THE OTHER SIDE OF JAPANESE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Today, most of the countries, (including India), are attracted by the charm of Japanese Management or working techniques. We blame our Industries and service sector for not coming upto the mark due to their traditional work-style. Every one today, it seems, argues in favour of the Japanese method.

But, the Japanese work ethics propound the well known tradition of long working hours and short holidays. An estimate reveals that employees in Japanese auto industry work around 2,400 hours or 250 days annually and most often follow an irregular work pattern. There is also a 'service overtime' system where workers donate time to the company by not recording it on their time cards. This over work and busy schedule has resulted in an increase in the number of deaths of workers, most of them in their thirties.

Data compiled by doctors and lawyers in June'91 reveals that one out of four Japanese workers' fears that he/she will succumb to death in his/her forties. The fight to make companies and the labour ministry accept deaths brought on by overwork is proving difficult for bereaved families and their lawyers. Most Japanese companies refuse to recognize overwork as the cause of death, and give no compensation to the families or dependents. The Japanese government stipulates that overwork can be considered the cause of death only if the victim worked 'continuously for 24 hours preceding death', or 'worked at least 16 hours a day for seven consecutive days leading up to death'.

In May, the Tokyo high court ruled that a 24-hour shift was responsible for the death of a Dai Nippon company worker in 1977. The sale of nicotine-laced drinks, that promise the buyer working 24 hours with no sign of fatigue, has gone up and so have the cases of deaths due to cerebral hemorrhage.

Recently AASAI, a daily from Tokyo, published an article which reports that a Japanese worker's average working life is only 15 years, though his lifelong working hours are highest as compared to USA and France. It is 109,000 hours for a Japanese worker while for USA and France it is 76,000 hours.

Mr. Hedio Friytor, Professor at the Risshyo University in Japan stated recently in a personal talk that though the standard working hours have decreased (42 hours from 1992), the total working hours have not. Workers are under a great pressure to work for long hours and earn more money as living, particularly housing and education, is very expensive in Japan. Physiological and psychological sufferings lead to an early death. Every year, 20 to 25 thousand Japanese workers meet with sudden collapse i.e., 'Kharoshi'. This is a major issue of concern for Japanese workers today. This is an additional issue to be tackled by the already weak Trade Unions in Japan. 'Kharoshi' is the term that the Japanese use to signify death due to overwork and stress.

The time has come to put a full stop to that robot-like mechanical mass-production and instead, encourage production by the masses.

SOCIETY FOR PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH IN ASIA
This study was conducted in collaboration with INFAC (Kerala). The main focus of this study was to find out the hazards of a very much neglected area of work in which women are involved, which is the prawn-peeling industry. This article is being prepared on the basis of the study conducted by INFAC (Information for Action), Kerala.

Background

It is the irony of our workers that though the fisheries sector in Kerala earns a major share of India's foreign exchange but the working conditions are very bad. Traditionally, peeling work is classified as an unskilled work. Prawn peeling is the most monotonous and difficult work involving wet working conditions. This study was conducted in Aroor Chandaroor, Ezhupunna areas of Alappuzha district of Kerala. The study covers 600 women engaged in prawn peeling work. Prawn peeling is an integral part of this industry and also most of the work is done by women workers. Since it is a piece rate work, women are employed on a daily basis. For peeling a basin full of prawns weighing around 1 kg. the woman is paid a token which she can exchange for one rupee at the end of the day. The last one decade has seen many efforts in the direction of empowerment and equality of women but it has done very little to improve the situation of women in the prawn peeling industry.

Socio-economic background

The workers engaged in the peeling work fall within the age group of 10-40 years, which means the child labour exists in prawn peeling industry. Those who are above forty years of age are thrown out of this industry as they are treated as occupational rejects in this industry. In the context of marital status of pealing workers, around 30% are unmarried. Most of these unmarried women are unmarried because of the economic reasons. The main reason is the lack of dowry (a practice prevailing in Kerala). The overwhelming majority of workers are literate even though most of them had only primary education. Out of these 33% have studied upto SSLC and 6.7% had further education. It is found that the workers who have only primary education are more likely to be absorbed in the occupation because owners believe that these workers are less likely to constitute a threat to the smooth functioning of prawn factories. Most of the workers have to discontinue their studies due to economic compulsions and in some cases due to health reasons. There are many socio-economic compulsions which make these women workers prone to the exploitation by the shed owners.

