



Beedi Workers in Jangipur Subdivision of Murshidabad District (1990-2020): A Historical Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Jangipur sub-division of Murshidabad district is a major hub of beedi industry in West Bengal and also in India. In Jangipur sub-division about seventy (70) percent of the workers involved in the Beedi industry are women and children. Major Beedi factories in the state are located in Aurangabad and Dhuliyān areas of Jangipur sub-division and this area is home to the largest number of beedi workers. They have various problems related to wages, job security, and health issues. Due to the production of tobacco products, the number of diseases among workers in this region is high. School dropouts are high among children as they are engaged in beedi production from an early age. The workers are duped in various ways by the Munsis and beedi companies. As most of the workers are unorganized and poverty is a constant companion of the people in this region and there are no major industries in this district, the economic base of this region is dependent on beedi industry; they cannot voice their demands for fear of losing their jobs. The State and Central Government have various developmental schemes for the workers but these schemes reach them with very few benefits.

Keywords: Beedi Workers, Jangipur Subdivision, Labour, Murshidabad District, Organized Sector, Unorganized Sector.

Introduction

The beedi industry is primarily an agro-forestry and home-based rural labour-intensive industry where a large number of men, women and children are involved. This industry is considered an important industry in several states of India including West Bengal. Jangipur sub-division of Murshidabad district of West Bengal is one of the major centres of beedi industry in India. Beedi industry has a long history in Jangipur sub-division before Independence. The process of making beedis is very labour intensive and largely unorganized in nature. There is no major industry in this sub-division, moreover the Ganges erosion is a major hindrance to the development of the region, and because of several reasons the industry has spread deep in Jangipur sub-division due to the availability of labour in this densely populated region. A large section of workers, especially women and children, are heavily involved in this industry. Gradually the industry developed as a cottage industry in the Jangipur sub-division and became an important and major means of livelihood for a large number of working people. The main objective of the present study is to trace the social and economic condition, working environment, wages, health, employer and worker relations and the measures taken by the Government for the welfare of the workers associated with beedi industry for the area of study.

India's labour history is complex when it comes to the historiography of the beedi industry; the work has evolved to include a nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between capital, labour and the state. Historians have shed light on the issues from various angles, considering the struggles and aspirations of marginal workers in the informal sector of beedi production, socio-economic, political and cultural dimensions and its impact on the workers. The history and labour history of the beedi industry in India has evolved over time, reflecting changes in theoretical frameworks and approaches. Historically, early studies of the beedi industry tended to focus on the exploitative conditions of workers, highlighting harsh working conditions, low wages, and a lack of social security for workers. Scholars such as Jan Breman and Barbara Harris-

White have highlighted the informal and precarious nature of hard work conditions, low wages, and lack of social protection for beedi workers. They emphasized the informal and precarious nature of beedi work, often long hours, low pay, and where women and children often work alongside men in cramped, unsanitary spaces. Later on the Marxist approach was studied to analyse the capitalist dynamics operating in beedi production. Where labour organization penetrates deep within the beedi industry, examining the role of contractors, subcontractors and middlemen in the exploitation of workers, exploring how they extracted surplus value from workers while perpetuating their economic vulnerability. Influenced by Marxist perspectives, these studies emphasize the capitalist dynamics in beedi production and the ways in which workers are systematically marginalized and disempowered. This approach emphasizes the structural inequalities inherent in the beedi industry and the wider capitalist system. Gender has also become an important focus in the historiography of beedi labour. Studies have begun to highlight the significant participation of women and children in beedi rolling, often supplementing household income. Scholars have explored how the gendered division of labour shapes the experiences of beedi workers and affects their access to resources and opportunities. Recent studies have increasingly moved to highlight the agency of beedi workers and their collective action efforts to resist exploitation. Researchers have documented examples of collective action, unionization, and grassroots organizing among beedi workers, exploring their efforts to challenge oppressive labour practices, preventing exploitation through advocacy for labour rights, and illustrating their ability to demand better working conditions. This perspective highlights the resilience and ingenuity of beedi workers in the face of structural inequality and oppressive labour practices.

