

Ground Realities of Beedi Workers in Madhya Pradesh



Centre for Health & Social



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Year of Publication: 2017

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Executive Summary

Madhya Pradesh is the largest tendu leaf producing state of India and also one of the first states where beedi manufacturing began in 1902 in Jabalpur district. In 1915, a beedi rolling unit was established by Abdul Noor Mohammed in Sagar followed by BhagwandasShobhalal Jain (B.S.Jain& Co.) in 1920. Since then, beedi manufacturing has been the main source of employment and revenue in Sagar district, second only to agriculture¹. Madhya Pradesh has a large number of beedi workers; however in the absence of a census, it is difficult to estimate accurately the exact number. Sagar, Damoh and Jabalpur are said to be the districts with the largest number of beedi workers as per data from the 1990s. It is estimated that there were 530 beedi establishments and 1,40,575 registered beedi workers in Madhya Pradesh before the formation of Chhattisgarh in 2000², but recent estimates are unknown. According to those working in the field, there are approximately 3.25 lakh beedi workers in Sagar district alone but the district administration disputes these figures³. Beedis are also produced in Satna, Rewa, Panna, Chhatarpur and Gwalior. There are many beedi brands, big and small, operating in Madhya Pradesh. SherChhapBeedi is very popular. Other brands are Tractor Beedi, Mohan Beedi, KantaChhapBeedi, DholakBeedi, BM Company etc.

Beedi rolling is a home based activity in Madhya Pradesh and the system of production is through contractors or middlemen (called *sattedar* or *thekedar*). The beedi manufacturer usually has a factory or workshop and a large godown where raw materials are stored and given to *sattedars*. The *sattedars*, in turn, have their storerooms in areas where beedi workers live. Workers are given raw materials to roll into beedis which they return to the *sattedar* and are paid per 1000 beedis. The *sattedar* hands over the beedis to the manufacturer and is paid on a commission basis per 1000 beedis. The manufacturer roasts, packs, brands and labels the rolled beedis. While this is predominantly the mode in which the industry functions, there are also some variations. For example, beedi rollers sometimes also buy tendu leaves and raw materials by themselves, and provide rolled beedis to the *sattedar* which is either sold as loose beedis or sold to smaller companies by the *sattedar*. In such a situation, the wages provided are higher as it includes the costs for raw materials as well.

¹ Best Practices Foundation (2001). The Beedi Industry in India: An Overview. Retrieved on 20.04.2017 from <https://www.scribd.com/doc/95519427/The-Beedi-Industry-in-India-An-Overview>

² Government of India Labour Bureau (2003). Report on evaluation studies on implementation of the minimum wages act, 1948 in Bidi making establishments in Madhya Pradesh. Retrieved on 20.04.2017 from <http://labourbureau.nic.in/MW3ch2.htm>

³ Interview with Medical Officer, Sagar

Beedi rollers are largely women while the work of manufacturing and contracting is done by men. Historically men and women both rolled beedis but with the shift to home-based work fewer men roll beedis as their main / only wage work. Those employed in the factory do not roll beedis but do all the other work associated with the manufacturing of beedi, such as roasting and packing. However, the number of such factory or godown workers is relatively small.

Policies and Welfare Schemes for Beedi Workers

The Central and State governments, over the years, have enacted legislations and policies aimed at monitoring working conditions and providing social security benefits for the welfare of beedi workers. Besides the existing labour laws such as Minimum Wage Act and the Provident Fund Act, the Government of India has also enacted two important laws specifically for the beedi sector workers. The Beedi and Cigar Workers (Conditions of Employment) Act, 1966 is an Act to provide for the welfare of the workers in Beedi and Cigar establishments and to regulate the conditions of their work and for matters connected therewith. However, regulating this is a challenge as the workers are largely home-based. The Beedi Workers Welfare Fund Act, 1976 resulted in the creation of Beedi Workers Welfare Fund (BWWF) for the welfare of beedi workers. The BWWF is administered by the Labour Welfare Organisation (LWO) under the Ministry of Labour and Employment and is financed through a cess levied on manufactured beedis, which applies only to registered companies manufacturing more than 2 million beedis per year. This exemption excludes the large number of workers who roll beedis for smaller unregulated companies, but are not eligible for benefits and entitlements.

This study is on the situation of beedi workers in Madhya Pradesh, with the primary aim being to identify key concerns of beedi workers with a focus on (but not limited to) labour, livelihood, health, social security and related exploitation. The study also explored the beedi industry and its geographical distribution, the status with respect to legal entitlements of the workers and key issues of advocacy which have been taken up by various stakeholders.

Methodology

The field work for the study was carried out in October-November 2016 in Jabalpur, Sagar and Satna districts, which are the three important beedi producing districts in Madhya Pradesh. In-depth interviews with key informants drawn from important stakeholder groups, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with beedi workers were the main data collection methods used. 9 FGDs across all three districts were conducted with beedi

rollers and 1 with tendu leaf collectors in Satna. A total of 11 Key Informant Interviews were held with officials of beedi companies, trade union office bearers, government officials from the labour department and health department, as well as representatives of organizations working on the issue of beedi workers in the area such as Gram SudharSamiti (Satna), Institute of Social Research and Development (Jabalpur) and People's Research Institute (Sagar).

Findings

The following key issues of concern around the welfare and rights of beedi workers emerged during the study:

- ***Registration of workers for social security and welfare benefits***

Access to social security and welfare schemes requires two types of documentation – a registration/ID card (which links a worker to a company), and a card to access schemes of the Beedi Worker Welfare Fund. Many of the beedi workers who participated in the study had a card to access welfare schemes (locally called the 'gharkhatashramik' card). However they did not have a registration ID which would link them to a company, thereby depriving them of social security benefits like Provident Fund (PF) and Pension. In order to get a registration ID card, a worker has to be certified by the factory that s/he has rolled 5,600 beedis per month for 2 months. The *sattedar* is responsible for ensuring that a worker gets register however in practice most of the workers do not have such registration. Further, workers who do not work for the registered companies (i.e. those manufacturing more than 2 million beedis annually) do not get a registration card at all.

The card to access welfare schemes is made at the civil dispensary/hospital run by the Beedi Workers Welfare Fund. Beedi workers have to roll a minimum of five beedis in front of the Medical Officer after which the application has to be verified by the concerned *sattedar*. This leaves the beedi workers at the mercy of the *sattedar*. However, this is not a uniform practice. In Sagar district for instance, the verification was done by the ward member or councilor. Moreover, since June 2016 registration of new workers and renewal of cards has been temporarily suspended apparently due to the decision of the government to merge the Beedi Workers Welfare Schemes with the Employees' State Insurance (ESI)⁴

- ***Access to schemes and entitlements***

There are a variety of schemes specifically implemented for beedi workers by the Ministry of Labour, through the Beedi Workers Welfare Fund. These include schemes for educational scholarships, housing facilities, insurance for

⁴Interviews with medical officer at Jabalpur Civil Dispensary and NGO representatives.

death and accident, funeral expenses, free treatment and medicines, spectacles, maternity benefits up to two live births, family planning operations, treatment for cardiac and renal problems, cancer, tuberculosis, leprosy, mental health, and other minor diseases such as ulcers, hernia, etc. It is important to note, however, that most beedi workers are not aware of the existence of these schemes and the entitlements therein. It is not surprising therefore that according to the data from the Central Hospital in Sagar, between January 2011 and April 2016, there were only 2658 applications for accessing 9 schemes and only 2145 beneficiaries. The housing scheme, though popular, had several barriers. It required that the land for the house should be on the name of the worker and the worker had to deposit an amount of Rs.5000 as security, and hence did not get utilized.

- ***Non-adherence to minimum wages***

The wages for beedi work are set at the state level, and that for Madhya Pradesh is Rs. 67 per 1000 beedis (this amounts to approximately one day's work). This amount is much lower than that in other states like West Bengal where the minimum wage is Rs.126 or Tamil Nadu where it is Rs.192 per 1000 beedis. In practice, workers do not even get this meagre wage due to various reasons. Oftentimes the raw material provided by the *sattedar* is insufficient for rolling 1000 beedis and so the workers have to buy additional material and pay for it from their own pocket. Additionally, there is rejection of beedis by the *sattedar* and in effect the worker may end up getting only Rs 30 to Rs 35 for rolling 1000 beedis. This amount is insufficient for sustaining families and workers are pushed to seek loans, especially in emergency situations.

