

Chapter - IV

FEMALE LABOUR PARTICIPATION IN BIDI ROLLING

Bidi¹ tobacco is the most important non-virginia tobacco produced in India. It occupies 25 to 30 per cent of the total area under tobacco in the country, while in terms of production its share is around 30 to 35 per cent. This type of tobacco accounts for about 50 percent of the total production of all types of non-virginia tobacco in the country. Bidi is typically Indian. Bidis are also smoked in neighbouring countries of Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Singapore and Malaysia. By far, the largest produced of bidi is in India, accounting for about 85 per cent of the total world production. In manufacture of bidis, the industry is using annually about 150 million kilogram of bidi tobacco and 30 million kilograms of bidi wrapper leaves. The annual production of bidi is presently estimated to be more than 55,000 crore pieces and sales of bidi are ten times higher than cigarette sales. Bidi industry is essentially a cottage industry providing gainful employment to more than 30 lakh of mostly rural population. This industry is basically rural oriented, labour intensive and also makes significant contribution to revenue to the government. During 1987-88 all tobacco products contributed to the National Exchequer on excise revenue of Rs 1,686.24 crore, of which the contribution from bidis alone accounted for Rs 169.22 crore, while during 2000-2001 the total excise duty collected from bidi industry was Rs 354 crore. The location of the industry is decided more by the presence of cheap labour and availability of tendu leaves used in bidi rolling (Directorate of Tobacco Development 1990: 36).

Bidi rolling is an agro-based labour intensive industry with an employment size next only to agriculture and the handloom sector (Govt. of India 1995: 2). The existing studies on the socio economic conditions of bidi workers in different parts of the country reveal that their continuing struggle for survival even while sustaining in this activity in spite of low wages, irregular employment and steady exploitation by middle men and agent, lack

of credit, education and medical facilities and neglect in government policies (Avachat 1978, Mishra 2000). There are several studies on socio-economic conditions of bidi workers and their problems in Indian context. These studies have dealt with the problems in availing benefits of social security measures like weekly holidays, provision for annual leave, maternity leave for women workers, sick leave and medical benefits. Further, they have emphasised on the status of working and living conditions, poverty indebtedness and sexual exploitation (Mohandas 1980, Mohandas and Praveen Kumar 1992, Govt. of India 1994-95). There are various studies conducted at regional level to address the socio-economic conditions of bidi workers. These studies have mainly highlighted on low wages, working hours, indebtedness, illiteracy, health conditions, role of trade unions and problems of contract system, both in rural and urban areas (Srinivasan 1999, Saravanan 2001). At the national level, studies conducted by the government concluded that welfare measures have failed to produce the expected result (Govt. of India 1981, Govt. of India 1994-95).

In India, bidi manufacturing is not uniform in terms of capital invested, number of persons employed and the size of bidi and also in terms of concentration. There are a few units in the organised sector, but most of the units are in the unorganised cottage sector. No fixed premises are required for bidi making unless it is other than home working. The only tools that are required for bidi rolling include a pair of scissors for cutting the wrapper, a small hand knife and trays to keep the raw materials. The process is very simple but does require much skill for neat and even turn out (Giriappa 1987).

Under the contract system of employment in bidi industry, the trademark owner provides bidi tobacco and tendu leaves to the contractor, who on receiving the materials makes bidis by directly employing labourers or by distributing the raw materials to the home workers. The latter form of arrangement is common where in there is women who primarily roll bidis with the help of the male members and children. However, in some cases, the workers may receive the raw materials directly from the manufacturers and supply bidis directly to them. In few cases, it is not unusual to find bidi

making being carried out in tiny scale. A family may roll out and sell few thousand per day. Moreover, up to a certain level of production, tiny scale bidi making is kept out of the excise preview by the government, which encourages small-scale production.

