

An Appraisal of the problem of Bidi Workers of Mahesail Village in Murshidabad, West Bengal.

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ABSTRACT

Bidi industry has always acted as one of the strongest foundation of rural development in India. In spite of being injurious to health, bidi is smoked by a huge section of population in India especially among the middle and lower income section of the people in rural and urban areas. But the bidi workers have been facing several problems that has highly affected their quality of life. Mahesail village in Murshidabad district of West Bengal is one of the villages where people are largely engaged with bidi rolling. The bidi workers have been facing many problems. An attempt has been made in this paper to analyze the problems of bidi workers of Mahesail village by using Weighted Score technique. The study revealed that health problem turned out to be the most important problem of the study area as it has the highest weighted score. Spread of education and conduction of awareness campaigns will help in bringing about solution of the problems and will ensure further development of the bidi workers in future.

KEYWORDS: Bidi workers, Mahesail Village, Weighted Score, Health problems.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Consuming tobacco is injurious for health as it causes cancer and several other health problems in man. In spite of this, millions of people around the world smoke tobacco. India is also not an exception. According to the reports of Global Adult Tobacco Survey in India in 2016-17, about 267 million adults (population of 15 years and above) are the users of tobacco that accounts for about 29% of the total adult population in India. India is also the country who is the second largest producer and consumer of tobacco. People in India consume tobacco either in smokeless form or in smoking forms. Gutkha, khaini, betel leaves etc. are various forms of tobacco in smokeless form while bidis and cigarettes are mainly various smoking forms of tobacco in India. A huge bulk of rural population in India are the smokers of bidis. Bidi is smoked by mainly poor and lower income section of the people living in rural and urban areas (Ghatak, 2017). Poor people prefer bidis to that of cigarettes as one packet of bidi costs ₹ 6 to ₹ 7 which is within the purchasing power of lower and poor income section of population of India.

Owing to its large scale popularity, bidi industry in India is also one of the famous small scale industry which is mainly engaged in manufacturing of bidis. The industry largely contributes to the development of rural economy and also creates employment scope of poor and illiterate rural population. Not only that, the bidi industry is also one of the main weapons that helps in women empowerment as the industry provides employment to women and makes them self-sufficient and self-independent. Mahesail village in Murshidabad district of West Bengal is one such village where people are engaged in manufacturing bidis. But the bidi workers are undergoing through several problems. An attempt has been made in this paper to analyze the problems of the bidi workers of Mahesail village using Weighted Score Analysis and to suggest suitable suggestions to bring about solution to those problems.

II. OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The main objectives of the study are:

- To analyse the problems of bidi workers of the Mahesail Village by weighted score analysis.
- To suggest recommendations for their solution.

In order to accomplish the task, a brief survey was undertaken in the village through random sampling technique. 75 bidi workers were surveyed. Secondary data was collected from census website. Problems of the bidi workers were identified through literature review, perception survey and face to face interaction. Then, weights were assigned out of 1 based upon the degree of problems faced by the workers. Now, the weight was multiplied with the number of respondents responding to a specific problem to compute the Weighted Score

(Goswami & Sen, 2020). Higher the value of weighted score, greater will be the intensity of the problem. Collected data were tabulated and analysed. Maps and graphs were prepared from the tabulated data using MS Excel and ArcGIS 10.3. Finally, the maps and diagrams were interpreted to arrive at the results.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A brief idea about Mahesail Village

Mahesail is a small village located in the Suti II block of Murshidabad district in West Bengal. It covers a total area about 9.83 square kilometers. Its latitudinal extension is from 24°34'9" N to 24°36'44" N while its longitudinal extension is from 87°58'57" E to 88°1'24" E (Figure 1). According to census 2011, the village code of Mahesail is 313954. Berhampore is the district headquarter while Dafahat is the sub-district headquarter of the village. The nearest town is Aurangabad located at a distance of 5 km from the village. The total population of Mahesail village as per 2011 census was 16178. Out of this, 8233 are male (51%) while the rest 7945 are female (49%). Out of total population, about 15046 belong to general caste (93%), 1132 belong to Scheduled Caste group. There is no Scheduled Tribe population in the village. Out of total population of 16178, 6648 people are literate while the rest 9530 are illiterate accounting for about 41% and 59% of the total population respectively. Out of total population of 16178, 7434 are workers while the rest 8744 are non-workers which also constitutes 46% and 54% of the total population respectively.

