

**BIDI MAKING AS A LIVELIHOOD OPTION IN
MURSHIDABAD (W.B) IN RELATION TO SOCIO-
ECONOMIC AND HEALTH STATUS**

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ABSTRACT

Bidi industry occupies a prominent place in rural orthodox society by providing employment opportunities to large number of poor and uneducated people. In Murshidabad Bidi is the largest home based cottage industry. In this present study the investigator tried to find out the importance of bidi industry as a source of livelihood for the poor and illiterate people in relation to certain social, economic and health condition. For collecting data, the researcher used self-made questionnaire by applying simple random sampling technique through descriptive field survey. The investigator found that for poor, illiterate and landless people bidi industry is the main source of earning livelihood though it caused many life threatening diseases to the people. The result showed that about 80% bidi rollers are female and about 15% are child predominantly girl child. The investigator also found that socio-economic condition of bidi workers are below the average level, lacking of potable water, proper sanitation and medical facilities. The researcher found that most of the workers were not satisfied with their work.

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Introduction

Bidi industry is employment and skill oriented cottage industry in India. The Bidi industry occupies a prominent place in rural development in terms of its capacity to offer potential employment opportunities to a large number of people. Bidi manufacturing is done by artisan families in urban and rural areas, with the help of family members including children, physically handicapped persons and aged people. It gives employment to millions of people and is a source of lively-hood for the Bidi rolling families. As an agro-based industry, Bidi-manufacturing activity generates the backward and forward linkages like agriculture and marketing activities respectively. It employs over three million workers mostly consisting of adult females and children in India. In addition, another forty lakhs, are estimated to be seasonally engaged in tendu leaf collection. While 80 percent of the work force in Bidi industry comprise of women and girl children. All these workers are poor and uneducated. All of them roll the Bidis at their respective homes and supply them to the nearby factories. The Bidi industry is a major informal sector in Karnataka, Andhra-Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil-Nadu, Uttar-Pradesh and West-Bengal.

The district of Murshidabad has a population of almost 7 million with a density of almost 1101 persons per sq. km. Over time, it became difficult for such a large population to earn their livelihood by agriculture alone. In the past, residents of Jangipur earned their livelihoods by weaving lungis and towels; Dhuliyani was famous for the weavers. However, because of the land erosion by Ganga and Padma (the two famous rivers in the area) during the rainy seasons most residents became landless labourers and soon poverty compelled them to sell their belongings. With no other alternatives to earn a livelihood, they took up the home-based profession of bidi rolling, especially the women who could do this work from within their homes.

Study area

As it was not possible to study the whole district, only four blocks of the district namely Farakka, Samsanganj, Suti-I and Suti-II were selected. The investigator has been surveyed few villages of these blocks door to door. All these are fall the under Jangipur, the northern most sub-division of Murshidabad District of West Bengal.

Significance of the study

Being labour intensive industry, it is a very important source of employment as it needs labour for cutting tendu leaves, rolling and packing of Bidis, labelling of Bidis, administration staff and

transportation etc. Even the physically handicapped can roll Bidis to earn their livelihood by working at their homes. Not only that, the industry gives employment to those women who cannot go out for work. It gives employment to males, females, young poor persons particularly in the rural areas. Thousands of people are engaged in the industry, as it provides direct as well as indirect employment.

The industry gives employment not only to Bidi rollers but it provides work to the agricultural labourers at off season. Thus the industry provides supplementary income to rural people in India. The industry is mainly rural, it gives employment to the rural workers, and as a result, it prevents the influx of agricultural and other rural workers to urban township.

The broad objective of this research study was to examine the importance of bidi industry on the people of Murshidabad.

Objectives

- I. To study the origin and profile of Bidi industry in Murshidabad.
- II. To examine the employment opportunity provided by Bidi industry.
- III. To understand the socio – economic background of Bidi workers.
- IV. To analyse the demographic profile and quality of life of bidi workers.
- V. To analyse patterns and types of tobacco related occupational health hazards faced by the Bidi-workers.

Literature Review

Business Standard (2010) a whopping 75 percent of about 44 lakh 'Bidi' workers in the country suffer from multiple illnesses due to continuous exposure to tobacco and other hazardous substances. The study conducted by the 'Voluntary Health Association of India (VHAI)' claimed that workers spent at least 12 hours rolling Bidies and faced the risks of contracting TB and developing chronic bronchitis, asthma, skin and spinal problems among others.

Mukhopadhyay. And Mukhopadhyay (2008) studiedentitled 'Caught in a Death Trap' involved a sample of over 1,000 workers of Anand district in Gujarat and Murshidabad in West Bengal. The survey also claimed that all workers worked under "dehumanizing conditions" as the industry openly "flouted" provisions of labour laws.