- ***Health Impact***

The nature of work of beedi rollers involves prolonged sitting with the trunk bent forward and the constant use of fingers. Different studies with beedi workers in India including a National Commission for Women (NCW) report on women beedi workers have discussed several health problems of beedi workers like calluses in hands, fatigue in the arms and numbness in fingers. Throat ache, respiratory disorder, piles and pain in urinary tract are common problems faced by large number of beedi workers. Constant exposure to tobacco dust results in respiratory irritation. Tuberculosis and Asthma are also common. Sitting for long hours causes back and neck aches, joint pain, as well as arthritis and gynaecological problems. Headaches, nausea, giddiness and burning of the eyes from long hours of work and exposure to tobacco are almost a way of life for many beedi workers. Although health hazards of tobacco exposure are well documented, many workers in Madhya Pradesh do not recognize their health problems.

- ***Inadequate health care facilities and access***

There are 36 dispensaries, mobile vans and a 30 bedded hospital in the state exclusively for beedi workers. However, workers complain of poor services at these facilities. There is only one doctor who is appointed on an adhoc basis and there are no adequate medicines and diagnostics available. Therefore even if the workers go to the facilities they are sent to other government health facilities which are crowded and a lot of time is spent in seeking treatment there. Therefore people prefer to go to private practitioners or to various kinds of informal practitioners close to their village. As one worker remarked "We don't go to the beedi hospital (dispensary). It is in Jabalpur and far from our village. Once or twice I had gone there but I spent my whole day which is a big loss of money. Despite that I didn't get proper medicine and treatment there".

- ***Trade Unions and other organising efforts***

There have been sporadic efforts by mainstream Trade Unions to organise beedi workers in Madhya Pradesh. The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) and the Lal Jhanda Beedi Mazdoor Union and its breakaway faction Madhya Pradesh Beedi Mazdoor Union are working with beedi workers in Madhya Pradesh. The Trade Unions have been raising concerns about the lack of adherence to minimum wages and facilitating registration of workers. However it appears from discussion with workers, that they have not made concerted and coordinated efforts to organize workers to demand other welfare benefits. Moreover, with respect to providing alternative livelihood options, some union leaders themselves believe that home-based beedi work is suitable for women as it helps them manage other household responsibilities, and because they prefer to stay at home.

Apart from Unions there are other organizations also working towards realizing beedi workers' rights. Institute for Social Research and Development (ISRD) based in Bhopal and Amanva Nyay Pehal based in Sagar work with beedi workers to increase access of workers to social security and entitlements, organize workers in groups and encourage them to join trade unions and link workers with National Livelihood Mission and the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has indicated some important issues of the beedi industry that affect workers. The state must take steps to improve the situation for the workers and make existing laws and welfare provisions effective. The responsibility for the same lies with all the stakeholders particularly the

beedi company owners, the state labour department, trade unions and the civil society organisations, among others. In view of strengthening of rights of beedi workers and for providing them humane and just conditions of work, the following recommendations are provided based on the research:

- **Registration of Beedi Workers:** Companies should be made accountable to issue passbooks and ID Cards to the workers enrolled with them or with their contractors so that workers can get their rights under social security schemes. There is a need of uniform and transparent registration process in the state which reduces dependence on the *sattedar*. Trade unions, civil societies and labour department could play a key role in making beedi workers aware of the registration process.
- **Adherence to Minimum Wages:** The labour department must make efforts to ensure that at least minimum wages are given to workers, make workers aware of the wage rate, and provide avenues of grievance redressal when they are not adhered to.
- **Access to Welfare Schemes:** In order to improve the access of beedi workers to welfare schemes, department should establish mechanism to make beedi workers aware of the schemes and of the procedure to be followed. Periodic Awareness camps should be organized in areas populated with beedi workers. Department should make available compiled reports of the beneficiaries under various welfare schemes to trade unions and civil societies.
- **Census of the Beedi Workers:** A census of all the beedi workers whether they are working for smaller or big, registered or unregistered companies should be undertaken to build a comprehensive and up to date data base. Information on contractors/ *sattedar* should also be collated.
- **Monitoring the Enforcement of Legislation and Grievance Redressal Mechanism:** Department should monitor the enforcement of legislation through periodic checks and audits. Since workers are largely home-based, a different mechanism for this will need to be worked out. There should be a system for grievance redressal where workers can approach in case of violation of their rights and entitlements.
- **Preventive Measures to Reduce Health Impact:** Workers should be informed about the risk involved in beedi rolling and should be made aware of the preventive measures to reduce the risk to their health and overall wellbeing. Beedi companies must provide mask, gloves or take other preventative measures that could reduce the risk.
- **Strengthening Health Facilities:** There is an urgent need to strengthen and reactivate the health institutions which have been established for Beedi workers. The health facilities should provide only health services unlike now, where they are appropriate authority for registration of beedi workers and for disbursement of welfare schemes.
- **Alternate Livelihood Opportunity:** There is a need for the government to create alternate livelihood opportunities for the beedi workers so that

those who do not want to continue beedirolling, could choose other livelihood options.

I. Introduction

Beedi manufacturing is a traditional agro-forest based industry in India, highly labour intensive and predominantly unorganized. The beedi industry is one of the largest employers of workers in India, after agriculture, handloom and construction. The industry employs unskilled labour and is located in specific pockets across the country. There is no accurate estimation of the number of people employed in the beedi industry and the numbers vary depending on who is making the estimates. The most popularly quoted figures are government estimates of 4.4 million workers in the beedi rolling industry (1999-2000), majority of whom are home based women workers. The trade unions claim that there are over 7 million beedi workers (Best Practices Foundation (2011)). It is said that if those engaged in beedi trade and the tendu leaf collection are also taken into account, the actual numbers of people involved in the beedi sector is much higher. The unions also point out that beedi workers constitute a major share of the workforce under the poverty line.

Beedis are cheap and widely smoked in India. About 19% of tobacco consumption in India is in the form of cigarettes, while 53% is smoked as beedis. The rest is used mainly in smokeless form. Roughly eight beedis are sold for every cigarette (John, 2008). While a packet of 20 normal cigarettes can cost in excess of 150 rupees, a bundle of 15 beedies can sell for as little as five rupees, their price kept low by favourable tax rates. Each year close to 1 million deaths due to tobacco-related diseases are recorded in India; about 600,000 of those deaths are tied to beedis (Krishnan and Ray, 2011). The beedi industry in India produces 750 billion to 1.2 trillion sticks every year and beedis contain more tar and nicotine than regular cigarettes. India is home to some 300 major beedi companies and thousands of smaller ones (Krishnan and Ray, 2011). More Indians have been found to be dying of beedi smoking than from all other forms of tobacco combined, according to studies by the World Health Organisation and the Voluntary Health Association of India (Krishnan and Ray, 2011).

Beedi rolling is generally done by poor households in backward areas where the workers have usually no other means of sustainable employment. Although beedi rolling began in the factory sector (in early twentieth century), over the last three decades, the beedi manufacturers have increasingly shifted the work from factories into the households. Currently, about 10% of the beedi manufacturing takes place in the organised factory sector.

Beedi manufacturing takes place in almost all the major states of India such as in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Kerala and Karnataka. The cultivation of beedi tobacco is mainly concentrated in Gujarat, Karnataka, and Maharashtra, although it is also grown to some extent in Orissa and Andhra Pradesh. Bulk of the beedi wrapping leaves (tendu leaves) are grown in Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar.

II.Objectives and Methodology

This is a study focusing on the situation of beedi workers in Madhya Pradesh, particularly in the districts of Jabalpur, Sagar and Satna.

Objectives

1. To understand the profile of people engaged in Beedi work and the nature of the industry
2. To explore and identify key concerns related to the welfare of Beedi workers (with a focus on health, social security, labour rights, child rights and gender based exploitation), from the perspective of various stakeholders.
3. To understand the administrative structure of government programmes to address Beedi worker welfare and industry regulation.
4. To map efforts (especially advocacy efforts) to address Beedi worker concerns by organisations, activists, unions or others, and understand challenges faced therein.

