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**PRESENT STATUS OF BEEDI LABOURER :
A CASE STUDY ON JANGIPUR SUB-DIVISION, MURSHIDABAD
DISTRICT, WEST BENGAL**



Swati Biswas¹ and Soumya Das Laha²

INTRODUCTION

BEEDI - is a type of smoking component filled with tobacco and wrapped in a tendu leaf. At present beedi is made at home and factory premises too. In most of the cases, the head of the family is the only contract labourer but rest of the family members are engaged in beedi making at their leisure time. It makes them unorganized labourer of Informal industry. Informal or unorganized sector of industry rose to create wealth and eradicate poverty through developmental planning and strategy (Sengupta, 2010). Beedi rolling industry is one of an informal industry which is important for its economic as well as socio-cultural aspect. Due to unequal growth the BEEDI industry has developed in rural and semi-urban areas of India. In the state of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Orissa, West Bengal beedis are manufactured. Beedi industry is always an agro-forestry based, cheap

ABSTRACT

BEEDI industry is one of the informal industries in India. This industry is now blasting day by day. It employs millions of workers. Most of them are all BPL labourer and deprived of many facilities. This paper attempts to focus on the socio-economic as well as health status of the labourer of Jangipur sub-division of Murshidabad district, West Bengal. In this paper methodology is used on the basis of Secondary data, literature review and different conversation with the labourer. This paper also attempts to bring out the living condition of the workers and how they can overcome from this circumstances for the welfare of their family mainly children who are dependent on them.

KEYWORDS :unorganized, organized labourer, formal, informal industry, thekkadar/middleman.

Short Profile

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labor cost based, women and child labour intensive industry. It is reported that there is a predominance of child and woman labourer. They are mainly engaged in beedi rolling due to their thin fingers where as men labourer are engaged in sorting, bundelling, packaging and marketing. Beedi industry generally falls under informal sector because “ informal sector comprises of some poor unskilled labourer who are forced to work under unregulated and miserable working conditions for their

livelihood. They are used to get low wages as employment opportunities are scarce in this sector.”The unorganized labourer sells their output to the formal beedi sector. “the beedi factories comprising the beedi industry have a huge amount of working capital, fixed capital, variable capital, assets like massive building and huge campus areas of their own and they also maintain a balance sheet showing their turn

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over, profit and costs. From the point of view they definitely fall into category of formal sector.” (Sengupta, 2010). Beedi industry is a large scale formal industry which used to do its production with the help of informal labourer.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

For understanding the actual condition of beedi labourer, different literature have been done. Sengupta .et.all(2010) says that the labourer sell their output to formal beedi sector, but they are not counted as employee. District Statistical Handbook 2002,2003,2005 ,2006, 2008,2012, published the data related to murshidabad beedi industry where no. of factories and no. of employees are inter related. Mushidabad zila gazetteers 2003 give a qualitative description about the history , present condition and problems of beedi labourer/. Rastagi of CWDS team in their paper emphasis about the women and child labourer of India. Inspite of all these help full literature ,a very few cover the empirical socio economic condition of the unorganized beedi labourer.

LIMITATIONS

Beedi industry is an informal industry. Most of labourer are unorganized. For that reason , there are no government records about unorganized labourer such as the wage rate,working hours and future plans about the industry. Secondary data unavailability is a major limitation of the work.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To identify the socio-economic status of unorganized labourer of beedi industry.
2. To find out the problems related to the socio-economic and physical health of the labourer as well as the society.
3. To suggest the future prospect of beedi labourer for their development

STUDY AREA:

Jangipur sub-division, Murshidabad has been chosen as study area because it is one of the most important for Beedi rolling industry in India. It's geographical location is 24°50'20" N to 24°13'34" N and 87°49'17" E to 88°15'09" E. The area is a flat alluvial plain and river Bhagirathi is streaming through the sub-division. It has Tropical monsoon climate. Jangipur has 1079.69 sq km area and is populated with 1788437 persons among which 49% are literate(Census Of India, 2011). The area is well connected to Berhampore, the district headquarter through road and rail.



DATABASE METHODOLOGY:

The present study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary survey has been done through conversation with beedi co-operative and some beedi labourer. Secondary data have been collected from the office and websites of different governmental departments and non-government organization. Besides that, publication from different journals, reports, etc have been intensively

studied. Different statistical techniques, diagrams have been used to analyze the data. The Statistical calculation and Diagrams have been done with the help of Microsoft Excel 2007 software. Most of the maps are prepared in MapInfo Professional 7 version. The methodology is adopted to discuss the relationship between the condition of beedi labourer and their socio-economic status.