4.1 Economic Significance of Bidi Industry

The following table presents the generation of gross value in different sub-sectors of bidi industry including domestic consumption and exports. The total value generation of Rs 6,110 crore by the industry is accounted for by different sub-sectors as:

Table 4.1

Gross Value Generated by Bidi Industry (Rupees in Crore)

Cultivator	Processor	Manufacturer	Wholesaler	Retailer	Total
329 (6%)	129 (2%)	5,064 (83%)	104 (2%)	484 (8%)	6,110

Source: Computed from Indian Market Research Bureau Report on Cigarette and Bidi Industry – A Comparative Status, 1996

Roughly one-third of the value generated by the bidi industry flows into supplier sectors. The magnitude of the direct dependence of a large number of non-tobacco sectors on the bidi industry is, therefore, considerable.

Table 4.2

Distribution of Gross Value Addition Bidi Industry (Rupees in Crore)

Gross Value Generated	6,110
Input Cost	1,988 (33%)
Gross Value Added by Bidi Industry by way of wages, interest, rent and profit earned	4,122 (67%)

Source: Computed from Indian Market Research Bureau Report on Cigarette and Industry – A Comparative Status, 1996

The table 4.2 shows that value addition is more than double the input cost in bidi industry. The gross value added within the industry is Rs 4,122 crore. Therefore, importance of bidi industry in respect of contribution to the gross domestic product is significant. Of greater significance is perhaps the per man day contribution to the gross domestic product as well as the per stick value addition generated by the industry (Tobacco News 1997: 5).

The foreign exchange earning from export of bidis over the past three years reveals that during 1998-99 the value of foreign exchange earning was 7.58 million US \$, during 1999-2001 the same was 7.43 million US \$ (Table 4.3). Thus, the total value of foreign exchange earning during the period 1998-2001 was 23.70 million US \$ and total quantity of bidis exported during the same period was 3,134 tones.

Table 4.3

Exports of Bidis

Year	Quantity (Tones)	Value (US \$ Million)
1998-99	998	7.58
1999-2000	1,174	8.69
2000-2001	962	7.43

Source: Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics and Tobacco Board

4.2 Bidi Industry: A Major Employer

The figures on employment in bidi industry during 1993-94 to 1996-97 were around 4.4 million (Rajasekhar and Sreedhar 2002: 4023). At present, the bidi industry generates a considerable employment, aggregating to a total of about 44,11,275 persons. The following table illustrates the number of persons engaged as bidi workers in the different states of the country.

Table 4.4

Employment in Bidi Industry

Name of the State	Total Number of Bidi Workers Estimated at Present
Madhya Pradesh	7,50,000
Andhra Pradesh	6,25,050
Tamil Nadu	6,20,950
West Bengal	4,97,458
Uttar Pradesh	4,50,000
Bihar	3,91,500
Karnataka	3,60,876
Maharashtra	2,56,000
Orissa	1,60,000
Kerala	1,36,416
Rajasthan	1,00,000
Gujarat	50,000
Assam	7,725
Tripura	5,000
Total	44,11,275

Source: The Golden Leaf in Parliament: A Summary of Questions and Answers in Parliament, 2001, p.5

Besides, the industry generated a total of 13,106 lakh man days. The break down in percentage terms is as under:

Table 4.5

Man Days Deployed in Bidi Industry (Rupees in Lakh)

Cultivator	Processor	Manufacturer	Distributor	Total
415 (3%)	88 (1%)	8,892 (68%)	3,711 (28%)	13,106

Source: Computed from Indian Market Research Bureau Report on Cigarette and Bidi Industry – A Comparative Status, 1996

Thus, the bidi industry employs a very large work force at the aggregate level, besides representing substantial employment across each sub-sector. Both in terms of man days as well as in terms of number of persons employed, the industry wields tremendous socio-economic importance.

4.3. Bidi Workers in India

As per latest estimates there are about 44.11 lakh bidi workers in the country. The Labour Bureau (Ministry of Labour) has conducted a sample survey on the working and living conditions of the workers in the bidi industry in 1995. According to the survey, 65.9 per cent women workers and one per cent children are engaged in bidi making.