Methodology

In-depth interviews with key informants drawn from important stakeholder groups, and focus group discussions with beedi workers were the main data collection methods used. The study was carried out in November, 2016 in Jabalpur, Sagar and Satna districts, which are three important beedi producing districts in Madhya Pradesh. The table (Table 1) below lists the people we met.



Group discussion with beedi workers in

According to the 2011 census

Jabalpur District has a population of 2,460,714. Jabalpur has a sex ratio of 925 females for every 1000 males and a literacy rate of 82.47%. Sagar District has a population of 2,378,295 with, a population density of 232 inhabitants per square kilometre (600/sq. mi). Sagar has a sex ratio of 896 females for every 1000 males, and a literacy rate of 77.52%. Beedi making is widespread in Sagar district. It is also an agricultural trade centre and has industries such as oil and flour milling, saw-milling, ghee processing and cotton weaving. Wheat, chickpeas, sorghum, and oilseeds are chief crops of the region and many people rear cattle. Satna District has a population of 2,228,619 with a population density of 297 inhabitants per square kilometre (770/sq. mi). Satna has a sex ratio of 927 females for every 1000 males and a literacy rate of 73.79%. In 2006 the Ministry of Panchayati Raj named Satna one of the country's 250 most backward districts. It is one of the 24 districts in Madhya Pradesh currently receiving funds from the Backward Regions Grant Fund Programme (BRGF).

Table 1: Interactions during field visit

Place	Person(s) met	Method
Jabalpur	Ajay Kumar Yadav of ISRD	Interview
	Activists of NagarikAdhikarManch	Focus group discussion
	GovindShirpurkar, Pharmacist	Interview
	Beedi workers	Focus group discussions (2)
	PhulaBai (an organiser of the CPI)	Interview
	Administrative staff at the factory of Central India Tobacco Company Private Limited (locally known as MohanlalHargobind Das)	Brief conversations with staff present
	Women beedi workers (Panaghar)	Focus group discussion
	Dr. KKHM SyamSundar, Dy Chief Labour Commissioner (Central)	Interview
Sagar	Dr SA Sharif , Medical Officer in Charge, Central Hospital Sagar and Santosh Kumar Pandey, Welfare Administrator	Interview
	Mohammad Haroon, People's Research Society	Interview
	Beedi workers (2 groups Muslim, 2 Dalit)	Focus group discussion
	Contractor or <i>Sattedar</i>	Interview

Satna	Beedi workers in Barhana(2 groups)	Focus group discussion
	ArunTyagi and DadholiPandey of Gram SudharSamiti, an organization working in Satna	Interview
	Tendu leaf gatherers - Adivasi (Kol) women	Focus group discussion
	SohawalBeedi Workers' Colony	Interviews with 4 residents
	Dr.Mukhtar Ahmed, Medical Officer (post-retirement)	Interview

III. Mapping the industry in Madhya Pradesh

Madhya Pradesh is one of the first states where beedi manufacturing began in 1902 in Jabalpur district. In 1915, a beedi rolling unit was established by Abdul Noor Mohammed in Sagar. BhagwandasShobhalal Jain (B.S.Jain & Co.) was established in 1920 after which beedi manufacturing has been the main source of employment and revenue in the district after agriculture (Best Practices Foundation, 2011). There is an interesting story about the beedi company MohanlalHargovind Das and Jabalpur. Mohanlal used to roll beedis by the roadside at Jabalpur until he started marketing them under the Sher (Lion) brand name in 1902. The company grew to be the country's largest till it was overtaken by Mangalore Ganesh.

Every day, the company, and its five allied firms which have 6,000 regular employees, pays Rs 10 crore as excise duty. The company turns out 6 crore beedis at a dozen centres and markets them all across north India. And it exports beedis with filters (Singh, Rajghatta and Mahurkar, 1989)

Within Madhya Pradesh, Sagar, Damoh and Jabalpur districts had the largest number of beedi workers in the 1990s. Beedis are also produced in Satna, Rewa, Panna, Chhatarpur and Gwalior. It is estimated that there were 530 beedi establishments and 1,40,575 registered beedi workers in Madhya Pradesh before the formation of Chhattisgarh in 2000 (Labour Bureau, GOI). There has not been a census of beedi workers after that and figures are not available. However, through conversations during our field trip, we learnt that 4 lakh beedi workers have been registered in Sagar but the district administration disputes these figures. A Community Based Organisation (CBO) representative and member of trade union in Sagar claimed that there are approximately 15 lakh beedi workers in the state. According to him there is a mismatch in the data as cards were issued by the Labour department, Madhya Pradesh and also by the central hospital, Sagar.

IV. The Process of Beedi Production

Beedi rolling is a home based activity in Madhya Pradesh and the system of production is through contractors or middlemen called *sattedars* or *thekedars*. The beedi manufacturer usually has a factory or workshop and a large godown where raw materials are stored and given to *sattedars*. The *sattedars*, in turn, have their storerooms in areas where beedi workers live. Beedi workers are now largely women. Workers are given raw materials to roll into beedis which they return to the *sattedar* and are paid per 1000 beedis.



Woman rolling a beedi in her house while also managing a small shop

The number of beedis a woman rolls in a day is dependent on several factors like the time she has at her disposal, her level of skill, her age, her place in the family hierarchy and the number of people in her household / community who roll beedis with her. Elderly women said that they used to roll many more beedis when they were younger and now they are no longer able to work so fast. On the other hand, women with young families have to balance beedi production with household demands. Women demonstrated how beedi rolling is a family / community activity – if the younger children are there to help with cutting and rolling much time is saved. The average number of beedis rolled by a family / woman appeared to be 700-800 beedis per day. These beedis are then handed over to the *Sattedar*.

The *sattedar* returns the beedis to the manufacturer and is paid on a commission basis per 1000 beedis. In some districts where beedi workers have access to forests, they collect the tendu leaves, use their own raw material and roll beedis and sell it to the contractor. In that situation they get Rs. 110 for 1000 beedis.

When we use our own tendu leaves then we get Rs. 110 for 1000 beedis and if the leaves are given by the contractor then we get only Rs. 50 for 1000 beedis. Although it is illegal but we go to forest early in morning before the forest officials come, collect leaves and come back.

Safiya (name changed) Katni district

The manufacturer roasts, packs, brands and labels the rolled beedis. While women roll the beedis, manufacturing and contract work is done by men. Historically men and women both rolled beedis but with the shift to home based work fewer men roll beedis as their main / only wage work. We were told that presently there is only one beedi brand i.e. ChakkiChhapBeedi that still has

factory based work. Otherwise the factory workers do not roll beedis but do all the other work associated with manufacture of beedi, such as roasting and packing. However, the number of such factory or godown workers is relatively small.



Tendu Leaf Harvesting and Use

Tendu leaf is considered the most suitable wrapper for beedis because of the ease with which it can be rolled and its wide availability. The use of tendu leaves in beedi industry is mainly based on their agreeable flavour, flexibility, resistance to decay and capacity to retain fire. Tendu leaves are selected and categorised for beedi making on size, thickness, texture, relative thickness of mid rib and lateral veins.



Madhya Pradesh is the biggest tendu leaf producing state of India. The average annual production of tendu leaf in Madhya Pradesh is around 25 lakh standard bags, which is nearly 25% of the total tendu leaf production of the country. One standard bag of tendu leaf in Madhya Pradesh equals 1000 bundles of 50 leaves each.

The procedure for collection and processing of tendu leaves has been standardized and the same procedure is used everywhere. The tendu plants are pruned in the months of February and March and the mature leaves are collected after about 45 days. The leaves are collected in bundles of 50 to 100 leaves, which are dried in sunlight for a week. The dried leaves are sprinkled with water to soften them and then filled tightly in jute bags and exposed to direct sunlight for 2 days. The bags, packed and cured, are

stored. The plucking, curing and storage of tendu leaves has to be done carefully to prevent decay and deterioration of quality.