Additionally, scholars have examined the impact of globalization on the beedi industry and its implications for labour. Market opening, trade liberalization and changes in government policies have affected the dynamics of beedi production and labour relations. Researchers explore how these broader economic trends intersect with local contexts to shape the experiences of beedi workers and inform strategies for advocacy and policy reform. In summary, the historiography of the beedi industry in the context of labour history in India has evolved to include a multifaceted understanding of the structural, economic, social and political dimensions of beedi labour. Incorporating different perspectives and methodologies, historians continue to shed light on the complex realities faced by beedi workers and their struggle for justice and empowerment. History of Labour studies looks at the world of work and employment and the social environment in which they take place. The present work is mainly focused on study of the Beedi workers themselves rather than long standing institutions focus, mainly concerned with the socio-cultural history of labours involved in Beedi manufacturing in Jangipur subdivision of Murshidabad district in the State of West Bengal for the time period of 1990-2020.

The area chosen for study is the Jangipur Subdivision of Murshidabad district because it is one of the biggest centers of beedi industry in the state of West Bengal as well as in India. It is important to note that the geographical location of the study area is from 24°13'14" to 24° 52' 15" north latitude and 87°48'00" to 88° 15' 39" east longitudes (Ghosh, 2022). The Padma River, on the east, separates Murshidabad district from Malda district and Chapai Nawabganj and Rajshahi districts of modern day Bangladesh in the north. Jangipur Subdivision covers an area of one thousand ninety

seven point eighty two square kilometre (1,097.82 km²) and has a population of nineteen lakh seventy two thousand three hundred eight (1,972,308) people in the Census year 2011 (District Statistical Handbook 2014: Murshidabad, 2016). Density of Population in this Subdivision is one thousand ninety seven (1797) per square kilometre (District Statistical Handbook 2014: Murshidabad, 2016).

It is known that at the end of the nineteenth century, tribal Barkandaj, palanquin bearers and lethel forces worked in the reign of feudal king Mortuza Reza Chowdhury of the Dhani Pahar area, twenty (20) km northwest of Pakur sub-division of Jharkhand, consumed Chuti made of Tendu or Kendu leaves and tobacco as intoxicants (Abdullah, 2019). The modern form of this Chuti is the beedi. The Zamindar of Nimtita of Aurangabad under the Jangipur subdivision acquired great wealth due to his good relations with this king of Pakur now in the state of Jharkhand, to protect the zamindari, tribal Santals from Santal Parganas imported palanquin bearers, barkandajs, lethels and what they were given for entertainment was the modern beedis (Abdullah, 2019). Gradually the value of beedi as an intoxicant increased, especially among the lower class people, and the beedi industry gradually developed in Murshidabad district. After the First World War there was a crisis in the world economy. A large section of the population of Murshidabad, chiefly engaged in agricultural and cottage industries, suffered from the depression of 1930–31, when the demand for beedi from farmers in Bihar, tea workers in Assam and the local areas increased and the beedi industry accelerated (Ali, 2019).

