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A case study on the socio-economic condition of the beedi roller of Kaliachak -III block of Malda district of West Bengal during the lockdown

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Abstract

The incomprehensible origin of COVID - 19 virus in Wuhan of Hubei province, China is a severe setback of health, socio-economic condition and educational system of around 219 countries and territories of this planet. This epidemic plays a pivotal role to worsening the health, socio-economic condition and educational system. There was a huge impact on economic activities, especially labor - intensive activities. Beedi rolling is mainly a labor intensive industry in India, coming under the unorganized sector, the lion share being women.

The principle objective of this paper is to understand the socio-economic condition of the beedi roller of the Kaliachak Block of Malda district in the West Bengal in India, has been selected as the study area famous for pomum culture and sericulture. The study is based on primary and secondary sources of data. Although leading a life of a beedi roller is so challenging then after the start of lockdown their life become more worsening. From April to June their work was completely shutdown and after that they are getting only 2-3 days per week till now.

The study showed that 93% of the beedi rollers life was influenced by the lockdown and remaining 7% was uninfluenced. The researcher urges a need of Government assistance to revive the life of beedi rollers of the study area. And Government should provide Corona Vaccine to them so that they can lead their life in the mainstream.

Keywords: COVID-19, worsening, beedi-roller, incomprehensible, corona-vaccine, mainstream

Introduction

A novel strain of Corona Virus - SARS - COV - 2 was first detected in December, 2019 in Wuhan, Capital of Hubei province, China, which was later known as the "2019 Novel Corona Virus" or "2019 - nCov*". The whole world is in owe today for the Covid - 19 that originated in December, 2019. WHO has declared on 30th January, 2020 Corona as Public Health Emergency on international concerns and on 11th March as Pandemic. The Virus has spread through human contact. Symptoms of Corona Virus including Coughing, Sneezing, Fatigue, Shortness of breath, Loss of sense of smell etc. Regular hand washing, use of sanitizer, wearing mask, maintaining social distance can protect against this virus. Up to 31st October, 2020 number of people infected by Corona virus was 45.24 million and total death is 1,183,788 out of the world. The epidemic make a severe setback of health, socio-economic condition and educational system, Economic activities are severely affected.

Beedi rolling is one of the major informal and unorganized sectors of India. The employment size of beedi workers is next only to agriculture and handloom sector in India. The Government of India estimates that there are about 4.16 million workers were employed in the beedi industry (Ministry of Labor & Employment, 2015) and amongst them 3.42 million were fulltime worker and the remaining 0.74 million workers are employed as part time workers engaged in this particular cottage industry.

Men, women and children are involved in the process of beedi making, an easy way of earning a wage in the rural areas of Malda district of West Bengal. People are engaged as beedi workers facing serious problems including poverty, health hazard, family problems, poor housing facilities, insufficient nutritious food, unhygienic environment, illiteracy, physical stress and debt etc. The researcher is very much keen to learn about the beedi rollers during the lockdown period.

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The findings of the study will be very much useful to the Ministry of Labor & Employment, Govt. of India and NGOs working for the development of this unorganized sector. In West Bengal! Beedi rolling activity as well as performed in the district of the Murshidabad (hub of the beedi rolling districts), Malda, Uttar Dinajpur, Nadia, Birbhum, Bankura etc.

Beedi Industry in India

Beedi rolling is one of the major unorganized sectors of India. India is the largest beedi producer of the world accounting for about the 85% of the total production of the world. Contd. 2.

According to estimation Madhya Pradesh (17%) is the highest producer of beedi followed by the states like Tamil Nadu (14%), Andhra Pradesh (14%), Karnataka (12%), West Bengal (11%) and Uttar Pradesh (10%).

Objectives of the Research

The primary objectives of the research are

1. To find out the socio - economic condition of the beedi rollers in the Maida district of West Bengal.
2. To study about the problems faced by the beedi rollers of the study area during the lockdown.
3. How they maintain the situation and what kind of help they got from various sources.
4. Our suggestions to overcome the conditions.

