

The Kihore Chhabria Group Companies has finalised a collaboration agreement with one of the best brewery groups in the world producing the group's own brand of beer on a buy back basis. The group's chief executive Utpal Ganguli, a chartered accountant by profession, told *Indian Express*...

national basis with cities like Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta and Madras. The group has experience in producing professional products in selected cities in the country, the group further plans to launch brands of IMFL. The...

Dinakar

...on the heels of the...
...ing revolution on...
...infanticide in...
...Nadu comes the...
...children being bonded...
...industry in Chingle...
...districts by poverty...
...relatively easily made at home...
...the local halwai has found that he...
...pete with domestically made...
...one hand and with branded shrik...
...per cent of the adult...
...are under bondage in...
...are mortgaged by...
...repay the loans they...
...to the contractors in...
...Bharu.

Another successful brand is rasagullas, though the product still is a national market. This and other products are sold through outlets in Calcutta, Bombay and...
...the parents see in mort...
...when we have to...
...asks Rajeshwari, a...
...wife.

Bonded children were only in North Arcot district where it is estimated there are over 2 lakh bonded workers. Though children are common among workers roll beedis, the covert perpetuity of parents of these children...

...nce I wrote a new...
...walis and Pongals...
...much difference to...
...old Thangam lament...
...alls into an agonis...

SIS jucing prod...

There is acute scarcity of funds for small enterprises. The banks needing working capital required in the project. Funds are not made available through legitimate channels connected with product marketing. The inadequacy of capital has proved to be a major deterrent elementivity to Indian Small S...
...Added to this, the working capital are mortgaged in proportion to the inflation pressure and the raising of inputs. The effect of this is per cent of the Small Scale...

...would become sick. Thirdly, the revised wages had been arrived at through consensus at meeting with...
...The Government's convening independent meetings of employers and employees and arriving at decisions which go against the...
...insider sector even as they espouse the cause of employers should be replaced by genuine concern if workers are to get their due.



D. Sampath Kumar

neither time to rest nor time to play. Nor has she seen her parents. But her's is not a unique case in Tamil Nadu. ...
...Theruveethi, 12, her elder brother, remarks, "How can we think of TV when the earnings are hardly enough for our stomachs. I discontinued my education because...

of my family circumstances. Together we earn Rs 20 a day. But after deductions due to leave taken and shortfall in output for the day, our net income comes to around Rs 8 a day. At least, my contractor is not cruel," he observed. These are among the hundreds of helpless children who have been mortgaged...

by their own parents to repay the loans to the contractors in the beedi industry in the State. ...
...Children are 'mortgaged' to contractors for obtaining loans. If the beedi workers fail to repay their loans they are "bonded" to the contractors. Suresh (13), one of the few children who have actually...

come out of bondage, says he had been mortgaged for a loan of Rs 700 from the contractor. But his parents could not repay the loan and he got 'bonded' for nearly two years. He would work the whole day without rest and was not even allowed to go home. ...
...Beedi-worker Paner (40) says,

"Sometimes the bonded children are beaten mercilessly and parents do not have any right to question the contractors until the loans are repaid." ...
...It is impossible to free these children because the parents themselves are reluctant to admit that their children are being mortgaged.

A woman beedi-worker, Santhi, asks, "Does it help the family economically in any way if the bonded children are freed?"

Despite sincere efforts of the Government to release the children from bondage, "The possibility that retrieved children will again be mortgaged negates the Government efforts," says Dr G. Kannabiran, a member of the Central Advisory Committee for Beedi Workers Welfare Fund.

It's a vicious circle. Loans are taken at exorbitant interest rates by the parents from the contractors. The 'security deposit' is the child. The interest rates are so high (10 to 25 per cent) that the amount is never returned and the children never redeemed.

Some of the contractors in Chinglepet, Tirunelveli and North Arcot districts make it mandatory for loan-seeking workers to roll 1000 to 1,500 punni (one-side closed) beedis for half the wages. Manohar (30) of Perumbadi village says that children are employed to just close the other end of the beedis and paid Rs 2 per 1000 punni beedis.

Pannerseivam (41), another beedi-worker, explains: "For every 25 beedis falling short of the stipulated quota, 40 paise is deducted from the wages. So, we lose invariably Rs 6 on that count. For leaf-cutters and punni workers we have to pay Rs 3 to each. For thread Rs 1 and Rs 1.75 goes for Provident Fund (PF). Eventually, after deducting interest on loans we are given a meagre Rs 150 a month."

In Tamil Nadu, where there are 300 big beedi-manufacturers and 3000 to 4000 contractors with about ten lakh workers in the industry, the legislative provisions for the welfare of the beedi-workers are being blatantly flouted. And this will continue to eternity unless some drastic steps are taken to ensure them natural justice if not Constitutional justice.

that the commercialisation of the rural economy in the Punjab together with high wage rates and the increasing sex-ratio linked to the changing occupational structure and the shift in cultivation from wheat to rice and vegetables and cotton, have in fact contributed to the growth of female labour in agriculture.

In the paper on the perception of woman as earner, Karlekar discusses a persisting problem of role conflict in the specific cultural conditions and value system affecting primarily middle class women. Karlekar examines the phenomenon of role conflict in terms of the dilemmas it imposes on both women and society and the consequences that follow when patterns of socialisation and unequal relations between the spouses force women to give primacy to the domestic sphere and not to career and profession.

Fonseca discusses the basic issues of UNCTAD VI in the context of the crisis of countries and systems that had overtaken the global economy. The major theme of the Conference was development and recovery through a recognition of global interdependence. The recession in the developed countries because of the deflation of demand and the consequent sharp fall in exports from developing countries had a severe impact on the international monetary and financial system. The paper discusses the way in which the four Committees at UNCTAD VI tried to resolve the problems related to commodities, protectionism, the monetary and financial system and trade. On the whole the response of the developed countries was disappointing, and protectionism continues unabated in spite of pressures from Third World countries for liberalisation of trade and aid.

Alfred de Souza

Women Beedi Workers in Vellore: Pedagogy for a People's Organisation

G. Anuradha
K.V. Eswara Prasad
Syed Akhtar

This paper presents an account of an action research programme (ARP) for women workers in the *beedi* industry in Vellore. The first part present a comprehensive survey of the structure of production and the position of women workers in the *beedi* industry. The second part is concerned with a process analysis of the action programme which was based on the data of the survey.