Despite the availability of labour in this area, there are no major industries in the region, as a result of which most of the people here were engaged in the beedi industry. Although the raw materials for making beedi, kendu leaves and tobacco are not produced in Murshidabad district, they are mainly sourced from other states of the Country, yet the base of the beedi industry was formed in Murshidabad District because of some related reasons. After Independence, Murshidabad District, plagued by several socio-economic factors and the erosion of the Ganga, saw a large increase in its unemployed population, but no major industries developed there. Since it is a labour intensive cottage industry and the job of beedi making is not so complicated, it can be mastered easily, thus, beedi tying as an alternative livelihood quickly became popular and over time it became the sole means of livelihood for the people of Murshidabad District. The beedi industry started in the Jangipur sub-division roughly around last century. In the 1920s, with the encouragement of Brindaban Mishra, a primary school teacher in Aurangabad, Upendra Kishore Sarkar and Vijay Kumar Sarkar of Khulna district (In modern day Bangladesh) set up an institution called 'Vijay Beedi Factory' in Aurangabad of Jangipur sub-division (Abdullah, 2019). The initiative and success of this factory caught the attention of the whole Country. As a result, the 'Moolji Shikka' bidi factory of Gujarat set up their production center in Aurangabad (Bandhyapdhyay et al., 2003). It was they who first tried to make use of the surplus unemployed labour force of Jangipur sub-division by training large numbers of people in beedi tying and making it an attractive means of earning money. Earlier the beedi worker-owner relationship was direct, but they used munsis or contractors as intermediaries. 'Contractor' acts as an intermediary between the beedi tying worker and the owner in the local language of Jangipur Subdivision it is known as Munsis. He delivers an average specific amount of tendu leaves and 300 gram tobacco against 1000 beedis, among the

workers from a certain place in the neighbourhood. On the next day, he took the tied beedi according to the leaves and tobacco given earlier and deposited it in the company's factory.

Jangipur subdivision is the main centre of the Beedi industry in Murshidabad district. Although Beedi is produced elsewhere in the district, it is mainly to meet local needs, but the beedi produced in Jangipur subdivision is exported to other states, and also other places of the country and even outside the country. There are about twelve (12) lakh beedi workers in Murshidabad district and the number of beedi workers in Jangipur subdivision alone is more than seven (7) lakhs. Across the time, beedi manufacturing as a cottage industry has developed in the blocks of Jangipur subdivision especially in Suti, Samsorganj, Farakka, Sagardighi, Raghunathganj etc. The largest and oldest Beedi factories in West Bengal are Pataka Beedi, Howrah Beedi, Shiv Beedi, Jahangir Beedi, Das Beedi etc. which are located in Aurangabad area of Suti Block.

Human activities are categorized as organized and unorganized sectors on the basis of employment conditions. The National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector noted that 'unorganised or informal workers, defined as those who do not have employment security, work security and social security. These workers are engaged not only in the unorganised sector but in the organised sector as well.' ("Report on Conditions of Work and Promotion of Livelihoods in the Unorganised Sector", 2007, p. i).

In India, there is a total labour force of four hundred six (406) million (Lal, Manohor, 2005), out of this around nine (9) million (2.2% of the total workforce) are what is known as 'openly unemployed', i.e. they did not have any work during the last 365 days as per National Sample Survey conducted by the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) during 1999-2000 (Lal, Manohor, 2005). Remaining three hundred ninety seven (397) million are the workforce in the country, out of this near about twenty eight (28) million are employed in the organized sector as per the definition given above and the remaining three hundred sixty nine (369) million engaged in the unorganized/ informal sector (Lal, Manohor, 2005).

It is to be noted that, out of India's huge labour force, over Three Hundred Ninety (390) million strong, only seven (7%) percent are in the organized sector, the rest— ninety three (93%) percent of the labour force—works in what is known as the 'unorganized' or 'informal' economy (Harriss-White, B., & Gooptu, N., 2009).

As far as the present paper is concerned about the beedi workers, they can be considered as unorganized due to its nature and characteristics. The beedi industry in India is largely considered as an unorganized sector because majority of beedi workers are engaged in the beedi-rolling job which is a home-based activity in the rural areas. However, some workers are directly employed in factories of beedi companies; they get the benefits of organized workers, though the number is very small.

