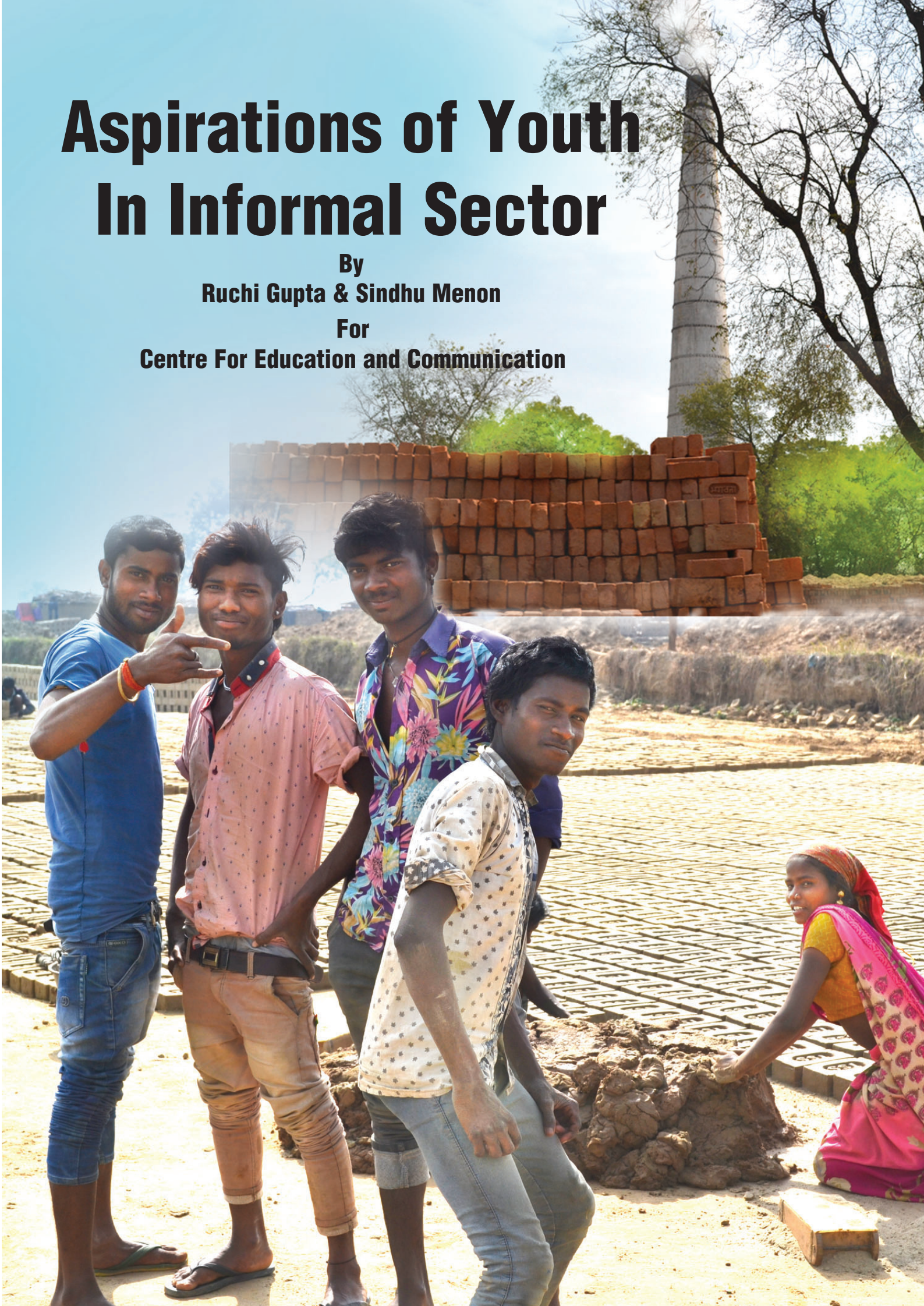


Aspirations of Youth In Informal Sector

By
Ruchi Gupta & Sindhu Menon
For
Centre For Education and Communication



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Ruchi Gupta & Sindhu Menon



Introduction

Aspirations of Youth In Informal Sector

Global youth population today is at its highest ever. One in six persons in the world today is a youth. India lies at the cusp of a demographic transition with a youth size of 354.4 million and constitutes 27.5% of the total population in the country. The youth bulge, between 15-29 years, can be utilized as a demographic dividend for the nation only if appropriate and adequate development measures for youth is undertaken (National Youth Policy Document, 2014).

According to an International Labour Organisation (ILO) study on Global Employment Trends for Youth 2017: Paths to a better working future says, in developing countries, as many as 19 in every 20 young men and women work in the informal economy and globally 76.7% of working youth are in informal jobs as compared with 57.9% of working adults. In India, Informal employment is one of the main reason for working poverty especially amongst youth. The report also cautions that the 'youth employment challenge is not just about job creation but also- even more so- about the quality of work and decent jobs for youth'. This may imply not only lack of decent work conditions but also low wages/ remuneration for the youth.

A problem that confronts all labour markets to some degree is informality, broadly understood as work arrangements with poorly enforced legal and social protections, generally low productivity, poor working conditions, usually low incomes and where workers and entrepreneurs generally have little voice and representation.¹

In the recent years, construction sector in India has absorbed more workers and there has been a shift out of agriculture. Between 1990-00 and 2011-12, rural non-farm employment has seen a considerable increase with construction sector accounting for 30.1% in 2011-12 of employment as compared to 14.4% in 1990-00.

An FAO report (Youth and Agriculture : Key Challenges and concrete solutions)² points out that the rural youth continues to face challenges related to unemployment, underemployment and poverty. Key challenges that the report identifies is the youth's insufficient access to knowledge, information and education. According to the report, productivity and acquisition of skills is limited by poor and inadequate education whereas the entrepreneurial ventures by insufficient access to information and knowledge.

The Study

Centre for Education and Communication has been implementing a project - Empowering CSOs for Decent Work and Green Bricks in India's Brick Kilns- since 2016 with the objective to increase the capacity of CSOs including human rights groups, labour organisations, child rights organisations, CSOs working on green technology, brick kiln manufacturers associations, workers' associations and local authorities to perform their roles more effectively to ensure inclusive 'decent work' in brick kilns and produce 'green' bricks. As part of this effort, CEC has been working with adolescents and children who accompany their parents for work to the brick kilns.

This study was an effort to understand the conditions of work in which the youth of today are engaged

¹ Jobs and skills for youth: Review of policies for youth employment in Mongolia, International Labour Office, Geneva, ILO, 2017

² Source: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i3947e.pdf>



in and bring out their voices- voices of concerns, of exploitation and aspirations, particularly from construction, stone quarries, agriculture and brick kilns. 20 profiles of youth was captured from brick kilns of Surir in Mathura, youth working as agricultural worker, construction worker and stone quarry workers in various regions of Agra.

Key Findings

Some of the aspirations gathered from a sample size of 20 youth workers across brick kilns, agriculture, construction and stone quarries:

48% responded that they aspire for a regular job in the organized sector, 24% responded that they look to more learning and skill enhancement opportunities whereas the remaining 28% said they do not aspire for professional growth as their mobility in work is significantly constrained by factors of caste and gender. 65% of the youth said that theirs is a caste based occupation and they were introduced to their work during their childhood.

Substantial vulnerabilities have been faced by the youth which leads to their exclusion from accessing improved labour market.

Education

Although 64% of them attended primary school, only 2 respondents have pursued/are pursuing higher studies. While most girls dropped out of school citing domestic responsibilities and undertaking care work, economic constraints of not being able to meet the costs of supplies (books, uniforms, fines) or of entering the work force for supplementing family income, migration of entire family for work and in some cases reasons have also been ecological distress of water shortage and crop loss which forced them to quit school. At a young age (at age less than 15) 92% of youth were introduced to the labour market.

In 2011-12, the unemployment rate of rural young men aged 15-19 is 8.9% whereas it is 12.8% for urban men. Similarly, for women aged between 20-24 years the unemployment rate in rural area was 6.3% and 18.8% in urban areas.³

Indebtedness and Restricted Mobility

From the respondents interviewed, 76% were under a debt either from the money lender in the village or from the labour contractor. They were working to repay the debt. While 80% of the youth in brick kilns migrated from other states to repay the advance they have taken, the youth working in stone quarries, construction and in agriculture did not consider migrating out of their village as they did not want to leave their land holdings (however marginal the holding is) and family behind. 40% of the working youth were married and they had the responsibility of taking care of their parents, siblings, wife and children. Caste was the common factor, which explains why over at least two generations, as some recalled, they have been doing the same work - be it pathai, jalai in the kilns, dhulai in quarries, mason, plumber in construction work and women as agricultural labour.

Fear and Insecurity of the Future

There is fear and insecurity in the future that they see from the current work they are engaged in. 70% youth seek a change from the work they are presently in. While occupational hazards like exposure to dust and to heat and inadequate compensation has been sited as the most common fear/reason to

³ India Labour Market Update, ILO Country Office for India, July 2016. Accessed from https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---sro-new_delhi/documents/publication/wcms_496510.pdf

seek a change amongst workers, work demanding too much physical labour was the next. 50% of the stone quarry workers have incurred huge debt to treat their father of TB/Silicosis, citing that the average life span of a stone quarry worker is not more than 45 years. 66% youth expressed that they constantly work under the fear of their wages being reduced and illegal deductions made from their payment, receiving untimely payment.

Working Conditions

Except for youth in brick kilns who get paid by piece rates, all others said they are paid differential wages. Because of the age and gender, the youth faces discrimination not only in terms of low wages but they are also given odd jobs by employers and senior co-workers without any payment, are subject to verbal and physical abuse.

Are they Better Off than their Parents

40% youth said they are better off than their parents due to the following reasons:

- Ability to find work in a factory or in a city during off season
- Increased social network because of mobile technology
- Scope for training and skilling

16% expressed that they are seeing the worse times, as land is getting increasingly fragmented and individuals hold marginal size which are unviable, they go hungry to bed more often now, shifting from a single employer to now multiple employers and contractors there are no avenues to meet contingencies.