SURVEY OF THE BEEDI INDUSTRY

The objective of the survey was to obtain baseline data which would form the context for the action research programme. Women workers were interviewed at the place of production, both individually and in small groups, to elicit information on the stages involved in *beedi* production; the position of the women in relation to the contractor; their wages working and living conditions; and availability of welfare facilities.

Structure of production

Beedi production is carried out at various levels and each level in turn consists of several stages. Usually factories employ only few workers whereas a major proportion of *beedis* is produced outside the factory in the workers' homes.

The factory owner, who is the principal employer, supplies the raw materials—tendu leaves, tobacco and yarn in large quantities to middlemen (contractors) for a specified number of *beedis*. These middlemen in turn distribute the raw materials to several workers attached to them to roll a stipulated number of *beedis* in their homes.

The authors, members of the Faculty, National Labour Institute, New Delhi, are equally responsible for the content of the paper. This paper is a part of a larger study financed and conducted by the National Labour Institute.

When the rolled *beedis* are returned to the middlemen, they are then sent to the branch office of the principal employer. The branch office in turn distributes the *beedis* along with labels to a different set of home workers for labelling. The workers return the labelled *beedis* to the branch where they are stacked, cured and packed for despatch to the principal employer.

Rolling

The workers bring the raw materials home and share the work with other members of the family, including children, and at times with neighbours. This is necessary because *beedi* rolling involves several stages all of which are time consuming, and it is not possible for one worker alone to perform all the stages of *beedi* rolling. The leaves have to be cleaned, washed and dried. They are then cut according to the size of a particular brand of *beedis*. The cleaning and cutting of leaves is done by women and children. The wages for cleaning leaves for a thousand *beedis* is 15-20 paise whereas for cutting it is 80 paise. The next stage, rolling of tobacco in leaves, involves all available hands—men, women and children. Next, the edges of rolled *beedis* are folded either by those who rolled them or by other workers for 80 paise per thousand. Finally the *beedis* are tied in bundles of 12 or 24, depending on the requirements of the contractor. The wage rate per 1000 *beedis* rolled is Rs 8.10 and the work to produce this number is usually shared by 3 or 4 members of a family.

Given the fact that each contractor has hundreds of home workers employed by him, *beedis* pour in every day in large numbers. Since physical counting of the *beedis* brought in by the women workers is a laborious task for the employers, they have their own methods of counting. Each bundle should hold 12 or 24 *beedis*. The contractor counts the bundles by stacking them in trays which are designed to hold usually several thousand *beedis*. The *beedis* are then sent either to the factory or to another branch from where they are distributed to a different set of home workers for labelling.

Labelling

The women workers are given *beedis* in large quantities for labelling. They are also provided with large sheets of labels which have to be cut into thin strips and pasted on each *beedi*. The women usually share this work of labelling, as also *beedi* rolling, with other members of the family or subcontract the work at the rate of 15 paise plus gum and yarn per 1000 *beedis*.

The wage for labelling 1000 *beedis* is 45 paise, but the cost of gum and yarn required for labelling is borne by the worker. The cost of 45 paise for gum and yarn to label 3000 *beedis* implies that the wage for 1000 *beedis* goes towards the cost of gum and yarn. It must be mentioned that the cost of any shortage in the number of *beedis* labelled is deducted from the wages of the worker.

At the branch the bundles are stacked in trays and cured, individually labelled and repacked in large cartons of 20 bundles. To make 200 cartons (about one lakh *beedis*) and pack them in gunny bags a worker is paid Rs 9.60. These gunny bags are then sent to the factory from where they are marketed.

Workers' problems

The production process and the way in which the *beedi* industry is organised is such that there is scope at every stage for exploitation of the workers. This in turn gives rise to a variety of problems, some of which are discussed below.

Problems related to wages comprise shortage of raw materials, improper counting of bundles of *beedis*, incorrect entries in the pass-book, irregularity in the work and payment of bonus to workers

Shortage of raw materials. It is an accepted fact that 800 grams of tendu leaves and 350 grams of tobacco are required to roll 1000 *beedis*, provided the leaves are not defective. Since bundles of tendu leaves are usually given to the workers, poor quality or damaged leaves in the bundles will necessarily mean shortage of leaf to roll *beedis*. Similarly, shortage of tobacco may often occur due to sudden gusts of wind which blow away tobacco from open trays. In either case the worker is held responsible for the number of *beedis* short of the quantity specified by the contractor and wages are cut accordingly. For instance, if a worker is short by one bundle the wage cut varies from 50-75 paise although the average cost of one bundle would be only 30 paise if they were to buy the raw material on their own. By and large workers usually fall short of leaves and tobacco and prefer to buy raw material to make good any shortage rather than incur large wage cuts.

Improper counting of beedi bundles. When stacking bundles in trays for counting, the contractor takes unfair advantage on the pretext that a large number of *beedis* need to be collected and counted from many workers in a limited time. Usually more bundles are stacked on a tray than it should hold. Naturally, in the final count there is always a shortage of *beedi* bundles, but the women worker, though present at the spot, is not permitted to do the stacking and counting herself.

Improper entries in the passbook. In some factories each home worker is allotted a number and provided with a passbook containing the details of the number of *beedis* she has turned in and the wages due to her. This book is checked by the inspector of excise. However, wage cuts due to shortage or in other words actual wages paid to each worker are never entered in the passbook. The details of shortage of *beedis* of each worker are maintained separately by the contractor and wages are cut accordingly. In other words, wage details entered in the book necessarily mean that wage has been paid to the women.

Irregularity of work. The supply of raw material in a number of branches is reported to be sufficient for only four days a week. Furthermore, the quantum of work given to the worker depends on the sweet will of the contractor. Also during the monsoon there is no *beedi* production and often workers find themselves unemployed without any compensation. As a result, these women workers are put to a lot of hardship.

Non-payment of bonus. There is no system of paying bonus to workers. Some branches do pay a bonus—20 paise per day is deducted from the wages and eventually Rs 30-40 is paid as bonus per year.

Indebtedness. The shortage of raw material, seasonality of work and intermittent layoffs force the workers to seek loans at very high rates of interest (40 per cent per month) from local money lenders. The result of this situation is that most of the families are chronically indebted.