The government has introduced various welfare measures for the bidi workers through the Bidi Workers Welfare Fund Act, 1976. These include financial assistance for their housing, healthcare, educational needs for children and recreational needs. Besides, the Minimum Wages Act was enacted in 1948 to protect the interest of the workers engaged mostly in the informal sector. Under the provisions of the Act, both central and state governments are the appropriate authority to fix, revise and enforce payment of minimum wages in scheduled employments falling under their respective jurisdictions. Bidi making is a scheduled employment only in the state sphere. The wages are generally on piece rate basis. Hence, erosion of bidi sales could lead to reduce work per person and should not result in unemployment. Research has also shown that on 22 per cent of households involved in bidi making are fully dependent on bidi income and bidi work is largely a supplementary income among most of the women.

The appalling condition of bidi workers despite the government passing several legislations for their welfare is also worth mentioning. Women constitute a majority of the bidi industry's work force. Since, most women bidi workers operate from their homes, they are isolated from the rest of the industry workforce and therefore are easy targets for exploitation. There are a large number of cases where acute poverty has forced bidi rolling women to mortgage their children to repay debts (Tobacco News 1997: 7). Employers

consistently deny minimum wages to bidi workers even the government has fixed these for them. The incidence of child labour is also significant in bidi industry. In some districts of Tamil Nadu women have pledged their yet to be born children to bidi employers in order to repay debt.

However, the bidi workers in India have been facing the following problems:

- (a) Wide disparity in minimum wages
- (b) Limited implementation of even statutory social security schemes like provident fund and insurance
- (c) Short supply of raw materials and non-payment for rejected bidis
- (d) Predominance of illness like tuberculosis, asthma, and problems of eyesight
- (e) Deprivation of children due to lack of educational inputs

The aspirations of bidi workers for better standard of living and education, coupled with improved economic conditions and employment opportunities will drive them to shift to better jobs (Tobacco News 1996: 7).

4.4 Work and Wages of Bidi Labourers

The manufacturing process of bidi consists of rolling, sorting, drying, labeling and packing. The female labour is preferred for rolling bidis, while sorting, drying, labeling and packing activities are carried out by the male workers. Before rolling, the tendu wrapper leaves are soaked in water overnight and cut into suitable pieces for wrapping blended tobacco mix. The size of leaves, nature of tobacco blend may vary according to the different trademarks. The process of rolling comprises in taking a small quantity of tobacco flake on the wrapper kept ready for the purpose, spreading the flakes evenly and then rolling the wrapper between fingers diagonally to give a conical shape. A piece of cotton thread is tied toward the smoking end. The edges of the wrapper pieces are placed partially inside this end and the flattened smoking tip remains partly open. The broad end is closed by folding the open edges inward. The size of the bidi may vary from 5 c.m to 6 c.m in length as per different manufacture practices. An average roller can

make two to three bidis per minute, though some experienced and skilled hands can roll even four to six bidis. Average daily working hours for the worker is fairly ranging from 6 to 8 and number of bidis rolled by an average worker per week is about 5,500. While rolling process is over, the bidis are packed in a bundle of usually twenty-five and brought to the principal employer or contractor. The workers have to deposit bidis following the instructions of the employers. Generally, all bidis are collected from the workers twice or thrice in a week.

One bidi worker traces out her workday as follows:

I collect bidi leaves and tobacco from my employer twice in a week. I can roll about 6,000 bidis per week. I have to work sincerely for fulfilling my expected level. I wake up early and prepare breakfast. I begin rolling at 7 a.m and carry on the activity up to 10 a.m. During this period of time, I have to roll about 500 to 600 bidis daily. Then, I go for other household work and cook for my family. In the evening, I have to take care of my children after rolling 100 to 200 bidis side by side. I devote as much as 7 to 8 hours daily for the work. I enjoy the work because it provides me certain amount of independence in addition to money wages.