Apparently, about 96% of workers own a house and 92% have land but these properties are so small and so polluted by the waste from prawn industries that it has no significant contributions in their domestic income. Secondly, there is no alternative employment available to them. Hence, about 53% of women have to rely totally on these peeling sheds. Most of the women are interested in switching over to other occupations but the situation is such that they have no hope about the alternative avenues of livelihood even if approximately half of the women (48.5%) know other handicrafts like coir making.

Another significant finding was that there are 40.5% women whose families totally depend on their income from this occupation. This industry is seasonal depending upon availability of prawns which is highly unpredictable. During high seasons they have long hours of work such as from 6 O'clock in the morning to late in the evening and during lean seasons woman get only two hours of work. Workers say that they get work between 100-150 days in a year. It is evident from the fact that 76% of the women get work only between 100-150 days in a year. Their hours of work also fluctuate depending upon not only the season but also the mood of the shed owners. The average income per year is estimated to be around 2000-3000 Rupees. The daily wage of these women is approximately Rs. 15-20 a day. While discussing with women it was found that provided a chance for alternative employment, these women would like their children not to join this industry, but due to lack of alternatives and economic compulsions, women are forced to take their children also to these sheds. Women are not able to accrue the benefits provided in the law due to the lack of implementation. Sometimes employers give incentive in cash or in kind (rice, sari, etc.) to these women on festivals and other occasions. Even these benefits are given to very few women.
Working Conditions

These women work under a shed which is divided into two parts: one, where the prawns are washed and iced cold water is stored; and the other section, where these women sit on the floor on a small pallet (wooden block). Under one shed about 150 - 200 women sit. The size of the shed is generally about 30x60 ft. Women sit in a line, with their share of prawns. Generally in one line there are about 25-30 women and in one shed there are about 6-8 such lines of woman sitting and peeling prawns. Normally, the atmosphere is very wet and humid since prawns is a highly perishable item which is stored in ice and when women are working with prawns, they are given to them in bowls full of ice-cold water.

Occupational Injuries

Due to the wet working conditions, the work-shed is always very slippery. Many a times women fall and dislocate their joints but they do not get any help from the employer, even as a medical benefit.

Another common injury is cuts and pricks on the wet and swollen fingers. For prawn-peeling, women use a small knife (which is very sharp) to remove the head and stings of prawns. Usage of such a sharp knife for peeling and also stings on the head of prawns result in small cuts and pricks. But, these injuries of fingers are not considered as work-place injuries at all, rather they are considered as a part of the occupation.

Occupational Health

Due to wet and humid working conditions, workers are inherently prone to bacterial as well as viral infections. Apart from these infections, their sitting posture also gives rise to many health problems. Sitting on the wet floor for hours together leads to circulatory problems, resulting in numbness in appendage and their feet also get fungus. Due to the ice and cold water, most of the women suffer from Bronchial diseases. Approximately, 62.9% of women complain of backache, with 30% having it very regularly. The cause of this backache is actually the posture which they have adopted for sitting on the floor. Headache is ranked second with 80.9% women suffering from it. Apart from these most common illnesses, the pain in the joints is also often complained about. About 77.4% women complain about numbness in the fingers and out of these, 15.5% always have this problem. Around 71% of these women complain about the pain in their heels and swelling of feet and 20.4% women workers are perpetually affected by it. Seventy percent women complain of shoulder pains. Most of these problems are attributed to the posture and the speed of work they have adopted to earn as much as possible due to the piece-wise system. While working with the icy and salt water, the upper skin of the hands is removed. As a result, most of the women complained that they couldn’t eat with their hands and they had to use a spoon because the salt and chill, which are the most important ingredients of Kerala food, cause acute pain as they come in contact with their already raw hands.

Access to Health Facilities

Whatever health facilities are available, in the private as well as in the government hospitals, they are rarely used as it is not possible to forego their day’s work in the peeling shed. Only in exceptional circumstances do they use the medical facilities. The overall hygiene and sanitary conditions are abysmally poor.