Pledging of children. The occurrence of any religious or social function means additional expenditure to the worker ranging from Rs 500-Rs 2,000 or more. Workers often borrow from their employers by pledging their children for want of any other security: the child is forced to work for the employer for a very low wage (Rs 1.50) and for long hours of work (10-12 hours per day) till the parent is able to repay the loan. The employer justifies the abysmally low wage paid to the child as payment towards interest on the loan but not towards the principal. The child is bonded to the employer till the principal is repaid.

Inadequacy of the Beedi and Cigar Workers (Welfare) Act of 1966. The Act's definition of 'establishment' has been so twisted by the employer that it ignores in toto the existence of the home workers. As the women workers' names are found nowhere in the records of either the sub-contractor or the principal employer, neither of them feels responsible for their welfare.

Non-recognition by Unions and the State Labour Departments. Apparently, the local unions have not been concerned with the problems of women workers because they are not members of any union.

Union leaders argue that since, their husbands are already members of their unions, women workers are entitled to the benefit of union membership. Such an argument unfortunately ignores the existence of women workers who are otherwise destitute or with husbands not necessarily employed in the *beedi* industry. The State Labour Department, on the other hand, appears to be too helpless to identify women workers because of their sheer number and the absence of any records with the employer. As a consequence, the women workers do not get any identification card which would entitle them to medical benefits from the *Beedi Workers Welfare Fund* dispensary.

To sum up, our survey of the various *beedi* production pockets in Vellore, our discussions with women home workers, trade union leaders and other officials related to the industry revealed the following:

- (a) the weak bargaining position of the workers in general and of women home workers in particular involved in the various stages of *beedi* production;
- (b) non-recognition by both the employer and the trade union organisations of women as an important segment of the labour force and their substantial contribution to the *beedi* industry;
- (c) total lack of organisation of any kind among the women workers to fight for their rights;
- (d) complete dependence of the women on the industry in view of the fact that there are no alternative sources of employment;
- (e) incidence of chronic illiteracy among workers;
- (f) high incidence of excessive drinking by the men thereby adding to the misery of women workers;
- (g) total apathy of the people who matter to the problems of these women workers and to providing them with welfare assistance;
- (h) inability of the Beedi and Cigar Workers (Employment Conditions) Act 1966 to have any impact on the welfare of women workers in the *beedi* industry.

There is no single solution to the plethora of problems the women face either as home workers or as individuals. Certainly disbursement of loans on a selective basis is no answer. What is required is to help them to help themselves. The first step in this process is to facilitate an awareness of their shared problems and arrange a forum where understanding and solidarity can develop. It was precisely this that led us to promote an action programme for the women workers in the *beedi* industry in Vellore.

ACTION PROGRAMME

Selection of participants

The preliminary survey outlined in the first part familiarised us with the area and working conditions of women workers in the *beedi*

industry. After the survey we once again went to the selected areas—Saidapet, Chowk Maidan Virudhampatti and Satvachari—to discuss with the women workers in group meetings the idea of collective action. The immediate impression of the women was that a group had come from Delhi to provide them either loans or employment. However, it was made clear to them that there was no offer of any special assistance but rather our endeavour was to bring women workers from different areas of Vellore together to reflect on their problems collectively. We also informed them that we would pay them the minimum wages for five days to compensate for their absence from work.

The response was not particularly overwhelming but enthusiastic enough to proceed with the selection of participants. We selected women workers from each area who were: from different sub-occupations in *beedi* making such as cutting, rolling labelling, folding etc.; willing to participate for all the five days; able to articulate community problems; somewhat educated; and in the age group of 18-50. A total of 44 participants were selected. Their level of education was so low that only 10 had some formal education and a few others able to read and write.

At this juncture in one predominantly Muslim locality the women expressed reservation about their participation. The local contractor had spread a rumour to the effect that women going to the programme would be converted to Christianity and also be made to eat pork. And in another locality, the workers expressed the fear that the contractor would not employ them after an absence of five days.

We visited these women again on the eve of the programme which was to be held during March 18-22. A worker in each area was nominated to take the responsibility of bringing the other workers to the venue of the programme and paid the bus fare for the group. The venue for the programme was a large marriage hall located in the heart of Vellore town and away from the *beedi* pockets. It was easily accessible by local transport.

The programme, which began with 100 per cent attendance, focused on problem identification, organisational form, dynamics of collective action, issues of leadership, interface and action plan.

Problem identification

The participants were subdivided into five groups, each consisting of women from different localities and from all sub-occupations. The task before them was to reflect on their problems in a brainstorming session without any structure. Every group had at least two educated women so that they could list problems posed by all group

members on flip charts. As soon as the small group work was complete, one representative from each group presented a report at a general session. These presentations were followed by discussions in which participants were invited to make comments based on their experience.

From the discussions that followed a number of common problems emerged which fall under four broad categories:

Employment: (a) non-implementation of revised minimum wages; (b) improper disbursement of wages; (c) abysmally low wages for labelling; (d) inadequate supply of raw materials; (e) purchase of gum and yarn for labelling by themselves; (f) improper counting of *beedis*; (g) big wage cuts for shortage of *beedis*; (h) irregularity of employment and illegal layoffs; and (i) seasonality of work.

Health: (a) high incidence of T. B., asthma, easnophilia, nervous disorder etc.; (b) no access to *beedi* workers dispensary for women workers; and (c) inadequate medical attention in government hospitals.

Socio-economic: (a) dowry; (b) alcoholism and gambling among males; (c) destitution; (d) child labour; (e) pledging of children for loans; (f) underemployment of educated youth in *beedi* industry; (g) high incidence of indebtedness; (h) exorbitant rates of interest on loans (40 per cent per month); and (i) no alternative sources of employment and income

Government related: (a) exploitation of women by *panchayat* members regarding allotment of land etc.; (b) competition in fair price shops; (c) dissatisfactory functioning of mid-day meal and nutrition schemes; (d) lack of night schools for children; (e) lack of facilities for adult education; and (f) no cooperative society for women.

To heighten the participants' critical awareness of their problems we intervened to focus on two statements made during the presentation. For instance, they had said: 'For generations together we have been working in the *beedi* industry, yet we are not happy.' Another statement was: 'Howsoever good the work we do, we do not seem to be getting anywhere.' These statements were repeated so that the women could reflect on why they began to examine these problems only now and not earlier.