The bidi workers are employed by the principal employer or by the contractor. Under factory employment system, the trademark owner supplies bidi tobacco and tendu leaves to the factory workers who roll bidis at their own premises and supply the finished product timely to the trademark owner, while under contract system of employment, which is most widespread, the principal employer supplies the raw materials to the contractors who on receiving the raw materials employ labourers and supply the finished product to the principal employer. The contractors have to keep the particulars about the workers and they will have to report to the principal employer time to time about the quantum of output produced by the workers. Besides, the workers have to account for raw materials received from the contractors by rolling the stipulated quantity of bidis. Usually, 500 grams leaves and 300 grams tobacco are supplied for rolling 1,000 bidis. Sometimes, the workers have to buy extra quantity of raw materials from outside to set right the deficiency. If workers

roll sub-standard size of bidis, they have to make good for the same out of their own pocket. The workers have some genuine grievances against the contractors. One bidi worker complained:

Often contractors provide us inferior quality of tendu leaves, which is inadequate for rolling stipulated number of bidis. In every week, I have to purchase raw materials from the market at a high price in order to meet the deficiency. The rejection of two or three bidis out of a bunch of twenty-five is the common practice of the contractor.

The wage rate for bidi rolling largely varies from one manufacturer to another. The principal employers or manufacturers after making discussion with the concerned trade union settle the wage rate. So, there is a possibility of revision of wage rate every three to four years after. In bidi rolling, female and girl child workers are mostly preferred because of the limitation of alternative job opportunities for them and moreover, they can be easily exploited by the contractors in paying a lower wage rate. The wage rate for the factory workers in Cooch Behar district varies from Rs.30 to Rs.33.50 per 1,000 bidis, while contract workers are paid of Rs. 24 to Rs.28. Most of the workers have experienced to incur on average expenses of Rs. 1.50 to Rs. 2 per 1,000 bidis out of own pocket due to deficiency of raw materials and rejection of defective bidis which turn into a further decrease in wage rate. Apart from the regular money wage, the factory workers are provided other benefits like provident fund contribution and ex-gratia. Besides these, children of bidi workers get scholarship for study and bidi workers welfare fund is being utilised for the benefit of the labour force.

4.5 Findings of the Survey of Field Investigation

The field survey on 200 female bidi workers randomly chosen from 200 households of Cooch Behar, Dinhata and Tufangang. The general findings of the survey are as follows:

□ Age Composition of Female Bidi Workers

It is found that the main concentration of female bidi workers was in the age group of 25-34 (41.5%). At the same time 11% of the women workers were virtually child labour in the sense that they were in the age of below 14. 24.5% of the workers were in the age group of 15-24, while only six workers were found to be age above 45. Usually, old female workers did not engage in bidi rolling because of their eyesight problems. The following table shows overall pattern of age composition of women workers in bidi rolling.

Table 4.6

Age Composition of Bidi Workers

Age	Number of Workers	Percentage
Below 14	22	11.0
15-24	49	24.5
25-34	83	41.5
35-44	40	20.0
Above 45	06	3.0

□ Religion Wise Distribution

The survey reveals that percentage of Hindus workers was 91.5, while only 8.5% of the workers belonged to the Muslims community.

Table 4.7

Religion Wise Distribution of Bidi Workers

Religion	Number of Workers	Percentage
Hindus	183	91.5
Muslims	17	8.5

□ Caste Composition of Female Bidi Workers

Another feature that has been noticed in bidi rolling was that 78% of the workers belonged to the schedule caste category with only 22% belonging to the general caste. No woman belonging to schedule tribe was found.

Table 4.8

Caste Wise Distribution of Bidi Workers

Caste	Number of Workers	Percentage
Schedule Caste	156	78.0
Schedule Tribe	0	0
General	44	22.0

General Educational Level

Table 4.9 shows that among the bidi workers, the illiterates constituted 47%. 53% of the women had gone to school. Of the total respondents, 30.5% had the primary education. 22.5% of the workers had the education beyond the primary level. It is interestingly found that young adults had more educational status than the other women. Majority of child workers were school goers too.

Table 4.9

Educational Level of Bidi Workers

Educational Level	Number of Workers	Percentage
Illiterate	94	47.0
Up to Class IV	61	30.5
Class V to VIII	42	21.0
Above Class VIII	03	1.5

Marital Status

74.5% of the women bidi workers were found to be married. Majority of the workers were in the exhaustive bidi rolling only for economic necessity. The presence of maidens, widows and separated women was relatively low. The widow and separated groups together constituted only 1.5%, while unmarried women accounted for 24% of the female bidi workers.

