

Ecological Threats of Brick Kilns in R.S. Pura –A Study in Gandhian Perspective

Abstract

Ecological threats can be a challenge for humanity in large in the time to come. Ecological imbalance is constantly becoming a major threat for humanity. No compromise is required wherever environmental threats exists. There are certain areas where by laws are openly challenged especially in R.S.Pura (Jammu and Kashmir) where large number of Brick kilns are being operated fearlessly. These kilns are openly polluting the total environment of the area which is really a matter of concern. There are few ways to look into especially in Gandhian way as he always opine that there should be minimum exploitation of natural resources.

Keywords: Labourers Exploitation, Human Rights Violation, Low Chimneys, Mindless Digging, Dangerous Soot, Pacca House

Introduction

Brick Kiln industry in R.S. Pura is involved with the immediate future of around eight thousand human lives. The brick kilns in R.S. Pura further affect directly the daily lives of about one lac villagers living in the vicinity. About one lac thirty two thousand lives are directly or indirectly related very seriously with these brick kilns in R.S. Pura area of Jammu and Kashmir.

It is believed that Gandhi was against the mechanization and modernisation. In reality, Gandhi was never against Mechanization as such because he believed that human body was also a machine. Gandhi wanted to encourage such machinery or machines which do not displace human labour. It however does not mean that such preferences on the part of mahatama Gandhi for a small scale industry like brick kilns gives licence to Governments and society in general and humanity at large to remain ignorant about highly difficulty and environmentally hazardous situation in which the labourers in the kilns work, perspire and try to sustain themselves under highly objectionable and exploitative conditions. The vast agricultural area is occupied by brick kilns in R.S. Pura as a result agriculture is rendered almost completely infertile for prospective and fruitful agriculture. Further, these brick kilns lead to severe air pollutions as they use fire wood as the fuel resulting in to dense smoke exhausts.

Ignoring all the rules, regulations and by-laws devised by the different institutions like Directorate of Industries, Pollution Control Boards and Environment and Remote Sensing etc. With the connivance of certain higher ups in the mentioned agencies, the brick kilns run their business unhindered. The mushroom growth of brick kiln industry in R.S.Pura and surrounding areas along with roads has posed a serious threat to the environment. Not only the human life but also the crops, fruit trees, vegetables, gardens etc are seriously affected due to the pollution created by these kilns.

A large number of brick kilns are situated close to the main roads of the area which is against norms. A senior official in the pollution control board, when contacted, confirmed the violations and informed that notices have been issued to some of the defaulters and strict action under rules is being initiated. But, the action against the influential owners of these brick kilns is yet seems to be a far cry.

Brick Kilns and Environmental Threat

Gradually the villages surround the once isolated brick kilns. Some are almost in the heart of the villages and the heavy soot fly in and around the houses. It is gradually lowers down and makes way to the human lungs causing respiratory diseases. A survey can undoubtedly can establish the fact that respiratory diseases are a common phenomenon in the surrounding areas. The poisonous gasses like carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide and sulphur dioxide released by burning coal, created

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havoc in the environment. The vital issue at hand is the health of the workers who are by and large are bonded labourers. They borrow money in advance in off season and have to toil hard to repay the amount to the owners. There is no schooling provisions for the children of these labourers. The children grow up to take the profession of their elders. They live in unhygienic living and working conditions. And, become victims of water borne diseases, skin infections etc. Hence, the brick kilns are affecting and degrading the ecological balance of the region.

Total Land under Kiln Construction

The Brick kilns do not involve the erection of chimneys and basement area under it only. But, lot of area is required to store baked bricks, store fuel materials, wastage before disposal etc. Thus, in total an area of fifteen kanals is kept for every brick kiln for all these activities. This area becomes a permanent waste land as nothing can be grown on this land for decades. Many such abandoned sites can be seen in and around the area. Apart from the fifteen kanals of land required to establish a brick kiln, they undertake mindless digging for the materials for making bricks. Hence, huge areas of land are being rendered useless for agriculture by this industry.

Immense Use of Fuel

Further, it has been observed while interviewing the owners of the brick kilns and labourers that huge amount of fuel is needed to produce/bake bricks. It is important to mention that fifteen tons of coal and almost twenty tons of wood is required to produce one lac bricks. While, the average production of bricks in R.S. Pura is around thirty lacs per year, the amount of coal and wood burning and subsequent release of pollution can be well estimated. Such types of utilization of natural resources is causing environmental hazards. This industry is a great threat to the already depleting green cover of the area.