As per the Census Report of 2001, the majority of the main marginal workers in Murshidabad district are engaged in home-based cottage industries. Murshidabad Zilla Gazetteer mentions that, eighteen point four eight (18.48) percent of the main and marginal workers of the district are farmers, twenty seven point nine nine (27.99) percent are agricultural labourers, twenty point four two (20.42) percent are engaged in cottage industries and thirty three point one (33.1) percent are

engaged in other activities (Bandhyapdhyay et al., 2003, p. 333). According to a 1991 Census report, fifteen point one seven (15.17) percent of the district's head and marginal workers were engaged in cottage industries and the district ranked number one in West Bengal. Murshidabad retained its position in 2001 as well and the percentage of employees employed increased to twenty point four two (20.42) percent. The Murshidabad District Gazetteer claims that the majority of these workers are involved in the beedi industry (Bandhyapdhyay et al., 2003, p. 333). These claims are even stronger when it is seen that most of the workers engaged in cottage industries are women. Sixty four point six six (64.66) percent of the total female workers are employed in cottage industries, while males account for only seven point two three (7.23) percent (Bandhyapdhyay et al., 2003, p. 333). On the other hand, most of the workers engaged in the beedi industry are women and children. According to the information provided by the Ministry of Labour and Employment, Govt. of India (2018), the total number of registered beedi workers in India are forty eight lakh twelve thousand three hundred fifty eight (4812358), among them, the total number of registered beedi workers in West Bengal are sixteen lakh fifty eight thousand four hundred one (1658401), out of which three lakh sixty three thousand five hundred eighty one (363581) are male and twelve lakh ninety four thousand eight hundred twenty (1294820) are female (Government of India, Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2018). Thirty four point four six (34.46%) percent of the total beedi workers in India are from West Bengal. According to the information provided by the Annual Report, Labour in West Bengal: 2014-15, the total Beedi workers in West Bengal were nineteen lakh seventy nine thousand sixty seven (1979067), where seventy nine point three six (79.36%) percent were female workers and twenty point six four (20.64%) percent were male workers (Labour in West Bengal 2014-15: Annual report, 2015). According to the same statistics, Murshidabad district has the highest number of Beedi workers in West Bengal with thirty four point four (34.40%) percent of the total, followed by Malda with fourteen point six five (14.65%) (Labour in West Bengal 2014-15: Annual report, 2015). It is to be mentioned that, the total number of beedi workers in Murshidabad district is about seven lakh sixty thousand (760000), out of which sixty thousand (60000) i.e. seven point eight nine (7.89%) are male and seven lakh (700000) i.e. ninety two point one one (92.11%) are female (Labour in West Bengal 2014-15: Annual report, 2015).

It is to be noted that, the number of beedi workers in Murshidabad increased by twenty eight point eight five (28.85%) percent in 2014 compared to 2001 (Sardar, 2019). In another source it can be seen that, there are about ninety (90) registered manufacturers of major beedi brands involved in bulk production in West Bengal, and the estimated number of beedi workers (Industrial and Home workers) are around twenty (20) lakhs (Beedi workers welfare schemes, n.d.). Most of the beedi workers carry out work from their houses and more than seventy (70%) percent are women workers (Beedi workers welfare schemes, n.d.).

There are about twenty (20) lakh beedi workers (industrial and home-based) and around ninety (90) registered manufacturers of major beedi brands in West Bengal (Patra, 2016). It is mentioned that, according to the local office of the Centre of Indian Trade Unions there are ten (10) lakh workers, eighteen (18) big factories and fifty (50) small factories in Jangipur Subdivision, which is the nerve centre of beedi industry, where around ninety (90) percent of these workers are home-based (Patra, 2016). As of 2003, around four lakh (400,000) workers were engaged in the prime area

locations of beedi making, especially in Farakka, Samserganj, Suti-I, Suti-II, Raghunathganj-I and Raghunathganj-II CD Blocks of Jangipur subdivision (Kar, 2012).