Table 4.10

Marital Status of Bidi Workers

Marital Status	Number of Workers	Percentage
Maiden	48	24.0
Married	149	74.5
Widow	02	1.0
Separated	01	0.5

Family Size

Most of the bidi workers came from the families having more than three members. In fact, there was a large concentration of female workers while family size increased. Only 3.5% of the workers reported that their family consisted of less than four members.

Table 4.11

Family Size of Bidi Workers

Family Size	Number of Workers	Percentage
1-3	07	3.5
4-6	135	67.5
Above 6	58	29.0

Mode of Recruitment

The bidi workers may be recruited by the principal employer or contractor. It is found that 48% of the total workers were employed by the principal employers or manufactures, while 52% of the workers was recruited by the contractors. The demand for contract employment was on the rise because of limited opportunity to work as direct factory labour.

Table 4.12

Mode of Recruitment of Bidi Workers

Recruitment Through	Number of Workers	Percentage
Principal Employer	96	48.0
Contractor	104	52.0

Reasons for Taking the Job

The economic compulsion was the main reasons of the workers behind taking up bidi rolling as their livelihood (58%). However, there were a small percentage (4.5%) of the workers, mostly the wives from middle class families, who entered the job market for passing out idle time. Besides, 6.5% of the workers, mostly child labourers, entered the labour force for meeting own educational expenses. The vast majority of the female bidi workers joined the workforce for supporting their child's educational expenses.

Table 4.13

Reasons for Taking the Job by Bidi Workers

Reasons	Number of Workers	Percentage
Economic Compulsion	116	58.0
Income Supplementation	62	31.0
Meeting Own Educational Expenses	13	6.5
Passing out Idle Time	09	4.5

Number of Bidis Rolled Per Week

It is found that an average worker could roll about 5,500 bidis per week. 53.5% of the workers rolled 4,001-5,000 bidis per week, while 30% of the workers made 5,001-7,000 bidis. Most of the child workers had capacity to make 3,000-4,000 bidis. Generally, young adults group rolled 5,001-7,000 bidis. Nineteen workers were found to roll more than 7,000 bidis.

Table 4.14

Number of Bidis Rolled by Bidi Workers

Number of Bidis Rolled Per Week	Number of Workers	Percentage
3000-4000	15	7.5
4001-5000	107	53.5
5001-6000	31	15.5
6001-7000	28	14.5
Above 7000	19	9.5

Work Experiences of Bidi Workers

Table 4.15 shows the responses about work experiences of the female bidi workers in bidi rolling. The respondents were asked to recall the age at which they began rolling. 14% of the workers reported that they had been working for less than 3 years, while 49% of the workers had an experience of 8-15 years. 16% of the workers had more than 16 years experience. The majority of middle age group workers joined the labour force at the age of 10-15 years old.

Table 4.15

Work Experiences of Bidi Workers

Years of Work Experience	Number of Workers	Percentage
Less than 3	28	14.0
4-7	42	21.0
8-11	63	31.5
12-15	35	17.5
Above 15	32	16.0

□ Health Status of Female Bidi Workers

The female bidi rollers were affected by the tobacco flakes and tendu wrapper leaves they handle day in and day out. It is found that some health related problems like tuberculosis, asthma and eyesight problems increased with age and number of years work. 32% of the women had no major health problems except the problems like headache, shoulder pain, leg pain etc. All the rest had faced acute health problems due to inhalation of tobacco dust. 44.5% of the workers had been suffering from asthma, while 21% of the workers had eyesight problems. Five workers had faced problem like tuberculosis.

Table 4.16

Health Status of Bidi Workers

Health Status	Number of Workers	Percentage
No Major Health Problem	64	32.0
Tuberculosis	05	2.5
Asthma	89	44.5
Eye Sight Problems	42	21.0

□ Number of Children

It is found that majority of the female bidi workers had more than two children (58.11%). 33.11% of the workers had either one child or two children, while 8.78% of the bidi workers had more than four children.