Constraints to Work

Following are the constraints that the youth identified to decent working conditions:

1. Occupational hazards and risks
2. Low/absence of education
3. Lack of skills
4. Lack of high skills and capital for acquiring productions assets particularly for construction workers
5. Lack of labour market information
6. Lack of a continuous availability of work

A younger workforce is emerging, which now shares new demands, has greater aspirations and potentials, accesses technology better than their previous generation. They have greater sensitivity to hazards and risks at work place. Worker exposure to dust, heat, respirable suspended particulate matters calls for greater measures to be taken for worker health and safety. Besides training for safer operations, the workers need to be covered under social security with rightful entitlement to medical facilities and insurance. New developments in the industry vis a vis the overall environmental policies has begun to affect the work landscape. Operations at the stone quarries in Agra (visited for this study) were banned because of the direct impact of emissions from crushers on the Taj Mahal. The workers were the loaders or dhulai who were working to cut the stone to size and load them subsequently were anxious about the future of work. Similarly, the construction and brick kiln industry are also witnessing change given the strict enforcement of environmental norms so as to mitigate the negative impact they have on environment. The gradual shift in the brick manufacturing to a more energy efficient, lower emissions is also raising the demand for a skilled work force. Trainings on skills relevant to the labour market, life skills, skills for financial literacy irrespective of the educational qualification will improve individual capacities to overcome their vulnerabilities.

Strengthening institutions like that of employment exchange, so that reliable information reaches both the workers and the employers.



Conclusion

Brick Kilns as a Potential Green and Decent Job Industry

India being the second largest producer of bricks globally, with more than 100,000 brick kilns, relies heavily on the use of conventional Fixed Chimney Bull's Trench Kiln (FCBTK) technology. The brick industry is also known to be the second largest consumer of coal after the steel industry. It is because of the production technology used that results in large emission of suspended particulate matter and carbon.

Efforts to bring in cleaner and energy efficient technologies have been initiated in the country, and studies conducted have shown with the green technology, there has been a significant reduction in the emissions and consumption of fuel as well as improvement in the quality of bricks. This has resulted into increased profits for the entrepreneur.

A transition to clean and green technology will require more work force who are skilled and trained with the new technology. With acquisition of new skills the confidence level of the workers will get boosted and will place them in a better position to articulate more for a decent and fair wage. With the new technology, processes and practices and the resultant change in the working conditions will impact not the quality of employment alone but also social inclusion on a large scale.⁴

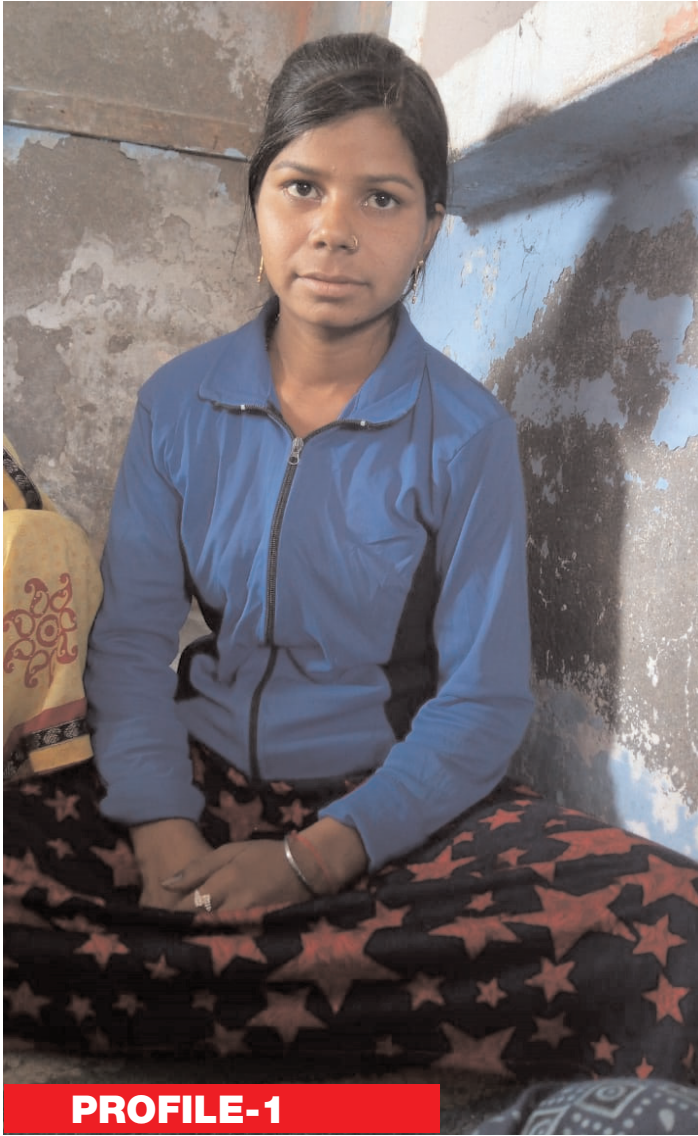
The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) defines green job and decent work as ' a green job reduces the environmental impacts of enterprises and economic sectors to sustainable levels, while providing decent work and living conditions to all those involved in production, and ensures workers' rights are respected. A decent job ensures safe work, fair wages, respect for women's rights and social protection.'

Adapting green technology makes brick kilns not only reduce their dependency on fuel and lower emission, but also addresses seasonality of production. Change in technology will have to be complemented with changes in the world of work by facilitating increase training opportunities particularly targeting the disadvantaged regions (mostly the source area for labour) and women, longer duration of employment as a result of continuous production, reliable and strong market information.

Some of the key demand side interventions that the youth have placed are- provision of safety tools and measures, accident free work place, reduced exposure to emissions, adequate compensation for workplace accidents and contracted diseases, health and medical facilities, fair wages, access to sanitation facilities, access to electricity and water .

"Sareer ghat jaata hai, magar pasand hei, mujhe Bhatta ka kaam. Kaam karte jao, paisa milta rehta hai", When Umesh Kumar, the 17 year old from Hamirpur district in Uttar Pradesh says this, he had expectations with life in kilns. He realises that for a semi-literate, village youth, with no opportunities at source, one of the major survival means are the kilns. There are many like him, who feels that if the kilns adapt for some positive changes the work atmosphere can change. In brick kilns workers taking advances are habitual and falling a prey to the system of bondage rampant. If Brick kilns demonstrate with improved and safe working conditions, increased access to labour market information, skill upgradation, improved earnings and provision of social security - can there be opportunities for youth to have a decent living and escape from debt bondage?

³ ILO: Sustainable development, decent work and green jobs, Report V, International Labour Conference, 102nd session, Geneva, 2013



PROFILE-1

Kamla Mahar

The Life of Kamla Mahar: Where Illiteracy and Ignorance Turns to be a Bliss in Disguise!

"I have never stepped out of my village and have no idea about how other places look like except for what I have seen on television or heard from my married friends," says Kamla Mahar, the nineteen year old seasonal agricultural labourer from Nangla Masjid in Agra district of Uttar Pradesh. "May be I'll be fortunate enough to migrate to one of the cities, when I get married off", says Kamla, with a glitter in her eyes.

Kamala began work as an agriculture labourer when she was barely 15. Last four years she has been working in the fields growing seasonal vegetables. She accompanies her mother, who works in different farm land as a daily wager cultivating crops like potatoes, onion, mustard, and a variety

of other seasonal vegetables. Her family have been engaged in doing agricultural work for years', following the tradition of her mother, grandmother and great grandmother.

Male members from Koli community are mostly construction workers and for women, agriculture is their livelihood, though they are mostly working on agriculture land owned by others. Kamla's family do not have agricultural land of their own,

“Though the amount of work is same we get less because we are considered as girls, hence not entitled for full wages

except for the semi pucca house in the basti.

Work for Kamla, begins early in the morning. She attends to all household chores, supporting her mother, before leaving for the work at the farm. Kamla is illiterate and was not fortunate enough to attend even a primary school. "My mother was unwell and the responsibility of all my younger siblings and the domestic work at home was bestowed on me", she says. "Besides, I was not keen on going to school nor studying. Why should I waste my time in school when I very well know that, like my mother, my life will be in some agricultural field or taking care of another family, when I get married", she says with disgust.

It was in the month of November when we met Kamla and she was busy in the farm planting potatoes. "Potatoes grow in cool season and it requires sufficient moisture and fertile soil", says the 19-year-old like an experienced farmer.

The work, she is involved with, while growing potatoes are manifold. The ground has to be prepared for cultivation. Using a hoe or a shovel, trenches - around 6 inch width and 8 inch deep - are dug in the field and organic manure is put at the bottom before planting the seed potatoes. "We



place potatoes in 3 ft gaps and cover it with mud. When the shoot comes out, we have to heap the plant with more mud", says Kamla. Regular weeding has to be done, plants will have to be watered, manure given on time and the plants have to be inspected and protected from insects and pests - all this is part of the families job. Around 12 to 13 girls of her age from the same village, work along with her. " I am happy with this work", says Kamala and the reason she points out is the comradery she enjoys working with her friends mostly of here age group. Kamla and her friends get Rs. 100 for their work, whereas the elders are paid Rs. 150. "Though the amount of work is same we get less because we are considered as girls, hence not entitled for full wages", says Kamla. Even though she enjoys working in the farm, she hates when the employer makes her attend to other odd jobs other than what she is supposed to. "At times we are asked to fetch water and sent to do small errands. They always cheat us by lying", says Kamla.

Kamla has never given a thought to migrate from the village in search of a job. During off season, she is into making anklets, which is a home based work. The employer/contractor gives her silver anklets in kgs and her job is to string ghungroos on to them and for every kg of anklets she is paid Rs 55 as her wages. Kamla says she enjoys this work too because she can work with her siblings, her friends often join her with their own quota of anklets.

When we sought Kamala's opinion on migrating to other places in search of job or working in a brick-kiln, she said that she had never thought of it, nor does she have any intention to do so. For her, the home in the village, her work in the agricultural farm and anklet making was the small happy world.

'I am sure that the nature of work in the farm will never change, because it was the same work my great grandmother did, and others followed, still continuing to do the same. As long as man need to eat there won't be any dearth in agricultural work", believes Kamala. She doesn't have exposure or information on anything outside the village, hence she has never given a thought of migrating in search of job, exploring different avenues or look for better prosperity in life.

Here, illiteracy and ignorance has helped them lead a simple life away from greed. A bliss in disguise!



PROFILE-2

Jitender Mahar

With Mounting Expectations for a Day's Work: Jitender Awaits at Labour Chowk

At a young age of 12, Jitender Mahar started working for a construction company at various construction sites. Now at twenty-five, he still continues to do the same work, a little elevated from the beldar (labourer) status to a mason. His father too was a mason, and it was he who introduced him to this work, as is the practice of the members of the Kohli Community. A majority of the male members of this community are into construction work, and they make sure that the baton of mason is passed on to their son.