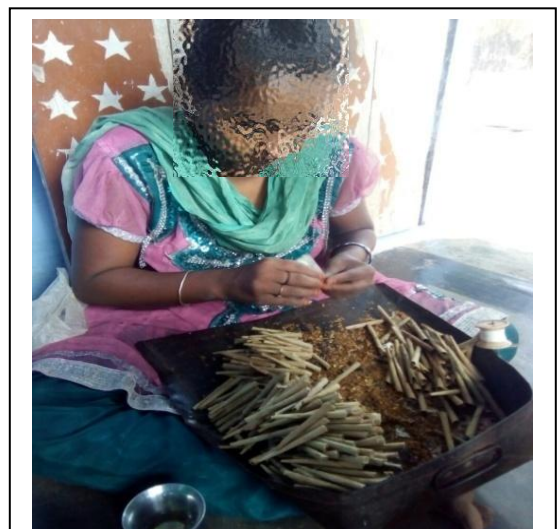
The Government of Madhya Pradesh took over the trade in tendu leaf in 1964. The Madhya Pradesh State Minor Forest Produce (Trading & Development) Co-operative Federation Limited was formed in 1984 to give more benefits to forest dwellers. In 1988, the State Government decided to involve co-operative societies in the trade of tendu leaf and formed a three tier Co-operative structure. Madhya Pradesh State Minor Forest Produce Federation was placed at the apex level of this structure. At the primary level, Primary Forest Produce Co-operative Societies were constituted. At the secondary level, District Forest Produce Co-operative Unions were formed.

Collection of tendu leaf is done by the Primary Co-operative Societies of pluckers of leaves. There are over 15,000 collection centres in the State. The collection work is seasonal. It lasts for about 6 weeks. Depending on the geographical location of districts, the season may begin any time from the middle of April to second week of May. The collection stops about a fortnight before the onset of the monsoon, so that leaves can be cured, bagged and safely transported to godowns.

V. Profile of Beedi Workers in the Area

Madhya Pradesh in central India has a large number of beedi workers, second only to West Bengal. Madhya Pradesh is the second largest state in the country by area and the fifth largest state by population. The population of Madhya Pradesh consists of a number of ethnic groups and tribes, castes and communities, including the indigenous communities or *adivasis*. There are 46 recognised *adivasi* communities in Madhya Pradesh. According to the 2001 census, *adivasis* or 'tribals' constitute 20.27% of the total population of Madhya Pradesh.

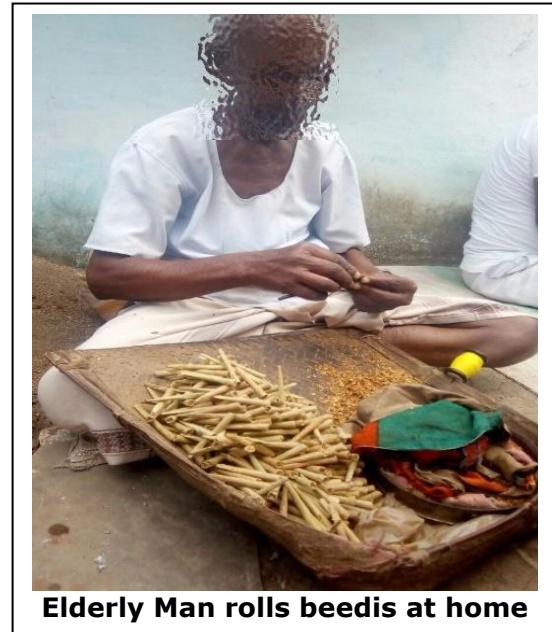
In the socio-economic context of Madhya Pradesh, it is not surprising that a large number of people from the most deprived communities in the state are engaged in the monotonous and low paid occupation of beedi making. In the study districts of Jabalpur, Sagar and Satna, we saw both men and women from Dalit, Muslim, and Other Backward Class (OBC) communities, rolling beedis though the majority was women workers. In Jabalpur, beedi workers are mainly Dalits and Muslims, in Sagar



Adolescent Girls independently roll beedis to support family

majority workers are Muslim but there is good number of OBC workers also. Here we saw men beedi workers from OBC / Scheduled Caste (SC) communities rolling beedis. In Balaghat district, tribal communities (Baiga, Gond) also roll beedis. Company owners are mostly Jains, Sindhis and Patels.

However, we understood that while beedi rolling is the only income earning work for most of the women beedi rollers, men beedi rollers do other wage work as well. Many men migrate to other places in search of employment like Jabalpur, Bhopal, Mumbai, Delhi and Hyderabad. More women came into beedi rolling as the work moved from factories into the workers' homes. There aren't many income options available for poor people and the culture in the beedi making districts has evolved in a way that it deems it right for women to be working from home and earning money besides managing other household chores. This is, of course, tied to deeply



Elderly Man rolls beedis at home

held notions of gender division of labour and the idea that home based work is suitable for women. In the next section, we will see how beedi rolling is seen as a family activity and the registered worker is often the male head of the household.

In the context of male migration, beedi workers we spoke to in Bichi Colony in Jabalpur pointed out that they were Dalits and none of the men had migrated out for work. This community had settled in their present location as early beneficiaries of the Indira Awas Yojana in the mid-80s. Since then they said no government had been interested in their welfare and they got no opportunities for betterment. Beedi rolling was the only income opportunity available to them.

Sattedar – the Middleman

Beedi workers see themselves completely under the control of the middleman – locally known as the *thekedar* / *sattedar*. Wages and registration are controlled by the *sattedar*. The workers said that they are never able to question the *sattedar* about wages or even ask for a raise. They are always afraid that the *sattedar* will stop giving them work. Beedi workers also feel trapped in a net of obligations to the *sattedar*. He is the person giving them regular wage work and occasionally helping out in times of trouble by paying advance wages or providing interest free loans. This sense

of obligation and a deep seated fear prevents any kind of resistance to the *sattedar*. Since workers and *sattedars* belong to the same area, there are also kinship / community ties. Workers, however, are very poor and the *sattedar* is certainly better off.

The dividing line between the *sattedar* and the beedi worker may not always be very sharp. Women in a *sattedar's* household may also be found rolling beedis. We saw the weighing of beedis in a *sattedar's* home in Sagar. The *sattedar* was away distributing materials to beedi workers in another village. The weighing was being done by the *sattedar's* assistant and supervised by the *sattedar's* wife. We were requested not to take photographs. She told us that she and her daughters roll beedis too. Here and during many other conversations it was implied that rolling beedis is also something good, industrious women are expected to do – they stay at home, are always at work and also earn some money.

VI. Welfare Schemes for Beedi Workers

The Central and State governments, over the years, have enacted legislation and policies aimed at monitoring working conditions and providing social security benefits for the welfare of beedi workers. Besides the existing labour laws such as Minimum Wage Act and the Provident Fund Act, the Government of India has also enacted two important laws specifically for the beedi sector workers.

The Beedi and Cigar Workers (Conditions of Employment) Act, 1966

is an Act to provide for the welfare of the workers in Beedi and Cigar establishments and to regulate the conditions of their work and for matters connected therewith. It provides for coverage regarding daily hours of work, weekly rest, leave with wages, maternity leave, benefits and welfare amenities such as drinking water, toilet facilities, canteen, etc.

The Act prohibits an employer or contractor from arbitrarily rejecting more than 2.5% of the beedis as sub-standard beedis. Rejection of 5% would necessitate making entries in writing, recording the reasons for rejection so that the workers have a record in writing. In practice however, the rate of rejection is higher. Also prescribed in the statute are measures to promote healthy working conditions of workers at workplace in terms of cleanliness, ventilation, first aid, etc. Since most beedi workers in Madhya Pradesh are home based they do not benefit from this Act.