It is to be noted that, 'There are three types of Bidi workers in Jangipur Subdivision, viz. Type-I consist of a family of six person average income Rs.150/- per day per family. The main task of type-I Bidi workers is to roll the Bidis which are given by the agents of various factories locally known as Munsis. These people have I.D and Provident Fund Cards. If a Bidi Sramik pays Rs.100/- for Provident Fund, the Bidi Company contributes an equal amount. After ten years of regular deposit for P.F. he is entitled to pension at the rate of forty per cent P.F. balance. Type-II Bidi workers are direct employees of Bidi factories earning about Rs.6000/- per month and enjoy facilities like E.P.F., medical, pension etc. Their main task is to 'toast'. Bidi rolls by type-I workers. The type-III Bidi workers are engaged in packaging and labelling of finished products and are engaged by commission labour earning Rs.186/- to Rs.195/- for packaging and labelling of one lac Bidis. They enjoy P.F., Bonus facilities but in some Bidi Factories children are engaged for this type of work violating the provisions against child labour (Mukherjee & Dwivedy, 2014, p. 1-2).'

It is important to note that, 'The beedi industry contributes to only zero point six five (0.65) percent of the total Gross value added (GVA) by the entire manufacturing industry. Employment in this industry was primarily through contractors. Beedi workers earned only seventeen (17) percent of wages compared to workers in other manufacturing industries. Although females constitute the majority of beedi workers, they earned INR 7,000 to 8,000 less than male beedi workers annually. Despite the increase in beedi industry profits from INR Rs. 1.7 billion in 2005–2006 to INR 12.8 billion in 2010–2011, the wages of beedi workers have continued to decline over this period (Arora, M., et al. 2020, p.1).'

As per the Circular issued by the Government of West Bengal, minimum rates for the workers employed in Tobacco (Beedi Making) in the state of West Bengal, the rate per one thousand (1000) Beedis rolled is two hundred sixty seven point four four (267.44) rupees for the workers of Murshidabad District (Joint Labour Commissioner, 2020). In reality the workers are paid much less than the prescribed wages, ignoring the government rules. In this case, the amount of wages is fixed through discussion and understanding between the workers and the owners. In 2021, according to the bilateral agreement between the Beedi owners' organizations and the Beedi workers' organizations, the wage per thousand beedis is fixed at one hundred seventy-eight (178) Rupees (Ghosal, R., 2021), but even in this case, the workers are subjected to various frauds by Munsis and the Company. Workers are paid wages every week, but if a worker wants to take wages in cash daily, then in that case One hundred sixty (160) rupees or One hundred fifty (150) rupees are also given per thousand beedis. Due to financial hardship, workers are forced to take that amount of wages. Apart from wage evasion, there is an additional manipulation which is rejection of beedis on the pretext of inferior quality and supply of raw material less than required quantity, this method was to reduce wage payment and keep wages below the minimum wage. Sometimes it is also seen that some of the beedis of the workers, sometimes all the beedis are deliberately rejected by the Munsis just to meet their own compensation shortfall or in the hope of making more profit and they sell these seized beedis at higher prices in the market. It is seen that beedi Company supply low quality raw material or get good quality raw material from the company but Munsis sells it in

the market at high price and supply comparatively low quality raw material to the workers, so if the workers are not able to make good quality beedi with it then the beedi is rejected, the labourers face a shortage of raw materials, so they have to purchase raw materials with cash to cover the shortage. Moreover in order to maintain the quality of the beedis produced according to the conventional rules, each Beedi worker has to pay some extra beedis for every thousand beedis, in local language it is known as Chant or Patti. The workers do not get the wage of that additional beedis. The owner of the company claims that many beedis are broken or damaged during packaging, which has to be thrown away. That is why a few handfuls of extra Beedis are taken from the workers in advance, without any wages. When workers deposit beedis with the Munsis; workers are charged an additional of hundred (100) or one hundred fifty (150) beedis for every one thousand (1,000) beedis. That is, if 1150 beedis are tied, the worker gets a wage of 1000 beedis. Although under the Beedi and Cigar Workers (Conditions of Employment) Act, 1966, no employer can accept more than five (05) percent of the beedi produced from the workers as Chant or Patti and the owner or contractor is obliged to pay half the wages for this, but it is not actually paid to the workers. Chant beedis are collected by evading wages and are often marketed in packets.

