
Socio-Economic Condition of Beedi Workers: A Case Study in Puttur Taluk

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Abstract: *Beedi rolling has a very important role for rural people especially women. This is generally done by poor households in backward areas where the workers have usually no other means of sustainable employment. It is because of the beedi many rural people have been benefited and improved their condition. To support the beedi workers the government of India has launched programmes like scholarships for their children, providing bonus to the workers, health cards, PF and gratuity. In this context, through this paper a small effort has been made to know the socio-economic condition of beedi workers in Puttur taluk. The study is conducted in Puttur taluk to know how the beedi workers are benefited by these schemes. The purpose of this paper is to create awareness among rural people and to know their socio- economic condition.*

Key Words: *Beedi Rolling, Socio-Economic Condition, Labor Welfare, Rural Poor, Rural Employment.*

Introduction

Employment is a very crucial part as per the Indian economic scenario. In India most of the people live in rural area where employment opportunities are very less. Rural women have serious problem regarding their employment opportunities. Earning livelihood is very difficult for those women who are illiterate and poor. Government of India had made several programmes and created many opportunities for the employment generation. Now rural women have several opportunities to earn their livelihood. Among them beedi rolling has its own role in empowering rural women. Beedi rolling is one of the major informal sector activities in India. The government of India estimates that there are about 4.4 million workers in this industry. The majority are home based workers who live below the poverty line (BPL). Beedi is a kind of little cigarette, made of tendu leaves (instead of paper) and tobacco.

According to conservative estimate more than 6 million persons are engaged in Beedi making process and allied work. Beedi workers are vulnerable segments of the country's labor force which has increased involvement of women and child labor in beedi rolling activities.

Objectives

1. To understand the socio economic background of beedi workers.
2. To find out the problems of beedi workers.
3. To understand how beedi rolling as an employment and income generating work for women.

Methodology

The present study is partially qualitative and partially quantitative in nature. The methodology of the study is as follows:

1. Area of the Study

The present study is geographically restricted to Puttur taluk of Dakshina Kannada district. The primary data is collected from the respondents in Puttur taluk.

2. Source of Data

The present study is based on both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data are collected through sample method by using well designed questionnaire method. Besides questionnaire method personal interview method is also used for collecting the desired information. Secondary data is collected through various journals and magazines. The respondents are selected through simple random sampling method.

3. Data Analysis

In order to test the objectives of the study, data gathered through primary investigation is analysed with the help of simple statistical tools such as percentage and averages.

Beedi Rolling in India

The debate on the existence and continuity of beedi industry is heading towards major crisis day by day for want of suitable interpretations and interventions, favoring the major component of the beedi industry called the beedi rollers. India is one of those countries that encouraged the income generating activities at the level of villages to encourage the poor to overcome

their poverty. It is here in India that people experimented different activities capable of generating income and as a result of it several cottage industries came up. One among them is the beedi industry which has always had its ups and downs in its journey over the years. Unlike other cottage or small scale industries, the beedi industry has attracted and accommodated large number of rural aspirants who volunteered to take up one or the other activities involved in beedi rolling. It is commendable that no other industry succeeded in bringing out significant changes at the village level especially among the poor in its unique operation. Both men and women, aged and children, working and not working have taken up the beedi rolling either as a full time work or a part time.

A cursory look at the people engaged in beedi rolling helps in reading the entire activities positively as in its own way the beedi industry has helped in making their life with basic fulfillment. Their involvement in the industry and interest to continue with the same and of late today dealing with the industry in detail marks the significant changes taking place in the beedi industry. While attracting people to be a component, the beedi industry as a whole opened up variety of opportunities to the village level people. Over the years, it is noticed that beedi industry appeared to be a classified one as different categories of the people did different work in the industry. To make it specific, barring few cases here and there the rolling exercise has been carried out by women and all other activities until smokers have been dominated by men. Its close study like the present work may further suggest that the beedi industry has helped in improving the standard of life of those who have depended upon it. Its chronological study tells that early stages of beedi industry and later excluding the present condition helped the rollers in a big way in terms of their economic empowerment. In its earlier context related to other existing conditions the earning at the village level by the beedi rollers helped them in getting the average meal, dress and other basic requirements needed to live a life. Perhaps, this is one reason as to why people encouraged beedi industry at the village level. Its other chapter reveals that this is such an industry that did not expect the rollers to be completely involved within rolling and had provided with an opportunity to choose to be either a full time or a part time work. It indeed got popularity amongst those who opted for part time rolling besides their other routine work.