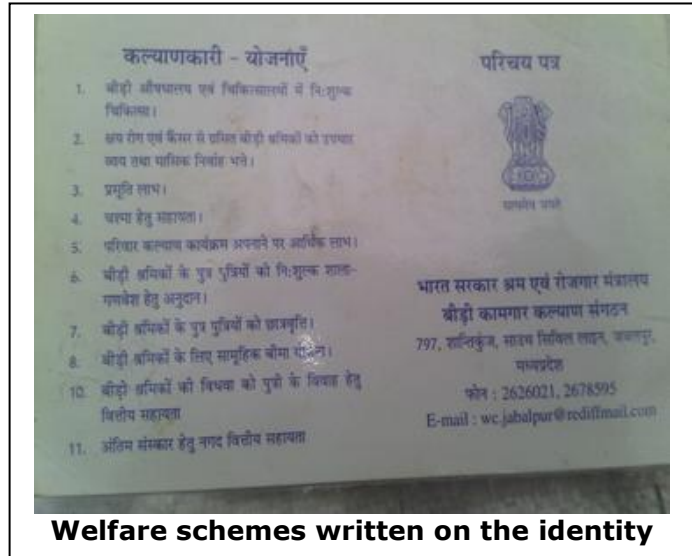
The Beedi Workers Welfare Fund Act, 1976 resulted in the creation of Beedi Workers Welfare Fund (BWWF) for the welfare of home based, informal beedi workers. The BWWF is administered by the Labour Welfare Organisation (LWO) under the Ministry of Labour and Employment and is financed through a levy of cess by way of excise duty on manufactured

beedi, which is revised periodically by the central government. This cess applies only to registered companies manufacturing more than 2 million beedis per year.

The other Acts applicable to beedi workers are:

1. The Minimum Wages Act, 1948
2. The Employees Provident fund and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952;
3. The Employees State Insurance Act, 1948
4. Payment of Wages Act, 1936;
5. Maternity Benefits Act, 1961;
6. Workmen's Compensation Act, 1923;
7. Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972;
8. Chapter IV and Section 85 of the Factories Act, 1948; and
9. Children (Pledging of Labour) Act, 1933.
10. Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013

Labour Welfare Organisation (Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India) runs various welfare schemes for beedi workers which are managed through Beedi Workers Welfare Fund. At the StateLevel, Civil dispensaries and Central hospital are responsible for execution/ administration of these schemes. In Madhya Pradesh these schemes are printed on the rear/ back of the identity cards issued to beedi workers.



Welfare schemes written on the identity

Schemes Available for Beedi Workers

- Free of cost treatment at civil dispensaries and hospital for beedi workers
- Free of cost treatment of TB and Cancer and monthly maintenance Allowance
- Maternity Benefit Scheme for female beedi workers (up to 2 live births)
- Financial Assistance for purchasing spectacles
- Monetary compensation on undergoing sterilization operation
- Grant for school admission of children of beedi workers.
- Financial assistance/scholarship to school going children of Beedi Workers
- Group Insurance Scheme
- Financial assistance to beedi worker's widow for her daughter's marriage
- Financial assistance for performing last rites of the beedi worker.

Beedi workers and their families are entitled to various health benefits like free medicines and reimbursement of costs upto Rs 30,000 for minor surgery like hernia, appendectomy, ulcer, gynaecological diseases and prostate diseases. Workers are reimbursed actual expenditure on treatment, medicines, and diet charges incurred by themselves or their dependents for cancer. Rs 1, 30,000 is reimbursed for treatment of heart disease to workers. A worker is reimbursed expenditure up to Rs 2 lakhs for kidney transplant. A financial assistance of Rs 300 is provided to workers for spectacles. A

grant of Rs 1000 per delivery is given to female workers for the first two children. Interestingly, the grant for delivery is provided only to women workers and not to the wife of a worker. The state avoids giving this benefit if women workers are not registered. Additionally, workers are given Rs 500 if they undergo sterilization operation.

Beedi workers are also entitled to different social welfare benefits, other than health benefits, like, single parents are provided Rs 5000 for the marriage of each daughter (up to 2 daughters), children of beedi workers get some financial aid for their education through school and college(Class I-IV : Rs 250 per year Class V-VIII: Rs 500 per year for boys and Rs 940 per year for girls Class IX: Rs 700 per year for boys and Rs 1140 per year for girls, Class X: Rs 1400 per year for boys and Rs 1840 per year for girls, Class XI-XII: Rs 2000 per year for boys and Rs 2440 for girls. A grant of rupees 3000 per year is available for beedi workers' children going to college and Rs 15,000 per year is provided for those attending technical courses). There is more money offered for school-going girls than boys because the assumption is that parents need more 'inducements' to send / keep their daughters in school and the state would like to encourage girls to complete their education. There is more financial support for 'technical courses' in college than for non-technical courses. We could not get a clear idea whether these 'technical courses' are clearly defined or not.

A sum of Rs 1, 50,000 is now provided for building a house with two bedrooms and a kitchen provided the worker or his / her spouse has a clear title to the land. We visited a beedi workers' colony in Sohawal. This was a special initiative of the BharatiyaMazdoorSangh, a trade union affiliated to the BJP. The colony was constructed 5-6 years ago. This was according to an earlier scheme where each beedi worker family would be given Rs 40,000 to build a 10 ft by 15 ft room on a 600 square feet plot. There was no provision for a separate toilet or kitchen. Two hundred and fifty (250) houses were to be built there but only 151 were made. Of them, 51 have collapsed and 100 are left standing. Families have been living there for 4-5 years but the houses were officially handed over in 2015. On allocation, each allottee had to pay Rs 5000 and those who could not pay were not allotted houses. Further, there are many houses where people are not staying and the house is locked up, or is being squat on. The residents said that only 30 of the houses had people living in them. According to the community members, the Rs 40,000 which should have been given to the families were instead given to the contractor and hence the quality of construction is poor. The houses had no provision for water or electricity. People have made their own arrangements for these.

Administrative structure for operationalization of Beedi Welfare Schemes(State and Centre)

State	Centre	
Labour department	Min. of Labour & Employment	
Labour Commissioner	Commissioner -Welfare & Cess	
Division level – Assistant Labour Commissioner	Assistant Commissioner	
District Labour Officer	(Welfare & Health)	
Labour Inspector	Hospital/Civil Dispensary (exclusively for beedi workers)	
	Welfare Officer	Medical Officer

Workers are issued cards from the beedi hospital / dispensary to enable them to access welfare schemes related to health, education and social security. All through 2016 there has been disarray in services offered by these dispensaries and hospitals, including the issuing of cards, because by March 2016 the dispensaries and hospitals were to have been amalgamated into the ESI. This has caused confusion not only amongst workers but also staff of the dispensaries.

They are also unsure about the processes required for securing documentation and getting benefits. Many do not realise that they have to apply for benefits. They think the benefits will come as a matter of course. Again, workers are not clear about what benefits they get from the state government and what the measures are specifically for beedi workers.

VII. Concerns of beedi workers

This section presents the concerns that beedi workers expressed during their discussions with us. It is important to note that workers across the three districts we visited had similar complaints and concerns. Workers in different locations reiterated concerns that exist amongst beedi rollers across Madhya Pradesh.

i. Registration of workers for social security and welfare benefits:

Access to social security and welfare schemes requires two types of documentation – a registration/ID card (which links a worker to a company),

The image shows a handwritten 'Identity Card' for beedi workers. It includes a photo of a worker and a table with columns for 'क्र. नाम' (Sl. No. Name), 'जन्म तारीख' (Date of Birth), 'संबंध' (Relationship), and 'व्यवसाय' (Occupation). The card is filled with handwritten information in Hindi, including dates and names. There are also some official stamps and signatures on the card.

Identity Card

and a card to access schemes of the Beedi Worker Welfare Fund. Many of the beedi workers who participated in the study had a card to access welfare schemes (locally called the '*gharkhatashramik*' card). However they did not have a registration ID which would link them to a company, thereby depriving them of social security benefits like Provident Fund and Pension. In order to get a registration ID card, a worker has to be certified by the factory that s/he has rolled 5,600 beedis per month for 2 months. The *sattedar* is responsible for ensuring that a worker gets registered, however in practice most of the workers do not have such registration. "*The sattedar says you have to be literate to be a permanent worker. We are not literate,*" said a woman beedi roller in NimuhaTola in Satna. Further, workers who do not work for registered companies (i.e. those manufacturing more than 2 million beedis annually) do not get a registration card at all.

The card to access welfare schemes is made at the civil dispensary/hospital run by the Beedi Workers Welfare Fund. Beedi workers have to roll a minimum of five beedis in front of the Medical Officer after which the application has to be verified by the concerned *sattedar*. This leaves the beedi workers at the mercy of the *sattedar*. However this is not a uniform practice; in Sagar district for instance, the verification was done by the ward member or councilor. Moreover, since June 2016 registration of new workers and renewal of cards has been temporarily suspended due to the decision of the government to merge the Beedi Workers Welfare Schemes with the Employment State Insurance (ESI).⁵

During our visit to civil dispensary, Jabalpur we met the Medical Officer who was posted there since many years. Showing us the heap of applications on her table she told that Civil Dispensaries and Central hospital are appropriate authority for registration of beedi workers. These applications first have to be verified by the respective contractor for which beedi worker rolls beedis. Beedi worker is required to roll minimum five beedis in front of the Medical Officer. It was clearly mentioned on the notice board that 'at the time of submitting application it is mandatory to demonstrate rolling of beedis and for that workers must bring with them their own raw material.

