in the development of leather industry.

During the 1990s, the Exim Policy favoured export of value added leather products and duty free import of all types of leather was allowed. This helped a lot in the development of footwear industry. Since 2000, the increasing demand of footwear from foreign countries, government policy support, etc., have been giving strength to footwear industry.

Many institutions have been established by the Government of India for the development of leather industry, such as, CLRI, CFTI, FDDI, NLDP, CLE, etc. The result is that Chennai and other places around Chennai, such as, Ranipet, Ambur, Dindigul, etc., and other cities like Mumbai, Kolkata and Delhi emerged as new centres for manufacture of footwear. Agra and Kanpur, traditional centres for manufacture of footwear, are also on their way to
modernization and are developing fast.

In terms of quantum, annually 1,640 million pairs of footwear are produced which consists of 960 million pairs of non-leather footwear and 680 million pairs of leather footwear. After China, India is the second largest producer of footwear.

The footwear industry is labour oriented and spread over the organized as well as unorganized sectors. A large part (nearly 60-65%) of production of leather products is in the small/cottage sectors. The industry employs 2.5 million people mostly from the weaker section of the society and women folk.

Agra is ranked a major footwear production centre in India and a large part of world requirement is met by this city only. The footwear industry in Agra exists mainly in the form of cottage units. The welfare of workers in this industry assumes significance as they form a sizeable chunk of Indian labour population.

Fair wages, good working conditions, health and safety measures are essential for the welfare of industrial worker. Developed countries like America and Japan, provide all facilities to their labour. The productivity of labour in these countries is higher and the output is larger and the countries avail economies of efficiency. But labour are considered as servants in our country and their normal entitlements of welfare, health, safety, etc., are ignored.

A number of labour laws and welfare schemes have been enacted for the welfare of labour but the employers ingeniously circumvent them. The condition of labour in Agra footwear industry is far from being satisfactory. They work in dirty atmosphere that affects their health and efficiency. As a result, the labour productivity and output also decrease.

A comprehensive study on labour problems in footwear
industry of Agra district needs to be conducted. Studies, which particularly focus on labour problems in footwear industry of Agra district, are negligible. Hence, the present study covering this topic aims at breaking new grounds in the 21st Century so as to highlight the plight of labour of Agra footwear industry and to suggest measures for alleviating their sufferings.

The study has been divided into seven chapters. Chapter-I gives a brief introduction of footwear industry, mentions the need and importance of the study, sets out the objectives, hypothesis, research methodology and limitations of the study. Chapter-II deals with the synoptic view of footwear industry in India, location of tanneries in various parts of India, major footwear producing cities in India, world footwear industry, export of footwear from India, etc. Chapter-III traces the shoe production technique of the manufacturers. Chapter-IV discusses the development of footwear industry in Agra, number of workers employed in Agra footwear industry, export of footwear from Agra, weaknesses of Agra footwear industry, etc. Chapter-V makes an analysis of the legislative provisions of welfare measures and security. Chapter-VI brings to fore the problems of labour in Agra footwear industry and application of various legislative provisions. Chapter-VII draws conclusions and presents suggestions for the improvement of working conditions of labour in Agra footwear industry.

The study finds that Agra is the largest market for closed shoes (finished and unfinished) in Asia. About 2,00,000 pairs of footwear are produced in Agra per day. Footwear uppers are also produced in Agra on a large scale. 60% of footwear produced in Agra is used for domestic consumption and 40% is exported. It employs a workforce of 2,00,000 male and female workers.
In every industrially advanced country of the world, rights and privileges of labour have been sought to be secured mainly through labour legislation. In India, too, various labour related Acts exist to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of all workers, to provide and maintain plant and systems of work in the factory without risks, to make arrangements for ensuring social security to employees, to provide necessary information and training for the health and safety of all workers, and to maintain safe working environment in the factory, etc.

But the manufacturers do not follow these provisions. The measures related to safety, welfare and social security need to be implemented in every industry, and the leather footwear industry of Agra is no exception.

During the course of investigation, the scholar noticed that the working environment in registered companies is better than small-scale and cottage units, but a major part of factories in Agra belong to small-scale and cottage units.

A large part of labour in footwear industry is found to be illiterate. This is the reason that they are not aware of their legislative benefits and are being exploited in the hands of employers.

The following findings emerge with respect to labour conditions in Agra footwear industry.

1) The labour in Agra footwear industry work in unhygienic conditions and dirty atmosphere. There is lack of proper cleanliness in most of the footwear units. The atmosphere in almost all the unregistered units is found to be unhygienic.

2) There is inadequacy of proper ventilation in Agra footwear industry. The condition of ventilation is somewhat good in a
few factories but the rooms in many factories are found to be small and congested.

3) Adequate temperature is not maintained in most of the footwear units. Further, the place where workers work, is found to be congested.

4) There is no arrangement of suitable and adequate lighting in Agra footwear industry. The natural lighting is also inadequate. The lighting is found to be sufficient in all the registered companies taken for survey.

5) The condition of latrines and spittoons is found to be quite unsatisfactory in Agra footwear industry. Neither these have been constructed properly nor are cleaned with detergent.

