

Socio-Economic and Work Life Conditions of Beedi Rolling Workers in Dakshina Kannada District

Dr. Chandrashekara. K

M.Com. MBA, M.HRM, M.Phil, PGDIRPM, Ph.D.

Associate Professor

Department of Commerce and Management

Government. First Grade College for women

Puttur, D K District, Karnataka

shekarkadri@gmail.com

Abstract:

The beedi industry is one of the biggest among the unorganized sectors. The work life conditions of Beedi workers are characterized by low wages, piece rated remuneration, lack of social security and absence of organized organization. The majority are home based women workers who live under the poverty line. The beedi rolling is generally done by poor women in backward areas where the workers have usually no other means of sustainable employment. This study aims to understand the socio-economic and work-related challenges encountered by the people who roll beedis, primarily from low-income households in Dakshina Kannada District of Karnataka. Given the risks associated with beedi rolling and the government's efforts to reduce tobacco use, this study sought to shed light on how these beedi rolling workers and their families may be influenced. This study highlights the need for comprehensive support for beedi rollers in Dakshina Kannada District of Karnataka, especially older rollers, and emphasizes the importance of socio-economic development programs to improve their well-being. The beedi rolling function is generally done by women who have no other means of financial earning. The aim of the present study is to understand the socio-economic status, working conditions and health status of women beedi workers and their social protection. Data collection with beedi rollers was performed in focus group settings. This was chosen over individual interviews, as it was felt that beedi rollers' work is often the result of social interaction and the sharing of views.

Keywords: Socio economic, Beedi workers, work life conditions, Beedi rolling, Beedi industry

Introduction

The beedi industry is one of the major small scale industries in India. It is considered to be an important sector providing employment to the rural areas and the backward classes of the world. The beedi industry has a history of centuries in India and has grown widely as it is an industry that can be started with low capital. The beedi industry is most developed in the states of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and West Bengal. The beedi industry is mainly a home-based employment system. Especially

women, the elderly and people with less education opportunities are working in this industry in large numbers. It is an important sector that helps the rural economy.

It is said that the beginning of beedi making in India took place in the 19th century. Initially, beedi was made using tobacco leaves. Later, the practice of using tendu leaves started. The beedi industry slowly grew from a small-scale industry to a large-scale industry. The beedi industry was more widespread during the British era. Since it could be made at a low cost and was easily available to the common people, beedi became more popular. After independence, this industry played an important role in increasing employment opportunities in rural areas.

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Today, millions of workers are working in the beedi industry in India. Most of them are women. Since beedi making takes place in homes, women get the opportunity to work while taking care of family responsibilities. Workers working in the beedi industry are generally paid low wages. Manual workers get jobs through middlemen. This creates a problem of workers not getting proper wages and benefits.

Steps in Beedi preparation method

- 1) Collecting Tendu leaves
- 2) Preparing tobacco
- 3) Putting tobacco in the leaves
- 4) Folding the beedi
- 5) Tying with thread
- 6) Drying
- 7) Packing
- 8) Handing over to beedi branch

Importance of beedi industry

The beedi industry is an important part of the rural economy.

- Provides employment opportunities
- Economic self-reliance of women
- Rural Development Economy
- Poverty alleviation

Problems of beedi workers: Workers working in the beedi industry are facing many problems. Important among these are:

- **Low wages:** Beedi workers are usually paid based on the number of beedis they produce. Therefore, they do not have a stable income. There is also the problem of undercutting wages by middlemen.

- **Health issues:** The use of tobacco in beedi making causes health problems for workers. Respiratory problems, allergies, headaches and eye problems are common. Women and children are more susceptible to these problems.
- **Lack of job security:** Workers are paid only for the number of beedis they roll, with no formal employment contracts or fixed monthly salaries. Workers can lose their livelihood instantly if they complain about low wages or join labour unions.
- **Lack of social security:** Because they work from home through a chain of contractors and middlemen, standard benefits like paid leave, pensions, and maternity care rarely reach them. Constant handling of tobacco dust leads to chronic illnesses like tuberculosis, asthma, back pain, and breathing problems, with little affordable medical care.
- **The problem of children's education:** The piece-rate system forces families to produce more, which often leads to young children helping out at home instead of going to school. Financial hardship means families cannot afford proper schooling supplies, leading high numbers of children to drop out early.

