

AMOGHVARTA

ISSN : 2583-3189



An Overview of the Economic and Social Mobility of Labourers Working in the Stone Mining of Rajula

ORIGINAL ARTICLE



Author

Jayshree Jani

Ph.D. Scholar

Department of Sociology
Maharaja Krishankumarsinhji
Bhavnagar University
Bhavnagar, Gujarat, INDIA

Abstract

From a geographical perspective, Gujarat is a prosperous state; within the Sorath region, the Amreli district specifically the Gir tract stands out for its vast geographical expanse. This area is characterized by the presence of Pipavav Port, an extensive coastline, and unique geological features, particularly the rocky terrain of Rajula. Rajula has a large number of stone quarries. As this business has become a significant source of income, traders exchange the quarried stone based on market demand. An examination of the socio-economic dynamics of the labourers working in these quarries reveals the prevailing reality the number of quarries has steadily increased over time, leading to a corresponding rise in the workforce. More than 300 families earn their livelihood from the pre-independence stone industry; however, artisans have turned to other professions due to inadequate wages. Rajula's

stone industry, which dates back to the pre-independence era, possesses unique characteristics and supports over three hundred families. The stone is renowned both domestically and internationally; it is immune to salt-related decay and unaffected by adverse weather conditions.

Key Words

Stone Mining, Economic and Social Mobility, Labourer.

Introduction

From a geographical perspective, Gujarat is a prosperous state; within the Sorath region, the Amreli district specifically the Gir tract stands out for its vast geographical expanse. This area is characterized by the presence of Pipavav Port, an extensive coastline, and unique geological features, particularly the rocky terrain of Rajula. A distinctive quality of the stones found here is their resistance to moisture; historical monuments constructed from these stones have remained intact for ages, showing no signs of salt-induced erosion or decay, as they are a true heritage of the land. These stones are exported globally, as their chemical composition differs significantly from other types of stone, driving high demand both domestically and internationally. Consequently, the stone quarries of Rajula have gained worldwide renown. In this article, we will examine the lives of the labourers working in these developed stone quarries, focusing on their economic and social conditions.

Rajula has a large number of stone quarries. As this business has become a significant source of income, traders exchange the quarried stone based on market demand. An examination of the socio-economic dynamics of the labourers working in these quarries reveals the prevailing reality the number of quarries has steadily increased over time, leading to a corresponding rise in the workforce. These labourers perform various tasks such as breaking stones, sorting them into different categories and handling exports processes that are highly demanding in terms of both time and physical effort.

An examination of the various types of labourers and their socio-economic dynamics reveals a distinct reality this community hails from a highly educationally backward stratum and has largely been deprived of formal schooling. Since they must also shoulder family responsibilities, the business owners provide them with housing arrangements. Furthermore, to ensure their children do not miss out on education, they are enrolled in nearby government schools. Owners provide free electricity and water supplies and also consider the health and well-being of these workers by offering various related facilities. Socially, too, these labourers come from a backward class consequently, they lack awareness of ideal social norms and often harbour a distinct mindset shaped by a deep-seated inferiority complex, making it difficult for them to integrate into mainstream society. They face numerous life challenges such as uncertainty regarding where to secure higher education for their children or a lack of information about available financial assistance. Consequently, just as their economic standing is weak, their social ties also become fragile; a look at the lives of these labourers reveals that their entire day is consumed by stone-related work, leaving them unable to enjoy social festivals or celebrations. Furthermore, the livelihood they earn is a source of personal satisfaction for them; the socio-economic condition of the labourers working in the stone quarries of Rajula presents a serious issue, which can be understood as follows.

More than 300 families earn their livelihood from the pre-independence stone industry; however, artisans have turned to other professions due to inadequate wages. Rajula's stone industry, which dates back to the pre-independence era, possesses unique characteristics and supports over three hundred families. The stone is renowned both domestically and internationally; it is immune to salt-related decay and unaffected by adverse weather conditions. Although the stone quarries are confined to a one-kilo meter radius within the city, the industry is now on the verge of extinction as artisans shift to other trades due to insufficient pay. Active since the days of the old Bhavnagar State, the industry gained widespread fame; the rulers of that era even laid a dedicated railway line for transporting the stone, which remains in existence today. The quarries are located within a limited one-kilo meter area of Rajula city. No machinery is used in this industry; labourers manually excavate and extract the stones from the quarries. These quarries are primarily operated on a lease basis. Although the government has recently increased lease rates, leaseholders compelled by the need to sustain numerous families pay the higher fees. In addition, they pay various government dues, royalties, and 'dead rent.' The dead rent, previously 4,000, has risen to 25,000; consequently, as the financial burden increased, the Department of Mines and Minerals cancelled the leases in accordance with regulations. These cancelled leases remain unused by other leaseholders. Since machinery is not employed in these quarries, artisans extract the stone using large hammers through strenuous manual labour. The stone is exceptionally durable; it has been used to construct numerous buildings in Rajula, as well as the Maharaja's bungalow and a hospital in Bhavnagar. Many temples across Gujarat and riverfront "ghats" have also been built using Rajula stone. Within the city, landmarks such as J.A. Sanghvi High School, various traffic circles, and the centrally located Mohan Tower showcase the distinctive identity of this stone. It has also been used in many of the city's streets. Even in the modern era, the stone is utilized for building elevations and staircases in large bungalows, and artisans carve exquisite statues from it. This stone never loses its appeal and remains durable for years. Various products crafted from this stone have reached markets both within the country and abroad. Currently, however, artisans are gradually shifting to other professions due to inadequate wages, leaving the industry on the verge of extinction. Office bearers of the Rajula Stone Association are making concerted efforts to sustain