PRESENT SCENARIO OF BEEDI INDUSTRY OF MURSHIDABAD WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIZED ON JANGIPUR SUB-DIVISION:

Beedi rolling industry is an unorganized or informal industry as per the concept is concerned. The Beedi industry of Murshidabad is mainly located in Northern most part of the district specially in Jangipur subdivision. From the 20th decade of the last century Beedi Industry has been exerting a massive impact on the economy of the study area. Bishwa Vijay, Mulji Sikka,

Mrinalini, Pataka Beedi industry are well known from the decade ago. Except those Bharat Beedi Factory (Aurangabad), Ashok Beedi Factory (Aurangabad), M.K Brothers and Co.(Salar), Nur Beedi worker Pvt. Ltd. (Ratanpur) have most of the employee in respect of total number (Field Office, Berhampore, NSSO). Jangipur subdivision is vulnerable to river bank erosion which cause delimitation of agricultural land. Beedi industry of the study area has grown up so steadily because of those agricultural labourers who have been shifted to household industry for eradicating poverty and to live a life. According to 2011 Census of India, 17.99% of total workers of Murshidabad are engaged to household industry like - Handloom industry, Bell & Brash Metal Industry, Sponge wood industry, Beedi Industry, etc. Different literature reviews reveal that beedi industry has grown up on three systems. The systems are:

Type of System	Description
1. Factory based	Work carried out on factory premises under the supervision of manager and the workers are known as employees
2. Beedi rolling through company	on behalf of the factory owner work is carried out at a local common shed or labourer's own household
3. Contractor / middleman	They supply raw materials to the workers and collect final products from them

Table : 1 (Source: Rustagi, CWDS research team)

YEAR	NO. OF FACTORIES	EMPLOYEES
1990-2000	83	7164
2000-01	63	10137
2003-04	50	4218
2004-05	59	4874
2005-06	64	3855
2009-10	62	11732

Table: 2Source: District Statistical Handbook, Murshidabad

The table no: 2 shows that all factories are formal and employees are organized. But in reality The beedi industry of Murshidabad has been enriched with contractor or middleman system. There are almost 300000 unorganized labourer in that industry (Murshidabad Zila

Gazetteerrrs,2003). Almost 65% of these unorganized labourer are women and 15% are children (Rustagi,CWDS Research Team). Most of the beedi workers are poor and belong to Muslim religion in the study area. In October 2000, devastating flood massively destroyed

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houses and agricultural land in the study area. Table 2 shows that in that time though the number of factories decreases but employees increases by 29%. Again in the year 2009-10 number of employees increases due to natural calamities.

Map no. 2 : Distribution of Beedi industry and Labourer in five sub-division of Murshidabad (Source: National Sample Survey Organization (Field Office Dept.)Berhampore Murshidabad 2008-2009)



According to NSSO (F.O.D), Berhampore, in the year 2008-09 Murshidabad has 90 beedi industry and 6938 beedi labourer. Map 2 shows that the study area has 72% industries with 90% employees of Murshidabad district. Aurangabad (in Suti II block) and Dhulian (in Samserganj block) have 39% and 28% beedi labourer of the district.

**Table no. 3 : HOUSEHOD INDUSTRY WORKER OF JANGIPUR SUB-DIVISION
(Source: Census Of India, 2011)**

BLOCK	HOUSEHOLD INDUSTRY WORKER				
	TOTAL	MAIN HOUSEHOLD		MARGINAL HOUSEHOLD	
		MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE
FARAKKA	48561	5289	28544	1433	13295
SAMSERGANJ	80000	22548	32831	4165	20456
SUTI-1	28330	1637	13319	591	12783
SUTI-2	80825	22732	36334	3730	18029
RAGHUNATHGANJ-1	24735	1716	16687	358	5974
RAGHUNATHGANJ-2	43428	2562	28991	493	11382
SAGARDIGHI	8251	899	3339	391	3622
TOTAL	314130	57383	160045	11161	85541
% OF TOTAL HOUSEHOLD WORKER	100	18	51	04	27

According to Census Of India, 2011, Jangipur Sub-division has 67% of Labourer engaged in household industry of Murshidabad district. Though it is not proved, but expected that most of them are from beedi industry. According to Table no. 3, Jangipur sub-division has 07 number of blocks. Samserganj and Sut-2

block have 51% of labourer of this sub-division i.e 80000 and 80825 respectively. It also shows that percentage of female labourer are higher (78% of total household industry worker of the sub-division) than male labourer. Local people survey reveals that male labourer are engaged as Rajmistry, agricultural labourer and other