Most of the workers who have PF slips or bank pass books are men. There is no clarity amongst beedi rollers whether the documentation is done for individual workers or families. It appeared that the 'head of the family' logic has been followed and mostly cards have been made in the name of men. There is much confusion amongst workers regarding the different kinds of documentation they have and the specificities of their entitlements. Most workers were not clear whether they had to renew the cards they had. Over

⁵Interviews with medical officer at Jabalpur Civil Dispensary and NGO representatives.

the years, the colour of cards issued had changed. Workers say that no one has told them about period of validity of cards and renewal processes, if any.

ii. Non adherence to minimum wage:

Beedi rollers in Madhya Pradesh are paid between Rs 50 to Rs 55 for 1000 beedis which is lower than both West Bengal and Tamil Nadu. Workers point out that after deductions and rejections, many, in effect, get between Rs 30 to Rs 35 for rolling 1000 beedis. If a woman works 8-10 hours a day, only then she is able to roll 1000 beedis every day. But her plight does not get over by this as there is still uncertainty of getting full wage which depends entirely on the contractor who can reject her beedis giving various reasons like not rolled properly, having less tobacco filling, having variation in size, less number of beedis rolled with the given raw material etc. and above that he would claim 100 beedis per 1000 beedis as his 'cut'. Then wage rate is different if workers use their own tendu leaves or tobacco. This is an unwritten understanding and no written document is available for the criteria used for variation in wages even within a district or among districts.

Salma (name changed) is 45 years old and lives in village Panaghar of Jabalpur district with her husband and five children. She has been rolling beedis since the age of 8 years. It is the main source of income for her family as her husband had to give up his tailoring work due to illness. She gets Rs 55/- for 1000 beedis from the contractor but the raw material given by him is insufficient to roll 1000 beedis. Hence, to compensate the difference she has to buy extra tobacco and leaves from the contractor out of her own pocket. At the end she gets only Rs. 35 for 1000 beedis. She narrated that she had once asked the sattedar to give approved minimum wage. However he replied that since Tractor Beedi is not a registered company he cannot pay the official rate. Salma rolls 6000 beedis in a week and for that she gets Rs.210 which is insufficient to make ends meet. Many times the family has to take loans for daily needs. Since she is associated with the NGO ISRD and is a member of a self help group, things are comparatively easier for her.

iii. Exploitation by the contractor:

In lack of clear regulatory mechanism for home based workers, women workers have to face different kinds of exploitation. These include arbitrary rejection of beedis, less than optimum wages and there are also instances of sexual harassment and assault. If workers protest against lewd comments or sexual advances of contractors they are threatened with loss of work, rejection of beedis or getting lesser quantity of raw material.

Rajni Chaudhary (name changed), 35 years old, lives in district Satna with her husband and children. Since her childhood she has been rolling beedis, earlier she used to do with her mother and after marriage she continued beedi rolling to support her husband and his family. For 1000 beedis she would get Rs 55 but after deducting shortage in leaves and taking cut of 100 beedis by the contractor she

gets only 40 Rs. She told that she was sexually exploited many times by the contractor. First time in her maternal home she went to deposit the rolled beedis. She said, "Contractor asked me to wait and took my beedis in last and started counting. He threatened me to make physical relation with him otherwise he would reject my beedis. In order to save my earning I had to surrender to him. Then he did not reject my beedis and also gave me more leaves and raw material to roll beedis." In this way he forced her to have sex with him many times. After marriage she came to her in-law's place and continued rolling beedis. Here also many contractors exploited her sexually. In fear of social humiliation she did not talk about this to anybody. She shared that she feels helpless as she does not know any other work except rolling beedis. She told us that like her, many women workers silently suffer from sexual exploitation just to secure their earnings. They want to leave beedi rolling but there is no other employment opportunity available for them.

It was difficult for us to meet *sattedars* in the field. We ran into one *sattedar*, in a beedi worker's home, in Sagar. He deflected questions about his work and relationship with workers and emphasized the *sattedars'* responsibility towards workers. "All *sattedars* pay the same wage. We have to be careful about quality otherwise the companies will not do business with us and how will the workers then make their wage?"

iv. Working conditions

Beedi rollers work in cramped and poorly lit areas in and around their homes and owners and *sattedars* feel absolved of all responsibility because it is the worker's home. Arun Tyagi of Gram Sudhar Samiti is a veteran activist of Madhya Pradesh. He pointed out that neither the government nor beedi manufacturers had given much thought to creating better and safer working conditions for beedi workers. They make no effort to create work-sheds in the beedi making villages and encourage the idea that women like working from their homes. They also don't think of providing simple precautions like safety masks for beedi rollers and their families to protect them from unnecessary exposure to tobacco dust. He pointed out that even the beedi workers' colonies that had come up in a few locations in Madhya Pradesh had not provided better work spaces for the workers. There is also hardly any discussion about the conditions and safety measures in the factory where the roasting and packaging is done.

v. Health

The nature of work of beedi rollers involves prolonged sitting with the trunk bent forward and the constant use of fingers. Different studies with beedi workers in India including a National Commission for Women (NCW) report on women beedi workers have discussed several health problems of beedi workers like calluses in hands, fatigue in the arms and numbness in fingers. Throat aches, respiratory disorders, piles and pain in urinary tracts are

common problems faced by large numbers of beedi workers. Constant exposure to tobacco dust results in respiratory irritation. Tuberculosis and asthma are common. Sitting for long hours causes back and neck aches, joint pain, as well as arthritis and gynaecological problems. Headaches, nausea, giddiness and burning of the eyes from long hours of work and exposure to tobacco are almost a way of life for many beedi workers. "I don't roll beedis all day and so I don't have any health problems related to beedi making," said RukayyaBano (name changed) of Satna. "However, people who sit making beedis all day have pain and stiffness. They also have cough and cold very often". Although health hazards of tobacco exposure are well documented, many workers in Madhya Pradesh chose to play down their health problems.

"Yes, we get tired. There's so much to do but all work is tiring. Poor people have to work hard. Why blame beedis?" said one beedi worker in Jabalpur. "When I work in the field my back hurts," said another worker in Sagar. She said it was easier to roll beedis than work in the field.

A doctor from Sagar, who we interviewed, said there hadn't been any studies conducted in Madhya Pradesh amongst beedi workers to clearly assess the effects of working with tobacco. "Some people are allergic to tobacco," he said. "Coughing, asthma and bronchitis are more among men than women. That's a consequence of smoking, not of rolling beedis." Tuberculosis and bronchial asthma among beedi rollers – mainly due to the dust they inhale – is higher than that among India's general population, according to research by the Mumbai-based Factory Advisory Services and Labour Institute, which is part of India's Labour Ministry.

Nafisa (name changed) is 53 years old and lives in Charbag of Jabalpur district. She has been rolling beedis since she was a child. She has many health problems like pain in knees and in back bone, headache, backache, and poor eyesight. Since she has back pain, she is unable to sit for a long time and rolls beedi while standing up. Besides this her eyesight is also deteriorating, and as the evening approaches it becomes difficult for her to see anything. She went to civil dispensary for beedi workers 2-3 times but every time she was sent back asking to come some other time. She is now taking treatment from a private hospital. She is also facing difficulty in opening a bank account as her fingerprints are unreadable.

vi. Children's education

A study conducted in 2012-13 by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) revealed that Madhya Pradesh tops the list of highest number of child labourers in the country. The appalling figures point out that the highest number of child labourers engaged in beedi industry, are from Madhya Pradesh. The study conducted by Mohandas Godson and NCPCR

member Dr. YogeshDubey claimed that 18.3% of the total beedi workers (4.3 million) are in Madhya Pradesh and it is also the state with the highest number of child labourers in the trade. (Marwaha, 2013)

We have said earlier that beedi rolling is a family activity and children, especially girls, lend a hand with beedi rolling. Of course, many of them go to school and roll beedis before and after school and during holidays. However, it is an established fact in India that children from poor families, more so girls, are kept away from school if more hands are needed at home. Also, people often feel that education does not really give them more opportunities.

