

Beedi Industry: A Study of the Jangipur Sub-division in the district of Murshidabad, West Bengal

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Abstract: *Beedi industry played an important role in the economy as well as socio-economic life and livelihood of the beedi workers in Jangipur Sub-division of Murshidabad district. Moreover, this district especially Jangipur Sub-division is famous for beedi industry and known as beedi production hub in India. At the moment there are 73 large registered establishments and huge number of individual entrepreneurs. In this paper, an attempt has been made to highlights the historical background of beedi industry, production relation, job availability and wages of the beedi workers and social security welfare.*

Key Words: *Beedi, Beedi workers, Unorganised sector, Murshidabad district.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Jangipur Sub-division has a long history of beedi industry since long before independence. Although there is no proper data about the establishment of this industry, it is estimated that the first beedi industry of the state was established in this Sub-division. The process of manufacture of beedi is highly labour intensive and predominantly unorganised in nature. The industry has spread to all levels of the Sub-division and a large portion of the workers, especially women, are intimately involved in beedi making job. Women are easily associated with this industry as it is household oriented in nature and the payment system is piece rate. Economy of this Sub-division highly influenced by this industry as it plays an important role in providing livelihood to a large number of working people. In this study we provide a snapshot of beedi industry in Jangipur Sub-division.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

International Labour Organization (2001), in its reports focused on the beedi industry in India, in which it attempts to explain a project on improving working conditions and employment opportunities for women.

Rajasekhar, D. and Sreedhar, G (2002), in their study “Changing Face of beedi Industry: A Study in Karnataka” studies the excise duty exemption provided to small manufacturer and constant efforts on the part of large manufacture to weaken the bargaining power of workers due to evasion of labour laws resulted in proliferation of unorganised companies.

Marfat (2013), in its study evaluate the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the households of working children in Dhuliyani Municipality.

Chakraborty, A. (2013), in the study “Beedi bundling as a means of women employment generation in backward rural area: A case study on char areas of Bhagawangola-II Block, Murshidabad district, West Bengal” analysed the socio-economic condition of beedi workers and discussed the production procedure as well as evaluate the role of beedi industry

Mukherjee et al. (2014), in their paper “A study on health profile of beedi workers in West Bengal, India” discussed that most of the beedi workers were economically weak and facing several problems such as illiteracy, unemployment, low wages and irregular payments of wages.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

Data Sources: In this study data have been collected from primary as well as secondary sources.

- **Primary Data:** Multi stage sampling method was adopted to conduct this study. We select Jangipur Sub-division at the first stage, 4 CD Blocks at the second stage from the selected Sub-division, 2 Gram Panchayats from each of the selected CD Blocks at the third stage, 2 Villages from each of the selected Gram Panchayats

at the fourth stage, 5 Households from each of the selected villages at the fifth stage and finally, we select 80 beedi workers' households (i.e., 4 CD Blocks × 2 Gram Panchayats × 2 Villages × 5 Households = 80 Households). After that we conveniently select 143 beedi workers as samples from the 80 selected households. To achieve this study, a well structured questionnaire was used to collect the data.

- **Secondary Data:** The secondary data were collected from government offices, available publications, research articles published in various journals and websites.

Tools and Techniques: The data has been analysed by using statistical tools and conceptual understanding.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The main objectives of the present study are:

- (i) To explore historical background of beedi industry in Jangipur-subdivision, Murshidabad district.
- (ii) To examine employment relation, job availability and wages of the beedi workers.
- (iii) To find the working condition and social security measures of the beedi workers.

5. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND PRESENT STATUS OF THE BEEDI INDUSTRY:

Beedi industry in Murshidabad district, especially Jangipur Sub-division began in 1905 with the establishment of 'Belal Beedi Industry' in Dhulian. Though some other sources claimed that beedi industry was established in the real sense in 1920s with the establishment of 'Biswabijoy beedi' established by the Bijoy Sarkar. After that some beedi industries like, Mrinalini Biri (1925), Moolji Sicca Beedi Company (1930s), Laxmi Biri industry (1942), etc. brought in a new dimension in the scenario of beedi industry. Illiteracy, easily availability of cheap labour, lack of scope for alternative employment opportunities to maintain livelihood and the huge markets throughout the country helped the growth of beedi industry in this Sub-division. The number of factories has increased steadily since independence. The industries are Pataka Beedi (1950), Mantu Beedi (1957), Kishan Beedi (1970), Das Beedi Factory (1975), Shive Beedi (1988), B. A. Beedi Factory (1988), Nur Beedi (1991), Kalpana Beedi (1992), Jahangir Beedi (1999), etc. Among them 'Pataka Beedi' is the prominent name and produce huge number of beedis per day and dominating over the beedi market in the district as well as the country.

