

## Entrepreneurs & Workers.

"Write 'Rahmani', not 'Kumhaar'", the most vocal of the group of youngmen running the small kiln insists. "Sure" I say, having not considered putting ~~them~~ down as Kumhars, the name of the work<sup>ers</sup> co-operation<sup>tive</sup> that owned<sup>s</sup> and ran<sup>ns</sup> the kiln. After all kumhaars are ~~prehy~~ menial types, the donkey owners who work carrying bricks in kilns and generally act as transporters of<sup>all</sup> things a donkey can carry. "Kumhar, is no name of a clan, or to give a clan anyway" grumbles another in punjabe to his fellow 'Rahmani's'

Later with some more questioning I discover, these young owner-workers are indeed Kumhaars - who like many of their fellows have after years<sup>of</sup> working as menial donkey men, banded in small groups to start and earn the fruits of their own kilns. Hence forth, with their slight rise in accupation, they object to be called by their common donkey associated name of kumhaar and have (resumed?) their clan name of Rahmani. With perhaps at best only one<sup>person</sup> barely literate in their groups, with the vaguest of business sense, starting the kiln without knowing whether at the end of the season they will turn up a profit or loss, financing<sup>the making & burning of each additional row</sup> each step ahead of bricks being fired by the sales of th<sup>e</sup> last row of bricks that<sup>were</sup> cooled, and were sold, these social economic p<sup>r</sup>ioneers attempt the leap from the 2nd lowest<sup>row</sup> pay of the rural menials, ladder to the<sup>second</sup> lowest rung in the rural 'industrial' entrepreneurs ladder. (The sirkemat makers are at the lowest rung in this latter class) strata. They learnt what they did from working in kilns, from relatives in Sind where such kilns preceded those in Punjab, and introduced and spread them through out Punjab. Thus they are pioneers and inovators - "technology transferers" in the full sense of the world, introducing and spreading a brick-firing techlology in an area and in which it has never been tried, and barely having learnt it themselves.

"God alone knows, when we begin, whether we will come out with a profit or loss" the bespectacled Kumhaar --- sorry Rahmani-earnestly informs me. If we are not selling (bricks) & <sup>therefore</sup>

cannot pay our Thapairs to produce more to fire, we just narrow the width of the kiln so we are firing at a slower rate. and if things really get bad, we just

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fighten our <sup>belts</sup> ~~be it~~ and eat even less."

Who says the rural poor are risk averse. They are used to living at below subsistence and willing to risk all in trying to get above it. If they lose all, as often they do, they just returns to living on practically nothing. In fact in these 8-13 years when they are spreading these rice husk kilns all over Punjab, they continue to live on nothing despite their occasional profits. Like the Rs.9000/- each 'shareholder' of another Rahmani co-op got at the seasons end, like the Rs.52,000/- the other Rahmani saved and invested in a house from his 8 years owning-operating such kilns. Who knows in a decade or two the Rahmani clan may be noted as wealthy kiln owners.

Their precursors seem to be the Pathans. Still largely wood-sellers (Lakerwala's) living in tented encampments <sup>in</sup> are mud and thached houses (with the occasional burnt-brick mosque) <sup>their settlements</sup> noted by the huge stacks of wood, the camels that carry their wood & the clay mounds in which they produce wood coal. For the most part Pathans continue this occupation in the ~~land of the~~ Punjab. (Even to their urban <sup>in</sup> cousins, or <sup>can be seen in Lahore for example, finding</sup> their women at least surveying, collecting and carrying huge bundles of branches and leaves <sup>dropped off or surreptitiously torn from</sup> ~~collected from~~ Lahore's road side trees). But already some now ~~or such as~~ <sup>at least one I know, Omar Khan</sup> <sup>have</sup> built <sup>themselves</sup> a large 'pukka' houses, and has his own tractors <sup>trailers</sup> to carry his huge piles of wood, and others, such as Asmatullah and wood-sellers (lakerwalas) <sup>of</sup> 3 years ago - have now bought and run kilns, the larger bull-trench, wood and/or coal fired types.

Meanwhile the Thapers, continue at the bottom of the pile ~~hundred burning beneath~~ the burning sun - <sup>moulding the mix to</sup> ~~shapping mud to mould, or mixing, themselves in mud and water to~~ produce the billions of bricks that pave our roads and pathways and hold up our roofs ~~for their wretched survival~~. What daring, innovation or luck will offer them the chance to clamber out of the mud?

→ (insert) Striving to insure their wretched survival; in the afternoons knee deep in mud stamping the mud (that the next day they squat hunched over, black beneath the burning sun)

Finally - in a back alley-across open<sup>scwazy</sup>-~~drain~~ rutted mud alleys I find one family in Qabula whose sole income is from making bricks. ~~You~~<sup>U</sup>shered into their unlit house, in the unlit neighbourhood of an largely unlit town-Qabula. I meet by kerosence<sup>e</sup> - wick lamp light the man, blind, his wife, who and shows me her knotted fingers and ~~turn~~ palm from years of mud-brick making, & he ~~says & presents~~<sup>sud</sup> the rest ~~and~~<sup>of</sup> her family - 3 daughters - 9, 16 & 18? - The oldest married and then abandoned by her husband because she is blind at night now, with a child<sup>l</sup> - a young girl crippled ie with no ~~sensations~~<sup>a</sup> in her 2 legs. One

One or 2 more families work entirely as ~~shapers~~<sup>brick moulders.</sup> Others have either begun to augment their income through pimping (at times their own women) or taken credit from Kilns and got ens<sup>n</sup>ared the<sup>re</sup> (X) say my guides - a local B.Sc graduate and a mason.

"Is this any life" says the young (35 years old?) Thaper - just 6 months into having had to take credit and becoming one - "My whole family - these children, spending <sup>days</sup> their ~~in~~ this mud-yard - playing in dirt and then working with me in dirt! ~~No~~, I will never pay off my debt - unless they raise <sup>our</sup> ~~our~~ rate (now Rs. 24/1000) you calculate it. At most 6000 bricks a week - Rs. 144.0 - with 8-9 <sup>u</sup> months to feed. No - I'll never do it." And he <sup>hunches</sup> ~~humps~~ back to <sup>slapping</sup> ~~moulding~~ and <sup>e</sup> ~~shapping~~ mud in and out of moulds at <sup>0.5</sup> ~~1~~ paisa a time. (100 paisas = 1Rs)

Yes they are the most wretched - our brick makers. Scorned by all. "One thing is clear" says my <sup>Y</sup> young B.Sc "even by accompanying you - the<sup>Y</sup> (thapers) take large <sup>loan</sup> advances and <sup>then</sup> ~~run~~ away." He has spent one or 2 interviews with me listening to kiln owners and <sup>(assistants)</sup> ~~munshies~~ label the thapers as shiftless <sup>rascals</sup> ~~and ascases~~ who do little work, demand large sums, and gamble what they have.

Coming away with me <sup>now</sup> ~~from~~ interviewing a thaper group. I wonder if he holds the same opinion.

"We have to buy them" says the kiln owner. Yes they are bought and sold, illiterate wretches, most of whom did not know what their paishzi <sup>(outstanding loan)</sup> was any more, some still hoping to pay it <sup>off, others not caring any more and few literate enough to</sup> ~~and none able to~~ keep account to see if they were.

Illiterate they are almost completely at the mercy of the kiln owners to tell them what they've earned, what spent and how much they owe. Most can only be sure <sup>that their indebted</sup> it will increase. <sup>perpetuating their bondage</sup> The occasional one who has worked <sup>off the loan</sup> ~~his way out and lift~~ may give <sup>some</sup> them hope.