- activities. Most of them are migrated to other town or state due to lack of employment and higher wages. That is why female labourer engagement is higher than male. Some other causes are:

 - 1.Easy way of learning beedi making
 - 2.Work can be done at leisure time along with other household activities
 - 3.Other oppertunities are not available in that area
- 4.Cheap labour cost
 - 5.Unawareness about their rights/duties
 - 6.Loss of houses and agricultural lands due to Ganga river shifting which bound them within this work for their livelihood
 - 7.Women worker want to avoid certain religious taboos that might prevent their off-home activities (Sengupta, 2010)
 - 8.Less competition from male worker
 - 9.High rate of illiteracy

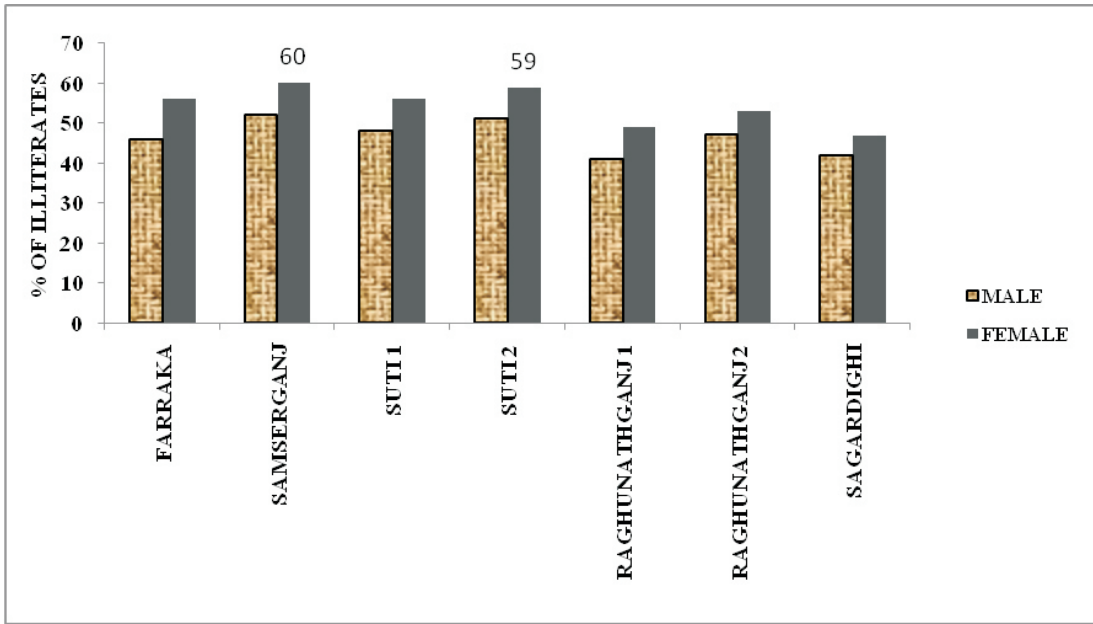


FIG 1: PERCENTAGE OF ILLITERATES IN DIFFERENT BLOCKS OF JANGIPUR SUB-DIVISION (Source : Census Of India, 2011)

Jangipur sub-division has 51% illiterate population. From the upper diagram, it is noticed that Samserganj and Suti II block have higher percentage of illiterates among both male and female population. It can be noticed that these two blocks have higher concentration of female beedi labourer. The illiteracy rate is higher among female population throughout the sub-division. When those illiterate female become mother the cyclic pattern of illiteracy goes on.