From what one woman said, it was apparent that they were becoming aware of changes in the relations of production in the *beedi* industry and related these changes to the persistence of their weak bargaining position vis-a-vis the employer. She further explained that during the 1950s the production system was characterised by a feudal relationship between employer and worker. There was no strict check on the amount of raw material supplied to the worker nor on the *beedis* produced. The wage rates were very low. Yet the women had not complained about the working of the system.

In 1959, workers went on strike and a wage increase was demanded from Rs 1.50 to Rs 1.75. The strike was successful in that the employer agreed to the hike in wages but not before compelling the workers to agree to a system of checking the quantum of raw materials applied to them for a pre-determined number of *beedis* to be rolled. Thus began the downward slide in the bargaining power of the workers. Now they were compelled to produce a certain number of *beedis* for a given quantity of raw material, and any shortage, either due to defective leaves or lack of tobacco, meant a wage cut.

Furthermore, with the *Beedi* and Cigar Workers Act, 1966, several large factories wound up and a new type of production pattern in *beedi* manufacture emerged with the accent on the middleman or contractor. The contractor collected the raw materials in large quantities from the employer and in turn distributed them in smaller quantities to the home workers. The *beedis* rolled were later given to another set of workers for labelling.

The contractors by and large supply less raw material necessary for the number of *beedis* to be rolled. Thus either due to defective leaves or shortage of tobacco the workers generally fall short of the target and have to accept a wage cut. Added to this is the devious means the contractor uses in counting *beedis* and giving them for labelling. All these mean wage cuts for workers and profit for the contractor. The contractor also gets a commission from the employer for arranging his requirement of rolled and labelled *beedis*. Thus from the commission of employers and wage cuts the contractor is doubly assured of his earnings. Employers can easily afford the commission they pay to the contractors, but for women workers any loss of earnings means enormous suffering. If they protest they risk losing their jobs because of the availability of other women workers and the fact that they are unorganised.

In the process of sharing and analysis the participants realised that employers (contractor/branch/factory owner) from whom they expected at least fair wages and medical facilities were systematically exploiting them. They then turned their attention to government agencies and politicians, and once again their experience was not encouraging. They now found themselves in a situation of extreme helplessness where they thought that we, as organisers of the programme, could be relied upon for assistance. For instance they said:

We are happy that we have given you all our problems.

We feel relieved for having unburdened ourselves.

Nobody has come forward thus far to ask us about our problems. We are pleased that you have given us a hearing. This has given us confidence.

We will be still more pleased if you could get us a raise in wages.

We feel that you would do something good to us.

These statements are indicative of their dependency, which they transferred from employer to government and now to us. To discourage this dependency on us, we made clear that not much could be expected from us. At this stage they became hostile towards us demanding an explanation as to why we came there at all if we could do nothing for them. In return we clarified our role once again by saying, 'We are here to help you to get together so that you can reflect as a group on your problems.'

The situation was dramatic: on the one hand, they expressed their disbelief in external agencies which promised them the moon and did not give them even a morsel, while on the other we were reiterating our inability to do much for them and yet they were unwilling to believe us. To help them come to terms with reality we asked them what they would do after we went away if they were to depend on us to solve their problems? Their response was:

'Even if you go away we are confident that you are with us'; and 'We are certain that the forty of us can bring together four thousand women if you want us to do so. We will unite and fight for our rights.'

The last statement reflected once again their dependency on us and to counter it we replied that the issue now was not what we wanted but rather what they did. They said that it was their desire to organise themselves for their betterment. We pointed out that it was not so easy to unite and stay together in their situation of exploitation. They might like to probe into the sources of exploitation before thinking of ways to achieve unity. We made this suggestion because we perceived that their talk of unity was more a reaction to our assertion of their dependency on us than a well reasoned response to their situation.

Sources of problems

The discussion on the sources of their problems led the women to identify two major sources: Among the *external* sources were the establishment, politicians, and government agencies; scarcity of alternative sources of employment; excess supply of labour and limited employment opportunity in the *beedi* industry and hence the weak bargaining position of the workers in general and of women workers in particular. Lack of unity among the workers was the *internal* source. This categorisation helped the women realise that they had little or no control over the external sources, whereas the

internal sources were a part of their problem over which they could exercise some control.

Need for collective action

The issue of unity therefore came up once again but with a difference this time. The difference was that the women were conscious of the difficulties involved in organising themselves for collective action. They believed that any attempt on their part to organise themselves would be scuttled by their employers and they would lose their jobs. Employers could disrupt any organised movement of the women because even the police were in league with them. Given this situation, the women felt totally helpless, and even the idea of unionising themselves did not appear to be a viable alternative.

Having sensed the women's helplessness, we enquired whether they could think of some other approach to their problems in case organisation for action was not a viable method. This led to a listing of issues which their organisation limited as its role might be, could take up. Brainstorming in small groups, they felt that their organisation should:

think in terms of alternative occupations in order to improve their economic position;

seek the aid of government in case they went on strike against employers;

demand from the government fair price shops, medical facilities, night schools for children, housing and aid for destitutes;

seek aid from government so that they could run a women's cooperative;

arrange for loans with low rates of interest for the purchase of raw materials;

procure raw materials;

demand government stipulated wages from the employer;

demand wages for weekly holidays;

ask for recording of shortages in the number of *beddis* and proportionate wage cuts in the passbook;

fight against social evils such as dowry, alcohol abuse, wife-beating etc.;

remain united irrespective of caste, creed or colony of its members.

In the course of the discussion the women were helped to understand how wide the scope of their organised activities could be though they had initially attributed a very limited role to it. At the same time we

noticed that most of the issues they had mentioned were basically *demands* and the organisation was perceived as something separate from themselves. This meant transference of their dependency from us to the organisation. In order to help them see this point we asked them whether there could be an organisation without people. This question further made them reflect on the issue of membership and their participation in organised activities. It gradually dawned on them that they had been rather unwilling to take on individual responsibility and see organisation as a medium of collective action.

By now it was apparent that the women had undergone a definite change in their thinking. They realised that they could no longer rely on external agencies for their betterment and perceived the necessity of collective action by themselves.

Dynamics of collective action

Till now the discussion had focused on the issue of unity in the context of forming an effective organisation for collective action. In order to illustrate the dynamics of collective action we conducted an exercise which aimed at making the women aware of the benefits of unity and the costs of conflict within the group.