Effect on The Crops

Although no scientific investigation has ever been carried out in this field but even the illiterate farmers of the immediate surrounding have confirmed that the soot from these kilns has adversely affected the crops of the area. To mention one case, the Banota village of the area was once known for its brinjal crop and other local vegetables has stopped producing any vegetables after the establishment of these kilns. The repeated crop failure in the area forced the farmers to give up farming in many cases.

Living conditions of the workers

It has been observed after analysing the living conditions of the workers of the brick kilns through the method of interviewing and questionnaire that they are living in a very miserable condition. They work for more than eight hours daily in and outside the premises of the brick kilns along with their children. Even after such labour their condition remains hand to mouth. Majority of the labourers are unhappy and work under very objectionable and compelled situations. While interacting with the workers it was found that they don't have the pacca houses to live. They live in make shift huts and without sufficient space desirable for any human.

They sleep on floor and without sufficient beddings. They have no privacy and eat unhygienic food with undrinkable water.

Children in Brick Kilns

It is understood that there should be very clear cut and well-published rules governing the overall functioning and maintenance of brick kilns, but after visiting the various agencies at Jammu, no list of rules could be found in these offices which could establish the seriousness of governmental agencies for the welfare of these poor souls. However, i could find a small list of rules and regulations governing brick kilns in the office of Divisional Commissioner, Jammu. But the utter violations of available rules and regulations in the functioning of brick kilns and maintenance is distinctively clear among others in terms their distances from highways, height of chimneys, salaries of workers, facilities to the workers and especially the worst hit victims viz children below the age of fourteen years. The entire working class in general and the children below the age of fourteen years in particular are the glaring instances of repeated gross violations of fundamental rights given by the constitution of India. The government does not seem to pay any heed to such violations of the rights of these brick kiln workers. Further, the non-governmental organisations are ignoring them, NHRC does not know about them. While the educated lot of the area is feeling victim of the violations by the influential owners. The highly educated class of teachers and students of colleges and universities are obviously quite unconcerned about the children in brick kilns. The locals living around the kilns have compromised with the inhuman conditions of the workers and children in the industry as an act of destiny and fate of workers. It has been observed that out of every one thousand workers of the industry nearly two hundred are children below the age of fourteen years

Aim of the study

The main aim of the study is to aware the people regarding the serious ecological threats around the area where brick-kilns are established. Not only the general people and labourers but also to apprise the concerned authorities to take serious note of it. Therefore educating all about the environmental danger of these brick-kilns is the main objective.

Conclusion

A keen study of R.S. Pura brick kilns show that the condition of the males, females and children who are working there is very grim. Their living and working condition is so badly affected by these kilns that they are exploited not only by the owners and other employees but also by general people around them. Every where they are treated inhumanly. Their education, health, mental as well as physical, aspirations have all been check mated by the atmosphere and the circumstances under which they are working/living. They are supposed to be one of the lowest classes in every aspect in the society. They work more but get less than their requirements and needs.

On the other hand, it is challenge to the modern science and technology and really wonders one as to why it is so indifferent to a sector which is basic building block to the entire socio-economic problems. It is very difficult to decide at this juncture that whether these brick kiln industry is constructive or destructive. On the one hand, big buildings, structures, hospitals, schools, dams and palaces are constructed by the bricks, on the other hand, these brick kilns have created terror and havoc by polluting the complete environment of the surrounding areas. A galaxy of scientist community is engaged in finding out the alternative technology of brick kilns at Roorkee in Utterakhand. Till date they have not come out with any really meaningful technology which would be eco-friendly and pollution free. But, it is hoped in near future that they would definitely produce some alternative means if they are really aware about the environmental pollution created by these kilns.

However, some solutions are presented and they need to be investigated for their scientific and technological viability:

1. The electricity-intensive kilns should be encouraged while simultaneously minimising the role of traditional coal based industry.
2. A safe distance from the residential area is the need of the hour.
3. A green belt of high growing trees needs to be planted around the kilns
4. Kilns should be completely constructed on infertile land.
5. The use of bricks in lanes, streets and nullahs etc. should be discouraged. The stone, which is

easily available, should be put to the maximum use.

6. The authorities concerned must maintain strict vigil.
7. A viable alternative is to manufacture bricks with concrete and cement. This mixture is far more stronger and durable than the traditional bricks.
8. The government must provide subsidies to the manufacturers of the cement industry so that the general people could be in a position to purchase the cement in stead of bricks at the cheaper rates.

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