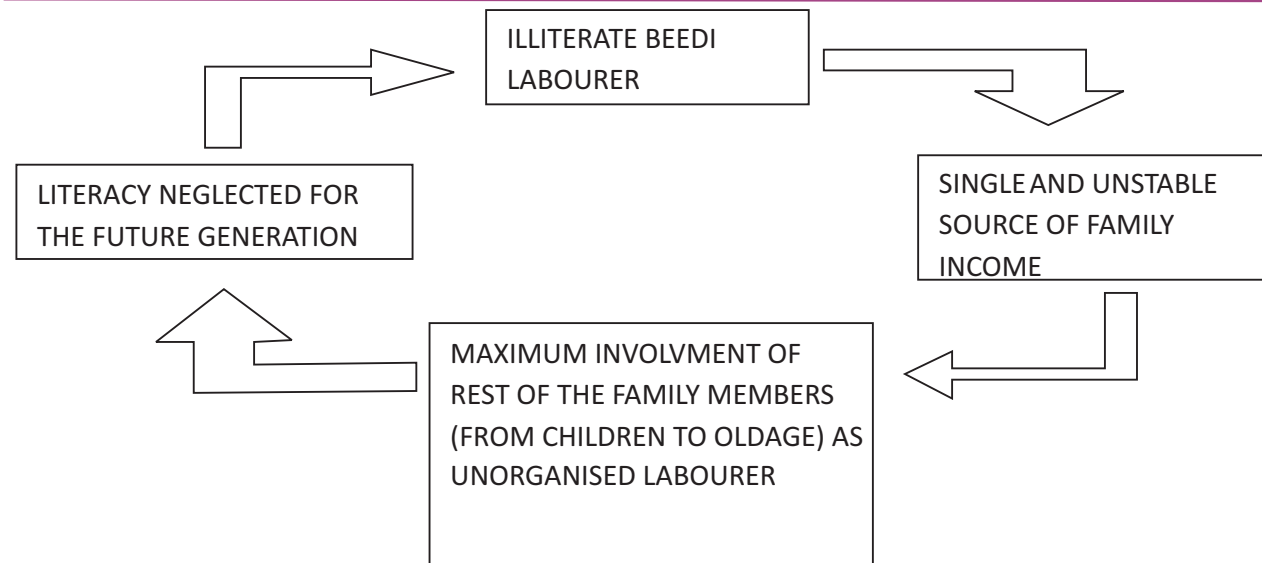


FIG.2: CYCLIC PATTERN OF ILLITERACY AMONG BEEDI LABOURER

ACTS AND RULES :

Lots of acts and rules are provided to the beedi workers to promote their livelihood. Most important for them are

1. Beedi and Cigar Workers (Condition of Employment) Act, 1966
2. Beedi Workers Welfare Cess Act, 1976
3. Beedi Workers Welfare Fund Act, 1976
4. Payment of Wages Act, 1936
5. Minimum Wage Act, 1948

Beedi and Cigar Workers (Condition of Employment) Act, 1966 concerned with some facts :

- Labourer are divided in Contract Labourer, Employee
- Contractor can execute workers with the help of Contract Labourer, Subcontractor, agent, munshi, Thekkadar or sattedar
- Act gives emphasis on cleanses; good ventilation of this work premises; availability of purified drinking water, latrines and urinals, canteens, first aid; facility of washing and changing cloths.
- Work has been permitted on the industrial premises for not more than 9hrs in a day or 48hrs in a week and the weekly one holiday is

necessary.

- It describes the 'ordinary rate of wages' as basic wages plus other allowances.

Payment of equal remuneration to men and women workers for same or similar nature of work has been protected under 'Enforcement of the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976'. Under this act some features has been provided:

- Legal aid to working women
- Organizing working women and educating them about their rights or duties.
- Central Govt. has been issuing grant-in-aid to organize seminar, workshop, etc. aiming at raising the general consciousness of the society about the problems of women labourer.

The Beedi Workers Welfare Fund Act, 1976 provided Employees Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) and Employees States Insurance Corporation (ESIO) for organized labourer.

As described earlier, in the study area most of the workers are unorganized and work during their leisure time at household. As the labour distributed to family members, they can produce more. For more and more income most

of the time they compromise to their livelihood and labour laws neglected. The prayer for Pay Slip, P.F facilities and other social needs are neglected. Sometimes signatures are taken on a higher amount than they are actually paid. Bonus, Leave wages, Scholarship for educating children are not permitted to the needy persons. At Tarapur (Jangipur sub-division) a central hospital with 50 bed is working for Beedi Labourer under Beedi Welfare Department, Govt. Of India. Except that Beedi Labourer Dispensary is located at Berhampur and Nimtita.

Wage Rate:

According to the Labour Department, Government of West Bengal, the minimum wage rate in scheduled beedi making are Rs. 134.43/ thousand beedi for unskilled labourer, Rs. 135.57/ thousand for semi-skilled labourer. Generally, labourer takes 4-6 hrs for cutting thousand tobacco leaves and 8-10hrs for binding. Then a semi-skilled labourer can earn approximately Rs. 140/ day. But in reality a beedi labourer of the study area get Rs. 70-75 per thousand depending upon gender and skill. Except that labourer agreed to add 50-100 'chat' beedies/ thousand without any wage (Murshidabad District Gazetteers, 2003). 'Enforcement of the Equal Remuneration Act' is not maintained properly. The wage rate is different for men, women and children.