this industry. A wide range of items is produced from Rajula stone, including garden stones, milestones, “haidar” (heavy stone blocks), “khandki” (stone slabs), “tola” (large blocks), “gadda” (rough blocks), pillars, “kumbhi” (pedestal bases), “paliya” (memorial stones), “khambhi” (commemorative pillars), statues, “ghantla” (bell-shaped stones), “kharal” (mortars), “khandva” (pestles), and even staircases for buildings. Additionally, the stone is used to create various decorative items through intricate carving.

Exclusive Labour Market of Rajula

The huge market or world of stones is the stone industry of Rajula in which the number of labourers working in stone quarries has become subject to growth because these labourers are less likely to get wages like here in other places. Their operation in the labour market is unique. The quarry labourers in this stone industry in Rajula are the contract base workers of the owner. They are mainly employed in machinery and stone breaking which are about seven or eight standard pass and they are Indian as well as outside the state.

Negative Change in Socio-economic Dynamics

Usually, we can call occupations that do not have fixed income or variable occupations, these backward class labourers are engaged in wadi labour whenever there is a shortage of work in the mines during monsoons and when the weather changes, they join this occupation again with the family. These labourers are provided with all facilities here by the mine owners like clean water housing and some medical assistance so that they feel like a family with the mine owners.

There is also a possibility of gradual increase in their income, so there is a gradual change or change in their lifestyle. They keep their family happy from this amount of cash for the necessities of life and festivals. There is no particular change in their standard of living, but they become aware of their rights and get mixed in the urban process.

Getting financial support is sufficient for their hobbies other than their needs such as new modern appliances they live and they take entertainment and they are always aware of their labour a positive energy experience is expressed in these workers due to which they get the benefit of new clothes and outside food according to the city life style motivates their children to study in school or school especially in government schools or colleges educate their children because the way they have experienced financial struggle they struggle to their children.

They are active so that they don't have to experience it, they become familiar with government benefits, they often get information about their rights or rights in government accounts. The only challenges they have are if the mine owners give them financial support, they can bring their families higher. For example, when there are festivals, they get early salary withdrawals, and if they get bonuses or sweets, they are very happy. If the checkup camps are held, they can be vigilant about their health, especially the addicted labourers should also be aware of their health. Besides, these labourers should be periodically checked for lung and intestine and respiratory diseases at a young age. Family planning and vigilance about children's health can also be mocked for the working class who are involved in this mine work.

Conclusion

Employers should adopt a benevolent approach towards the working class specifically labourers aiming to foster a better lifestyle for them and ensure their work meets employer satisfaction. Furthermore, it is the duty of mine owners, as Indian citizens, to remain proactive regarding the workers' amenities and general well-being. Realizing this objective would bring greater encouragement and renown to the industry. Additionally, attracting more labourers to this sector would enrich the trade and hold the potential to boost national wealth. To achieve this, mine owners and the Department of Mines and Minerals must act proactively to swiftly resolve workers' issues and promote initiatives that ensure their economic and social satisfaction. Only then can those engage in this humble profession attain a better quality of life, overcome social backwardness, and

experience a sense of equality; they could even go on to play active roles in the political and other spheres, potentially serving in leadership positions. Here, I present a set of well-planned proposals and insights aimed at improving the socio-economic lifestyle of the economically disadvantaged communities engaged in the aforementioned mining industry.

References

1. Quated in Anupam Sen (1982) The State, Industrialisation and Class Formation in India, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London
2. Ministry of Labor and Empowerment, Director General of Employment and Training, <https://www.labour.gov.in/>
3. <https://dmf.gujarat.gov.in/District/DistrictMineList/AMRELI>

---==00==---