"bahoot sapna tha hame, padneke baad kutch bada banneka. magar dekho abhi hum kya bana!" (We had lots of dream, to get educated and to become someone of importance. But, look

what have we become!) says Jitender dejectedly. Since his father often took him along as a helper to various sites, he had to drop out of school before completing his 8th standard. "hame hama-ra school bahouth pasand tha" (I liked my school very much), says a gloomy Jitender.

"Bachche kaam nahin karna hei didi", (Children should not work, sister) says Jitender. He pulls out a packet of tambaku (tobacco) and says he has been addicted to this since the age of 17, thanks to his fellow workers. Most children are fast to pick up all the bad habits, imitate the elders and follow their footsteps.

In a month, on an average, Jitender gets around 10 to 12 days of work. On work days, he gets Rs. 400 at the end of the day and the amount he gets is hardly enough to support his family.

Though jobless for more than half the month, Jitender is not willing to migrate for work through contractors. According to him, the condition of the workers hired by contractors are too pathetic. They do not get proper wages, they are made to stay in make-shift shelters with no proper water and sanitation facilities. His friends who have migrated shared with him their stories of

woes, violations and abuses. Besides, he says, he cannot leave his family in village and migrate in search of job. Since his father is no more, the responsibility of the household rests totally on his shoulders. He lives in Nangla Masjid, Agra, Uttar Pradesh, where he owns a pucca house, along with his mother, siblings and his wife. Being the only earning member of the family he really struggles to make ends meet.

Reflecting on his work Jitender says, "kaam karte waqt maalik se gaali sunna padtha hai" (At work we have to tolerate our employer's abuse). Abusing workers verbally, threatening them with wage cuts, with-holding wages for months are all common in work sites. Even then, Jitender feels

working at nearby places is much better, rather than struggling in some god-forsaken place.

Jitender is interested to seek a change from the construction work since he feels that there are health hazards involved with the work and no one compensates for any medical emergency. Cement dust and plaster from the construction sites results in irritation of lungs, cancer and skin diseases. Jitender is a victim of skin allergy. He is not much aware that construction work is closely associated with the issues of Asbestosis, silicosis, hypertension, Asthma, lung cancer, hearing loss, numbness of hands and fingers, sprain and rheumatism!

“There are no work opportunities in village. If there is a chance, it is only in brick kilns. But I don't like to work in kilns.

"kaam milneka avasar kam hei gaon mei. Mokka hei tho bhi who eent bhatthon mei hei. magar waham jaana mujhe achcha nahin lagtha" (there are no work opportunities in village. If there is a chance, it is only in brick kilns. But I don't like to work in kilns), says Jitender. He says, he would love to work in a factory but there are very few opportunities.

According to him, brick kilns are the only other work place options close to the village but they are situated too far off and with hardly any facilities avail-

able. If I stay in my village, I at least have access to medical services for myself and family.

When there is no work, Jitender's day starts by rushing to the labour chowk. "Hum sab nou-jawaan lok, baitha hei waham, inthesaar pe. aayega... ek na ek hume kaam pe lene.baitna hei, inthesaar karna hei.mazboori hei didi" (we, all youngsters, sits there at the labour chowk and wait... for someone to come, to offer us work... we have to sit, await... it's our compulsion, sister), says Jitender. What scares Jitender and most of the labourers like him is the painful experience of returning home empty handed and facing their loved ones.



PROFILE-3

Neha Mahar

Work Hard, Learn New Skills and be Financially Independent: The Motto of a 19-Year-Old Village Girl

Nineteen-year old Neha Mahar, hails from Nangla Masjid located in the district of Agra in Uttar Pradesh, she belongs to the kohli community. Neha was very fond of studying and regularly attended the local school till class 8th but had to drop out.

'Naya kuch seekhoge tho hi zindaghi me tarakee karsakte hai..'(Today Neha believes that financial independency and learning new skills are the most crucial things for improving life status).

For three months in a year Neha works as an agricultural labourer along with her mother, as is the general practice among the Koli women in vil-

lages. Belonging to a landless family, she works as a daily wager in neighbouring farm growing vegetables.

Neha, considers herself to be luckier than her elder siblings, who were deprived of school since the family was into homebased work of weaving carpets. Her elder sisters were solely into carpet weaving and the entire family were dependent on it for survival.

“Naya kuch seekhoge tho hi zindagi me tarakee Kar sakte hai..



But, when the child labour issue in the carpet weaving became a major concern and issue of debate, both national and internationally, the contractors who provided them work withdrew, which forced them to lean back on agriculture for survival. When her father died and sisters got married off, Neha had to quit school and support her mother with the agricultural work.

By the age of fifteen she was well versed in all aspects of farm work growing potatoes, mustard, onions etc working in various agricultural farms, where a majority of the workers were women. "I like the work in the farm, because my friends in village works along with me. We get enough time to chat", says a happy Neha. Besides, this work is the most accessible one for women. At the same time, Neha considers the work in the farm as too labour intensive and physically demanding, she says that she frequently suffers from body aches.

Neha does not receive her wages but it is handed over to her mother. "It may be 60, 80 or 100. I

am not sure about it. It's given to my mother along with her wages. Why should I be concerned, after all its my mother who runs the house", says Neha. At the same time she had complaints about untimely payment of wages, since she has seen her mother struggling to make both ends meet.

Agriculture being a seasonal occupation there are times when there is no work in the fields. During such off season, Neha engages herself in stringing ghungroos to silver anklets. Almost all the young girls in the village take up this work during off season. The contractor gets them the materials - silver ghungroos and anklets. For stringing every one kg of ghungroo, she is paid

“He feels, if he is allowed to work alone, he might take up the job in kilns



Rs. 55. Like other girls, Neha enjoys this work too, as it is done from the comfort of home along with her friends and family.

"I would love to change my profession and one option I have heard about is brick kilns", says Neha innocently. She has never seen a kiln before, but she feel the work there might be interesting and the logic behind is that in both agriculture and brick making, mitti(mother earth) is common. She is willing to work in kilns if timely and better wages are paid and a safe shelter provided.

Neha, is a little different from other village girls, she expressed her keenness to learn new jobs and skills. Though the general notion was migrating for work is not safe for women, Neha expressed willingness to explore new avenues. To work hard, learn new skills and be financially independent - is what Neha's motto in life is.

Suraj Mahar

**I Wish to be a Labour Contractor:
The Dream of Suraj, a 20-Year-Old**

Twenty-year old Suraj Mahar's life as a labourer began at a very young age of 12, when poverty and hunger in the family, forced him to work on a construction site.

Suraj was a keen student, but had to quit school while studying in the fourth standard since he couldn't afford to buy books and school uniform. Though he studied in a government school, he had to find money to buy his books, uniform and take care of his food requirements.

It was his father, a mason by profession, who first took him to constructions sites, where he worked along with his father as a beldar (labourer). Now



at the age of 20, he works as a mason in various construction sites for Rs. 400 per day.

"mujhe kaam ke liye apne gaaon se baahar jaane atcha nahin lagta hai. kaam karoonga, jahaan main rojana ghar vaapas aa sakata hoon" (I hate moving out of my village for work. I only take up work, where I can come back home daily), says Suraj. Almost all the young boys of village we met during the course of our field visit expressed the same opinion.

All of them sought work near and around their village so that they could be with their family.

They never entertained the idea of Migrating to distant places in search of work, nor were tempted by the possibility of earning higher wages.

Suraj had a brief experience of working in a factory for a short period. He was paid Rs. 60 daily as his wages. Besides the regular work, he was asked to clean up the office premises with the promise of Rs. 200 for the two hours of work. But he soon realised that they were cheating him, he was only paid Rs 50 at the end of the day. "malik lok cheat karneke alawa jaantha kya hai...?" (what do the employers know other than cheating...?), asks a dejected Suraj.

Suraj's work demanded that he spent long hours exposed to the direct heat of the sun even during summer and was the work was physically demanding. Suraj got addicted to chewing tambakku when he was hardly 15. According to him, when body finds it difficult to tolerate the harsh weather or physical strain or mental torture, Tambakku makes him keeps his cool. He bluntly admits that all youth of his age are addicted to tambakku and few had graduated to liquor as well.

Suraj says that he is looking for a permanent position which will give him a long term employ-

ment and security. "kaam ka thalash mei thak gaya hei" (I am exhausted with my job hunting), says Suraj. Like others, Suraj too has heard about opportunities in brick kilns, but he says kiln needs family labour. He is not interested in taking his family to some unknown village and start all over again. He feels, if he is allowed to work alone, he might take up the job in kilns. "magar atcha vetan, khane aur rehna ka praaband milgayato soch sakta hai" (but, if the they offer wages are good, food and accommodation provided, I might think about it), says Suraj.

Suraj narrated an incident where two contractors from the state of Kerala visited their village looking for construction labourers.

They lured the village youth by saying there will be continuous work along with accommodation and a wage of Rs. 700 per day. "A few elderly men decided to migrate, though the young refused to leave the comfort of their home and village. "gaon se do theen aurataem jane keliye thyaar hogaya, kyomki gaaonme unlokomko kam paisa milte hei" (two-three women decided to migrate with them for work because in village women are paid less), points

out Suraj. When men get Rs 400, for the same work, women are paid Rs. 250. Though they are badly in need of job, the women are scared to move out and the main reason pointed out is security and accommodation.

This 20 year old, who stays in his own house in Nangla Masjid Basti, in the district of Agra dreams of becoming a labour contractor one day. He really believes that a positive attitude can really make dreams come true.

"tekedaar bankke mei bahoot syada noujawaan ko kaam dilwayega aur unlogom ka ghar se ghareebi mittane koshish karega", (If I become a labour contractor, I will provide work for large number of youngsters and help mitigate poverty from their household), says Suraj with a twinkle in his eyes.

"tekedaar bankke mei bahoot syada noujawaan ko kaam dilwayega aur unlogom ka ghar se ghareebi mittane koshish karega"





PROFILE-5

Sonu Jadua

A Construction Worker's Struggle for Survival

It's at a labour chowk, that we met 21 year old Sonu Jadua. Labour Chowks are places in the city where labourer's sit along with their tools waiting for contractors to hire them for work. There are more than 50 odd men and women squatting along the footpath of the road along with Sonu, expecting a taker and an assurance for a day's wage for survival.

Sonu, who got married at the age of 15 lives in his own pucca house in Nangla Masjid in Agra, Uttar Pradesh. He is an experienced shuttering worker.