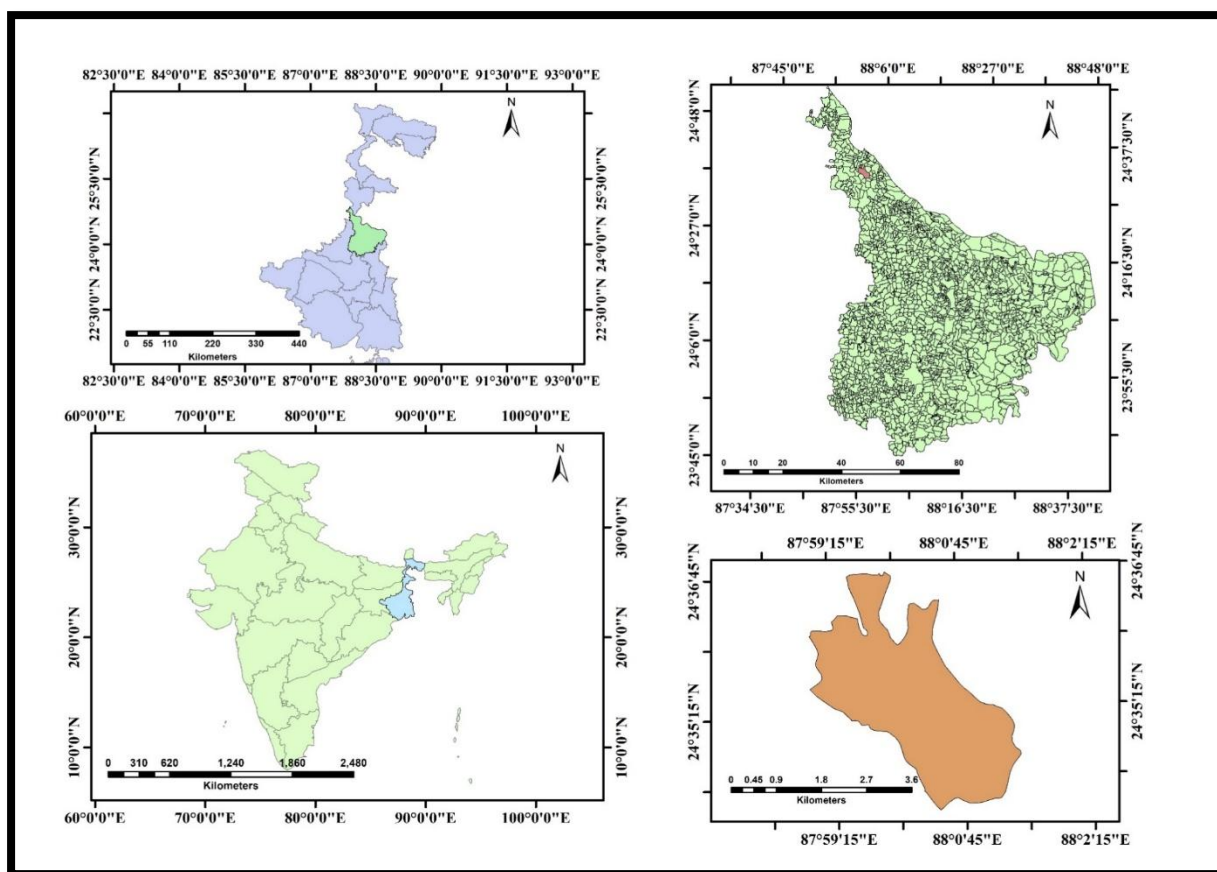


Figure 1: Location Map of Mahesail Village (Source: Socio-economic Data and Applications Centre, NASA)

Appraisal of the problems of Bidi workers of Mahesail Village

The bidi workers of Mahesail village has been suffering from several problems since time immemorial. There is an urgent need to bring about the solution of these problems. In course of the field survey, five most important problems faced by almost all the bidi workers surveyed were identified and then Weighted score technique was used to identify the intensity of the problem.