Government protective measures

- 1) **Beedi and cigar workers (conditions of employment) Act 1966:** This Act regulates the working conditions of beedi and cigar workers. It lays down rules regarding working hours, rest, safety and health. It is the responsibility of the employer to provide a suitable working environment for the workers.
- 2) **Beedi worker's welfare fund Act 1976:** A special fund has been established for the welfare of beedi workers affected by this disease. Through this, facilities like education, health care, etc. are being provided.
- 3) **Minimum Wage Act:** State governments set a minimum wage for beedi workers. Workers are not allowed to be paid more than the specified amount.
- 4) **Health facilities:** Free and low-cost medical services are being provided to government beedi workers. In some places, there are special beedi workers' hospitals and clinics.
- 5) **Educational facilities:** Scholarships are provided to the children of beedi workers and assistance is provided for school and college education.
- 6) **Home facilities:** The government provides financial assistance to beedi workers to build houses.
- 7) **Maternity Benefit:** There are schemes that provide maternity benefits to female beedi workers.
- 8) **Pension and Insurance:** Some schemes provide pension and insurance facilities to beedi workers.

Workforce and Demographic Statistics

- **Workers:** Approximately 1.90 lakh to 2 lakh workers are engaged in the beedi industry across Dakshina Kannada (along with around 21,000 in neighboring Udupi), with roughly 90% functioning directly as home-based beedi rollers.
- **Gender Distribution:** Women comprise an overwhelming majority of the workforce, estimated between 90% and 98%. For example, local occupational health studies in the coastal urban and rural areas report that nearly 98.2% of active beedi rollers are female.
- **Age and Education:** The average age of beedi rollers hovers around 40 to 45 years, with a significant portion of the home-based workforce coming from economically backward or rural households with limited formal education.

- **Economic Contribution:** Operating largely on a piece-rate system, beedi rolling provides crucial supplementary household income, though average individual earnings remain relatively low.

Socio-economic contribution and work life Vulnerability

Most of the beedi workers fall under the Below Poverty Line (BPL) category. This employment, which is done through contract labour, sometimes encourages the use of child labour. 96% of beedi workers are availing BPL facilities. This figure is 84% among RBI 14/52 workers. In addition, 78% of beedi workers are availing health and education facilities from the Beedi Workers Welfare Fund Scheme.

The beedi industry provides employment to over 3 lakh people in Dakshina Kannada districts alone. It is a significant contributor to the economy of coastal Karnataka. Dakshina Kannada district accounts for half of the total beedi production in Karnataka and 17% of the total production in the country.

69% of workers believe that beedi rolling is not a secure job. However, about 75% of workers are not willing to leave this job due to low education, advanced age and lack of financial resources for other jobs. There is an urgent need for better wage systems, social security and skill development programs for workers. More support is needed, especially for older and unregistered workers.

Indicator	Statistics
Number of workers in Dakshina Kannada	22 lakha
Number of workers in Dakshina Kannada	90-98%
Production per day (per worker)	800-1,000 Beedi
Average annual income	Rs. 24,787
Share in family income	14-24%
Health expenditure in income	29%
BPL category workers	54-96%
Those who do not want to change jobs	75%

Lifestyle of beedi workers:

The government provides facilities like scholarships for the education of the children of beedi workers. They fight for minimum wage increases through strikes to protect the rights of the workers. The employment system in this industry is not provided directly; instead, the leaves and tobacco are provided through contractors who tie beedis, which provides employment to the locals. There are different opinions about the impact of this industry on society - while many say that there is a problem of smoke, others do not consider it a big problem. Burning damaged beedis produces some amount of smoke, which has some impact on the environment.

