

"White Rahmani, not Kumhar" ~ the most vocal of the group of young men running the small kiln insists. "Sure" I say, having not considered putting ^{them} down as Kumhars, the name of the ~~owners~~ workers co-op, that owned ^{ran} the kiln. After all Kumhars are ^{pretty menial types} the donkey owners who work carrying bricks in kilns & generally act as transporters of things a donkey can carry. "Kumhar, is no name of a clan, or to give a clan anyway" growls another in Punjabie to his fellow Rahmani.

Later ~~then~~ with some more questioning discover, these young owner-workers are indeed Kumhars ~ who like many of their fellows have after years working as menial donkey men-banded in small groups to start & earn the fruits of their own kilns. Henceforth, with their slight rise in occupation, they object to be called by their common donkey associated name of Kumhar & have (resumed?) their clan name of Rahmani.

With ^{at best only one} ~~perhaps~~ barely literate ^{in their groups,} with the vaguest of business sense, starting the kiln ~~started~~ without knowing whether at the end of the season they will ~~have~~ turn up a profit or loss ~~not even~~ financing each step ahead by the sales of the last row of bricks that could ^{of bricks being ~~burnt~~ fired} be sold, these ^{social economic} ~~rural menials~~ attempt pusiness attempt the leap from the 2nd lowest rung of the rural menials ladder to the lowest rung in the rural 'industrial' entrepreneur ~~group~~ strata.

They learnt what they did from working in kilns, from relatives in Sind where such kilns preceded those in Punjab & ~~are now~~ introduced & spread them thru out Punjab. Thus they are pioneers & ~~even~~ innovators - "technology transferers" in the full sense of the word as they ^{introducing} spreading a brick firing technology in an area & in which it has never been tried, & barely having learnt it themselves.

"God alone knows, when we begin, whether we will come out with a profit or loss" the bespectacled Kumbh -- sorry Rahmani earnestly informs me. If we are not selling (bricks) & cannot pay our thapais to produce more to fire, we just narrow the width of the kiln so we are firing at a slower rate ~ & if things really get bad, we just tighten our belt & eat even less.

Who say the ~~poor~~ rural poor are risk averse. They are used to living at below subsistence & willing to risk all in trying to get above it. If they lose all, as often they do, they just return to living on practically nothing. In fact in these 8-13 years when they are spreading these rice brick 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 & invested in a horse from his

≠ 8 yrs. ~~working~~ ~~to~~ 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 - *hakeewalas* -
living in tented encampments are mud &
thatched houses (with the occasional burnt-
brick mosque) noted by the huge stacks of
wood, the ^{that carry their wood's} camels & 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 cousins, or their
women at least ^{scouring, collecting or carrying huge bundles of}
~~dry wood~~ branches & leaves collected from
ballows roadside trees) But already some
now - or at least one - know Omar Khan - has
built himself a large pukka house & has his
own tractor & trailers to carry his huge piles
of wood, & others ^{such as Amstrikhan} ~~at~~ *hakeewalas* 3 year ago - have
now bought iron kilns - the larger - bull-trench
wood & / or coal fired types

Meanwhile the shapers - continue at the
bottom of the pile - hunched burning beneath the
burning sun - shaping mud to mould,
or mixing ~~the mix~~ themselves in mud & water -
to produce the billions of bricks that pave our

roads & pathways & hold up our roofs for their wretched survival. What damn, in no way or luck will offer them the chance to clamber out of the mud?

11/5.

11 PM.

Finally - in a back alley - across ^{open} Adrain walled mud alleys I find one family in Qabala whose sole income is from making bricks. I shined into their unlit house in the unlit neighborhood of an ~~street~~ ^{largely} unlit town - Qabala - I meet by kerosene wick lamp light the ^{man} father - blind - his wife, who shows me her knotted fingers & palm from years of mud-brick making, she says & presents the rest of her family - 3 daughters - 9, 16 & 18? the oldest married & then abandoned by her husband because she ~~is~~ is blind at night - now with a child - a young girl crippled i.e. with no sensations in her 2 legs. One

^{or 2} One or more families work entirely as shapers. Others have either begun to augment their little pittance (at times their own women) or taken credit from Kilus & got ensnared their says my guides - a local BSc graduate & a mason.