Table 4.17

Number of Children of Bidi Workers

Number of Children	Number of Workers	Percentage
1-2	49	33.11
3-4	86	58.11
Above 4	13	8.78

□ Educational Level of Children

Table 4.18 reveals that among the children of bidi worker, illiterates constituted only 14.86%, while only nine children were found to be below the age of formal education. 25% of the workers' children went to primary school. Four children were found to attend college and seven children had passed secondary examination. The workers were very much ambitious about their children.

Table 4.18

Educational Level of Children of Bidi Workers

Level of Education	Number of Worker's Children	Percentage
Illiterate	22	14.86
Below the Age of Formal Education	09	6.08
Up to Class IV	37	25.00
Class V to VIII	63	42.57
Above Class VIII	17	11.49

Note: Maximum educational level of a child of each worker was considered.

□ Expenditure on Child Education

Apart from the general educational expenses, the workers had to pay remuneration of private tutor of the children out of own earnings. It is found that 57.26% of the workers incurred monthly expenses of Rs 100 to Rs 200, while 15.39% of the workers spent above Rs 300 for the purpose of child education.

Table 4.19

Expenditure on Child Education of Bidi Workers

Monthly Expenditure	Number of Workers	Percentage
Rs 100-Rs 200	67	57.26
Rs 201-Rs 300	32	27.35
Above Rs 300	18	15.39

□ Amenities Possessed by Bidi Workers

It is clearly evident from the table 4.20 that 14% of the female bidi workers possessed some agricultural land, 28% of the workers owned a radio set and 4% of the bidi workers had an audio tape. Only nine women possessed a watch. As far as the additional furniture were concerned, 19% of the workers were found to have wooden chairs, tables, benches etc. Twelve workers were found to possess a black and white television set.

Table 4.20

Amenities Possessed by Bidi Workers

Types of Amenities Owned	Number of Workers
Agricultural Land	28 (14.0)
Radio	56 (28.0)
Audio Tape	08 (4.0)
Watch	09 (4.5)
Additional Furniture	38 (19.0)
Television Set	12 (6.0)

Figures in the parentheses are percentage.

□ Level of Participation in Own Household Task

The female bidi workers had to manage simultaneously their own household task. They had to combine wage work with their domestic responsibilities. It is found that in addition to bidi rolling, the workers had to do sundry work for their own family. Table 4.21 discloses that so far as the fuel collection and maintenance of house were concerned, the role of the husbands or other family members was noteworthy. The workers had nearly full responsibilities on the activities like washing clothes and utensils, water

collection, food preparation and childcare. Apart from the large bulk of sundry task, often some workers had to help their husbands in agriculture activity.

Table 4.21

Level of Participation in Own Household Task by Bidi Workers

Household Tasks	Self	Husband / Other Member (s)	Jointly
Washing Clothes and Utensils	200 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Water Collection	172 (86.0)	13 (6.5)	15 (7.5)
Fuel Collection	06 (3.0)	192 (96.0)	02 (1.0)
Food Preparation	169 (84.5)	31 (15.5)	0 (0)
Maintenance of House	53 (26.5)	109 (54.5)	38 (19.0)
Childcare	182 (91.0)	04 (2.0)	14 (7.0)

Figures in the parentheses are percentage.

Occupation of Husbands of Female Bidi Workers

It is reported that the majority of the workers' husbands were agriculture labour (56%). 19.33% of the workers' husbands pulled rickshaw. The number of workers' husbands engaged in petty trading and wholesale trading was 17 and 12 respectively. It is interestingly to note that eight such husbands were found who serve as government employees.

Table 4.22

Occupation of Husbands of Bidi Workers

Occupation	Number of Workers' Husbands	Percentage
Agriculture Labour	84	56.0
Rickshaw Puller	29	19.33
Petty Trader	17	11.33
Wholesale Trader	12	8.0
Government Employee	08	5.34

Income Contribution to Family

The contribution of female bidi rollers to their families was in no way negligible. It is found that in the economic sphere the status of most of the female bidi workers was similar as that of their husbands. 10.5% of the

workers could contribute more than Rs 600 per month to their family. Most of the workers contributed in the range of Rs 301 to Rs 500 per month (60.5%). Among the child labourers, majority was found to spend a part of their earnings for the education.