It is important to note that, 'Labour Bureau surveys in the unorganised sector have found that seventy four (74) percent of the beedi workers had received festival holidays with some wages' (Report on conditions of work and promotion of livelihoods in the unorganised sector, 2007, p. 36). Although this is not seen in the case of beedi workers of Jangipur sub-division, because if the work of beedi tying is stopped due to festival or any other reason, they do not get any wages, if the workers do not work, they do not get any wages. It is mentioned that, in a survey of beedi workers across eleven (11) major states in India, the Labour Bureau found a large variation in the piece rates received by workers and after examining the productivity of workers, the survey estimates that about sixty five point six (65.6) percent of the beedi workers did not receive a minimum wage (Report on conditions of work and promotion of livelihoods in the unorganised sector, 2007).

Although there is a government rule to pay fixed amounts of wages, the workers do not get wages at the fixed rate. Workers are afraid to protest against the manipulation of Munsis and company owners, because if the workers make any kind of protest, the owners often threaten to stop production for an indefinite period. As a result, the workers are not able to protest strongly, because their livelihood is completely dependent on beedi production, if beedi production stops their livelihood will be stopped, moreover there is no surplus income from beedi, with which they can run the family without producing beedi for some days. On the other hand, the owner of the company is involved in other businesses besides beedi production.

Not only with wages, but also with Provident Funds (PF), beedi workers are victims of gross negligence. In 1977 they came under the provision of provident fund, but till now many beedi workers do not have any PF. As per rule, ten (10) percent of the worker's monthly admissible wages is taken as PF, but in this case Munsis deposits more money as PF in the name of himself or family or relatives. Many times, Munsis deducts PF money from workers but does not deposit it in government accounts. As the daily output of workers is not fixed, the amount of PF deduction is also not fixed. The workers complained that the Munsis, taking advantage of their illiteracy, misused their PF money.

The Government has launched several schemes for the welfare of Beedi workers. For example, PF, scholarships for the education of workers' children, hospitals for treatment of workers, and sometimes financial assistance for construction of houses are also provided. Many of the Beedi workers are not aware of the Government's social security schemes and social welfare benefits. In order to control the working conditions of beedi workers and their families, several laws have been passed, including the Beedi and Cigar Workers (Conditions of Employment) Act, 1966, the beedi Workers Welfare Fund Act, 1976, and the beedi Workers Welfare Cess Act, 1976. A central hospital was built in 2000 at Tarapur in Samsheganj block for the treatment of beedi workers and their families. Although the hospital services are practically defunct, the hospital survives in name only. It is to be noted that, 'since the Beedi Welfare Act, 1976 was repealed in 2019, the hospital has been plagued by lack of funds, shortage of doctors and supporting staff, poor maintenance, repeated power cuts, a lack of funds and maintenance, all these factors have been plaguing the country's biggest hospital for beedi workers for several years.' (Singh, 2022). On the other hand, many owners of the beedi industry have identified health as an investment area and are building private clinics and hospitals. It is often heard from the mouths of beedi owners that the beedi industry is in dire straits. However, looking at the properties of the beedi industry owners, it does not seem so. It is clearly seen that the property of the beedi owners is gradually increasing.

There is a housing scheme under which financial assistance up to Rs. 40,000/- per dwelling unit is provided for construction of a house to a beedi worker. The Government also provides scholarship for the children of beedi workers @ Rs. 250/- per annum per child studying in Standard I to IV and up to an amount of Rs. 8,000/- per annum for higher education, i.e. B.Tech, MBBS courses, etc. (Lal, 2005). The beedi workers are also covered under various other legislations such as the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, the Workmen Compensation Act, the Maternity Benefits Act, 1961, the Employees State Insurance Act, 1948 and the Employees' Provident Fund and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952. (Lal, 2005).