Problems related to Beedi Industry of Murshidabad

Health Problem:

As stated earlier, Beedi Industry of Murshidabad is mainly a household industry as the Beedi making occurs at home. For that reason it causes health hazards not only to the workers but also to the family members. Besides, smoking is injurious to health, it's making procedure creates environment dusty. Labourer suffers from some physical inconveniences:

- Due to 10-12 hrs surrounded with tobacco dust,

most of the workers suffer from Rhinitis, Mucous dryness, Respiratory problem, Asthama, Chronic Bronchitis.

- The dusty environment causes Eye irritation, Conjunctivitis.
- As the workshed is mostly populous, the virus/microbes spread easily and vastly to the workers.
- At the time of BEEDI wrapping and binding labourer has to sit for long time. Because of that they are continuously suffering from static construction of back muscle, cervical spine, backbone. They are always irritated with head, neck, back, leg ache.
- Workers mostly suffer from Piles, Rheumatism, Arthritis.
- Untidy situation of common toilet at the work place can cause intestinal, urinal problems.
- The health problem is hazardous for women workers. Sometimes they deprive of maternity, anemia.
- Unhealthy work pressure and huge financial crisis cause low vitamin intake which drives them to malnutrition.
- Children who are directly or indirectly related are exposed to all the hazards of tobacco.

Socio-economic Problem:

In the study area, beedi making skill brings advantage to the girls as social dignity for marriage. After their household work women are engaged to beedi making at their leisure time. Children are the mostly deprived. Sometimes Thekaddars engage them to Tendu leave cutting with an wage rate of Rs. 2/ thousand. After few years of practice they become efficient. A survey says that the young generation is more skillful than the age-old. Parents think that the children can be used as an unskilled labourer for eradicating poverty. In that way some are trapped and never be able to come out. Thekaddar always create a pressure situation by threat and workers work for 10-12 hrs which lead to health problem. It always generates poverty cycle. At present some young

try to educate themselves for forsaking the depriving beedi industry. Women labourer has suffered from job anxiety as they extend their support for children's education and family needs. For that sometimes they compromise to their own livelihood. Employers and thekaddar target them because of their poor bargaining power. The majority of the women labourer in the study area work almost 90-95hrs / week. Large number of labourer in Murshidabad work in exploited condition where labour laws are neglected.

SUGGESTION AND CONCLUSION:

It is surprisingly noticed that except all the provision of Acts and Rules, condition of beedi labourer is not good. Present paper may be concluded with some feedback of study:

- 1.The unorganized pattern of Murshidabd beedi labourer can be changed through formulation of formal/informal co-operatives.
- 2.Middleman policies have to be disposed. The Govt. has to take initiatives to enforce the company for buying products directly from the labourer.
- 3.The employer must ensure minimum wage to all the labourer.
- 4.Men and women must receive equal wage for equal work.
- 5.Child labour Act has to follow properly. The schools of that region have to be strict about drop-out children and ensure Govt. to make policy for dragging them to school.
- 6.Govt. can establish Night / Special School for adult education of the labourer. If they are educated, no one can fraud them.
- 7.Contract workers must be made permanent unorganized workers have to comprehension with Beedi-Card, Pay slip, Proof of attendance and BPL card too.
- 8.For the sake of Murshidabad Beedi Industry, the employers have to change adamant behavior towards the employee. They have to strictly stop corrupt practices, mismanagement.

9.Health department should ensure more importance to Beedi Hospital/ dispensaries. Beedi Welfare Fund Act, 1976 provides specialized treatment in respect of heart, kidney and cancer diseases on credit basis without paying advance. This facility should be available at nearest specialized hospital.

10.Initiatives should be taken to arrange seminar/ workshop with the help of Grant-in-aid under Enforcement of the Equal remuneration Act, 1976.

11.An idea of tobacco-free beedi has come in market keeping in mind anti-tobacco campaign. Flavour like strawberry, vanilla, grave, clove added to tobacco sometimes are useful to health. Some industries use 10-12 types of herbals to provide the smokers a health-friendly smoking opportunity. Though those ideas give a bitter test to beedi lover, but it is Environmental-friendly.

12.In recent times, Govt. of India have taken initiatives to encourage the workers in unorganized sector to voluntarily save for their retirement with the help pf Atal Pension Yojana (Jan Dhan To Jan Surakha). The local Govt. should reach to the Beedi workers for ensuring facility of those schemes.

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