Table 4.23

Income Contribution of Bidi Workers

Monthly Contribution	Number of Workers	Percentage
Up to Rs 300	30	15.0
Rs 301- Rs 400	38	19.0
Rs 401-Rs 500	83	41.5
Rs 501-Rs 600	28	14.5
Above Rs 600	21	10.5

Saving Potentials

It is found that 38.5% of the workers had no savings potentialities in real sense. No worker was found to have saving account in post office or bank. 19.5% of the workers saved certain amount of money at home, while 42% of the workers were compelled to contribute provident fund at the rate of 10% of wage earned, where at the sometime employer also contributed at the rate of 11.67%. However, only factory workers had to contribute to provident fund.

Table 4.24

Saving Potentials of Bidi Workers

Mode of Savings	Number of Workers	Percentage
No Saving	77	38.5
Post Office / Bank Saving	0	0
Provident Fund Contribution	84	42.0
Home Saving	39	19.5

Daily Work Profile of Bidi Workers

Table 4.25 reveals daily work profile of female bidi workers of different age group. The table is prepared taking into consideration of average activities performed by the respondents. Column 2 shows activities of child labourers. The activities of a worker in the young age group is disclosed in column 3 and

column 4 shows a day of a woman in the middle age group. The daily activities of the bidi workers have been stated as under:

Table 4.25

Daily Work Profile of Bidi Workers

Time	Child Labour Group	Young Age Group	Middle Age Group
5.00 a.m	----	----	Rises
6.00 a.m	Rises	Rises	Taking breakfast does household task
7.00 a.m	Taking breakfast involves in study	Taking breakfast does household task	Feeding children rolls bidis
7.30 a.m	Engages in study	Roll bidis	Carries on rolling
9.00 a.m	Roll bidis	Carries on rolling	Prepares food for family
10.30 a.m	Taking food goes to school	Prepares food / Helps mother	Serving food rolls bidis
12.30 p.m	Stays in school	Rolls bidis	Carries on rolling
3.00 p.m	Returning home takes food and plays with friends	Takes food and rest	Takes food and rest
4.00 p.m	Rolls bidis	Rolls bidis	Rolls bidis
5.00 p.m	Carries on rolling	Interacts with family members	Interacts with neighbours
6.00 p.m	Involves in study	Rolls bidis	Rolls bidis
8.00 p.m	Engages in study	Prepares food / Helps mother	Prepares food
9.00 p.m	Takes food	Serves food	Serving food interacts with children
9.30 p.m	Goes to bed	Takes food	Takes food
10.00 p.m	----	Goes to bed	Goes to bed

4.6 Few Typical Case Studies of Female Bidi Workers

Case I: Anjali (29), an illiterate married woman used to work as bidi labour for last fourteen years. Her family consists of five members. She has one daughter and two sons. Her two sons study in class five and seven respectively. Anjali's husband is a vegetable seller. Anjali described her daily life as follows:

I wake up early in the morning and prepare breakfast for my family. I start bidi rolling at 8 a.m and continue to work up to 10 a.m. Then I go to kitchen. Preparing food I again roll up to 1 p.m. In the noon, I have to help my husband in agricultural work. I can not roll bidis at night because of my recent eyesight problem. Few years ago I could roll as much as 6,000 bidis per week, but of late I can roll only 3,000 to 4,000 bidis. Sitting continuously on the kaccha-verandah² day by day for carrying on rolling, I have been suffering from anaemia for last four years.