For the exercise, the women were divided into two groups and each group was given a set of dummy arrows to shoot against each other in ten rounds. A round consisted of shooting any number of arrows by each group against the other. The difference in the number of arrows shot between the groups was to be paid in a cash equivalent to the group which shot the higher number of arrows. If the number of arrows shot was the same, both groups paid Re 1 each to the trainer. On the other hand, if both the groups decided not to shoot arrows against each other the trainer had to pay Re 1 to each group. Each group had a leader. There were observers on both sides from whom two women were asked to act as spies by the trainer. The spies' task was to instigate the members of either group to shoot more arrows. After rounds 3, 7, and 9 the leaders of both groups were given a chance to discuss among themselves a common strategy to shoot arrows against each other.

In the process of the exercise, the trust between the two groups gradually decreased and distrust was accentuated by the presence of spies who played a double game. Despite three meetings between leaders, prior to the beginning of 4th, 8th and 10th rounds a common strategy to gain larger payoffs generated only more distrust between them. Leaders and their respective group members were more keen to outwit each other rather than to think in terms of a strategy for both groups to maximise gains from the trainer. At the end of ten

rounds when the total loss and gain of both groups was calculated, it was found that the trainers had gained the most.

The analysis of the failure of the women to maximise their payoffs showed that each group was concerned about its own welfare rather than that of the total community. It led us to rivalry among the women despite the option of not fighting and winning money from the trainers.

The women identified trainers with employers or contractors and spies with their henchmen. When they understood this, it dawned on them that whatever happened in the exercise was akin to their real life situation. They now clearly saw how employers and the middlemen could divide them and prevent them from getting organised. For them unity now acquired a new meaning. It meant interpersonal and trusted solidarity and concern about the welfare of a wider community.

Issue of leadership

The women saw the possibility that employers could have their henchmen among them to create distrust, buy up their leaders and create fractions among them. In this context, when the question of leadership was discussed, the issue was whether a leader should be someone from among them or an outsider. Some were in favour of an outside leader because she could be easily punished and thrown out if she was bought off by an employer. However, the rest of the women argued that they would definitely have more faith in one of their own group than in an outsider. They saw the need of electing a leader who was educated, capable, trustworthy, honest, sympathetic and able to treat everyone equally.

To summarise, we have thus far outlined the processes involved in helping the participants to

- think critically about their problems and their causes;
- realise the futility of their dependency on external agencies for solving their problems;
- perceive the strength of collective action as compared to individual action;
- experience the dynamics of conflict and collaboration in collective action;
- understand the advantages of having a leader from among themselves;
- spell out the qualities of the kind of leader they wanted.

In other words from a situation of extreme helplessness, the women gradually moved towards confidence in themselves and belief in the strength of collective action.

Interface

This was the time when the participants were ready to have an interface with experts to enquire about their legal rights regarding payment of wages, workers'-compensation, women's rights, inheritance, rights with regard to marital discord, and with officials to enquire about loan facilities, welfare measures of the government, etc. A leading advocate, a former member of the district legal aid committee, the Industrial Development Officer of the Bank of India, the lead Bank in the district, and the District Social Welfare Officer were invited to meet the women.

At the meeting with the Industrial Development Officer of the Indian Bank, he focused on the following issues:

- lending schemes for individuals and cooperatives with or without guarantees;
- low rates of interest charged compared to the exorbitant rates of interest charged by money-lenders;
- special schemes for educated and unemployed youth;
- loan schemes under the Prime Minister's 20-Point Programme;
- schemes under Tamil Nadu Economic Development Corporation for Backward Classes;
- advantages of loans from the bank on a cooperative basis.

The Officer spoke at length about the bank having lent money to individual *beedi* workers in Guddiyatam and handloom weavers of Ranipet, Tamil Nadu. The participants were generally receptive to the talk and raised a number of pertinent questions. However, the reaction of some participants was dramatic. One of them, for instance, said to the Officer:

We people who live few miles of your bank have *never* heard of your schemes till now whereas your bank seems to be helping workers like us elsewhere and in other places. How came your bank, situated so close by and having been established years ago has never cared for us? Did it have to take some one from Delhi to make you come and talk to us? What have you been doing all these years? These friends (referring to us) have come all the way from New Delhi to make you pay us a visit?

The second session in the interface was with the advocate who was to speak to the women on issues relating to women's legal rights. His talk focused on:

- The district legal aid committees and its functions, especially legal assistance to the poor;

different Acts, according to Hindu and Muslim law, which have been introduced for the protection of women and their implications for women's rights;

Acts introduced by the Parliament for protection of workers such as the Minimum Wages Act, Payment of Workers' Compensation, etc.

His talk was illustrated with examples drawn from every day experience of the women. At the same time, he also stressed the point that group action would strengthen their demands rather than sporadic individual attempts for legal assistance. This session was greatly appreciated by the participants.

The last session in the interface consisted of an address by the District Social Welfare Officer who appeared to be very eager to know women *beedi* workers, especially since she had no contact with them so far. Her presentation to the women covered:

Schemes for women, including the very poor and destitute, regarding alternative sources of employment;

Educational aid for females with various levels of formal schooling;

Schemes for starting women's cooperatives for various purposes;

Loans for cooperatives;

Schemes for training in tailoring, typing and shorthand;

Special schemes under the Prime Minister's 20-Point Programme;

The assistance that she could give them in her official capacity.

The District Social Welfare Officer stressed the importance of organised group action and full support in any effort to form cooperatives to produce of various consumer items, including *beedis*. In this context she also mentioned the role of the Tamil Nadu Women Economic Industrial Development Corporation in marketing the products of women's cooperatives.

Action plan

To plan collective and concrete action the women who came from different areas of Vellore thought of organising immediately meetings in their localities with the idea of setting up their own organisation. A representative would be selected from each area and these representatives in turn would meet and decide the issues to take up first. They thought that they would consider in the beginning non-controversial issues so as not to invite the wrath of the employer. Some of these issues were:

education for illiterate women;

social evils like dowry and drunkenness;

assistance from the District Social Welfare Officer for alternative sources of employment and income.

The representatives would meet once a month to review progress of their collective action.

Conclusion

This survey and action research programme to enable women *beedi* workers to organise themselves has been a limited effort. Though no attempt is made here to generalise this experience, certain aspects have a wider relevance.

The situation of the women workers and their response reveal their weak bargaining position not only as women workers but as workers participating in the putting-out system which, by dividing the labour force in terms of domestic units, makes it difficult for women workers to come together for organised action on their common interests.