Pollution

Processing of prawns involves the use of lots of water. As there is no perennial water supply, this industry relies solely on ground water for its day to day usage. It includes washing of the prawns, making ice, cleaning the sheds, etc. The waste products (head, velas, other discarded items) are disposed off locally, along with the contaminated water from the sheds which percolates into the ground water. The ground water level also reduces (due to the excess use by these sheds), resulting in the saline back-waters entering (through seepage) into wells and ponds. The effect of it may be catastrophic in the near future. There is a rampant menace of house-flies in this area, which if unchecked can cause Cholera or dysentery. Paddy cultivation cannot be practiced in most of these areas because of the disposal of effluents and waste water into the paddy fields.

This study has provided a valuable insight into the lives of the poor, unorganised and exploited working women in the prawn industry in Alappuzha district. Discussing, observing, sharing and learning from the women workers not only exposed us to the hard and unhealthy life they live but it also strengthened our belief to strive for the well-being and health of these hardworking and courageous women. The major recommendations which emerged out of this study are as follows:-
Most of the women workers are not only living in poverty but are also a part of the unhealthy competition amongst themselves to earn more.

Despite various protective labour legislations, hardly any head is given to the suffering of these women workers. They are paid much less as compared to the profit earned by the owners of the sheds. No welfare measures, or benefits are given to them.

Since the male members of the family are involved in odd employments, there is no fixed source of income and therefore, their family largely depends upon their earnings through prawn-peeling.

As this is only a seasonal work, there is always an uncertainty of earning. When the catching season is there, they have to do more work and during the off-season their earnings also come down.

Most of the workers reported various occupational diseases. Some of their causes are directly or indirectly related to their work. However, the main problems were: back-ache, head-ache, pain in the heels and swelling of legs, numbness in the fingers, rheumatism, pains in joints, hands and shoulders.

Various cases of injuries due to slipping on the wet ground were also reported.

No medical or financial help is provided by the employers in the case of either workplace injuries or diseases due to working at these sheds.

Inspite of the existence of private and government health facilities, these workers are unable to utilise it. To get treatment from government hospitals, they have to spend more time, which (being a piece rate worker) they are not able to afford.

Most of them do not have any job-satisfaction in their work. They are employed temporarily by the contractors. They are also very much vulnerable to exploitation. Since most of them have only primary education they are unaware of their rights and do not feel the need to put-up their protest before appropriate authorities.

There is no leisure time in between the working hours and even if there is some, they would like to do more peeling in the available time to be able to earn more.

What Needs to be done?

All workers must be given their stipulated minimum wages and full welfare benefits. Women will have to get organised to be able to pressurize the prawn traders and shed-owners for these. The Factories' Inspectorate will also have to be pressurized to implement the labour laws properly.

Regular monitoring of the workplace-safety and health of workers, should be undertaken by the Factories Inspectorate. The possibility of providing proper tables and hand gloves, etc., should be examined. The Central Labour Institute, Bombay, and the Regional Centre of National Institute of Occupational Health (Bangalore) should be involved in this effort.

By co-ordinating, both with government and private trust hospitals, women could have greater access to better health services.

Further research on women workers' health problems, both occupational and others, should be undertaken.

A Fishy Business!

Fisheries in India play a very important role in earning foreign exchange. Export of marine products from India recorded a new all-time high during this year, touching the highest ever figure of 139,419 tonnes valued at Rs 89,367 crore. This year, exports from Kerala took a lion's share of the total export to the international market accounting for almost 41.9% of the total quantity considered for these markets abroad. Though no reliable statistics are available it can be safely assumed that the coastal belt of Alappuzha in Kerala is a major processing and exporting zone of shrimps and prawns, among other delivery points in the state. In order to increase the profit margin, most of the peeling sheds are concentrated in and around Alappuzha. The reason—cost of labour in these backward areas is very cheap. Moreover, these areas fall outside the jurisdiction of Cochin Corporation and the owner of these fisheries could very well obviate many regulations and procedures regarding labour that are prevalent in corporation areas. This is one of the reasons why Alappuzha and Ernakulam were selected for this study.
In Gujarat, pottery-making is done primarily in three districts namely, Than in Surendranagar district, Himmatnagar in Sabarkantha district and Naroda in Ahmedabad district. Than is the oldest centre of pottery work. The Harijan community of the Saurashtra region which includes Surendranagar has been involved in this work traditionally. During the last twenty years, the pottery industry has grown manifold in Ahmedabad and Himmatnagar.

