

VIKAS Agarbatti factory is a private factory which was established in 1980. It has two branches in Raipur, one in Lakhe Nagar and the other in Nehru Nagar.

This survey was conducted by Renu Shah who joined the factory as an apprentice worker, and gradually gained the confidence of the women workers. She was unable to tape record the conversations. The report was written by Shashi Sail and Anita Dev, on the basis of Renu's daily notes. All three women belong to Chhattisgarh Mahila Jagriti Sangathan which is still in contact with the women workers.

There are 60 women and 45 children employed in the Vikas incense factory. Of the children, 12 are between the ages of three and five and 15 between the ages of five and 10. Most of the women are contract workers, who do the work at home. The women rise at 4 in the morning and prepare incense sticks from 4 to 6, then they do some housework and return to factory work. This process of alternating factory work and house work goes on from 4 in the morning to 11 at night. They manage to make about 1000 incense sticks in one day.

They are paid at the rate of Re 1 or Rs 1.25 per 1,000 incense sticks. Often, the counting clerks pay them less, on the pretext that some of the sticks are damaged, so the women end up being paid only 75 paise per 1,000 sticks. A few of the workers work in the factory premises. They are employed in packing the incense sticks, and are paid at the rate of Rs 2 per 100 bundles packed.

On the other hand, the factory owners are reaping fat profits from their enterprise. They spend Rs 4 on one kilo of raw material, which is used to manufacture 1,000 incense sticks. The workers are paid Re 1 for manufacturing and Rs 2 for packing these 1,000 sticks, which are sold in the market for Rs 20. Thus, the factory owner spends a total of Rs 7 on raw material and wages, and gets a profit of Rs 13.

The raw materials used are sawdust, coal and wood powder, ash, colouring and perfumes. The unremitting labour under unhygienic conditions has a disastrous effect on the health of the workers.

## The Lines On Their Palms Are Worn Away

Suderwati, a 23 year old worker, showed us her palms from which the very lines are being worn away. This phenomenon is also observable on the hands of the little children who have become skilled in this labour before the lines of their destiny could take shape.

The factory premises consist of a tin roofed shed and the workers sit on the ground. The place is dirty. Dust and sawdust pervade the atmosphere, leading to chronic colds and breathing troubles for the workers. The workers live in poorly ventilated, badly lighted huts, with inadequate protection from cold, damp and

in hotels. He ill treats me and the children. I have five children. Three are in school and the two younger ones help me make *agarbattis*. The youngest child is about a year old, but I haven't yet been able to get him a single set of clothing. With great difficulty, I manage to earn Rs 10 or 12 a week."

These women and children live in a state of continual physical and mental tension, harassed by the employers at work and by the menfolk at home.

When in the course of discussion we told them exactly how much profit their employers were getting from their labour,



**Chemical burns on the hands of 16 year old Nirmaia Sharmai**

rain. They also suffer from malnutrition and lack of medical treatment.

A majority of the women reported that their husbands do not contribute to the household expenditure. These men squander their earning on drink, cigarettes and eating out, so that the women are in fact sole earners and supporters of families. Anasuyabai says :“My husband is a contract worker and earns upto Rs 80 a week, but he spends it on drink and food

many of them felt indignant and angry, but others felt that if they organize themselves and go on strike for higher wages, the employers will replace them with other workers, so they will be deprived of their meagre livelihood. They told us that at time some women did protest against the way they were being treated, so the contractors stopped giving those women work on contract.

*(translated from Hindi*