Aaj bhi hamare yaham ladke panthra saal me shaadhi kar lete hai", (Even today in our village boys get married at the young age of 15) says Sonu

Recollecting his childhood Sonu says he started accompanying his father to various construction sites around the city at a very young age. By the age of 14, he too started working independently doing odd jobs at the work site and later joining his father as a helper.

"Padai chod diya, ghar ka haalath kuch aisa hi tha", (Had to leave my studies because my family needed help), says Sonu, a fifth std drop out.

Sonu says shuttering is a difficult job that requires some experience. Mostly working on higher floors and exposed to the harsh sunlight it takes its toll on his health.

Expertise is required for shuttering work because the worker will have to very carefully construct a temporary platform with the help of wooden planks, legs, steel rods or bamboos which will support the structure and ultimately on which pouring of concrete is done. Falling from height is quite common in shuttering work. "kabi kabhi agar chese jo isthemaal kar raha hei, who sahi nahin hei tho, poora platform tootkke gir sakta hai" (if work platform erected is not done properly using the right materials, it can fall apart any time), says Sonu recollecting an incident of how one of his friend died falling from a height while working in a big construction site in Uttar Pradesh .

When he started accompanying his father he used to earn only Rs 30 but now he is paid Rs 220 per day. He laments that there is no regular work and that he hardly manages 15 days work a month. The money he earns hardly suffices his family requirements.

Sonu too, like most of his workmates has cultivated the habit of chewing tobacco. "Tambakoo ki aadath pad gayi, bachpan se (Addicted to tobacco from my childhood), he admits. Though he was fully aware of the hazards of tobacco chewing, he says he cannot work without it, since it relaxes him.

Sonu is open to looking at other odd jobs that could earn him an extra income but even that is proving difficult. He points out to all the young men assembled at the labour chowk and says that



most of them would return back disappointed.

Sonu says someday he would like to be tekheadar (contractor), and make some money. He is confident of getting work done because he knows his job and is willing to share it with others. Even though there is a risk in doing tekedhari, he says he would go for it.

"Kuch banke dikhana hai tho risk tho lena padega", (to become successful one has to take risks), says Sonu with an emphasis of expressing his willingness to take that risk.



PROFILE- 6

Babitha

**Education: The Only Means to be Heard:
Babitha, the Brick-maker**

"Life being a girl, is not that easy, and that too if you are born into a poor family," says Babitha, belonging to the Jatav community from

Premnagar Math, Mathura district in UP. She is 18-years of age and unmarried. She works in a brick kilns along with her family. The brick kilns are home and workplace of the whole family, they all perform various jobs or tasks. Babitha is engaged in pathai work which she has been doing since she was a child. Babitha never liked to attend school, she dropped out from school while studying in the 6th std.

She says, for girls from poor families studying is only a dream. They have many duties to perform at home. Being the eldest it was Babitha's responsibility to look after her young siblings while her mother and father went out to work. She was also expected to do the cooking and cleaning of the house. "yei sab kaam ke baad padayi kaise hoga? (after all these work how can one think of studies), asks Babitha

“Female workers are not paid wages. It is exclusively paid to the male head of the household unit

Babitha has two sisters and a younger brother. While the young girls have given up studies, her brother goes to school. They live in a pucca house and own a small farm land. The yield from the farm only suffices their daily need. She complains that the soil is not fertile and a lot of money is required to add fertilizers and manure. To make things worse, there is also the scarcity of water. Even borewells dry up during summer she says.

Thus, without much alternate opportunities, Babitha, like her other family members, decided to work in the brick kilns. Since work at the brick kilns are seasonal in nature, they take up alternate employment as agricultural labourers in off

season. As an agricultural labourer she gets Rs 200 per day, but the work doesn't last more than one or two months.

Babitha is not very happy with the work in brick kilns. She says the work is very demanding and sometimes we work all through the night to meet urgent orders. The wages in the brick kilns are very poor, while the whole family is involved, we are finally paid a paltry sum. There is a lot of discrimination too. "auratomko kabhi vetan detahi nahin hei, sirf aadmi lokomko paisa deta hei", (Female workers are not paid wages. It is exclusively paid to the male head of the household unit) bemoans Babitha.

What Babitha says is true. The female pathai's are not formally registered on the employment roll as workers and hence cannot access any related employment benefits. The existing system of family labour, the recruitment and the payment system - are all formulated in such a way that women workers are invisible.

"mere jaise bahoot syada ladkiyam aur auratem hei bhatte mei. Magar humare takleefe sunne ke liye koyi nahi hei.humarahi parivaar ke lokom ko bhi kutch parva nahin hei" (there are many like me, working in the brick kilns. But there isn't anyone to listen to our woes. Even members of our family do not listen to us), says Babitha furiously. She was talking to us in the context of not having toilets in the vicinity. They are forced to use open space as toilet. hume khule me toilet jane me bahoot sharam athee hei"(we are ashamed to go to toilet in open space), says Babitha. This leads to stomach ache and bladder issues in women. Apart from this, they have health issues like severe body ache, back pain, hypertension etc, which is due to continuous squatting while at work. Before and after working hours too, women are not free. They spent a lot of time doing household chores, while the men return home and relax. Her wages are paid to her father. She has no complain, but she feels that she has a right to know how much she is paid for her labour. "aurat ka issat koyi nahin karta hai.. (no one respects women), complains Babitha. If the wages are good and facilities improved why would anyone leave this place? she questions.

Now-a-days Babitha regrets for not being educat-

ed. According to her only educated women can fight for better facilities and benefits. Otherwise women are voiceless and no one listens to them or takes them seriously.



PROFILE- 7

Mangal Manjhi

With all Its Shortcomings, Mangal Manjhi Loves to Work in Brick Kilns

"Muje padna atcha lagtha tha magar paanchvi tak hi padpaaya. Humara bada parivaar ko dekhpaal karnekeliye papa ka saath dena pada, isilye mene padayi chodke kaam pe laga " (I loved to study, but could study only up to 5th std. I had to support my Papa to take care of our large family, hence left my school and picked up work), says, Mangal Manjhi a twenty-two year old from Saifabad in Nalanada located in the Gaya District of Bihar.

Mangal is the eldest of a large family and has 7 siblings. Mangal had to share the responsibility of his parents in running the household. He was forced to marry early so that his young wife could be of some support to the family. Joining his father's path, Mangal decided to work as a pathai.

Mangal and his wife migrated to work in a kiln in Agra, Uttar Pradesh and has been into moulding bricks for the last 3 years. His parents were pathai workers too but due to failing health and the need to look after the children they returned back to

“Mangal do have complaints about lack of basic amenities at the brick kilns

their village. Mangal's younger brother works as a mechanic in a workshop in Chennai but he hardly earns any money. Mangal says he too visited Chennai in search of some work, but miserably failed because they paid outsiders very little and he could not help his family. "Mai tho yaham usse zayda kama sakta hum, aur parivaar ke saath rah bhi saktah hum", (I can earn more money here and live with my family too) says Mangal

Mangal earns Rs 500 for working on a 1000 bricks but his income keeps fluctuating depending on his work output. The settling of wages is always tricky and finally the payment is always less after deduction of advances taken during the course of work. "Hum kitina eent banaya, woh sabka hisaab maalik raktha hei. Hum agar rakhega tho bhi, woh usko mantha nahin hei. season kadam hote jhoot bolkke hisaab karta hei. sab kutch malik ke manmaani se chalthi hei yaham" (It is the employer who calculates the number of bricks we moulded.

Even if we keep the account, he never trust us. At the end of the season, settles us with a manipu-

lated number. Only what works here is the employer's wish), complains Mangal. Most of the brick kiln workers take advance money from employers through contractors, and struggle to repay it. Their situation is no better than that of bonded labourers. "Anpadh aadmi ko bojh wala kaam milta hai. Humko samajh nahi aata", (The uneducated gets heavy work, I don't understand this) says Mangal.

He finds the work at the Brick kiln very strenuous but has no other choice since he knows no other kind of work. "doosre kaam ki jaankari nahi hai..." (I don't have knowledge of any other work) says Mangal. Besides he is well aware of the fact that life during off-season is miserable for the family. In the 0.5 bigha land, they cannot do much of a cultivation. Job opportunities are few.

Mangal do have complaints about lack of basic amenities at the brick kilns. They are not provided with safe drinking water and toilets. Most of the illness prevalent among workers is due to drinking unsafe water and working in unhygienic conditions. The women workers including his wife had complained for lack of toilet facility at the brick kiln but nothing happened. "Vada karte hai har saal, magar kuch nahi karte hai. Auraton ko bahouth takleef hai..." (They promise every year, but do nothing. Its very difficult for women) Mangal laments.

In spite of all the short comings, Mangal likes to work in brick kiln. Aur koi kaam mila tho karoonga, magar Bhatta ka kaam nahi chodunga" (I will do any work but will not abandon the work at the brick kiln), says Mangal. Mangal says that it is very important to keep a good working relationship with the contractors, only then can they expect any favours. There are some work that is not strenuous, but it's all up to the contractors. Besides, Mangal is too happy with the concept of advance and he is sure that based on his qualification no other work will give him more money than that of Bhatta.

"Agar kaam aur atchi tareeke se karne hume kutch training diya tho atcha hota" (It would have been very helpful, if we could get some training in learning more skills to develop the work), says Mangal with Great expectation.



PROFILE- 8

Raju Manjhi

Reconciled He is, with the Handicap and Difficulties:

Raju Manjhi, a Brick Kiln Worker

Sixteen-Year-old Raju Manjhi is differently abled with very low vision and at times no vision. Born without any disability, Raju lost his vision because of the negligence of his parents. The family is into brick making and to meet up with targets they ignored the infant Raju and he was directly exposed for long hours to the scorching sun. Hailing from Naugarh in Gaya district in state of Bihar, Raju could study only up to the first standard. His parents, in search of work migrated from one place to other and since Raju could not be left behind in the village, he was not sent to school.

"School ka aangan mere liye alag alag bhatte dhe" (for me the school ground was various brick kilns), says Raju. Raju doesn't have any siblings, being the only child he got more and more dependent on his parents. The poor vision also became an added reason for him to be with his parents, where ever they went.

Raju's parents are pathai's - the mixers and moulders of bricks and Raju, as a three year old used to mix the clay using his tiny hands and fill it in the mould. "bachpan se mujhe bahoot pasand hei mitti se khelna aur abhi bhi mei woh khel jaari raktha hum" (as child I enjoyed playing with mud, even now I continue playing with it), says Raju. His work was not accounted by the employer, but since last year he has been considered as half a unit for payment. One unit is of two people - usually husband and wife and half unit refers to a child. The advance amount gets decided by the number of working hands in a family.