About Seven Point Seven (7.7%) percent of adults in India consume beedi as smoke (Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS 2): Fact sheet India 2016–17, 2018). The health consequences of beedi are not only limited to its users but also extend to those involved in the beedi production process. A large number of people derive their livelihood from the beedi industry, but there is a risk of loss of life as a result. Beedi workers are exposed to various occupational diseases. Prolonged exposure to the kind of tobacco that is required to make beedis and long hours in unhygienic working conditions is known to cause asthma, bronchitis, tuberculosis, spondylitis, back-strain, shortness of breath and other diseases related to respiratory system, headache due to prolonged sitting in solitary confinement, abdominal pain etc. occur among the workers. On the other hand, it was found that most of them are not aware of the major diseases caused by beedi rolling. Most workers seek treatment from private clinics or Gramin Doctors and very few go to local government hospitals or health clinics. It is important to note that, according to the National Family Health Survey – 5, 2019-20, seventy seven point six (77.6) percent of women aged fifteen to forty nine (15-49) years in Murshidabad district suffer from Anaemia (National Family Health Survey-5: District fact sheet, Murshidabad, West Bengal, 2019–2020). Needless to say, this rate is alarmingly high. The increase in Anaemia in the new survey is many times higher than the fifty eight (58) percent rate

found in the National Family Health Survey four years ago (National Family Health Survey-5: District fact sheet, Murshidabad, West Bengal, 2019-2020). Anaemic mothers also have a natural tendency to develop Anaemia in their children. In addition, forty (40) percent of under-5 children in the district are stunted due to malnutrition. According to Dr Roderico H. Ofrin, World Health Organization (WHO) representative to India, 'All the ninety five (95) studies analysed consistently reported a high prevalence of disease conditions or related symptoms, across all organ systems of the body indicating the need to recognize beedi rolling as a hazardous process (World Health Organization, 2022). He also added that, 'about ninety percent (90%) beedi rollers in India are women and there is a need to tailor specific health interventions to address health issues faced by them and integrate these with existing public health programmes. In addition, safe working conditions and alternative sources of livelihood are also needed' (World Health Organization, 2022). Public and private initiatives are everywhere campaigning that smoking is harmful to health, but such propaganda is never seen that beedi making is harmful to health. The owners of the beedi companies were also not very concerned about the health of the workers.

There is no fixed wage for the workers in the beedi industry. The worker who is able to tie more beedis gets more wages; if a worker cannot tie beedis he has no wages. As a result, there is a rush among the workers to produce more beedis. Women and child workers are more in this industry; 5-6 year old children also extend their engagement in this regard. As a result, the younger members of the family also get involved in the production of beedis, even if the younger members of the family are unable to tie beedis, they help in the work of cutting beedis leaves, wrapping beedis, making the thread suitable for tying beedis, delivering beedis to the factory, etc. By doing such work, they also become skilled workers within a few days. As a result, education is neglected in these labour families. Because the family thinks that if the children can tie a small number of beedis on that day without going to school, that is a benefit. With their help, parents are always keen to increase the production of beedis, resulting in the reluctance of parents to send their children to school. As a result, participation in education in this area is less among them, and the numbers of school dropouts are high also. Since most of the workers in this industry are women, girls who are capable of tying beedis are highly preferred during marriage. Especially when looking after a bride, she is asked how many beedis she can tie in a day, most of the time girls who can tie more beedis are more acceptable as brides.

The economic base of Jangipur Subdivision is dependent on the beedi industry. Women, men and children here are all involved in the beedi industry. However, the number of male beedi workers is decreasing over time. As the income from beedi is very low, families' dependent on the beedi industry get their livelihoods disrupted by the high price market. As a result, men go outside the district and also of the state to work as masons, contractors, construction workers etc. It has been found that most of the beedi companies are not concerned while addressing the exploitation and plight of women beedi workers who have been working for decades.

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