Hence, it became the most popular income generating work at the village level amongst the housewives. The housewives, besides their domestic work took to the beedi rolling exercise on part time basis that helped them in not only earning but also saving little money. This perspective of looking at beedi industry from its advantageous point of view encourages others to take up this work for more activities that may help in improving their life style.

Karnataka Scenario

The industry came into existence at the dawn of industrialization to supply cheap smoking device to poor labourers. The present form of beedi owes its origin to the tribal habits of rolling leaves for smoking, a practice which is popular among the Adivasis and Tribals. The beedi industry contributes to the Government about Rs. 450 crores annually as revenue. This huge cottage industry caters to the needs of millions of people and the beedi has almost replaced the traditional hukka or water pipe smoking. The low paid workers and the unemployment strive to make the best use of their children by sending them early to this work in beedi industries. (Rogi S.R. 1998) In the beedi industry the following systems of production can be identified.

1. Factory System
2. Home – Based System

In the factory system, the process of beedi making takes place at the factory site itself under the direct supervision of the staff members appointed for this purpose like another industrial organizations. The wage payment is made piece wise and each worker is required to turn a fixed minimum quantity of Beedies in proportion to raw – materials supplied. In the home based system, the home of the workers is production site. In this system the distribution of raw – materials collection of beedies and disbursal of wages is made by the management either through a person who is employed by the company or through a commission agent, who is not a regular employee of the company but is paid a commission on the basis of production performance under his control.

The large sized companies have generally preferred to operate through the commission agents for this system entails lesser accountability and risk, and contrarily greater maneuverability and profit. (Rajkumar P.A. 2002 PP – 161) Beedi, the deemed “poor man’s cigarette” or the “poor man’s smoke” in India is made by rolling about 0.2 grams of tobacco flakes in tendu leaf.

In India, 34% of tobacco consumption is in the form of beedi. Snuff and chewing tobacco account for 35% whereas 22% of tobacco use is in the form of cigarettes. This shows that the size of the market for beedi is much bigger than the market for cigarettes. The total number of beedi smokers was estimated to be around 100 million in 1994-95, the majority of whom were adult males.

The total number of cigarette smokers was 25 million. In 1996, annual beedi consumption was estimated to be 700 billion sticks. The total number of cigarette sticks sold in 1996-97 was 102 billion. Smokers, mainly in the low-income categories, consume beedi, while cigarettes are consumed by the relatively well-to-do section of the population. The markets for beedi and cigarette therefore do not overlap significantly. Beedi primarily caters for the domestic market although it is exported in small quantities. In 1997-98, 1.1 million kg of beedi worth US\$6.5 million was exported to 36 countries. About half of the total exports went to the United Arab Emirates (49%), followed by the United States (10%), Singapore (7%), Afghanistan (6%), Saudi Arabia (5%) and Panama (4%). These six countries accounted for an 82% share of exports with the remaining 30 sharing 18%. In the beedi industry, a large number of unregistered and home-based enterprises coexist with factory-based manufacturing enterprises. A complete census or a comprehensive nationwide database capturing important statistics of registered and unregistered enterprises is not available. The only available database is partial and fragmented, which makes it difficult to construct a time series on production and employment in this industry encompassing all types of enterprises.

There is an important difference in the organic composition of capital between the beedi and the cigarette industry. The manufacture of cigarette falls within the organized sector where the production process is factory-based and capital intensive. The industry is dominated by the presence of a few multinationals or big companies such as Imperial Tobacco Company of India Limited, Godfrey Philips and Vazir Sultan Tobacco Limited. The beedi industry, on the other hand, is domestically owned. The production is highly labour intensive and is critically dependent on the availability of cheap labour. However the conditions of work in the beedi industry raise serious concerns about unethical labour practices which run contrary to the spirit of the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work – a declaration adopted by the International Labour Conference in June 1998.