"I left school after Class 5," said a young girl in Rahatgarh, Sagar. "My brother studied up to Class 12 but now he's a labourer. We don't get jobs. Why should I study?"

Schools lack adequate funding. Very few government schools get funding below Class IX. Village education committees exist only on paper say most parents. Parents feel helpless because most of them are illiterate. A veteran activist explained that the education system needs to reach every child and provide quality education. A good education system is a prerequisite to creating an economy where paid work is not synonymous to engaging in unskilled labour like beedi rolling.

vii. Inadequate Health care Facilities and Access:

There are 36 dispensaries, mobile vans and a 30 bedded hospital in the state exclusively for beedi workers. However workers complain of poor services at these facilities. At the Civil dispensary in Jabalpur, the doctor informed us that only basic services are provided here and for serious problems like TB and cancer patients are referred to Jabalpur Medical College or to the District hospital. According to the doctor, since this place is "easily accessible" the number of patients vary from 1000 to 2000 per month. Among the staff there were one doctor, staff nurse, pharmacist, dresser, birth attendant, driver and peon.

In contrast to the Jabalpur hospital which was well known, we faced difficulties in even locating Central Hospital in Baghraj of Sagar district. Barring few workers who lived close to the hospital, nobody knew about the hospital in the local community. It is locally known as 'BeediAspataal'. On the outside, the



Central Hospital, Baghraj (Sagar)

hospital building looked impressive spread over acres of land but as we stepped inside it appeared deserted. The hospital has inpatient facility with 30 beds. Apart from Medical Officer in-charge and Welfare Officer there is only one doctor who is appointed adhoc and there are no medicines and diagnostics available. Therefore even if the workers go to the facility they are sent to government health facilities which are crowded and a lot of time is spent in seeking treatment there.

Due to inadequate facilities in civil dispensaries and in hospitals people prefer to go to private practitioners or to various kinds of informal practitioners. As one worker remarked *"We don't go to the beedi hospital (dispensary). It is in Jabalpur and far from our village. Once or twice I had gone there but I spent my whole day which is a big loss of money. Despite that I didn't get proper medicine and treatment there."*

viii. Access to schemes and entitlements:

There are a variety of schemes specifically implemented for beedi workers by the Ministry of Labour, through the Beedi Workers Welfare Fund. These include schemes for educational scholarships, housing facilities, insurance for death and accident, funeral expenses, free treatment and medicines, spectacles, maternity benefits up to two live births, family planning operations, treatment for cardiac and renal problems, cancer, TB, leprosy, mental health, and other minor problems such as ulcers, hernia, etc. It is important to note, however, that most beedi workers are not aware of the existence of these schemes and the entitlements therein. It is not surprising therefore that according to data from the Central Hospital in Sagar, between January 2011 and April 2016, there were only 2658 applications for accessing 9 schemes and only 2145 beneficiaries. The housing scheme, though popular, had several barriers; it required that the land for the house should be on the name of the worker and the worker had to deposit an amount of Rs.5000 as security, and hence did not get utilized.

The following table shows the applications received and sanctioned for various welfare schemes for the period January 2011 to April 2016:

S.N.	Scheme	Total Applications	Sanctioned	Rejected
1.	Support for buying Spectacles	95	81	14
2.	Maternity benefit	294	283	11
3.	Support for last rites	1464	1379	85
4.	Group Insurance	317	0	-
5.	For Cancer Treatment	37	23	14
6.	For Heart related diseases	04	02	02

7.	For T.B. treatment	138	119	19
8.	For daughter's marriage	293	244	49
9.	For other minor ailments	16	14	02
		2658	2145	196

Source: Central Hospital, Sagar(Madhya Pradesh)

Beedi workers were aware of some of the schemes but due to procedural complexity, very few of them could really avail these benefits. No mechanism was seen in place on part of the state in order to increase awareness about these schemes among workers.

The workers were not clear about the documentation they had and the connection of those documents with entitlements. During focus group discussions, some workers reported having Below Poverty Line (BPL) cards, some said they had ration cards but very few said that they had both. Many more had Aadhar cards and some were in the process of getting them. However, as has been said earlier in this report, there is no clarity regarding entitlements. "We have cards but they are useless," was a refrain across the groups of workers we spoke to. There is also confusion about state government benefits and what they get specifically because they are beedi workers.

Younger women reported getting payments for JananiSurakshaYojana into their bank accounts. However, very few women could tell us if they had individual bank accounts or joint accounts. Some also reported getting money for children's education in their bank accounts but were not clear about the specifics. We visited Bichi Colony in Jabalpur, where all the houses were constructed as part of the Indira AwasYojana 35 years ago. We had a meeting there with 30 odd people. Despite the fact that they began living there as a consequence of a state initiative, the people did not seem very aware of their entitlements.

A visit was made to beedi workers housing society in Sohawal block of Satna district where a group meeting was done with the workers. The colony was made in 2004 by a contractor. Majority of the houses were in a dilapidated state with water leakage during the monsoons. The



Colony constructed for Beedi Workers in Satna

house comprised of just one room with a partition for kitchen. However, the colony lacked sanitation facility with no provision for a bathroom or a toilet. The hand-pump for filling water was 2km away which was an added burden to the residents. Even though the government has provision for regular health checkup for the workers, no health camp had been conducted till now. The hospital was located faraway and the women found it difficult to commute. All women complained of backache, continuous headache and poor vision. When asked about the demand for beedi production, they told us that during the monsoon season the production was particularly low. They had recently been out of work for 4 months owing to shutting of some beedi factories nearby.

VIII. Trade Unions and other organising efforts

Workers in the beedi industry are home workers and the very nature of their work makes them invisible and most of them are women workers. Characteristics of home workers in the industry are poorly defined employer-employee relationship, scattered nature of workplace because every household is a workplace, low skills (beedi rolling is learnt at home from mother to daughter), no bargaining capacity (sometimes a worker may not even know for whom she rolls beedis and so does not know with whom she has to bargain), low wages, absence of social security, and other insecurities related to loss of livelihood. All this makes them among the most vulnerable among the labour force. Protective labour legislation is absent, does not apply or cannot be implemented. Workers can protect themselves only when they are organised. Workers can be organised more effectively when they have a specific workplace, specific employer and specific terms of employment.

There have been sporadic efforts by mainstream Trade Unions to organise them. The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) affiliated to the Communist Party of India (CPI), the far left LalJhandaBeediMazdoor Union and its breakaway faction Madhya Pradesh BeediMazdoor Union are working with beedi workers in Madhya Pradesh. The BharatiyaMazdoorSangh (BMS) affiliated to the BJP also organizes beedi workers.

Shakti Prasad Pandey, a lawyer belonging to the Socialist Party had begun organizing beedi workers in Satna in the 1980s. According to DadholiPandey of the BMS, organising work with beedi workers lost momentum when Shakti Prasad left his political work and embraced a religious life. In 2005-06, BMS began work with beedi workers in Satna. In 2011, there was a move from the government to emphasise the health consequences of smoking by putting pack warnings on beedi packets. The beedi unions were opposed to this move because they thought this was a means of closing down the industry. A large contingent of beedi workers including 2,500 women went

from Madhya Pradesh to Delhi to demonstrate against the move. From April 1, 2016, the Health Ministry's notification for implementation of the Cigarettes and other Tobacco Products (Packaging and Labeling) Amendment Rules, 2014 came into force. It prescribes larger pictorial warnings, covering 85 per cent of packets on tobacco products. The BMS as well as the All India Beedi Industry Federation, a body of over 240 manufacturers controlling over two-third of total branded beedi production requested the Health Minister to reconsider this measure for the beedi industry. They said that such a measure would lead to a loss of livelihoods.

The production relations and contextual factors in the beedi industry have changed and become more complex but unions continue to use conventional strategies in organizing the workers as well as in dealing with the employers. It is ironical to note that in an industry where most workers are women, they are not represented as union leaders nor do they participate in the decision making process of the union. Unions have also failed to sensitise the families of the workers by creating awareness of the vulnerabilities that the women face.