Raju squats on ground for more than eight to eighteen hours a day doing the moulding of bricks. "mai ko peeth mei bahoot dard hota hai. Abba bhi kabi kabi poora sareer par dard batata hai" (mother complains about back pain and father at times talks about body ache).

Squatting on floor for hours and moulding bricks is a strenuous work, especially for a child like Raju. The normal weight of a brick is between 3kg to 3.5 kg and Raju moulds an average of 250 brick a day, which means he is handling a weight of 750 kg daily. "eent paltna padtha hai, phir nikalkke sookhne keliye rakhna bhi padtha hei", (bricks will have to twirled, and later removed and stacked for drying), says Raju. Due to continuously lifting of weight Raju suffers from painful shoulders, arms and fingers. "ye sab dard aadath bangaya didi.... Bookh methane keliye kaam tho karna hi padega na?" (these pain will become habitual. One will have to work to be out of hunger) he says.

Raju is well aware of his shortcomings. His poor vision shattered all his childhood dreams. Children from villages kept him away from mingling with them. But he never realises that continuous pathai work is effecting his eyesight. Every time he moulds a brick and twirls it around, sand particles (dry sand they spread in the mould



before the mix is put to facilitate easy removal), enters his eyes. Raju says, mujhe pasand hei yei kaam, mai aur abba ke saath baitkke karsakthe hei.yaham pe mujhe andha kehke koyi chidatha nahin hei.aur mere kaam se abba ko paisa bhi mil raha hei." (I like this work... I can be with my parents ... no one teases me here calling me a blind.... My work helps father earn some extra money).

Reconciled he is with the handicap and difficulties...!



PROFILE- 9

Bugal Kumari

The Women Power: Moulders with No Male Support

Bugal Kumari, is a 16-year-old girl, she hails from Bihita Village in Gaya from the state of Bihar. A number of girls of her age group have got married, but she is determined to help her mother by working in a brick kiln. Bugal lost her father when she was an infant and its her mother who takes care of her and taught her how to do pathai. The work involves a lot of physical labour and the long hours takes its toll on their health. Bugal lives in a

Kuchcha house and own a small piece of agriculture land. The size of the plot is so small that its not worth trying to cultivate it. Bugal and her mother work as agricultural labourers during off season and what they get for a day's work is 5 kg of rice as wages.

She says with pride that her father owned a large chunk of agricultural land which he had very successfully managed. He was a farmer and he saw to it that his brothers and sisters were well settled. When he got married the family members demanded their share of the land and eventually partition ruined him, he fell ill and died of a mysterious illness. Her mother had to sell land to treat

“Since there are no male members with them, their responsibility doubles while moulding bricks

her father. "Paapa ke bimaari aur mauth ne hume barbaad kardiya" (Fathers illness and eventual death ruined our life) she laments. It is then they decided to take up work in a kiln as pathai worker. The work as a pathai is not that easy a job, explains Bugal.

Bugal and mother finishes the cooking washing etc before 6 am and then venture with the brick making process. Since there are no male members with them, their responsibility doubles while moulding bricks. They have to sprinkle water on the heaped earth and it has to be made into a dough. The dough is then kneaded with their feet to make it more pliable. After the dough is ready it is made into rounds (lumps) of mud and then spread in the wooden mould provided by the kiln owner.

Bana hua a eent nikalkke sookkne keliye raktha hei aur baar baar palatna bhi padtha hai. (the bricks will have to be removed from the mould and

stacked for drying. We will have to turn it too for making it dry faster), says Bugal.

Since Bugal is brought up by a single mother, she keeps her alongside while working so that Bugal masters the craft. The nature of the industry is as such where women and the children work alongside, that the young ones learn their work and grow up to be moulders .
says Bugal.

In normal course, digging earth and a majority of kneading is done by men. "humara baba tho nahin hei na isiliye sara kaam ammi or mei milke karthe hei", (since I don't have father, all work is done by me and mother), says Bugal.

**Bana hua a eent
nikalkke sookkne
keliye raktha hei aur
baar baar palatna
bhi padtha hai.**

With all the hard work done, Bugal likes the work as a pathai. When everywhere in kilns, the work is headed by men, Bugal's is an exceptional case where the work is totally woman centric.

But Bugal is apprehensive about the meagre facilities in brick kilns. She argues that the brick kilns should provide more facilities for the workers and especially the women. They are often treated harshly and abused, and not even provided the basic facilities like a toilet.

"Hume bahouth door jana padtha hai, akele janne me dar aur sharam aathihai" (We have to go far away, we are scared to go alone and it's so shameful) says Bugal.

Bugal wishes she could learn new skill like stitching, but its not possible to devote time to it while working. "Kaam nahi karungi tho kya khayenge?" (If we don't work what will we eat?) she asks

She says she is not scared of hard work, maybe when she grows older she can work and earn more. She hopes one day she can setup her own shop and do her own work independently.



PROFILE - 10

Prem Singh

**Working 12 Hours for Rs. 150 Per Day:
The Fate of a Quarry Worker**

Prem Singh aged 23, belongs to Kushwaha community from Nasaua village (Kheragarh Tehsil) located around 75 kilometres away from district head quarter Agra in Uttar Pradesh. He works as a khudai (digger) in a stone quarry. Prem Singh is the 8th generation in his family that is into the same work, ever since they had to give up agriculture due to water scarcity for cultivation. So acute was the problem that they could hardly grow anything.



Prem Singh has been working as a khudai for the last ten years. His father too did the same occupation. As a child, in the initial years, he did odd jobs like dhulai (picking up gravel and collecting it in basket) at the quarry and to begin with was paid a petty sum of Rs. 50 per day for a very long period. Today, being a digger, he gets paid Rs 150 per day, for working around 10 to 12 hours.

Prem Singh is married and lives with his family in a kutcha house made of mud and bricks. He complains that wages has not increased for a very long time though the cost of living has been doubled or tripled. No one dare to raise their voice against this injustice. They are being exploited, because they have no other option. The stone quarry is the only means of livelihood in the vicinity especially for the poor and uneducated.

"Agar mei pada likha hota tho kab kha yei kaam chod detha" (if I was educated, I would have left this work long ago), says Prem .

He says he has heard stories that once upon a time all the agricultural land in the area was very fertile and well irrigated. There was plenty of water in the talab and rains were timely. With the abuse of land, drying of ponds due to scarcity of rains etc., agriculture has failed the poor and they had to look for other options. "Ek baar yaham pe koyi sansta se lok aayatha aur woh log hume batake diya gaonme paani kam hone kevaje patthar khadaan hei (once some people came here from one organization and told us that the scarcity of water in the villages are due to stone quarries), says Prem. "us din mujheye sunkke khadaan wale se bahooti nafrat hogaya... magarabhi aap vidambana dekhiye, usi khadan ka madat lekhe mei rozi roti ka intezaam kar raha hum" (from that day onwards, I used to hate quarry owners, but see

the irony, now I am dependent on them for my livelihood), he adds

Prem Singh says he has no great expectation because he is well aware of his limitations. Jab tak jaan hei kutch bhikarlenga (as long as one is alive, will do anything for survival). He only prays that his health should not fail him. "Khadaan mei kaam karne wale syadathar lokomko shwaaska bimari aur phephadon kee beemaaree hota hei. mera abbabhi phoora raat ko khaste rehta hei.) (a

majority of the quarry workers have respiratory disorders or lung diseases. Even my father keep on coughing all night says Prem. He is very careful about his health and till date has not cultivated any vices.

Most workers in the stone quarries are addicted to one or the other intoxicants, alcohol and tobacco being the most common. The hard physical labour, responsibility of the family, the huge debts and health issues are common factors among workers in quarries and hence they find intoxication is the best way to forget pain. Fortunately

Prem has not fallen prey to these vices. "Nasha ke liye alag se paisa chahiye", (One needs extra money to cultivate such habits), says Prem Singh.

Prem Singh considers himself healthy, but he is not aware of the silica or dust particles present in the air are getting deposited in his lungs daily and even while eating food the same is entering his body. The workers here are still unaware of the health hazards at work place, they work without masks or any other protective gears in the name of majboori'.

Prem Singh does not socialize much. He manages with whatever he earns. Qwab dekhe se kya faida. ..sachai yahihei. what is the use of dreaming, this is the reality.

"Agar mei pada likha hota tho kab kha yei kaam chod detha" (if I was educated, I would have left this work long ago)



PROFILE - 11

Raju Manjhi

Trapped into Bondage: Raju Manjhi

Raju Manjhi, the twenty year old, is from Faizabad in Nalanda district of the state of Bihar. He belongs to a scheduled caste and has been working in a brick kiln in the state of Uttar Pradesh for the last 4 years.

Raju migrated to Uttar Pradesh with his young wife to work in a brick kiln. Work was assured because his brother's family was already working in the kiln. Earlier it was his parents who were working in the kiln. But old age and ill health has forced them to stay back home, leaving the burden of household to their children.

Both Raju and his wife are pathai (moulders) workers. Though the work is strenuous, brick kilns

are the only place where uneducated and unskilled workers are easily absorbed in large numbers. It did not take them long to learn how to mould bricks.

Raju has never been to school since his parents were always struggling to survive. Hamare paas na zameen dha na ghar, zameendar ka khet mei kaam karte dhe (we had neither land nor house, we worked on land of the zamindar), says Raju. As a child he used to accompany his parents to

“Raju has never been to school since his parents were always struggling to survive

the fields. Since there was no land of their own, they were into sharecropping. Sharecropping is a form of agriculture in which a landowner allows a tenant to use the land in return for a share of the crops produced on their portion of land. Many a times, the crops failed and Raju's parents were forced to give whatever produce they get to the landlord and comeback either empty handed or some food as wages.

It was a local contractor who approached and convinced his parents by paying them a bulk amount as advance to migrate to Uttar Pradesh to work at a brick kiln. Even today, the method of hiring the workers for brick kilns remains the same. Contractors visits a number of villages and lure healthy vulnerable poor agricultural labourers with an advance payment. The advance is deducted from the wages at the end of the season, many a times with interest, when the final settlement is made. For workers taking advances is habitual, hence fall a prey to the system of bondage which is quite rampant in brick kilns.