1. *Health problem of the workers-* This is the most important problem which almost all the bidi workers have been facing. Since this is a home based job, involvement of women is very high in this industry. Sometimes children are also seen working in this industry. The bidi workers spend a long time in manufacturing bidis because the more the number bidis they prepare, the more the wages they get. In course of doing this, they

have to work for longer hours sitting in the same posture. As a result, there are greater incidences of spondylitis, back pains, joint pains and knee problems. They also suffer from pain in the joints of fingers. As they have to work with tobacco leaves for longer hours, they also suffer from the problem of Tuberculosis. Besides, skin problems have also been noticed among the bidi workers. This problem has been assigned the highest weighted score of 61.04 (Figure 2).

2. *Incidence of Child Labour-* Incidence of child labour is another serious problem among the bidi workers of Mahesail village. Low level of literacy and poverty are the primary reasons responsible for this. As most of the bidi workers of the village are illiterate, they are not aware of the issues of complication of involvement of child in a bidi industry. So, a good number of children are seen working in this industry. Most of the children are studying up to primary level (till class IV) and they leave school and get themselves engaged in the bidi industry. Such incidence is more common among girl children. This is owing to preferential treatment towards son by the parents. Parents prefer their sons for higher education. But they ask their daughters to leave school, stay back at home and work in the bidi industry (Jahangir, 2018). Thus, incidence of child labour has cropped up. Besides, bidi workers also are of the opinion that the more the number of workers, the more bidis they can manufacture and the more profit they gain from the market. One bidi worker surveyed stated that he and his wife can prepare 30 to 40 bundles of bidi every day. But, if his son and daughter joins him, then the family can prepare 60 to 80 bundles of bidi per day and thus the profit turns out to be more. Besides, owing to involvement in the bidi industry, children are also suffering from the health problems like juvenile spondylitis and tuberculosis. Besides, children have also acquired habit of smoking at an early age as they spend a lot of time working in the bidi industry. Keeping all these problems in mind, this problem has been assigned a high weighted score of 39.765 (Figure 2).

3. *Conflict with the suppliers and middlemen-* Since there is large scale involvement of middle men, there is often a conflict between bidi workers and the suppliers. As the suppliers act as the link between the bidi workers and the market, conflict often arises regarding the share of profit and deciding the price of bidis in the market. Sometimes, they also undergo conflicts with the suppliers of raw materials for supplying poor quality of raw materials. Owing to such conflicts, they often have to shut down their industry. The industry remains closed unless the issue is resolved. They are of the opinion that in most of the times, the conflict gets resolved within 6 to 7 days and the workers again start working. In most of times, the conflict is short-lived and is resolved through understanding among the workers and suppliers. Bidi workers are also of the opinion that under such circumstances when the bidi industry remains closed due to such conflicts, they shift to some other jobs like selling of vegetables, working as labours in construction sites etc. Hence, incidence of temporary livelihood transformation is also noticed. Keeping this in mind, the problem is given the lowest weighted score of 20.091 (Figure 2).

4. *Lack of Supply of good quality of Raw material-* It is another important problem faced by the bidi workers. In fact, it is one of the major reasons of conflict between the bidi workers and the suppliers. Suppliers often supply low quality of tobacco leaves to the workers which degrades the quality of the product. Supply of raw materials also get affected due to traffic problem especially during the rainy season (Sabale. *et al.*,2012). Increase in price of raw materials often compels the suppliers to supply poor quality of raw materials. This problem has been assigned a high weighted score of 31.605 (Figure 2).