The Declaration calls on International Labour Organisation member States to ‘respect and promote freedom of association and collective bargaining; the abolition of all forms of forced or compulsory labour; the effective abolition of child labour; and the elimination of all forms of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation’. Isolated case studies and media reports indicate that the beedi industry employs large number of women and children in inhospitable and exploitative conditions. Labour laws are grossly flouted. The workers living conditions are also poor. The industry therefore presents a typical case where concerted social action on the part of the government, workers, employers, civil societies and international organizations is need to promote and realize the goal of ‘decent work’

Beedi Workers in Puttur Taluk

The beedi workers of Puttur Taluk are living in a miserable condition. Many of them belong to socially backward class and exploited by the beedi factories. They get Rs 200 as wage if they make 1000 beedies per day. The income which is generated by rolling beedi is not enough to meet their basic needs. Many of them living in kaccha houses and they have loan in banks. Many people facing health problems like cough, breathing problem etc. They also denied with the basic social security scheme in their working area.

The study is done on the topic socio economic condition of beedi workers in Puttur Taluk. It is done to gather information whether the beedi workers have education, whether they have identity card, whether they have specified age group, to know employment category, health problems faced by beedi workers, the kind of welfare facility, earning in the month, wages payment etc. The study was also conducted to gather information regarding total income of the household work done by workers whether the beedi workers have any assets, whether they attached it to any organisation.

According to 2011 census there are 53.068 thousand people living in Puttur Taluk. There are 9893 beedi workers working in Puttur Taluk. There are 3 beedi companies in Puttur Taluk they are:

1. Ganesh Beedi
2. Fail man Beedi
3. Bharath Beedi

Beedi leaves, tobacco powder and threads are imported from other states. The Beedi leaves are imported from Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra. Tobacco

powders are imported from Nipani. Threads are imported from Doddabathi, Andhra.

The raw materials are given to the people by the contractors. Beedi will be collected by the people every day. 15 lakh beedis are collected by the people through contract basis and 60 lakh beedis are collected monthly. The wages of beedi workers are given by the contractor's weekly. The wages for contractors will be given on the basis of commission. Daily collected beedis are heated and it will go to label and it will be bundled and send to Mysore head office when they ask for it.

The beedi workers will get bonus yearly and it will be given on the basis of their earned wages. If the beedi workers have the pass book, if their children are going to the school, then they will get scholarship. The beedi workers will get more benefit from government. Government will provide health care facilities to the beedi workers and this card facilitates them to get any health facilities if they require.

The ban of beedi sounds everywhere now a days. If the beedi is banned the beedi workers will have a lot of troubles. The production of beedi is reduced every year.

Findings of the Study

1. Majority of the beedi rollers are illiterate.
2. Female labour force is the main source to the beedi industry.
3. Beedi rollers are not organised yet.
4. Younger generation is chief source of labour force to the beedi industry.
5. Beedi workers are giving importance towards the education of their children.
6. Beedi rollers are not satisfied with the remuneration.
7. Ill-health is the major drawback of the beedi workers.
8. The beedi work is carried as subsidiary source of income.
9. Beedi rolling work is carried with the support and co-operation of their family members.
10. Beedi rollers are having poor standard of living.

Conclusion

Modern generation is coupled with a dozen of bad habits along with their virtues. Beedi smoking is common among the middle income teenage, younger and elder generation. Therefore the demand for beedi product has been increasing over the years. Hence there is much scope for beedi industry.

It is obvious that beedi rolling process can be carried even by illiterate individual also. At present a plethora of illiterate female generation are embraced with the beedi rolling work for their income. However this work is monotonous in nature and harmful to both body and mind. Again the workers of beedi industry are not organized and united. Therefore they are working under visual circle of middle man and agency.

Therefore government should launch a number of social security measures and effective labour laws for the benefit of beedi workers.

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