"Mei ne advance lekke ek kutcha ghar banaya aur



ma aur baap ko karche ka paisa bhi diya. Mehnat karkke chukkadenge" I took advance and built a temporary house and gave rest of the money to parents. Will work hard and repay the money) says Raju,

According to Raju, it is important to get lump sum money to tide over the miseries at home. The workers from villages working in the brick kilns are such a vulnerable lot and hence never realise that the provision of an advance, withholding of wages and many other measures practiced by the employers are to control workers and to keep go the bonded labour system in the kilns. The male workers that have taken the loan then usually migrate to work with their family - so all family members work to pay off the debt.

"hum majboori ke waje shuruwat mei advance lete hain. Isi kaaran se hume kaam ka paisa turant nahin miltha hei. haphte ya pakhavaade mein ek chhota sa bata detha hei taaki apna khane peenekka karza utah sake (since we take advance out of compulsion, we are not paid wages daily, instead a small bata is given in a week or fortnightly for managing our daily needs), says Raju. Though, in India, not paying wages to the workers weekly or monthly is illegal, but this is what, practiced in brick kilns where settlements are made only at the end of the season.

The payment at the brick kiln is calculated based on the family and its working members. In Raju's case, it was his brother who was paid the advance as well as the wages, since he was working with them. But, for the last two years, Raju has taken advance and work with his wife independently. Raju hopes that one day, with all the hard work they do, he and his wife can save some money.

Every year, at the end of the season, they are cheated and settled by employer by paying only a minimal amount. They return back home, after months' of hard labour and get back to share-cropping. "humare gaaon mei aur koyi kaam nahin hei jo hum kar sake. Papi pet ko palna hi hei na" (In villages, we do not have any other opportunities. After all one will have to satiate hunger), says Raju. Their wait is on-for the next seasonthe advance... and then there it goes... the hard labour!



Ram Shankar

Profile of Ram Shankar, a Bharai from Uttar Pradesh

Ram Shankar is a 19-year old from Paharpur. Fatehpur, Uttar Pradesh. The young man is an unmarried Hindu belonging to OBC. He is a brick kiln worker, not by choice but by compulsion.

Ram Shankar says he studied only upto the 5th std. then never returned to school. He has a younger brother and a sister, who both gave up studies while his brother works in the kilns, his sister looks after the house and the farm.

Ram Shankar's family is mainly to agriculture. His father owns 3 bigha agricultural land where they grow all kinds of crops. They work on their land and also work as agriculture labourers. Still they can barely meet their requirements. When the crops fails, they go hungry for days.

At the brick kiln Ram Shankar is engaged in bharai work which is filling the chimney with the raw moulded bricks and preparing it for firing. The barai's stand for an average of 12 hours while loading the furnace. The season last for four months and he is paid Rs. 30000 at the end of the season. "It is not enough to support the entire family", says Ram Shankar.

The work at the brick kiln is very hazardous. They

work in close proximity of the furnace where the bricks are fired. In the summer, the problem gets compounded. The whole area become too hot and unbearable. We often work late night during peak season. Ram Shankar narrates an incident where a boy from his village, while duringjalaai got severely injured when the boiler exploded due to excessive pressure. Only his medical expenses were taken care of by the employer, he was not compensated for any loss of work. "I am told that brick kilns are there since ages, but why there are no new steps initiated to make it hazardous free?"asks Ram Shankar. The work in brick kilns are laborious and very strenuous. The number of blasts, burns and other physical injuries go mostly unnoticed and unreported in brick kilns. According to Ram Shankar, the brick kilns should adopt new technology and make it environment friendly as well.

During off-season at brick kilns, Ram Shankar joins his family in farming and also uses his horse cart for loading and transportation. His father use to ride the horse cart, but handed it over to the elder son.

Ram Shankar says, given an option, he will not work in a brick kiln. "Kam karaab hei magar maz-boori mei karna padtha hei" (He doesn't like the nature of work but do it out of compulsion.)

Has he looked for opportunities elsewhere?, the answer is a big no from Ram Shankar. There are no other opportunities available near the village. But what Rama Shankar feels is that instead of migrating and slogging under someone, it is better to be with his family and take care of his farm and agriculture. But he has his own apprehension on that as well. "The inherited agriculture land we own is getting smaller and smaller as they get it divided amongst the family. Soon we will be landless, he says.

"Kya kare aur kutch kaam bhi tho nahin hei. isse chodkke hum kya kare!" (What can I do, there are no other opportunities! If I were to leave this what else will I do!), exclaims Ram Shankar.



PROFILE - 13

Jitender

Brick Kilns will always Be Brick Kilns - Jitender

Seventeen year old Jitender from Mamana village of Hamirpur in Uttar Pradesh suffers from Eczema, itching and body ache which he attributes to his non-stop interaction with clay and mud in brick kilns. He is a pathai worker since the age of eight. Jitender's father worked earlier in his own farm. But later he realized the exercise is futile since the crop yield periodically decreased, he decided to try his luck with brick kilns. "Getting money in bulk as advance was the major attraction that Jitendra's father saw ten years ago, when he opted for migrating to Agra for work. Bound to his father's decision, the entire family moved with him to work in brick kilns.



It is quite hard and strenuous labour that one has to do in brick kilns. The pathai workers have to dig the earth for getting the clay for making bricks. No matter what the temperature is outside, they have to do it. Then comes the work of mixing it with water, kneading both with leg and hands, continuous squatting to mould it.... the work is unending and strenuous.... Jitendra had nonstop complaints.

"yaham pe koyi suvidha nahin hei... peene ka paani bhi gandha milta hei", (there are no facilities here. Even drinking water is polluted), says Jitender. As a result of continuous inhalation of dust Jitender's father became a victim of chronic lung disease. "Agar bimaar hogayatho aspathaal nahin hei aas-paas. Aur saara karcha hume utana padtha hei" (if one falls sick, there is no hospital around. And we have to bear all the expenditure) says Jitender.

Jitender's family is into brick kilns. Even then they are not out of poverty or debt. Every year, his father is forced to take more and more advance and at the end of the season ends up with only a few thousands which won't even last for one or two months.

Aur koyi kaam nahin milta hei hume gaaon me. Isiliye gaaon chodke janapadtha hei, ya bhatte pe kaam lena hei. (there are no job opportunities in the village,. We have to either leave the village or work in the brick kilns)

Jitender had tried his luck in a biscuit factory in the city. He was paid Rs. 8000 for the work. But after his accommodation and food expenses, there was nothing left.

Jitender dreams of getting a job in some factory or company. According to him the life in a brick kiln is tiring and meaningless. "Baba advance ka

chakkar mei hume bhi fasa detha hei" (by taking advance, father is putting us into trouble), says Jitender. He is highly critical of the advance system. According to him getting bulk money is good, but just for that getting bonded to brick kilns is what he hates. Besides, he never gets any money for his hard labour, though his father is getting it. "kya pata woh log teekse paisa dera hei kya...?" (who knows whether they are paying the correct amount), asks Jitender.

“According to him getting bulk money is good, but just for that getting bonded to brick kilns is what he hates

He says he never interacted with the employer, but has spoken with the contractor once or twice. Otherwise, it is his father who handles the entire work. "Bhatta... Bhatta hi hota hai... usko aur naam dalkke pukar nahin sakte hum. Waisayi hei.... koyi bhi badlaav nahin leke aa sakta hei yaham. Yei Bhatta hi rahega" (Brick kilns are Brick kilns alone. Like the way you can't change its name, no change can be brought in here. It will remain as brick kiln alone), believes Jitender.

Jitender feels that girls working in the kilns do suffer a lot without proper sanitation and toilets. The hard labour and harsh conditions take a lot of toll on their youth. "Atcha rishta bhi nahin milte hei unlokome ko" (they are not getting good matrimonial alliances too) he points out.

Jitender realises that as long as he finds a job somewhere else, he will have to continue working in the kilns. He says, "Kutch nahin hei tho thoda sa training diya gaya tho atcha hota. Kaam jaldi aur teek tareeke se karsakta hei" (if nothing, it will be good if they give us some training to improve the work).

Jitender is also keen to learn driving. But what is the point in this wishful thinking, we are here to be bandhua mazdoor.... Zindagi poora kaam karkke karz chukaana hei.... (bonded labourers.... Have to work all your life to repay debt) He exclaims...!



PROFILE - 14

Mukesh Kumar

I shall Overcome: Expectations of a Quarry Worker

Mukesh Kumar, looks frail, he works in a stone quarry as a loader. Only 24 he looks much older than his age. Mukesh is a Khuswaha from Kukason Tatapur, Agra in Uttar Pradesh.

Mukesh has been engaged in loading work at the quarry for the last 10 years, he was directly employed by the owner of the quarry. Mukesh's father and many of his relative worked in the same quarry performing various jobs such as digging, loading and breaking stones. Since his father had inherited a small piece of farm land, he used to grow vegetables during off days and off season.

Mukesh's father died due to silicosis at the age of 55. Though a comprehensive data is not available, thousands, have died of silicosis, the incurable lung disease caused by long-term exposure to silica dust given released in the mining quarries. "khaan mei mazdooromko koyi suraksha aur adhikar nahin hei. bandhua mazdoor jaise kaam karna padtha hei" (there is no safety or rights for workers in mines, they have to work like bonded labours), says Mukesh. According to him when

“Almost all the workers are addicted to either alcohol or tobacco, even the young are not spared

parents send their children to work in quarries, they never realizes that exposure to this work can kill them.

After the demise of his father, Mukesh, a keen student, doing final year BA, was forced to discontinue his studies and earn money to support his family. His family situation never allowed him to appear for his final year examinations nor get back to his studies.

Initially he was hesitant to take up work in a quarry because he felt being educated he could find a job, but the jobs he was offered was away from home and the salary was very little.

Along with his friend he travelled to Bangalore to work in a stone polishing unit, where he was promised a decent salary. But they were cheated, the salary was much less than promised and with that kind of money it was difficult to survive in a large city.



Mukesh has no regrets... Takdeer me jo likha hai wahi hoga naa...badal thodi sakte hai...(What's written in my fate has to happen, one cannot change it), says Mukesh very philosophically.

He thought farming will be profitable and he tried hard to work and develop his farmland. He even managed to get a loan from the local bank only to realize that too many factors stood in his way - water scarcity, soil fertility and unpredictable climate - over which he had no control. He had to give up the dream of becoming a full-time farmer and had to go back to the quarry where he could easily find work.

Mukesh says that for 6 months in a year, there is continuous work in the quarry. They work for 12 hours a day and are paid Rs 250. Loading the trucks day after day, there are days the contractor insists that we load all the trucks even when we are tired.