D. Rajesekhar and S. Madheswaran (2005) this study analyzed the Bidi rolling by largely women in their homes and is important source of livelihood for a large number of workers in some parts of India including Karnataka.

Department of Labour (2001) “Indian Government has enacted a number of legislative measures to regulate the working conditions and to provide welfare schedules to the Bidi workers and their favourites”. The important among these include the Bidi Cigar Workers (Conditions of employment) Act 1966, the Bidi workers welfare cess Act, 1976, and the Bidi Workers Welfare fund Act 1976.

Methodology

For the present study, the investigator used descriptive survey method.

Database

The data was collected through the field survey. A systematic random sampling technique was employed to collect the data. In Murshidabad, Bidi Industry mainly found in four blocks i.e. Farakka, Samserganj, Suti I and Suti II and that's why the investigator selected these blocks for collecting data.

Sample size

In the present study, the investigator collected data of 200 families or household. All the elements in the population were included irrespective of their cast, creed, religion etc. The sample were selected by using simple random sampling technique.

Table No. 1: Sample Size

Sl. No.	Block name	No. Of families
1.	Farakka	50
2.	Samserganj	50
3.	Suti-I	50
4.	Suti-II	50
	Total	200

Source: Primary survey, July- 2015

Tools

The investigator used self-made questionnaire which contain questions about livelihood and socio-economic and health status as a tools for collecting data for this research work. Space was also allotted on the questionnaire to write down, age, sex, education, marital status, occupation, monthly income and income from Bidi, religion, expenditure on various field, mood of employment etc.

Statistical techniques used

The analysis of data was done by using Mean and simple percentage techniques.

History of Bidi industry in Murshidabad

The Bidi industry started to grow in Jangipur Sub-Division under the district of Murshidabad, West Bengal during the third decade of the last century. Sri. BijoySarkar of Khulna set up 'Biswabijay' Bidi Factory in Aurangabad Under the aegis of Sri. Brindaban Mishra, a primary school teacher. But very soon, the initiative and success of BiswabijoyBidi factory came to the limelight and MuljiSikkaBidi factory setup their new production unit at Aurangabad. The arrival of MuljiSikka at the district brought about a new dimension in the world of Bidi industry. The new BiswbijayBidi factory, which captured the large market in the eastern India, now lost the market. MuljiSikka also closed the production. To take the advantage of the unoccupied market, MrinaliniBidi factory came forward. Being inspired by the success of the MrinaliniBidi factory, a new factory namely 'Das Bidi Factory' was setup. Later on some more factories were setup in the Jangipur Sub-Division, among them 'Pataka Industrial Group' is dominating over the Bidi market in the district which is known to be the largest in the country.

Profile of Bidi Industry in Murshidabad

As per 2001 Census, 55 Bidi Companies are running in the Murshidabad district and 300000 household workers are engaged. About 3 lakh households are directly or indirectly involved in the Bidi industry in Jangipur Sub-Division (As mentioned by the Project Director, DRD Cell, MurshidabadZillaParishad). There are more than 300000 Bidi workers in Murshidabad district of which 2.5 lakhs to Jangipur Sub-Division. Of this 70% are women and in case of the district the percentage is 65% 1. More than 33 companies are situated in the Jangipur Sub-Division, of which owner of 21 companies are local. The Bidi companies have made arrangements to bring Tendu

leaf mainly from UP, Chhattisgarh, AP, Maharashtra & Orissa, whereas tobacco comes from Gujarat & Maharashtra and label (Packet) comes from Kolkata (W.B.). The main market of the Bidi of Murshidabad is UP, Delhi & Assam.

Bidi as a Source of Livelihood

In the study area, the investigator found that Bidi making is the main source of livelihood for the poor and uneducated people. About 74% of the family are engaged in Bidi in the study area. Percentage of female engagement is very high in Bidi making because it is a home-based industry. About 18% of family who are considered Bidi as a subsidiary source of livelihood. Only 8% of family take Bidi making as a temporary source of livelihood. Most of the peoples are skilled in Bidi making. So that they choose Bidi making as their source of livelihood. Beside this, they get raw materials for Bidi from the neighbour Munshi or Merchant and from the factory.

Table -2: Source of Livelihood

Sl. No.	Types of Livelihood	% of Family
1.	Main source of livelihood	74
2.	Subsidiary source of livelihood	18
3.	Temporary source of livelihood	8

Note: percentage-wise

Nature of Employment

It is found that Bidi making is permanent work for 78% of the total Bidi workers. On the other hand 16% are seasonal and only 6% are the causal workers.