Second, existing organisations like trade unions, which are male dominated, do not feel any responsibility for the conditions of women workers who continue to be exploited without any legal protection. Third, welfare programmes for women, even when they are implemented, do not benefit the women for whom they are designed. Finally, notwithstanding the fact that these women perform crucial functions in the production of *beedis* and their earnings were necessary for the survival of the household, their status in the family, the market and society remains low.

In the context of the exploitative mechanisms of the market, the role of collective action becomes important. True enough, such collective action can be organised through an external agency but there is no substitute for a people's organisation in which the women themselves can decide on the kind of action that needs to be taken to improve their work and life situation. It must be recognised that women in low income groups whose survival depends on their daily earnings are unable to bear the opportunity costs of spending much time in setting up their own organisation. The support of an external agency will continue to be required by the women workers and it will be important for such an agency not to force the pace but rather to enable the women to take collective action when they are ready for it.



PRAYAG MEHTA

"We Are Made To Mortgage Our Children"

Interviews With Women Bidi Workers Of Vellore

been enrolled as members. A group of about 50 women had travelled to Madras to participate in the first anniversary celebration. I met this group of women workers and had a spirited talk with them. The very fact that they had travelled from Vellore, leaving their work behind, showed that they were active members of the Union. The following is a brief summary of discussions held with them.

The women reside in different colonies of Vellore. Most women and many men work for the *bidi* industry there. There are some factories but most women work at home. *Bidi* manufacturing is done through various operations, as if based on division of work. Only one operation is carried out at one place. Some of the women are engaged in rolling *bidis*, others in labelling them, some others in putting *bidis* in bundles and a few others in packaging them. Practically every one in the family, from a five year old child to the oldest, helps to

make and process *bidis*. *Bidis* are sold under different brand names such as Goat, 100 Mark, L.R.K. 75 Jaffar *Bidi*, 100 Mark *Bidi*, T.S. *Bidi*, Lakshmi *Bidi*. The 100 Mark *Bidi* is probably the largest manufacturer.

Many of them have been working for more than 15 to 20 years without any break. The questions of leave, sickness benefit or bonus do not arise. Their work is not regular. Some of them get work only three days a week. Nobody gets work more than four days a week. The work depends on supply of raw materials, and income depends on the number of *bidis* rolled or labelled. They are tightly controlled by the employers or contractors who may refuse to give them work on any day of the week.

Each brand has its own market place. Workers have to go to respective marketplaces to obtain work and their wages. Generally when employers supply the material for 1,500 *bidis*, the material is so

much and there is a deficit of 300 *bidis*. The workers have to buy raw materials like tendu leaves, tobacco, and replace the missing material in order to roll and deliver the required number, 1,500 *bidis*. Some of the women workers employ children to fold leaves, at the rate of Rs 2 a day. The women's net earnings, therefore, about Rs 4 on a working day which is 10 to 12 hours long. Their weekly earnings range from Rs 12 to 16.

"How do you manage with such low wages?"

Spontaneously came the response: "We mortgage children." There were whispers in the group. We also looked around to gauge the significance of the statement. Then a middle aged woman stood up and said: "I have mortgaged my seven year old girl, and eight year old boy to a Sheth three years ago for a loan of Rs 200. Two years later, my husband was mortgaged to the same Sheth for a loan of Rs 200. My two children and their father roll 4,000 *bidis* a day. They work all the time for the master. Their total wage should be at least Rs 20 a day. However, the Sheth has been paying them each Rs 2-50 a day, out of which he deducts half the money every day. My husband also gets the same wage as the children. The Sheth does not give them any food. They come home to eat. They work for him all the time and have to report daily to the Sheth at 8 p.m."

We were started to hear the story. In response to our query: "How is it possible?" there was a mild commotion in the group. Everyone began speaking to everyone else. They were surprised that we did not know about such a widespread and common practice. They said: "All of us are forced to mortgage our children. What else can we do? When we mortgage other items to the Sheth, we lose control over these items, like our utensils and jewelry. We don't have these any more. We have only children. When we mortgage them, we lose control over them, as we lose control over other items." The women then gave several other instances of mortgaged child labour.

An old sickly woman stood up. She is Kannamma. She said: "I took

a loan of Rs 500 for the funeral of my husband, four years ago. He was a driver. He was killed in a road accident. In exchange I gave my 10 year old boy, 17 year old boy and 10 year old girl. Since then, they have been rolling *bidis* for the Sheth. They roll 4,000 *bidis* a day. Their daily wage should be at least Rs 20 a day. However, the three children together have been getting Rs 12 a day. The Sheth has been deducting Rs 8 every day since then." She was in tears while saying: "I have lost my children. I have not been able to pay Rs 500 as yet." Another woman stood up. She is Saroja. She said: "Our grandchildren are also mortgaged. We are like bonded labour. We are slaves. We just give birth to children and then leave them to work for the moneylenders. We can ask no questions. We have to follow them, like slaves. Husband, children, grandchildren all work in this way. All are slaves."

The employed working mothers were in real agony. It was writ large on their faces. In voices choked with emotion, they described how mercilessly their children are beaten by the moneylender employers. Most of the children are very young when mortgaged. It is difficult for them to work all the time. Sometimes they do not go. The Sheth then beats them severely. Their fingers are injured by cutting. A woman added: "Children are beaten by employers when they don't go to work for them. At times, we also beat our children and drive them to go and work for the Sheth." She broke down while narrating this tale of woe and cruelty.

Dying In Bondage

"You have already paid much more than the loan you took years ago."

"Yes", the women replied, "We have paid much more to the Sheth but when we ask for our children back, he demands Rs 500 or Rs 200, that is, the principal amount of the loan originally taken. We never have so much money with us. Therefore we cannot get our children back. They continue to be mortgaged with the Sheth."

Another mother added: "The

Sheth put his fingers in the eyes of my daughter. He always keeps a stick in his hand and beats our children." The next one said: "I brought back my daughter from the Sheth because he used to beat her and mistreat her. I then mortgaged her to a new Sheth for Rs 450 and paid this amount to the earlier Sheth. The new employer behaved well for a month or so, thereafter he also started beating the child." Another mother added: "I took my child to the Christian Medical Hospital. Doctors told me that she has TB. She is 17 years old. I cannot do anything. She has to go and work for the Sheth. The doctors have refused to treat her because we are not able to give her rest, food and medicine."