Thekedar ko profit se matlab hai...hamara khyal kaun karta hai (The contractor is only concerned with his profit, why should he care for us) asks Mukesh.

Work in the stone quarry is very harsh and physically demanding. Almost all the workers are addicted to either alcohol or tobacco, even the young are not spared.

Mukesh says: "nasha ke bina kaam nahi kar sakte hai, bahuth mehanath karna padtha hai" (It's difficult to work without any kind of addiction, it is too hard a work). Mukesh's addiction to tobacco started 6 years ago, but alcohol, he says is a recent phenomenon that too occasionally during marriage functions or festivals like holy.

Mukesh says he wishes he had a permanent job in some office which involved writing or keeping accounts. There are time he feels like running away from home and work, but he cannot evade the responsibilities at home.

With a smile he made another philosophical statement- "Humara bhi din aayega-Intazaar kar raha hum woh ache Din ke liye" (My day will also come. Am waiting for those good days) he says with a smile.



PROFILE - 15

Ranjith Kumar

The Heat, Night Work and Long Working Hours: The Life of a Jalai Worker

Ranjith Kumar is an 18 year old from Paharpur, Fatehpur, state of UP. He attended school up to the 8th class and then dropped out since he got totally disinterested in studies. His father owns 5 bigha agricultural land where they used to grow different crops.

Ranjeet as a child used to spend most of his time working in the field. "Jab kheti mei nuksaan hone laga, papa aur me batte pe jaane lage. Kamaana zaroori dha karz chukane" (When the crop failed, I and my father started going to the brick kiln. It was important that we cleared our debt), says Ranjith.

Ranjith accompanies his father every day to the brick kiln for work which he hardly enjoys. They are jalai workers. Jalai's are those workers who fire the kiln and monitor continuously whether the bricks are being properly baked. This job requires a very specific know-how and constant attention otherwise the entire exercise of making pucca bricks go wasted. Amongst kiln tasks, jalai is the most obviously hazardous because of work with open fires. They have to frequently monitor Kiln openings in order to determine whether additional fuel is necessary for maintain baking temperature.

A jalai works late hours, sometimes all through the night. "Mujeh ye kaam bilkul pasand nahin hei.magar kya kare mazboori hei", (I don't like this work, but what to do its is our compulsion) he says while spitting tobacco.

Most of the workers are enticed in taking money as advance in exchange for work in brick kilns until its repaid. But in reality they never clear they debts because they keep on taking loans to meet emergencies.

Ranjit's father taught him how to do jalai . The long hours of work, the heat near the furnace, and the night work.... Ranjith hates them all. He has been doing this work for the last four years and his father, for the last twenty years.

Most brick kiln workers, like Ranjith's father are agricultural labourers some with land and most landless. A majority of them are migrant workers having arrived from different states along with their whole family. But Ranjit says, he or his family are not willing to migrate. "Khet aur gaon chodke kabhi nahin jaoonga" (We won't leave our field and village and migrate). he says.

The migrant workers live around the brick kiln in very poor hygienic condition. They live in poor shacks with no sanitation nor any medical facilities close by. Most of them are addicted to either tobacco or alcohol. Ranjit says, his father objected to him having tambakku but later ignored. "Iske bina jalai ka kaam mei nahin karsakta hum. Mann or than ko shaant raktha hei. (without this I cannot perform jalai work. (It keeps my body and mind at peace.), says Ranjith

Ranjith says he has never faced any problem with

the contractor/employer as his father deals with him.It's important to keep a good healthy relationship with them. Given the option Ranjith would like to run away from this work. "Yaham kutch saal aur kaam karenge tho bimaar hokke marjaayenge.Me yei kaam chodke painter banna chahta hum".(if I work for a few more years I will fall ill and die. I want to leave this work and become a painter), he says.



PROFILE - 16

Ankit Kumar

I want to be a Soldier and Serve the Nation - Ankit Kumar

Ankit Kumar is a 17 year old male from Surir, in Mathura. Surir is a town located in Mant Tehsil of Mathura district in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. Now-a-days Surir is known as the "Bricks Udyog" as it has more than 100 bricks factories, which provide employments to thousands of workers from this area. Surir encompasses 16



villages and Ankit is from the village Bhidauni, located between the Yamuna river and Yamuna Expressway.

Ankit is a tenth standard student. Along with his studies he support his family by working in a brick kiln. "School mei kisiko pata nahin hei yeh baat. Bataya nahin, kyonki woh log chedenge mujhe" (no one in school knows that I work in a kiln. If they know, all will tease me), says Ankit

In his family, its only Ankit who is studying. His three elder brothers are school drop-outs and are full timers working with their mother in the kiln. Ankit's father was a tractor loader. He met with an accident when the tractor trolley over turned. He was so badly injured that his right leg had to be amputated.

Being the sole breadwinner in the family it was a great tragedy. As is the fate of workers in unorganized informal sector, he did not get any compensation from anywhere. Since hospitalization and medical expenses were very high and to meet it, the family had to take a loan of Rs. Two lakhs from a local saukar.

Ankit's family doesn't have any agriculture land but their grandfather had some which he sold. Though they have a pucca house in the village, they still struggle at the brick for their survival. "Ganda kaam hei didi, karaab lagtha hai, keed makode jaise lage raho (it's a dirty work. I hate it. Have to live like keed makode), says Ankit.

Ankit says he is not bad in his studies and he enjoys going to school. At the kiln he does pathai work. Showing his hands and dress Ankit says, "yei haath aur kapda dekho, kya lagtha hei aapko?" (look at my hands and clothes, how do you feel), says Ankit. His hands are hardened, clothes are all layered with mud and dirt.

Ankit says he feels bad seeing his mother struggling with work. "Ghar ka sara kaam karkke,

bimaar paappa ka dekhbaal karkke, phir sambalhti hei woh bhatte ka kaam" (she does the work at brick kiln after doing all household chores and taking care of my handicapped father), says Ankit. Ma ko swas lene pe dikhat hei. Mei ne pada school mei mitti ka dhool peppede mei gus jayega tho bahoot syaada parishaniyam aata hei. aur yahaam pei mitti aur dhool ke alawa kya hei?" (my mother has breathing problem. I have studied that if dust enters the lungs it is problematic. Other than mud and dust what else is here), says Ankit.

He is very sad that even knowing this he cannot do anything. Besides posture-related problems of continuous squatting, many a brick kiln workers face difficulty in breathing as they are more and more exposed to dust.

"Gaaon gaaon mei shouchalay kahkke, bahooti ghoshan sunthe hei, magar yaham pe log abhi bhi khulle mei jathe hei" (Promises of toilets in every village is heard daily, but we still use open space), Ankit says. "Ek baar mujhe aur bahoot syada lokom ko diarrhoea hua tha. School mei jo doctor aate hei

woh bola tha gandha paani peekke aaya hei yei bimaari" (once me, and many others in the brick kilns developed diarrhea. The doctor at the school said the infection has come through drinking polluted water). "yaham ka peene ka paani bhi gandha hei didi" (drinking water here is unsafe), points out Ankit. A majority of the brick kilns doesn't have proper sanitation nor provide the workers with safe drinking water.

According to Ankit, in the brick kilns there is no security of work, nor there is any medical facility. "tabiyat karaab hogaya tho syadarthar lok neem hakeem ke paas jatha hei. aspathaal ka suvidha nahin hei aaspaas. Aspathaal jo shahar mei hei who mehenga hei" (if fall sick a majority approached quack. There are no hospital facility in the vicinity and to go to the city hospital it is expensive) laments Ankit. Ankit says, he does not want to end up like his father, leading a unsafe insecure life. He wants to continue with his studies, even if he has to pursue doing part time work

"No one in school knows that I work in a kiln. If they know, all will tease me

at the brick kiln. "mujhe upeed hei fuj mei barthi melene ka", (I hope to get selected into the Indian army) he says with pride. He is aware that there is no surety of a soldier's life, but he feels that it is for a great cause - for the nation. It is a dignified work unlike the work he is presently engaged in. "A soldier is a soldier - he is the nation's son. All needs of a soldier will be taken care by the nation", he says in his broken English. Let his dream come true!



PROFILE - 17

Radhey Shyam

**Dreaming a Mumbai Job:
Radhey Shyam Slogs in a Quarry**

The first thing in life what Radhey Shyam Parmar prefers is to go to Mumbai and look for work. He has been told by someone, that it is a city of opportunities. Radhey Shyam Parmar is a 22 year old young man from Jogipura Bagher, Tatpura in the state of Uttar Pradesh. Married 4 years ago, Radhey is the sole earner in the family. The responsibility of looking after the household-needs rests on his shoulders. He worked as a

loader in a stone quarry near to the village. Before him, his father too was engaged in the same job. "Yahi prarthana karta humki baap ke jaise marna nahin" (I pray that I should not die like my poor father), says Radhey painfully. His father too worked in various stone quarries from a very young age as a digger and loader. By the time Radhey was born his father was already a patient. Radhey recollects how his father used to cough all through the night and yet never skipped a day's work for he had a whole family to support. He saw his father struggle a lot with lung cancer and die. Cancer bahoot buri bimaari hei, yaham kaafi lok iske mareez hai (cancer is a very ruthless disease- here a lot workers are its victims)

The work in stone quarries are extremely hazardous. The workers are exposed constantly to heat and dust. Within the surrounding area, close to the quarries are affected by pollution. Radhey says, he would have preferred to do farming in his small agricultural land, if it was profitable. But the reality is that they often fall into a debt trap. "zamindar lok atcha keti karlete hei, aur kamai bhi, chota kisan bookha marta hei (the landlord do good farming and its earnings are high too. But small farmers die starving), says Radhey. Radhey had taken loan to cultivate his land and buy seeds and fertilizer. Because of scarcity of water, the crop failed and he is still struggling to clear that debt. They would have been worse without the quarry work. At least here they earn some money.

Radhey started work as a child getting a wage of Rs. 20 daily. And today he earns Rs. 150 a day. Even this meagre sum is not paid regularly. Radhey laments that the workers have no voice. They can hardly complain about the working condition or demand health benefits. Most workers fall ill but they are scared to visit the hospital because of the expenses, finally they all end up buying medicines from roadside quacks. Radhey is scared that he would meet his fathers' fate. But that does not stop him from abusing his body to addiction of tobacco and alcohol. "iske bina dimag chalna nahine hei" (without this brain stops working), he says.

Khuda ne chaha to kuch seekh ke hum Mumbai jayenge ek din (if god bless, learning a trade I'll go to Mumbai one day) he says with a glitter of hope in his eyes.