Phoola Devi is an activist with the Communist Party of India (CPI) in Majhauri, Jabalpur. She says that she was married when she was 10 years old but had begun to roll beedis even before that. This is not an unusual story. Most of the women workers we met said that they had been married off early - thirteen to fifteen seemed the most popular age range - and many of them were rolling beedis even before that. Phoola Devi has been a member of the CPI for 15 years and has been working with beedi workers for 6 years. Their efforts at organising were rather sporadic and they did not yet have a clear strategy for a workers' movement. She also said that she had not worked specifically with women workers. At present, they were thinking of strengthening their organising efforts.

Institute of Social Research and Development (ISRD) works with informal and unorganized sector workers in Madhya Pradesh and has its Head Office in Bhopal. In Jabalpur, ISRD works with domestic workers, construction labourers, street vendors, agarbatti makers and beedi workers. This project began in 2013. Their work aims to increase access of workers to Social Security and entitlements, organize workers in groups and encourage them to join trade unions and link workers with National Livelihood Mission and the PradhanMantriKaushalVikasYojana.

ISRD in Jabalpur works in close collaboration with the NaagrikAdhikarManch, a voluntary network that supports informal / unorganized sector workers and urban poor communities. The NaagrikAdhikarManch supports poor men and women in accessing entitlements and fighting cases in court. Some women

are gradually coming forward to seek legal advice for domestic violence. Ajay Yadav, the district co-ordinator of ISRD in Jabalpur, explained that organising efforts with beedi workers were yet to reach maturity and Trade Unions or NGOs did not yet have clear strategies about organizing beedi workers to demand alternative employment. Government programmes are concentrated on providing training for young people entering the job market.

Over the decades the nature and composition of the workplace has changed substantially and problems have become complex and chronic. All parties concerned appear to have accepted these facts and are not able to find solutions. Many union leaders themselves feel that women would prefer to be home based workers, and consequently prefer to be invisible.

Mohammad Haroon of the People's Research Society explained that there were many fissures within the Trade Union movement. Unions espousing Left politics were fragmented and unable to counter the growing power of the Right. This, in itself, he said, did not augur well for the workers' movement. He said that as a trade unionist, he also felt that it was important for Trade Unions to look at issues like communalism that are not 'traditional' labour issues. In Sagar, he was part of a network called Nyay v Aman Pahalto initiate community discussions and actions to end poverty, religious fundamentalism and communalism. He asserted the need for serious discussion within communities to address 'well kept secrets' like violence against women. "Unless these are discussed within communities how will they be discussed with people from other communities? Making laws is a beginning but laws cannot be implemented if people don't change their thinking."

He added that Left organising philosophy and strategies often failed to address the social and religious context of workers. Consequently, neither workers nor unions were questioning patriarchy and communalism, and there was no analytical framework to combat a society that was becoming steadfastly more conservative. Their work amongst beedi workers within the Muslim and Dalit communities was focusing on health, purdah, family planning, communalism and violence against women. The discussions on violence against women were trying to break the silence around violence within the home. Workers today cannot afford to take up prolonged struggles. Unions also work to preserve what workers already have because the threat of losing even that looms large. The strategic position of the employer, the vulnerability of the worker, indifference of the state, all leave the union hanging on a thin thread and the workers accepting exploitation.

IX. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has indicated some important issues of the beedi industry that affect workers. The state must take steps to improve the situation for the workers and make existing laws and welfare provisions effective. The responsibility for the same lies with all the stakeholders particularly the beedi company owners, the state labour department, trade unions and the civil society organisation, among others. In view of strengthening of rights of beedi workers and for providing them humane and just conditions of work, the following recommendations are provided based on the research:

- Registration of beedi workers: Companies should be made accountable to issue passbooks and ID Cards to the workers enrolled with them or with their contractors so that workers can get their rights under social security schemes. There is a need of uniform and transparent registration process in the state which reduces dependence on the *sattedar*. Trade unions, civil societies and labour department could play a key role in making beedi workers aware of the registration process.
- Adherence to Minimum Wages: The labour department must make efforts to ensure that at least minimum wages are given to workers, make workers aware of the wage rate, and provide avenues of grievance redressal when they are not adhered to.
- Access to Welfare Schemes: In order to improve the access of beedi workers to welfare schemes, department should establish mechanism to make beedi workers aware of the schemes and of the procedure to be followed. Periodic Awareness camps should be organized in areas populated with beedi workers. Department should make available compiled reports of the beneficiaries under various welfare schemes to trade unions and civil societies.
- Census of the beedi workers: A census of all the beedi workers whether they are working for small or big, registered or unregistered companies should be undertaken to build a comprehensive and up to date data base. Information on contractors/ *sattedar* should also be collated.
- Monitoring the enforcement of legislation and grievance redressal mechanism: Department should monitor the enforcement of legislation through periodic checks and audits. Since workers are largely home-based, a different mechanism for this will need to be worked out. There should be a system for grievance redressal where workers can approach in case of violation of their rights and entitlements.
- Preventive measures to reduce health impact: Workers should be informed about the risk involved in beedi rolling and should be made aware of the preventive measures to reduce the risk to their health and over all wellbeing. Beedi companies must provide preventive measures like mask, gloves or take other steps that could reduce the risk.

- **Strengthening health facilities:** There is an urgent need to strengthen and reactivate the health institutions which have been established for Beedi workers. The health facilities should provide only health services unlike now, where they are appropriate authority for registration of beedi workers and for disbursement of welfare schemes.
- **Alternate livelihood opportunity:** There is a need for the government to create alternate livelihood opportunities for the beedi workers so that those who do not want to continue beedi rolling, could choose other livelihood options.

For organisers

Trade unions, NGOs and other activists engaged in organising beedi workers must **focus on women as workers**. Women workers have to come together to share and analyse their experiences both as women and workers. This will also enable articulation of experiences of violence and discrimination both within the home, at work, and in other places.

Trade Unions and other organisers must develop effective means of holding the state accountable for points 1 to 11 explained above.

Conclusion

The beedi industry presents this paradox - there are poor people, largely women, working long hours and earning little money. Their health gets seriously damaged. The effects of tobacco on smokers are well documented. We know that the product is damaging for those who are working arduously to produce it and for those to whom it is targetted. Of course, the people at the top of the pyramid, the company owners, make fortunes.

Beedi companies enjoy huge tax exemptions. Research has shown worldwide that taxes on tobacco products are the single most effective way of reducing tobacco consumption and the related health and economic burden. It has always been argued that raising taxes on beedis will result in reduced consumption and consequent unemployment. Nandi A, Ashok A, Guindon GE et al argue that positive gains from higher taxes and reduced beedi consumption may well outweigh any temporary loss in economic activity. Again, the displaced workforce could be moved to a different trade or industry.

Despite the harm caused by beedis, the industry is seen as benevolent and useful – providing employment to enormous numbers of poor women and men. However this assessment of the group situation in Madhya Pradesh, shows that this is not the case. Beedi manufacturers and the state both benefit from the beedi trade but the benefits are not reaching the workers despite special measures like the Beedi Workers' Welfare Fund. Despite the fact that struggles of workers unions have resulted in legislation that

guarantees beedi workers entitlements and social security, its implementation even 50 years after passage of the legislation leaves much to be desired. Further, the recently proposed changes in labour laws will pose a different challenge to guaranteeing Beediworkers rights. As new laws emerge, the fate of older ones such as the Beedi and Cigar Workers Welfare and Conditions of Employment Act, remains uncertain. Being an unorganized, largely female workforce, the new labour code does not bode well.

While some may argue that the beedi industry must be “closed down”, the livelihoods of lakhs of people employed by it cannot be ignored. The most effective way of phasing out this harmful industry has to be worked out. In the meantime, it is important to strategise how beedi rollers may gain other employment and also protect their own health. The education system needs to reach every child and provide quality education. A good education system is a prerequisite to creating an economy where paid work is not synonymous to engaging in unskilled labour like beedi rolling. It is also important to question the ties that exist amongst powerful people like politicians and traders that allow the beedi industry to flourish despite the harm it does to the health of workers and smokers.

X. References

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