Industry Challenges:

The major challenges facing this industry are stringent laws and foreign restrictions; there is a fear that this will affect employment. The many company has plans to expand into different sectors in the future and has also started schools, agarbatti manufacturing and hotel businesses in the Mangalore region. Apart from Ganesh Beedi, many other companies like Bharat Beedi, Telephone Beedi, Pailen Beedi are operating in Mangalore. But the sale of beedi is decreasing year by year, and it is noteworthy that the

production of beedi, which used to be in the crores per day, has now decreased to a great extent. The prepared beedis are first transported to the warehouse and then released to the market through Mangalore or Mysore offices. The inability to advertise due to government regulations is a sales challenge. Overall, this industry, which once employed lakhs of people in coastal Karnataka, is now slowly declining, he said, expressing the opinion that it is unlikely to be an attractive industry for the next generation.

Analysis of experience and opinions of beedi rolling workers

As part of our study, we met and interviewed female beedi workers the Bhavya, Megina Panja household in Aryapu village in puttur. They have been doing beedi tying work sitting at home for many years and shared their life experiences and the reality of this industry with us. They said that they bring the materials required for beedi tying home from the Megina Panja branch and make beedis at home. They said that they started this work from the age of about twenty. They said that they make about 300 to 350 beedis a day and get paid about Rs. 275 for a thousand beedis. They said that they make about one thousand to two and a half thousand beedis a week. When asked about the health problems caused by beedi tying, she said that he coughs as a result of the beedi dust and tobacco smell. She said that sitting in one position for a long time also causes back pain. However, she has not taken any pension scheme or government security scheme.

As part of our study, Ramani of Bantwal household in Ammunje village was met and interviewed. Through this interview, important information was learned about the lifestyle of beedi workers, their hard work, health problems and financial condition. Ramani said that he started beedi tying after his marriage. She said that he brings the materials required for beedi tying home from the Ammunje branch and makes beedis at home and that she handles this work along with family responsibilities, but is not able to make beedis for a long time during the day due to household chores and taking care of children. Therefore, she makes beedis only in small quantities when he gets time during the day. Ramani said that he does not use gloves or safety equipment while tying beedi. But said that she gets a bonus in this job. When asked if this job will benefit the children in any way, said, Since we have not taken out a beedi pass book, we do not get any special facilities, nor do the children get scholarships.

In an interview conducted on the life of beedi tying women, Kamala's life story, although very simple, clearly showed the struggle of life. During the interview, she said that she learned beedi tying from her childhood and got involved in this field. She said that she learned to tie beedi of her own free will, not because anyone taught her. This work, which started from childhood, has today become the main occupation of her life. Kamala said that she ties about 700 beedis a day. She said that she ties about 3000 beedis a week. She said that she gets ₹250 for a thousand beedis and gets about ₹350 as daily wages. When asked about her monthly income, she simply replied, "We don't count it, it is enough for daily expenses." Her words reflected the ordinary life of the working class. When asked if the government has issued a card for beedi workers, she said that no card has been issued. However, she said that they will get pension and insurance benefits.

It is studied that beedi workers are not just workers, but people with many dreams and interests in their lives. Some are involved in art, drama, music and other activities. It is truly inspiring to see them balancing

household responsibilities, children's education, and family care while also making time for their interests. The way they face life without losing courage, no matter how difficult it may be, gave us new ideas.

Suggestions for the development of beedi workers:

- 1) Workers should be paid a fair wage.
- 2) Health facilities should be increased
- 3) Educational facilities should be provided
- 4) Social security should be provided
- 5) Special schemes should be formulated for women workers.

Conclusion

Overall, the beedi industry is one of the major small scale industries in India. This industry, which employs lakhs of people, is vital to the rural economy, but beedi workers face many problems. If the government and society work together, it will help improve the living standards of beedi workers. The beedi industry will remain an important sector for rural industry in the future as well. Most of the beedi workers started this work from a young age. Due to the weak financial situation of the family, they stopped their education halfway and took on the responsibility of the family. There is very little rest in their lives. They work from morning till night, striving for the future of their children. The fatigue seen on their faces and the hope in their eyes touched our hearts. Even though some are facing health problems, they are unable to stop working, because it is their livelihood. Seeing all this, we realized that no job should be taken for granted.

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