A Geographical Outlook of the study area

Maida is one of the important districts of West Bengal with regard to pomumculture (Mango, Litchi, Banana, Guava) and olericulture (various types of vegetables). It lies along the northern bank of Ganga plain in Lower Ganga Deltaic Plain. The latitudinal extension of Malda district is 24°40'20" N to 25°32'08" N and the longitudinal location lies between 87°45'50" E to 88°28'10" E. The district covers an area of 3733.66 sq kms. To the North it is surrounded by Uttar Dinajpur district and South it is Murshidabad district and to the east it has an international border with Bangladesh and to the West State of Bihar and Jharkhand Total population of Maida is 3,997,970 (2011 Census). The literacy rate is 61% (66% of Males & 57% of Females). About 86.4% of people still live in rural areas. For administrative purpose Malda district is divided into 15 Development Blocks. The district headquarter is English Bazar, also known as Malda, which was once the capital of Bengal. Gour, Pandua are most famous historical places of West Bengal. Rice, Mango, Jute, Oilseeds and Silk are the most notable products of the districts. The main rivers of the district are the Ganga and Mahananda.

Kaliachak - iii community development block located at 24°83'72" North latitude and 87°97'76" East longitude. Kaliachak - iii Block has an area of 127.37 sq kms. It has 1 Panchayet Samity, 14 Gram Panchayets, 204 Gram Samsads (Village Council), 75 Mouzas, and 65 Inhabited Villages. Baishnabnagar Police Station serves this Block. According to population census of 2011 total population of Kaliachak - III Block were 3,59,071, where population density were 2800/sq. km. The National Highway (NH-34) passing through the middle of the block, which connect Kolkata to Siliguri. Contd.3.

Database and Research Methodology

The survey was done by the both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data have been collected through intensive field survey based on well-structured questionnaire with regard to objective in mind. For conducting field

survey 6 villages i.e. - Chamagram, Laxmipur, Simultala, Bhangatola, Chakbahadurpur, Namdatola has been selected from Kaliachak - III Block of Maida district and each village contains around 52 respondents has been selected based on random and stratified sampling technique. A total 312 household has been taken.

The secondary source of data has been collected from the Labor & Welfare Department, Govt. of West Bengal, Self-employed Labor Organizer (SLO), District Statistical Handbook, Govt. Reports, Magazine Journal, Articles, Research Papers and Newspapers etc.

Result and Discussion

After obtaining the data a simple percentage method is utilized to show the different aspects of socio-economic condition and impact of lockdown and its remedies.

Table 1: Number of male and female respondents

Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Male	100	32.05
Female	212	67.95

Source: Field Survey November 2020.

Table No. 1 shows that among the all 312 (100%) respondents 100 (22.05%) are males and remaining 212 (67.95%) are females. According to self-employed labor organizer (SLO) of this block total number of bidi roller of this block is 1.30 lacs. Among them total number of male bidi roller is 25,000 (19.23%) and female bidi roller is 1.05 lacs (80.77%) of Kaliachak - III block, where in the State of West Bengal average male and female bidi roller ratio is 16:84. The All India Bidi, Cigar and Tobacco Workers Federation estimates woman comprise 90-95% of total employment in bidi manufacture in India. Contd.5.

In India, where female bidi roller ratio is 90-95% female bidi rollers contribution in West Bengal is about 84% and female contribution in Kaliachak - III is 84%. But at our study area where we conducted our household survey female contribution only 67.95%, i.e. a declining tendency of female bidi rollers contribution from national level to our study area.

Reasons

There have few reasons behind the growing tendency of contribution of male bidi roller.

- 1) During the lockdown period the male members of their family were lost their work (Dadan).
- 2) They are from very low income family to meet their basic needs.
- 3) There have no such good alternative work for them.

Table 2: Age group of the respondents

Age Group	Number of Respondents	Percentage
<13	80	25.64
13-19	44	14.10
19-40	121	38.78
40-60	45	14.42
>60	22	7.05

Source: Field Survey November 2020.

Table No. 2: Basically there are three determinants of age composition of a population, i.e. natality, mortality and mobility (Clarke - 1972, Page 66.). And age structure is one

of the major determinants of the socio-economic condition of an area or vice versa.

Table No. 2 shows that among the all household 25.64% are less than 14 years and age group between 15-19 years household are 14.10%. 19-44 years old household are maximum contributor of bidi rolling, i.e. 38.78%. 44-64 years old bidi rollers are 14.42% and remaining 7.05% is more than 64 years old.

The most significant fact about the above mentioned Table No. 2, that child labor is predominant in this industry. The number of household between the age group of 0-14 years are 80 (25.64%) in our study area, (according to census report - 2011, India's population between the age of 5-14 years is 259.6 million. Out of these 10.1 million children are victim of child labor. Contd...6.

This is the shocking result Because a children who are compelled to do this work that will spoil him or her mentally, physically, socially, morally and so on. We found that there are two basic reasons behind the child labor of our study area.