At present in Jangipur Sub-division, 73 registered beedi establishments are existed. Although beedi industry is spread across this Sub-division but the highest beedi establishments concentrated in Samsrganj block after that in Suti-II and Raghunathganj-I block. About 0.4 million beedi workers of this Sub-division directly engaged in beedi manufacturing, of which a bulk portion of the workers don't have any Identity (ID) card. Block and Municipality wise number of ID card issued and number of registered establishment are shown in Table-1. It is found that the highest beedi workers concentrated in Farakka block (25.99%) after that Samsrganj and Suti-II blocks about 24.74% and 17.20% respectively.

Table-1: Block/ Municipality wise No. of ID card issued and Registered Establishment

Sl. No.	Name of Block/Municipality	No. of ID Card Issued by the Labour Dept.	Percentage (%)	No. of Registered Beedi Industries	Percentage (%)
1	Raghunathganj -I	16537	7.27	15	20.55
2	Raghunathganj -II	21586	9.49	03	4.11
3	Suti -I	20787	9.14	Nil	-
4	Suti -II	39084	17.20	18	24.66
5	Samsrganj (Including Dhuliyan MU)	56228	24.74	5+27 = 32	43.84
6	Sagardighi	5964	2.63	01	1.36
7	Farakka	59069	25.99	04	5.48
8	Jangipur MU	8039	3.54	Nil	-
	Total	227294	100.00	73	100.00

Sources: Assistant Labour Commissioner Office, Jangipur, 2017

6. BEEDI INDUSTRY AND PRODUCTION RELATION:

The beedi establishment of this district has been enriched with a large number of middlemen working as contractor (which is locally known as Munshi), petty beedi manufacturers and some big establishments. After thoroughly review of different literature and interviewed the various stakeholders of beedi industries we grouped the

establishments of this district into the four categories, viz., Branded Establishments, Distribution and Collection Centres, Contractors/Munshi and Unbranded Establishments. Branded Establishments further classified into two categories, i.e., Factory based and Company based.

Women are the backbone of this industry as it is evidenced by about 90% of their presence and they doing work at their home. In this Sub-division we found three types of production relation, i.e., Type-I, Type-II and Type-III workers. Type-I workers are those who hold a legal ID card and doing job through contractor. Such type of workers mainly concentrated near the main establishment and get comparatively more opportunities in terms wages than others. Type-II workers are those who do not hold any legal ID card and doing job through a chain contractor and being far away from the establishment, they get relatively low wages and are deprived of all the benefits provided by the Government due to not having any legal ID card and Type-III workers are those who may or may not hold any legal ID card and doing job more than one contractors to maximise their income.

7. JOB AVAILABILITY AND WAGES OF THE WORKERS:

It will not be irrelevant to mention that the workers involved in this industry do not have any education, skills and training for making beedis. Besides, due to lack of job opportunities in this Sub-division people easily take it as a profession. Although it is very easy to get jobs in this industry, the workers living far away from the main establishment do not get jobs according to their ability. Contractors or Munshis do not want to give more work to the workers so that the quality of produced beedis is reduced. As Type-III workers doing job more than one contractors or munshis they only get highest job after that Type-I and Type-II workers. It is very difficult to maintain livelihood by making beedis because a worker can make about 1000-1200 beedis by working 7-8 hours daily with the help of their children. A very few numbers of beedi workers can earn more than Rs.3000 per month. It is found that, the minimum wage rate for rolling 1000 beedis is Rs. 245.41 fixed by the Government of West Bengal (September 2018 to February 2019); but in reality it is near about 50% of minimum wages. However, in some remote rural areas it is less than Rs.100. It is found that Type-I workers of this Sub-division get the highest wage rate; but Type-III workers who get the lowest wage rate, has highest average monthly income as they work under more than one contractors to maximise their income.

8. WORKING CONDITIONS AND SOCIAL SECURITIES:

The beedi workers of this Sub-division are suffering from various socio-economic problems like illiteracy, living below the poverty line, big family size, poor health condition due to malnutrition, lack of other employment opportunities, etc. Most of the workers who are forced to choose this work as a profession have very poor living conditions at home where there is no adequate provision of light, air and drinking water. As they live and work in the same place, they face different tobacco related diseases. In this Sub-division there are 2 hospitals (Central hospital, at Dhuliyān and a new approved hospital at Sagardighi) and few dispensaries set up under the Beedi Workers Welfare Fund (BWWF). Moreover, Government and different NGOs run various programmes for the welfare of beedi workers like electrification, housing subsidy, scholarships for beedi workers children, health schemes, etc. to ensure the social security but most of the workers do not get this facilities or unable to take this facilities due to some legal obligations.

9. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS:

The socio-economic conditions of this Sub-division are responsible for the growth and dominance of beedi industry. Despite the ban on tobacco products and warnings against tobacco use across the country, the boom in the beedi industry is on the rise in this Sub-division. Although different types of beedi workers and production relation with the establishment are different, no significant change in the socio-economic status of the workers can be observed. Unless the people of the region develop socio-economically, it will be very difficult to get them out of this predicament because they are deliberately employed in this profession despite the risk to their livelihood.

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