Table - 3 : Nature of Employment

Sl. No.	Nature of Employment	% of Workers
1.	Permanent	78
2.	Seasonal	16
3.	Causal	6
	Total	100

Note: percentage-wise

Share of Bidi in Total Family Income

According to the survey, on an average, Bidi rollers contribute 55.41 percent of the total income of the families studied. This showed the importance of sector in the economic sustainability of the household. As the data collected from the study area showed that the average income of the selected families from all the sources was Rs.3130 per month. Moreover, if we consider the mean total family income only from Bidi, then it comes around Rs. 1721 per month.

Table - 4: Share of Bidi in Total Income

Sl. No	Level of contribution in Total family Income	% of Family
1.	Below 40%	14
2.	40-70%	24
3.	Above 70%	62

Note: percentage-wise

Expenditure of Money

The investigator found the percentage of expenditure of bidi workers is highest in the field of Food which share about 60% of their total income. While they used about 13% of the total income for the Health facility. For clothing purpose about 15% and only 8% were used for Educational purpose out of the total income.

Mode of Payment and Wage

Payment is given to the workers in terms of Rs. per 1000 of Bidi rolling. Most of the companies paid the wages as the weekly bases, though there are some companies who paid in terms of daily basis. The wage trend are as follows:

Table-5: Trend of Wages

YEAR	WAGES(Rs.) / 1000(piece)
2004	40
2006	45
2008	55
2010	75
2013	90
2015	110

Source:primary survey oncontractor

Provident fund (PF)

The Bidi companies also have made the facilities of provident fund. It will be given after some years when the worker's account is pass a certain years. Actually, this fund is kept for their future needed money which will be very helpful in case of emergency.

Gender-wise Engagement

While investigating the gender-wise engagement in Bidi making, it is found that Bidi-making is one of the female task oriented cottage industry. About 79% among the total workers are female and rest of the workers are male workers. The investigator found that the share of male workers are decreasing day by day with the changing nature of modern technology which creates larger job opportunity for them and female engagement is very high as it is a home based cottage industry.

Age wise Engagement

While studying age wise engagement in Bidi in the study area, the investigator observed that child are also engaged in Bidi making. The following table shows the age wise engagement in Bidi making and Bidi related works.

Table-6:Age-wise Engagement

Sl. No	Age of the Workers (Years)	Percentage of Workers
1.	Up to 15	16
2.	15-30	34
3.	30-45	42
4.	Above 45	8
	Total	100

Note: percentage-wise

About 16% of the workers are up to the age of 15 years whom we may call Child Labour. Whereas about 34% of the workers are 15 to 30 years old people, nearly 42% are between the ages of 30 to 45 years. While about 8% workers have their age above 45 years. The high engagement of child in Bidi making is that Bidi making needs very less manual labour. In the rural areas poor people engaged their child in Bidi making because to them child is also an earning member of the family. Among the Child workers, most of them are girls' child.

Sanitation Facilities

The investigator found that the sanitation facilities of the Bidi workers in the study area is not as good as compare to the other people. Most of the Bidi workers do not have proper latrine facilities.

Drinking Water

In the study area, only 26% of the households have their own water supply, about 62% people uses Govt. tubewell as their source of drinking water and rest of the household access their drinking water from neighbour or from the common water supply resources provided by local governance.

Sources of Lighting

Though all the villages selected for the study have the coverage of electricity but it is also to the capacity of the household to access it. About 68% of the households have facilities of Govt. electricity as source of lightening, about 24% household uses kerosene and rest of the household (8%) uses other sources like private or rented generator as the souse of lightening.

Household Size

The table given below highlights that about 66% family are large in size which consist of more than 6 members, about 26% are of medium household size ranging from 4-5 members and nearly 24% are of small household size. Most of the Bidi workers have large or medium family because they consider large number of family as a productive source of income for their livelihood.

Table-7: Family Size of the Bidi Workers

Sl. No.	Family size((parents)	Percentage of household
1.	Small (1-3)	24
2.	Medium (4-5)	26
3.	Large (6+)	66
4.	Total	100

Note: percentage-wise

House Type

The investigator found that about 50% houses of the Bidi workers are semi-pucca, about 26% have the pucca houses and nearly 24% have the kachha houses.

Level of Education

The average literacy rate is 67.5 percent in Murshidabad district (census 2011). But there is intra block variation as for the literacy is concern in Samsorganj only 53%. On the other hand it is a slightly higher 61% in Raghunathganj. In Farakka and Suti block there is no large variation. The literacy rate is 58 and 56 respectively. The female literacy rate is low. The literacy rate among the bidi workers are exceptionally very low.