6) The noise problem is also found. Some of the footwear factories in Agra are on the main road. The vehicles running on the road create noise. When generator is started, it creates a lot of noise. All this type of noise affects the health of workers.

7) Drinking water facility is also not up to the mark. Only the employers of registered companies have kept water coolers. Earthen Pots (Pitchers) are found in common use in unregistered units.

8) All the welfare facilities are found neither in registered companies nor in unregistered units. Even the registered companies in Agra are providing only a few welfare facilities to their labour and that too is unsatisfactory. Non-statutory welfare measures are not adopted by most of the Agra footwear manufacturers.

9) Necessary safety measures like fire extinguishers, training to workers, etc., are not found in most of the footwear units taken for survey.
10) The workers are deprived of social insurance and social assistance in Agra footwear industry. Various social security schemes are not available for workers in all the registered companies taken for survey. Hence, the workers engaged in the manufacturing of footwear cannot avail the benefits under these Acts.

11) The scheme of Family Pension-Cum-Life Insurance is also applicable to the footwear industry. But the labour are not getting any benefit from this scheme.

12) The wages provided to labour is not enough to meet both their ends. Footwear manufacturers in Agra are following neither the The Minimum Wages Act, 1948 nor The Payment of Wages Act 1936. Further, the workers are not getting bonus, dearness allowance, gratuity, etc. Only the manufacturers of registered units were providing reasonable wages to their labour.

13) Most of the workers live in slums. The facility of water, ventilation, lighting, etc., is far from satisfactory in the slums. The manufacturers of registered companies have not given housing facility to their labour.

14) It is revealed by the survey that trade unions, though supposed to be the main well-wisher of workers, are just on paper. The labour being unorganized, have not formed their trade unions in Agra.

15) The labour are feeling job insecurity due to insufficient availability of raw materials.

16) A large part of workers are found under debt. They were in the clutches of the money lenders.

Agra footwear industry can progress rapidly if due attention is given to the human aspect of the industry. The following
suggestions are being made with a view to solving problems of labour and improving the working conditions and environment in footwear industry of Agra.

1) The floor inside the factory should be pucca. The Government should give instruction to footwear manufacturers to build pucca floor inside the factory. Dust and dirt should be removed daily and dustbins should be kept.

2) The legal provision for creating windows and ventilation in the rooms should be strictly enforced by the concerned authorities. If it is not possible for manufacturers to build windows, etc., for proper ventilation, artificial ventilation should be maintained.

3) The manufacturers should bring down the temperature to a bearable level for the workers during summer season. During winter season, the temperature should be kept warm by suitable heating system. The senior officers should make frequent visits to various factories to check the conditions of temperature and humidity in the factories.

4) Adequate lighting should be available near the place where the workers work. Side windows should be built in the factories for natural lighting.

5) The number of latrines in all the footwear units should be increased. The employers are advised to construct separate latrines for male and female workers. These should be cleaned properly. Spittoons at convenient places should also be provided to workers.

6) To check noise pollution, the generators should be located far from the work area to a separate distant place. There
should be separate rooms for machine operators and manual workers.

7) For the good health of labour, unpolluted and safe drinking water should be available for them.

8) The manufacturers of registered companies should provide all the legislative welfare facilities to their workers. The employers who are not providing the minimum welfare facilities as prescribed under the law, should be strictly dealt with. The State Government should also formulate various schemes for the welfare of the labour. The workers should be provided group insurance.

9) The manufacturers should set up fire extinguishers in their factories. The officers of the Safety Department should visit the factories and see that whether various laws and provisions relating to safety of workers are being followed or not.

10) The government should strictly order the employers to follow safety measures. They should also check the records to see if the manufacturers earmark the money for the employees' social benefit or not. If employers are found to be neglecting, strict action should be taken against them.

11) The industry, the State Government, the Central Government and the workers should cooperate to establish a fund for the social security benefits of the workers. When any worker dies, retires or becomes invalid for work, he and his family should get either a lump-sum amount or a sort of monthly pension to support himself and his family.

12) The officers of Wage Board should visit the footwear units frequently to inspect whether the employers are paying reasonable and fair wages to workers or not. The officers
should also check the financial accounts of the factories to find out the actual profit available for distribution as bonus to the labour.

13) There is a need to build low cost houses for the workers. The municipality should also provide to such housing colonies with water, light and drainage facilities.

14) The idea of Works Committee and Joint Management councils should be popularized. This will help in improving the relations between the two, i.e., the employer and the employees.

15) In order that the atmosphere inside the factory should be friendly, the manufacturers should organize periodical get together with workers.

16) Scarcity of raw material is a factor that causes job insecurity in labour. The government should re-open the closed tanneries by setting effluent treatment plants. The employers should convince their labour that their job is permanent and that they will not be turned out of their job without any specific reason.

17) To solve the problem of indebtedness, Co-operative Credit Societies should be established by the State Government to extend credit facilities to labour. The labour should be given the retirement and old age benefits.

The solution of labour problems is important, both to the industry and to the workers’ community at large. No industry can develop without the co-operation of labour. To ensure better cooperation, the worker should be allowed to have his due share in the profit for increased production.