- 1) Because of their socio-economic condition, they forced to do this.
- 2) Due to lockdown period their family earning are became so poor

Table 3: Educational qualification of the respondents

Educational Qualification	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Illiterate	235	75.32
Madhyamik Pariksha (10 th)	31	9.93
Higher Secondary(12 th)	18	5.76
Graduation	24	7.69
Others	04	1.28

Source: Field Survey November 2020.

Table No. 3 shows the educational qualification of the study area among the house- hold. Our study area show very poor condition of this area. Among the total 312 household 235 respondents are nearly uneducated (less that 10th pass). According to census - 2011 the literacy rate of Maida district was 62.71% (18th position) and literacy Kaliachak - III community development block was 54.16%. So we found that Malda district is basically educationally one of the backward districts of West Bengal. Research indicates that children from low - SES households and communities develop academic skills slower than children from higher SES groups (Morgan, Farkas, Hillemeier, & Maczuga, 2009) and which severely effect educational condition of the study area and vice-versa. Bidi roller, who passed their Madhyamik Exam are 9.93%. Among the bidi roller 5.67% are Higher Secondary pass. Graduate candidates, who compelled to bidi rolling, are 7.69% and remaining 1.28% candidates are belonging to other category.

Major fact is that a large number of household, i.e. 235 (75.32%) are cognitively less developed, i.e. one of the major cause of their socio-economic backwardness. Contd.7.

Table 4: House type of the respondents

House Type	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Houseless	17	5.44
Kutch House	129	41.34
Pucca House	54	17.30
Mixed	112	35.89

Source: Field Survey November 2020.

Table No. 4: Socio - Economic status is one of the most important determinants of housing quality. Individuals with higher levels of income, education and occupational attainment are more likely to own their own homes and secure for themselves higher quality and more expensive housing. Table No. 4 highlight the house type of the household, which is directly related to the socio - economic condition of the study area. Among the all 312 respondents there are 17 (5.44%) respondents who are homeless; they lived at any or their relative's house. There are 129 (41.34%) candidates who live in a house made by mud with shelter or shade made by tin, taali or straw etc. There are 112 (35.89%) household, who belongs to mixed house, i.e. it's a mixture of Pucca & Kutch house. And remaining 54 (17.30%) household had pucca house type, which is made by brick, cement, sand and iron-bar.

Above mentioned discussion clearly shows that they are basically from very low-income family that showed their worn-out condition.

Table 5: Satisfaction with the wages

Criteria	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Compelled	102	32.69
Not Satisfied	200	64.10
Don't Know	10	3.20

Source: Field Survey November 2020.

Table No. 5: Through the household survey we have found that the respondents either compelled or not satisfied with this work. Table No. 5 uphold that among the all 312 respondents 102 (22.69%) household were compelled to do bidi rolling.

Reasons

There are basically few reasons behind their compulsion. They are -

1. There have no alternative job for them to meet their basic needs.
2. They belong to very low income families.
3. With the price hike of essential commodities they are became more helpless.

And with the remaining respondents 200 (64.10%) households are not satisfied with their work. There had some reasons behind their not satisfaction. They are -

1. Household earn daily wages are not satisfactory.
2. Because of their daily earnings they lead a worse socio - economic life which is not satisfactory.
3. Backache, Headache, eye - problem, pain - in - limb, gastric, stomach problem, cough and cold, asthma and tuberculosis are those disease, which are very common to the bidi roller. And rest of the candidates, i.e. 10 (3.2%) person cannot say anything about this.

Table 6: Impact of lockdown

Impact	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Unable to meet food and house hold	86	27.56
Unable to carry children education	24	7.69
Hardly carry health expenses	30	9.61
All of the above	150	48.07
No Impact	22	7.05

Source: Field Survey November 2020.

Table No. 6: During this COVID situation Govt's take some decision to break the chain of Corona Virus, Lockdown is one of the decisions in which every socio-economic organization was shutdown to prevent the public gathering. And this lockdown make severe setback to every citizen of this world socio-economically. Financial sector, education department, health status partly or more than partly breakdown. According to an estimation, during this lockdown an estimated 140 million people lost their employment and it was largest GDP contraction (-24%) ever in the history of Independent India.