PROFILE - 18

Ranveer Singh

The Woes of a Quarry Worker

Ranveer Singh is a quarry worker from Kachhpura, Tatpura, Agra, Uttar Pradesh. This twenty-year-old, belongs to the Kushwaha community that is classified under OBC. A number of men and women, young and old from the village, ek out a living from the stone quarries.

After the demise of his father Ranveer had no option other than to follow his father's footsteps and started working in a quarry at a young age. Ranveer is assigned Khudaai (digging/excavating) work at the site, he has been performing the same task for the last 10 years. His younger brother too works in the same quarry. Ranveer is married for three years, and he says almost all youth in the village get married between the age of 15 and 18.

Ranveer owns a pucca house in the village and has a small 1 bhiga agricultural land and some

livestock. He is passionate about farming but on such a small land he can hardly make any earnings. "Kheti baadi se guzaara nahi hota hai, isliye khaan me kaam karna padtha hai" (We cannot depend upon farming, that's why I have to look for work at the quarry), says Ranveer. His wife, after her household chores, helps him in farming.

Ranveer earns Rs 200 per day at the quarry but does not get the money regularly. The Tekeedar (contractor) holds back the money and threatens them that they will not be called for work again, if he was to demand his payment. Ranveer gets continuous work for hardly 7 months in a year, rest of the time he works on his small land and looks after the livestock. His priority is to first repay the loan he has taken from the local money lender. According to Ranveer many workers and families have fallen victim to unscrupulous mon-

“Ranveer shows his bruised hands and says he also suffers from breathing problems

eylenders because of irregular work and untimely payment of wages. Early marriage pushes them into family pressures and more burden of debt.

Ranveer laments that this is the only work he is familiar with, and has no intention to try his hands on some other work. He says he would not risk migrating in search of other work like some of his friends who returned back after working for a few months at a distant brick kiln. Their experience was the same, harsh working conditions and untimely payments that too in a distant unfamiliar land. "Janam yehi hua tha, kaam yehi karna hai, aur marna bhi yahim pe" (I was born here, will work and die here), says Ranveer.

Stone quarries and crushers all over are being heavily regulated or facing shut down due to the

environmental damage they create. Quarries destroy the land and cause air and sound pollution in the neighbourhood. The hazards they face while performing the task.

Ranveer shows his bruised hands and says he also suffers from breathing problems. "Is haath se mai garam roti bhi nahi pakad saktha hum..."(I cannot even hold hot roti (bread) with these hands). says Ranveer.

Workers in the stone quarry are not provided with any protection from the hazards they face while performing the task.

Ranveer shows his bruised hands and says he also suffers from breathing problems. "Is haath se mai garam roti bhi nahi pakad saktha hum" (I cannot even hold hot roti (bread) with these hands). says Ranveer.

Most workers at the quarries have multiple health issues. Even the women and young children are not spared, since they spend most of their time in the polluted vicinity.

To make things worse the workers are mostly addicted to alcohol or tobacco. Ranveer is no exception, he is addicted to chewing tambakku (tobacco) but says he can never give it up as long as he is doing this work. He points to other young men from his village and says they all look much older than their actual age. That applies to me too he says smilingly.

Mukesh Parmar

These Quarries Saved us from Starvation: Mukesh Parmar

Mukesh Parmar is a twenty year old from Jogipura Bagher, Tatpura in Uttar Pradesh. He works as a loader in a stone quarry and has been doing the same work for the last eight years. He never wanted to follow his father's footsteps, but with no other option he also struggles to earn a living from the quarry.

He recollects his first visit to the quarry in a bullock cart driven by his father, He would sit all day

in the cart watching men of all ages loading stones and take a trip to the mandi, where the stones were piled for sale.

Mukesh used to skip his school regularly to take this frequent rides along with his father. As a child



PROFILE - 19

he was fascinated by the market place where people from different places came together. Any thing and everything was sold. It was colourful spectacle for a child. His father tried to persuade him to work on the small agricultural plot they owned, but Mukesh was never impressed by farming. Bahoot begaar hai. Aanch se syada parishani hai. (it's useless hot sun and too much of problems), says Mukesh expressing his disinter-



est in farming.

When he was old enough to work, he ran away with a relative to Sholapur in Maharashtra and tried his hands on many things. He finally ended by selling pethas (sweets) along with his relative. Mukesh's basic needs were cared for but was not paid a single penny. He returned back home after a few months. Referring to the hostile attitude of locals to the UP migrants, Mukesh says "UP ka Bhaiyya, kehke bahoot chidathe dhey" (I was called UP Bhaiyya and bullied).

There is no other livelihood option available in the village, says Mukesh. No matter what religion or caste you belong to they all work here. A quarry worker has to be physically strong because the nature of the work is physically strong. All day long, they carry stones and load a number of trucks and tractors, that are constantly lined up inside the quarry. Even in peak summer they are forced to lift and carry stones with their bare hands. Years of physical abuse has taken a toll on Mukesh's health. He suffers from high blood pressure and frequent joint pain. "Yaham aaspaas koyi doktor ya dawai khana nahin hai" (There are no doctors or medical facilities near the place of work), laments Mukesh.

Mukesh says his family can barely survive with the meagre money he earns from the quarry. And for any extra expense like illness they are forced to borrow money from money lenders. He says every year they sell a small portion of agricultural plot to clear the debt. "kal do bigha zameen beja karz chukane (yesterday I sold two bigha lands to repay my debts" (yesterday too we sold two bigha land to repay debt).

Most of the workers are uneducated and in their struggle to make a living they neglect the education of their children. This is one of the reason why the workers fear to migrate to a distant place in search of work Mazboori hai, pade likhe tho nahin hei hum (we have no options since we are not educated). Even young women and children are not spared when times are bad. Ye kaam nahin hota tho hum bookhe marjate" (if this work was not there we would died out of hunger), says Mukesh.



PROFILE - 20

Umesh Kumar

With All Its Shortcomings, I Love to be in Brick Kilns" - Umesh Kumar

Seventeen-year-old Umesh Kumar hails from the village Mamana, which lies between the cities of Rath and Jalalpur in Sarila Tehsil of Hamirpur district in Uttar Pradesh. Umesh is associated with the brick kilns from an early age, which he cannot recollect. His entire family has been engaged in various activities involved with brick making

Umesh is a brain tumour patient. He is aware of it, but also realises that without his contribution, his family cannot survive. The family owns five bight agricultural land, but has no money to initiate farming along with it acute water shortage and ill health of his parents force them to migrate every year to the bhattas. During off season, his parents manage to grow some vegetable so that at least their daily needs are met.

My parents are old, I have to support them, says Umesh, an 8th standard drop out. He has two younger brothers and two sisters. They attend school for four months every year. The reason being that the work in brick kilns are seasonal in nature, and there is work only for 8 months. During off-season, the youngsters attend school where as Umesh being the eldest looks for alternate employment opportunities.

Muje Gujarat me ek gutka factory me kaam mila. Magar pehle saal unhone noukari se nikaal diya, yeh kahke mai bacha hum, (I managed to find work in a gutka making factory in Gujarat and worked there during off seasons. But, last year, they threw me out citing that I am not an adult), recalls Umesh. But one thing which he learnt from the gutka company is to chew tambakku. He is an addict and he says, doesn't realise pain when he uses it because he gets distracted for a while.

For Umesh, work is a must and the most easily accessible and known job is working in brick kiln, because for years, their entire family is into brick making. "Hume tho kadak dhoop me sare din khade rahena padtha hai. Koila todthe waqth sara dhool sharer ke andhar chala jata hai. Dhool, gas aur khule aag me kaam karna hai. Humlog jalte huae bhati ke pass chalke jaate hai "(We are exposed to the sun for long hours. While breaking coal a large amount of dust enters our body. We work exposing ourselves to gas, dust and fire from the burning coal. We walk on hot surfaces while monitoring and regulating the fire), says Umesh. He attributes the lung illness of his father to this exposure of dust and gas. Even while transporting or loading bricks, dust particles get absorbed in their body through inhaling and through skin pores.

No worker is provided with protection masks or any safety equipment, their family including small children are directly exposed to various hazards. A brick kiln worker, works more than 12 hours in the kiln and most of them live next to the kilns. With all the hazards and issues related to it, Umesh prefer working in a kiln. The first and foremost reason for his liking is that he can work alongside his parents. together there is a sense of

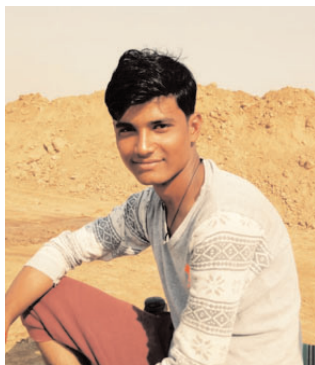
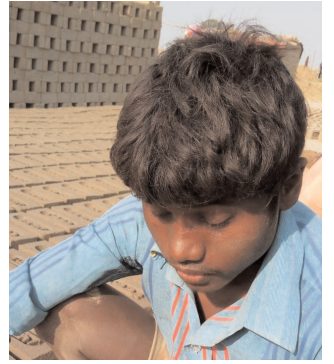
great security. Most brick kiln workers are caught in a debt trap. The debt taken by the family in the form of advance increases season by season. But for Umesh, this is quite natural.

Sareer ghat jaata hai, magar pasand hei mujhe Bhatta ka kaam. Kaam karte jao, paisa milta rehta hai. Advance chalta rehta hai" (Body gets torn into pieces, even then I like work in brick kilns. if you work continuously, you can earn money. Advance will continue on its way), he says. For making 1000 bricks, the wages they get is Rs. 500 and since it is a family labour, the wages are paid to his father.

Umesh is not happy with the fact that his mother and sisters have to work in the kilns. "Bhatte pe bathrooms nahin hai, ladkiyomko iske vache se bahoot dikkat hai" (there are no toilet facilities in brick kilns hence women face a lot of difficulties), says Umesh.

Brick kilns can be a wonderful place to work, believes Umesh, provided wages are increased, better safety measures and access to water and toilets are provided. Besides, there should be provision to attend to the medical needs of workers. "aat se nou mahine tak hum ekhi jage pe kaam karta hai. Agar tabiyat karaab hogee tho kaham kaham badakna padtha hai" (we work 8-9 months in one place and if our health deteriorates, we have to run around for treatment), laments Umesh. According to Umesh, the workers are not aware of their rights and entitlements. If they are educated on that, he feels the present condition of the brick workers can be improved much more.







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