The pottery industry employs workers on a piece-rate basis. In order to increase earnings, the employed person (usually the men) involves his whole family, including the children, in the work. Most of the workers live inside the factory premises, in small sheds provided by the owners. The factories observe weekly holidays. But, in fact, on these days also work continues except for the processes on the wheel.

Unfair labour practices are carried out in these factories. For example, the workers are not made permanent even after twenty years of work. Further, they are not paid for their weekly holidays. Even though workers work for the entire month, they are given wage slips indicating 15 or 20 days of attendance. Welfare services like creches are not provided. Women workers are not even recognised as workers.

Given the conditions of the workers, an initiative was made to organise them two years ago. A union was formed among the pottery workers of the three districts and named the Gujarat Pottery Kamdar Union. In the last two years, the union took up the issues like the increase in wage rate and bonus along with the issue of occupational health hazards of the workers of the Naroda region of Ahmedabad.

In Ahmedabad alone, there are sixty ceramic factories employing five thousand families. In all the units, labour practices are the same. In twenty of these units, the workers are very active and united. The union conducted a participatory research on occupational health in these 20 units with the support of UNNATI. It revealed that workers working on the wheels (locally called CHAKDA) for more than five years have been showing symptoms like cough, sputum in the cough, breathlessness, chest pain and general weakness. These symptoms may be because of the worker's exposure to dust. The union contacted the local ESIS chest hospital at Naroda after finding out from the workers that they have been going to the hospital regularly. Most of these workers had been diagnosed as suffering from T.B. It was also revealed that, despite of receiving long term treatment, these workers are not recovering. The chest hospital doctors suspected that they may be suffering from Silicosis. The chest hospital referred
a few cases to the National Institute of Occupational Health (NIOH), Ahmedabad. NIOH scientists and doctors, after the examination, felt that these workers were showing Silicosis symptoms. However, no official statement or report was available. It is well known that Silicosis is a notifiable-compensatory disease for which workers could obtain the appropriate compensation.

Against this backdrop, the Gujarat pottery Kamdar Union along with other institutions like UNNATI, Ahmedabad; Vyavasaik Swasthya Suraksha Mandal, Baroda; SIRMCE, Ahmedabad; NHL Medical College, Ahmedabad; Lions Club (Ahmedabad Air-Port) and PRIA, New Delhi, decided to take up the issue of Silicosis. As there is already a National campaign on Dust Related Occupational Lung Diseases initiated at the national level, it was thought that the issue faced by the pottery workers could be taken up under the auspices of the National campaign.

As a first step to this end, a diagnostic camp on lung diseases in ceramic workers was held on December 8, 1991, at Naroda near the site of the ceramic factories. Fifty workers who were showing positive symptoms of Silicosis were identified from participatory research conducted earlier. The chest X-rays of the workers were done prior to the diagnostic camp. It was thought that the portable X-ray machine might not give good results in diagnosing Silicosis. Hence X-ray of the workers' chests were taken by a standard X-ray machine.

On the day of the camp the occupational history of the workers was noted. This was made as detailed as possible with the help of a proforma developed earlier in consultation with occupational health experts. Following this, a general health check up was done. In addition, all the workers underwent the lung function test. Each worker individually met with a panel of experts, along with the X-ray, lung function test results and the doctors explained the causes of Silicosis to these workers, by showing the X-ray pictures. Many workers, not involved in the camp, accompanied their colleagues who were undergoing the diagnosis. This occasion was also used for general awareness-building among the workers on the issue of occupational health. The educators from UNNATI, PRIA and other institutions like NIOH and SIRMCE talked informally to the workers.

This diagnostic camp revealed the unhealthy working conditions of pottery workers. Out of the fifty workers diagnosed, about half are suspected to be showing positive silicotic symptoms. We plan to re-examine the X-ray and other medical reports with the help of a group of experts who have been involved in the issue of occupational health.

The Gujarat Pottery Kamdar Union is planning to take up action on workplace hazard monitoring and compensation. No doubt, it is a daunting task. We all need to join hands to ensure a safe work place for these workers. We hope all individuals and organisations who have been involved with us in this endeavour will continue their support for the struggle of these pottery workers for a safe and healthy work place.
LEAKAGE ACCIDENTS

° Gas Leak Scare
On October 12, panic spread among the people when an ammonia gas leaked from the N.F.L plant near Ugratpur.