Health Impact

Bidi has a very good importance on economy of the rural people particularly for the poor people. But as for the health is concerned it is not less dangerous, rather have it is very harmful. It is harmful for the workers who worked in the factory and rolled Bidi in the house. For the extreme negative health problems the Government of India has made the Bidi binding as tax free for the workers. Another important fact is that Bidi workers i.e. the females and children are suffer due to their work, but the males are suffer due to the smoking of Bidi. The males who are work in the factories also suffer from life taking diseases.

Tuberculosis

Tuberculosis (TB) is a major cause of death in India for smokers in general and bidi workers in particular. The local hospital's report said that more than 61% patients are engaged in bidi making. Thus it is very dangerous for health.

Lung Diseases

Tobacco smoking is an established cause of respiratory diseases such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, lung cancer, bronchial asthma etc. were found among the working and smoking people. It is also an important factor in causing increased morbidity and mortality from asthma, respiratory infections and tuberculosis. Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), which includes chronic bronchitis and emphysema as two distinct entities, is characterized by the presence of chronic respiratory symptoms, such as cough, expectoration and breathlessness, and

evidence of airflow obstruction are very common in the study area. It is a progressive disorder leading to marked respiratory disability and death.

Respiratory Problems

Most of the workers and smokers suffer from chronic bronchitis, asthma and so on. Most of the bidi workers eventually die of one of these ailments. Many studies report 20-30 per cent or less workers having these disease, while all highlight the high likelihood of workers suffering from them. Anaemia and malnutrition are also common among these women and children.

Miscellaneous Diseases

The nature of work which involves prolonged sitting with forward trunk bent, the excessive use of fingers and the constant high tension levels to meet targets cause a number of health problems among the roller especially. The sitting posture leads to a static construction of back muscle, resulting in head, neck, leg and back aches as there is no body movement. Workers also suffer from piles and rheumatism. Their poverty, weak constitution, lack of rest, endless work, poor food habits have all been listed as factors making them susceptible to diseases. Exposure to tobacco and the working conditions among Bidi workers are known to have caused intestinal and reproductive problems.

Conclusion

The study has addressed issues such as Bidi as a main source of livelihood; the living and working conditions; and the reasons leading to a decline in employment in the Bidi sector as well as the impact of such decline on the workers. On the basis of the findings of various study on Bidi workers, the ILO has launched a technical co-operation project in India entitled “Improving working conditions and employment opportunities for women in the Bidi industry in India”, funded by the Netherlands. It is hoped that this project, implemented by the Gender Promotion Programme, will assist the Bidi sector to engage in social dialogue to resolve the uncertainties and challenges facing the sector today.

Labour Welfare Department of the State has initiated various schemes for the wellbeing of the Bidi Rollers, like free health and maternity benefits from Government Hospitals, Scholarship for the education of their children. It is observed from the findings that very few Bidi rollers have exercised their rights. None of the Bidi rollers have had insurance. The Bidi rollers said that they

were satisfied with the work, but strongly felt that low wages affect their livelihood. About 70 percent of the rollers had asked for increase in their wages. Increase in wages will increase their overall income and consequently will help them to improve their livelihood. At Samserganj block many workers had complained irregularity in employment. Large scale prevalence of poverty among the Bidi rollers had made them to ask for economic support in the sector from government. Some of the Bidi rollers had also said that they face problems to make Identity card as it have to be signed from the contractor. And on the other hand, contractors/employers were not willing to give card to them. Even study reveals that 42.9 percent of the rollers don't have the Identity card.

SUGGESTIONS

- Workers have to be made aware of the value of the Identity card and its benefits through building their capacities and have to encourage to take benefits from Bidi Workers Welfare Fund Scheme.
- Reduce the middle man from the Bidi making process to maximize the profit of the Bidi workers.
- We have to make the Bidi workers to know about the dangerous effect of the Bidi rolling and smoking.
- The government also have to set up special provision for the better treatment of the workers.
- Alternative sources of income generation activities need to be created in the area.
- Country launched 'SulabhSauchalaya' programme, to provide low cost sanitation to the poor. Thus, awareness campaigns to create awareness about feasibility of the proper sanitation have to be made in the areas.
- Diversification in the current livelihood patterns to be integrated through mobilizing the local resources
- All the children should be covered under the education system. Girl children are to be focused more. Mid-day-Meal programme needs to be more regularized and this will also help to decrease dropout rates.
- The condition of Bidi workers will not be improved unless the Bidi worker would not be treated as "Labourer" as per the Law.

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