Table No. 6 shows the impact of lockdown on our study area. Among the household 86 (27.56%) are unable to meet their food and household. There are 24 (7.69%) household are unable to carry to children education. And 30 (9.61%) respondents are hardly carrying health expenses. There are 22 (7.05%) household, who said they don't feel any impact of lockdown. Remaining 150 (48.07%) household said that they are unable to meet their all of the above needs.

Reason

We have found some reason behind the situation of the bidi roller.

1. Due to lockdown bidi factories were completely shut down for at least three (April to June, 2020) months.
2. In the following months factories were partially opened, i.e. 3-4 days were working days per week,
3. Mostly male members of their family are migrant labor, who lost their job due to lockdown
4. They have no alternative job for their livelihood -
5. Bidi rollers are basically from very low-income family.
6. As the transport system was shutdown, the prices of daily necessities sky rocketed.

Table 7: How to maintain the livelihood of the respondents

Assistance	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Govt. Assistance	112	35.89
N.G.Os Help	50	16.02
Deposited Cash	30	9.61
All of the Above	120	38.46

Source: Field Survey November 2020.

Table No. 7 elucidates how the households maintain their livelihood during the lockdown. Through the survey we have find out that among the all 312 households 112 (35.89%) got Govt. assistance. Through the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yozana (PMGKY) which provide free ration to the people of India, 20 crore women get an ex-gratia amount of Rs. 500 per month for three months through Jan Dhan Yozana and through Ujjwala Scheme around 8.3 crore women, who belong to below poverty line get free cylinders of LPG for three months and soon. There had 50 (16.02%) respondents, who could not get any Govt. facilities but only NGOs help (Vigyan Manch). Some of them, i.e. 30 (9.61%) household lead their life through their own deposited cash without any Govt. or Non - Govt. assistance. And remaining 120 (38-46%) respondents received help from all of the above sources.

Major Findings of the Study

Following are the major findings of our research work

1. Beedi rollers of the study area are basically from very low income family.

2. The wages provided to the beedi workers are very low (Rs. 120-Rs. 140 / 1000 beedi) where actual rate is Rs. 267.44 / 1000 beedi according to a circular of the Govt. of West Bengal.
3. A company provides 550 gm leaves and 300 gm tobacco products to a contractor and then contractor delivers 500 gm leaves and 250 gm tobacco products to a beedi roller. If a beedi roller does not complete 1000 beedi with the raw material provided by the contractor then he / she will be compelled to buy raw material from the contractor with a rate of more than market value.
4. Before 2013, beedi rollers received financial support from Governments (Central & State) for construction of their house around Rs. 50,000/- through a Central Government Scheme but now it is unavailable.
5. Government provides them insurance facilities through a Government Scheme before 2015 around Rs. 11,500/- per head.
6. They also got maternity assistance from Central Government around Rs. 1000/- per head before 2015.
7. During the lockdown period they faced a huge problems, children education, health expenses, household utensils were out of their reach. There are maximum number of respondents, who even can't meet their two times meal too.
8. The respondents continue their livelihood by the ration provided by Government and others. And many of them from their own deposits.

Suggestion and Policy Implication

Following are the major suggestions

1. The Ministry of Labor & Welfare Department, State of West Bengal should secure their wages.
2. Both Governments should provide them a health card by which they can get modern medical facilities with a subsidy.
3. The Ministry of Labor & Welfare Department, State of West Bengal should confirm that the raw materials of beedi, which they need to roll, should get with a reasonable price.
4. Central and State Government should jointly provide housing assistance, insurance facility and maternity help through various Government Schemes.
5. Government should declare an instant relief fund for the families of beedi rollers who are severely suffered from the impact of lockdown.
6. Both the Central & State Governments should make some alternative economic activities to the study area that they can choose their best one and can live a better life.
7. Both the Central & State Governments should make some alternative economic activities to the study area that they can choose their best one and can live a better life.

Conclusion

Low income family and very low income family are the major portion of the respondents of the study area. Basically females of the study area are beedi rollers and male members are the labor class people, who spread all over the India for various work. During the lockdown period of COVID-19 pandemic their source of Income became zero. So, most of them were fully dependant on the helps from

others for span of their life. Although the Government of India and Government of West Bengal provided them food crops by ration but these are not enough for sustaining a life. Yet beedi rollers have been facing acute problems like disparity in minimum wages and lack of social security. There have a number of families who even can't meet the need of food. Now-a-days only 2-3 days are working day per week and remaining days of the week that are workless. Government should take some immediate steps to overcome the situation of the beedi rollers otherwise this handloom industry will drowned into the deep black sea.

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