5. *Low Wage rates-* Bidi workers get very low wages. The bidi workers earn money in two ways. One group of workers purchase raw materials from a middleman at the local market known as 'Munshi', make bidis and sell them back to the Munshi. The Munshi gives a share of profit to the bidi workers in return. Another group of workers purchases raw materials from the Munshi. They again sell this raw material to other workers at higher prices. Bidi workers are of the opinion that they get a very less share from the Munshi which often turns out to be a reason of conflict with the Munshi. Due to such low rates of wage from the Munshi, the bidi workers often fail to buy good quality of tobacco leaves and threads that are used for rolling bidies. Conflict with the Munshi also often leads to permanent shut down of many bidi industries and thus the bidi workers often have to seek other means of livelihood which leads to the incidence of livelihood transformation. This problem has been assigned a high weighted score of 47.058 (Figure 2).

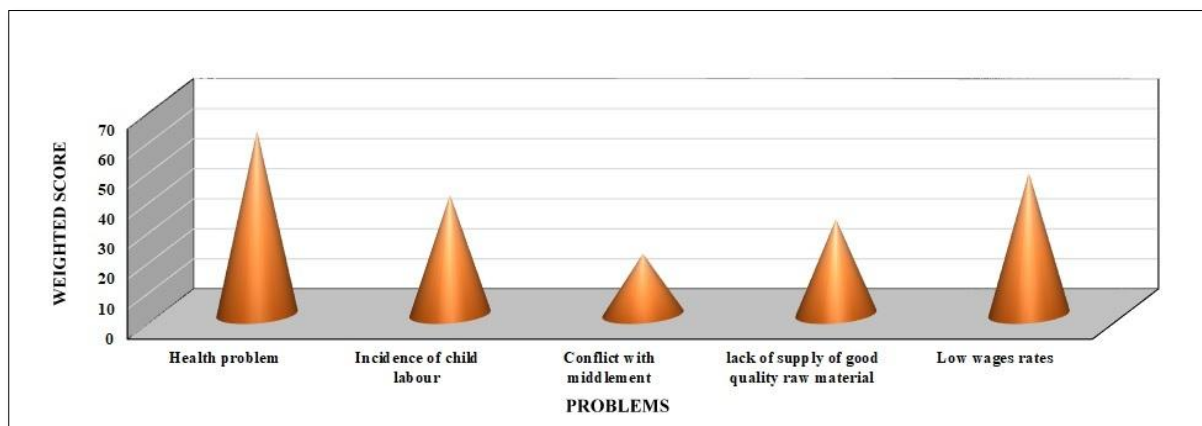


Figure 2: Appraisal of the problem of Bidi workers through weighted score technique.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

The bidi workers have been facing several problems for a long time period which has highly affected the well-being of the bidi workers. Hence, there is an urgent need to bring about a solution of their problems.

- Health checkup of the bidi workers should be done at regular time intervals owing to their long exposure to tobacco. The local health care center should come forward to undertake this problem. Besides, NGOs of the local area can also conduct regular health camps at regular intervals to keep a vigilant watch on the health of the bidi workers.
- Involvement of children in the bidi industry must be stopped. This can be done through spread of literacy and conduction of awareness programs that will make the people aware of the harmful impact of involvement of children in Bidi industry.
- Steps should be taken to stop the smoking habits of children at early ages. It can only be brought about through awareness campaigns.
- Incidences of frequent conflicts between the bidi workers and the Munshi regarding various issues like price of the bidi in the market and quality of raw material should be stopped. In case of any such dispute, both the parties must adopt peaceful strategies to solve the issue. Unnecessary closure of the industry should be stopped.
- Munshi, who act as the suppliers of raw material must ensure the fact that they supply the workers with good quality of raw material.
- Wage rate and share of profit of the bidi workers in the entire manufacturing process must be increased.

V. CONCLUSION

There is no doubt of the fact that the bidi workers of the Mahesail village have been going through severe problems. The central as well as the state Government in collaboration with the local panchayat must take necessary actions for the overall development of the village (Sudina. M. *et al.*, 2015). Once the steps are taken, it will not only help in the development of the village but will also strengthen the economic backbone of the state as well as that of entire India in the future

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