"What brought you to the union, what did you get?" There was a chorus of voices. The union will help us to get loans from the bank. We can then purchase raw materials." They were aware of the Kerala Dinesh Bidi Workers Cooperative. When questioned, they said: "Workers of that cooperative get bonus, leave and Rs 12 a day as regular wage. We would very much like to join such a cooperative."

"How will you get your children back from the Sheth?"

They had no answer. They looked at us, probably for an answer.

Visit To Vellore Bidi Areas

Vellore is 130 kms southwest of Madras. As one enters the township, widespread *bidi* manufacturing becomes visibly clear. There are big boards displaying different brands of *bidis*. In hotels and other such places, *bidi* calendars greet you. Workers can be seen sitting in front of their small hutments or shops rolling or labelling *bidis*.

We visited three important areas where women are engaged in *bidi* manufacturing. Viruhapatti is a famous *bidi mandi* of Vellore. Women and children are engaged here in rolling *bidis* for various brand names. We talked to about 30 women including some children in a small group meeting. Saidpet main road is another important

This survey was done for National Labour Institute, New Delhi.

area where women are engaged in labelling *bidis*. Women in Virudhapatti area specialise in rolling *bidis* and women at Saidapet specialise in labelling *bidis*. We met another small group of 30 women including some children here. The Vellore unit of the National Union of Working Women had quickly convened a meeting of women *bidi* workers at their branch office. About 60 more women including some children participated in this meeting. Thus, we met more than 100 women in these three areas.

In Virudhapatti, both women and children continued to roll *bidis* while talking to us. Their fingers were all the time busy rolling the tendu leaf and converting it into a *bidi*. One could see that they were doing their job with great skill. At the same time, some of them were also talking quite actively. The children, if anything, were rolling *bidis* more efficiently, their fingers working almost automatically. At Saidapet also, women continued labelling *bidis* while they were talking to us. Here also, the children were engaged in doing the same task. The swiftness of their fingers in cutting slips of paper, labelling, putting gum, tying *bidi* with a thread, and in carrying out other operations, was quite conspicuous. It was interesting to note that women worked in groups at some central place in their housing colonies.

Most of the women had formerly been working on various jobs relating to *bidi* making. Some of them had some land in nearby villages, which was taken away for developing a new township. Most other women belonged to families of landless agricultural labourers. They were driven to town in search of work.

In the colonies visited, most of the families, particularly women and children, were engaged in *bidi* manufacture. Most of the males were doing odd manual jobs. Some of them were engaged in pulling rickshaws, others sometimes worked as agricultural labourers. The males earned Rs 5 to 6 per day, whenever they got work. The work was quite irregular and they earned therefore only on three or four days of the week.

Workers Pay For Wastage

During discussions with *bidi* rollers at Virudhapatti, the women gave precise information about their income. They have to pay 90 paise to someone to cut leaves for 1,000 *bidis*. They have to purchase thread themselves. Out of the tobacco supplied, one fourth to half a kilo flies away or is wasted. They have to purchase this at Rs 7 a kilo. Out of 1,000 given by the employer, there is usually a deficit of 150 to 200 leaves. They have to buy new leaves at Rs 5 a kilo.

Two members of a family together make 2,000 *bidis* a day. They are paid Rs 7 per 1,000 *bidis*. They get work only for a few days in the week. They have material only for 10,000 *bidis* a week. Their weekly gross earning is therefore Rs 70 a week. On an average, they have to spend Rs 12 a week in replacement of wasted or poor quality material and toward forced cuts which the employers impose while paying them for *bidis* rolled. Their net earning, therefore, is Rs 58 a week, that is, about Rs 20 a person a week. Their daily income comes to Rs 3 a person.

Living In Fear

At the Saidapet main road colony, women are engaged in labelling *bidis*. Practically every woman in this area is employed in labelling *bidis*. They work for 100 Mark *bidi* of Bhodshah Bai. Women work in small groups by getting together at some place in front of their huts in the colony. Every morning they go to the *mandis* and bring *bidis* for labelling. The supply depends on the sweet will of the employer or contractor.

The women here gave the following information about their earning from labelling *bidis*. They have to spend on gum at Rs 2.50 a kilo, and on thread 50 paise for 10,000 *bidis*. A strip of the brand name has to be purchased. They are paid a wage of 45 paise per 1,000 *bidis* labelled. They can label about 8,000 *bidis* a day. Of course, two to three women have to work together. Therefore, the earnings come to Rs 5 a day.

However, they may not get work every day. On an average, they get work only three to four days a week.

The employer or contractor is free to reject the material. In that case, he may not give them further *bidis* to label. The women have this fear all the time. They have to employ some children for assistance in odd jobs. They pay each child 15 paise per 10,000 *bidis* labelled.

Child Labour

Several children were present in the group meetings. They carried their kits with them and were very swiftly either rolling or labelling *bidis*. They were working as efficiently as their mothers. It was reported that all children above five years of age work in this colony. The children can roll 800 to 1,000 *bidis* a day or can label 6,000 *bidis* a day.

Some of the children were going to school, primarily to get the mid-day meal. They would go before the meal, get the meal, come back and then continue their work. The working mothers described case after case of how they were forced to mortgage their children to the Sheths. Three such children, who have been mortgaged in lieu of small debts, were present in the meeting. They had come home to eat as it was 11.30 a.m. Even during lunch time, they carried their kits and were engaged in rolling *bidis*. These children were Tamizh Venden, a 14 year old girl, Shiv Kumar, a 16 year old boy, and Shanti, a 16 year old girl. Tamizh Venden has been mortgaged for the last four years in exchange for Rs 400. The other two children have been also mortgaged for Rs 200 each for the last two years.

Shiv Kumar said that his mother took a loan of Rs 200 two years ago. He can earn Rs 10 a day. But he is getting only Rs 3 a day. He works 10 hours a day, six days a week. Saturday is off, without any wage. He is illiterate. He has no idea as to how the money can be paid back. He has been continually working with the money lender employer for the last two years. No account has been kept of the loan or of the labour he has been doing for the moneylender.