"Is this any life" says the young 35 yr. old? Thaper - just 6 mths. into having had to take credit & becoming one. "My whole family - these children spending their days in this mud-yard - playing in dirt & then working with me in dirt!" No I'll never

pay off my debt - ~~you calculate~~ unless they
raise svr rate (now Rs 24/1000) you calculate it -
Almost 6000 bricks a week - Rs

with 8-9 months to feed. No - I'll never
do it." And he hurls back to moulding
& slapping mud in soft moulds at
→ paisa a time.

Yes they are the most wretched - svr brickmakers.
Scorned by all. "one thing is clear" says my young
BSc "even by accompanying you - they - (thapers)
shake it, advances & run away". He has spent
one or 2 interviews with me listening to
kilm owners sometimes label the thapers as
shiftless rascals who do little work, demand
large sums, & gamble what they have.

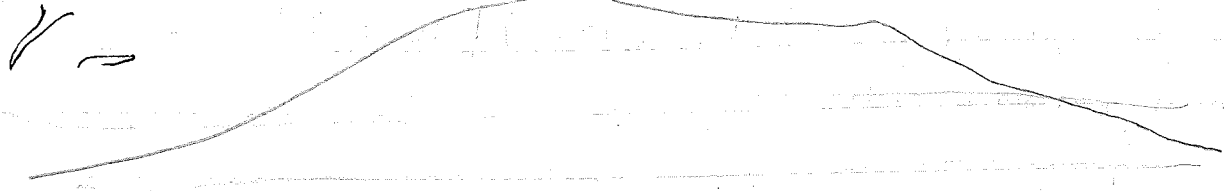
Coming away with me from interviewing a
thaper group - I wonder if he ~~is~~ holds the same
opinion.

have to
"Wep buy them" says the kilm owner. Yes they are
bought & sold, illiterate wretches, ~~2~~ most of whom
did not know what their paishgi was anymore,
~~with~~ ~~no~~ some ~~and~~ still hoping to pay it off - or
none able to keep account for ce if they were.

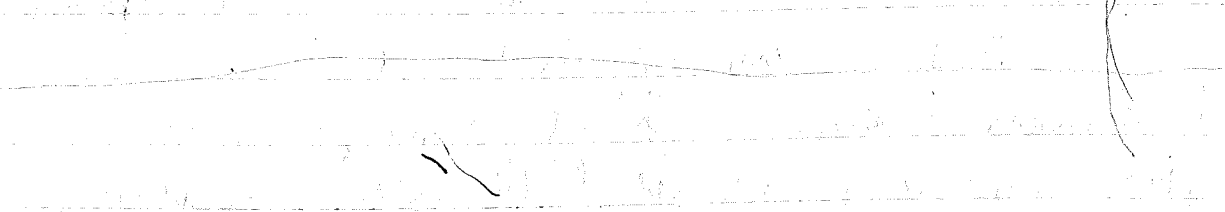
illiterate they are almost completely at the
mercy of the kilm owners ~~who is~~ to tell them what
they've earned, what spent & how much they owe.
Most can only be sure it will increase. The occasional

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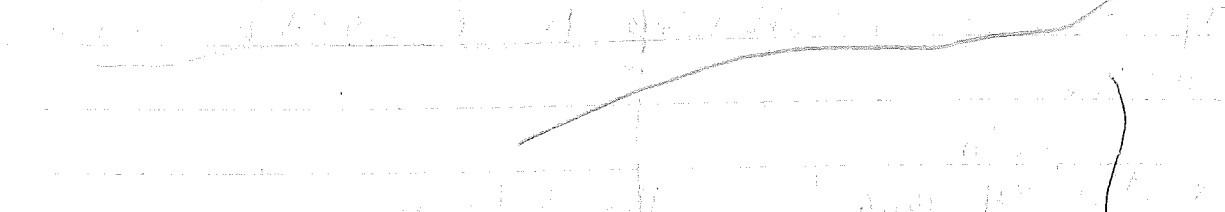
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