° Gas Leak at Ice Factory
On November 12, six women workers of a fish-processing unit fell ill following the leakage of ammonia gas from an ice factory at Maniktala, Calcutta.

° Gas Leaked After Fire in the Mine
On October 31, panic spread among the people when carbon monoxide gas leaked from the Lodana Colliery mine, of Dhanbad district, after a fire broke out the mine.

° Seven Hospitalised After Gas Leak
On November 13, seven people were hospitalised as ammonia gas leaked from the ice factory in north Calcutta.

ARE TANKERS SAFE?

° Hundred Hospitalised After Gas Leak
On 23 Oct, more than 100 people were hospitalised after some ammonia gas leaked from a tanker after an accident on the Thane-Belapur road. This leakage affected the residents of the Inga-Nagar (zoned by the adjacent Industrial Unit).

° Gas Leak Takes Place at Thana
On October 22 a second gas leak occurred when a truck carrying Old Age 35 overturned at the Gajumah crossing, Rardunt, at Thana. According to unofficial sources, a few hundreds were affected, many of them complaining of skin and eye irritation.

° Olfen Gas Leak
On November 26, Olfen gas, a toxic substance, leaked from a tanker carrying the chemical in a container near Utkar, on the Bhivend, Vashi Road.

° Sixty One Killed In Tanker Blast
On November 22, sixty-one people were charred to death and 58 injured, 40 seriously, when a chemical spilling out of an overturned tanker set fire to a major fire near Daliani, about 140 km. from Bombay.

° Two Killed In Gas Leak
On November 20, two people were killed and 10 others were treated for weakness, suffocation and irritation and throat pain after inhaling poisonous Olfen fumes that leaked from a chemical tanker when it rolled over and caught fire at Vador-Khangam, about 20 km. north of Thane city.

MISHAPS

° Well Collapsed Killed Two
On October 20, two labourers were killed when a well they were digging collapsed.

° Riviere Factory Blasts Injures Fifteen
On November 18, fifteen workers of a Riviere Factory at Nizamuddin area of Delhi were injured when the furnace in the factory exploded.

° Building Collapse, Injures Seven
On November 16, seven construction workers were badly injured when the building under construction in Kathpali, New Delhi collapsed.
ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION

There is a considerable literature dealing with environmental pollution, but most of the information is scattered through many scientific and technical journals and comparatively few books on the subject have been written. This book has been written to fill the need for a one-volume scientific discussion on the major types of environmental pollution—air, water, soil, thermal, radiation and noise pollution—and their impact on man and on the environment. This book also highlights the various methods of prevention and control of various kinds of pollution in an easy, non-technical way.

This book is divided into eight chapters, each of which covers a particular aspect of environmental pollution. Every chapter is discussed point by point and unnecessary descriptions are omitted.

This brief but comprehensive book will prove to be of great help and guidance for a laymen as well as activists working on the issue.

For details contact: Director, National Book Trust, India, A-5 Green Park, New Delhi-110 016.

NOT BEYOND REPAIR

(Reflections of a Malaysian Trade Unionist)

The author (Arokia Das) of this book combines a picturesque but critical reflection of British colonial influences on the development of the Malaysian labour movement with a harsh assessment of its recent history and character.

In a sincere but at times punitive style, the author makes a rigorous examination of the forces that made Malaysian unions what they are today and goes on to look at the possible new directions he feels Labour should take.

In the hazy political atmosphere, through which people are looking at the uncertain promise of a ‘New World Order’, Das addresses to the socialist ideals which he feels will more aptly serve the long term interests of the ordinary Malaysian worker.

For details Contact: Asia Monitor Resource Centre Ltd., 444 Nathan Road, B-5, Kowloon, Hong Kong.

SHAHIDON KI PUKAR

Shahidon Ki Pukar - is an Audio cassette of Revolutionary songs of Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha. This cassette is a musical tribute to the late leader of C.M.M., Comrade Shankar Guha Niyogi. It has lyrics of Shankar Guha Niyogi and also of Hirendra Nath Chattopadhay. The cassette is priced at Rs.28/.

For copies write to: Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha, Dalit Rajniti, Durg - 481 220, Madhya Pradesh.