Case II: Sumi (13), a serious student of class six, had started bidi rolling at the age of ten. Her family consists of five members – one elder brother, one sister and her parents. Her father is an agriculture labour and mother also engages in bidi rolling. Her elder brother is a college student. Sumi joined the labour force merely for meeting her own educational expenses. She wants to earn more money for carrying on her higher education. Sumi is happy with the job because she can even help her father too by giving Rs 200 per month to run their family. Sumi gets up early in the morning and involves in study up to 9 a.m. Rolling bidis for one hour daily in the morning, she goes to school. Returning from school, Sumi again starts rolling up to 6 p.m. In the evening, she does not work at all because she has to go through the study. Sumi opined that she had not enough time for playing with her friends. Sometimes leaving her work she engages in playing but limited time does not permit to do so.

Case III: Amina (24), an unmarried, class seven passed girl is working as bidi labour for last five years. Amina lives with two younger brothers and her mother comprising a family of four members. Her father died while Amina

was sixteen years old. Her mother is an agriculture labour. Amina and her family members reside in two small rooms with an open shed. One side of this shed is used for cooking and another side is used for carrying on rolling bidis. Amina works hard. She said that she joined the labour force after her father's sudden death for educating her younger brothers. She has to work for 8 to 10 hours daily for mere survival. Amina complained that always tobacco dust get mixed with the food as cooking and rolling are carried out under same shed, but they had no alternative way. Still she is proud with her present work because she is able to provide her family members a better life than a few years ago.

Case IV: Maya (41), belonging to a middle class nuclear family, has been working as bidi labour during last six years. Her husband is a primary school teacher. She has two sons who are school goers. Maya studied up to secondary level. While I met Maya first time, I found something unusual with her way of responding and behaviour. However, slowly everything became normal. Maya entered the job market for passing out idle time and she said that she did not have to work for money because her husband's income was sufficient to support the family. According to her, this work provides certain amount of independence apart from money income. Maya adds that since the formal job market is competitive, this type of invisible informal job³ helps them to generate extra income.

Case V: Promila (48), a widow woman, hails from a joint family. She is working as bidi labour for last twenty years after tragic death of her husband in an accident. Her son is a rickshaw puller. Her family consists of seven members – one son, one daughter-in-law and four grand children. Since Promila's son is very lazy and her son spends most of time by playing cards. Promila and her daughter-in-law had to join the work force for their livelihood. Promila's daughter-in-law is a maidservant. Of late Promila can not roll a good number of bidis because of her tuberculosis problem for last four years.

Promila told that she had not enough money for her treatment. With the acute health problem she is still working for their survival.

4.7 Summary

The economic significance of bidi industry as regard to gross value generation and foreign exchange earnings is not negligible. Besides, the industry absorbs a large number of female workers in India. Though the government has launched various welfare measures for the bidi workers by passing several legislations, still the workers have been facing acute problems like disparity in minimum wage and lack of social security.

The bidi workers are generally recruited by the principal employer or by the contractor. The employer supplies required raw materials to the workers who roll bidis at their own premises and deposit the finished product to the employer in a stipulated time. Sometimes the workers have to purchase extra quantity of raw materials from outside to make good the deficit. The wages rate for bidi workers in the Cooch Behar district largely differs from one brand owner to another. However, direct factory workers get a lucrative wage than the contract labourers. They are provided other benefits like provident fund contribution and ex-gratia in addition to regular cash wages. The contract labourers are deeply exploited by paying a low wage.

The survey reveals that main concentration of female bidi workers is middle age group and existence of child labour in bidi rolling is also notable. The aged workers do not engage in bidi rolling because of their eyesight problems. Many workers are facing acute health crisis by the tobacco flakes and tendu leaves they handle.

The economic compulsion is the main reason of the workers behind taking the job as bidi rollers. However, many child labourers join the work force for meeting their educational expenses. The educational attainment of the female bidi workers is not sound except some school going child labour. The workers contribute a major part of their earnings to the family and few workers save money thinking for the future. Hence, female bidi workers are

carrying out bidi rolling with their other domestic responsibilities in systematic way.

Notes

1. The term bidi denotes a preparation of tendu leaves and non-virginia tobacco for smoking.
2. An extended portion of a house roof made of earthen plinth.
3. The expression invisible informal job is used to mean a job resorted to out of public sight.