Jyoti, a 15 year old girl, was mortgaged for a loan of Rs 300 about six years ago. Since then she has been working with the money lender employer. She has been

rolling *bidis* since she was seven years old. The employer has fixed her wage at Rs 4 a day, of which he deducts Rs 2 daily, in lieu of the loan. She takes home Rs 2. However, this arrangement has been existing only for the last three years. For the first three years, she carried home only Re 1 a day. Shiv Kumar is Jyoti's brother. He is now 13 years old. A loan of Rs 200 was taken on him six years ago from the same money-lender employer. He has also been working for the last six years. The rates of payment are the same for him as for his sister.

The two children work at the place of the employer for some time and the rest of the time they work at home. They carry the material with them wherever they go. However, they have strict orders to report to the employer every evening at 8 p.m. with the rolled *bidis*. Their brand is Babu *Bidi*. They reported that five persons work in the room at the employer's place. Their mother also is a *bidi* worker who rolls *bidis* at home. She was also present at the meeting. She has no idea as to how she would pay back the entire amount.

"Only Listen, No Questions"

An old woman stood up and said: "I have mortgaged my child for Rs 100. My entire body is stiff for no rest, no help. The contractors are always after us. They withdraw material and we have no work. My daily earning is less than Rs 2. How can I exist on such income?"

At the meeting and discussions at Madras and later at Vellore, women talked freely about their relations with their employers. "The rule is—just listen and do as asked to do. Take whatever material is given. Ask no question." Any question about the quality and quantity of material supplied, payments made for *bidis* rolled or labelled is a very serious disqualification which results in immediate dismissal from work. The contractors just refuse to supply raw material, without which women are helpless. "We have to listen to them, do what they say and they do not listen to us." This is how the women described their working situation.



We told the women *bidi* workers about the *bidi* workers' welfare fund. They had not heard about this programme. They have not availed of any such welfare benefit. Tuberculosis, respiratory and other diseases are quite common among them. They go to the Christian Medical Hospital to "get some injection." There also, doctors do not like to treat them.

When asked whether they themselves were bonded or mortgaged when they were children, most of them said: "No. Conditions were

not so bad in our time." Two young girls reported that their husbands had paid back the loan and freed them from the moneylenders. The women further said: "In our days, there was no such poverty and parents did not have to mortgage their children." □

Thanks are due to Mrs Java Arunachalam, president, National Union of Working Women, Mrs Nandani Azad and other active office bearers of the NUWW, who enabled me to talk to the Tamil speaking women workers.

No VPP

Many readers write asking us to send them copies by VPP. This works out very very expensive and is a cumbersome procedure. If you want to order one or more copies, please send the price by money order or cheque, and we will then send you copies by ordinary bookpost.

Help Us Be More Efficient

1. When sending your subscription, please write your full address in block letters, with the pin code number. This is especially necessary if you are sending a money order.
2. When you write a letter to us, please write your full address, even if you are a regular correspondent. This helps us reply to you promptly.
3. When renewing your subscription, please mention your old subscription number. This number appears on the envelope of every copy sent to you.
4. If you can, please do send a stamped, self addressed envelope or inland letter form. This helps Manushi cut down overhead costs.

MANUSHI

NUMBER TWENTY TWO, 1984



Neither A Complete Success Nor A Total Failure

Report Of A SEWA Campaign To Organise
Bidi Workers

I first met Anasuya when she joined SEWA as an organiser. She was 20 years old. She belongs to a community of *bidi* workers and was the first girl in her family to go to college. I didn't see much of her at first because her job was to mobilise savings for the SEWA bank and I was the SEWA research expert. We collaborated in a campaign to organise *bidi* workers. It was an average SEWA campaign, not completely successful, nor a total failure. Many other SEWA campaigns were going on at the same time but I have deliberately left them out to concentrate on telling the story of "How the *bidi* workers got their identity cards."

The story begins when Anasuya brings a 40 year old, *pan* chewing woman to Eia Bhai (Elaben), SEWA's general secretary. She introduces the woman as Zohra Bibi, a *bidi* worker from Patan. Patan is a small town, 200 km away from Ahmedabad and famous for its weaving and *bidi* making.

"There are thousands of *bidi* workers there", Zohra Bibi tells us. "We have no other work and are very poor."

"Can't we organise them?", Anasuya asks eagerly. "My brothers have given me permission to go to Patan."

"She can stay in my house", adds Zohra Bibi.

"Maybe we can start with a survey of the *bidi* workers' socio-economic conditions", Elaben agrees.

So Anasuya and I design a survey form with simple questions about the *bidi* worker's family background, her earnings and working conditions. Armed with 200 copies

Most reports sent to us tend to mention only the positive outcome of various struggles. We found this report, by one of the full time workers of SEWA, Ahmedabad, particularly useful because it gives an idea of the actual zig zag process which most organising efforts go through and the persistence required to make very very small gains.

of the survey questionnaire, Anasuya takes the early morning bus to Patan where she is welcomed by Zohra Bibi and her numerous relatives. "The women were happy to see me", Anasuya reports later. "They offered me water and then sat down to roll *bidis* as they answered the questions. Sometimes they offered me tea or *sherbet*. One woman even invited me to her son's wedding. But one sleazy Mehmood Bhai kept following me around. If I asked a woman a question he wouldn't let her speak but would insist on answering for her."

Later we found out that Mehmood Bhai is a member of Major Mahajan and a spy for the contractors. The Major Mahajan, or Textile Labour Organisation is a trade union with branches all over Gujarat.

The results of the survey show that most of the *bidi* workers in Patan are Muslim women. All are homeworkers. Most work for a contractor, a few directly for *bidi* traders. The women are supplied tobacco and tendu leaves in their houses and paid four to five rupees for a thousand *bidis*—about half of the legal minimum wage. Of the

women 21 percent are sole supporters of their families. The rest contribute substantially to the family income. Children help to dry the *bidi* leaves and roll the *bidis*. The houses are full of tobacco dust and most of the women have respiratory diseases. Most houses are *pucca* but in dilapidated condition. Although most women do not wear burkhas they are not allowed to leave their *mohallas*. Most women are illiterate.

The survey over, Anasuya calls a meeting of the *bidi* workers. I take the morning bus to Patan and am surprised to find over 200 of these usually sequestered women gathered under a banyan tree.

"At first my husband forbade me to attend meetings. But after he met Anasuya, he saw she is a good and simple girl and knew there would be no harm in the meeting", Karima Bibi explains to me.

"I had to go to each woman's house to convince her", Anasuya says. "Habib Bhai, who owns a garage and is much respected by the Muslims, was very helpful to me. He told the women that *bidi* workers should go to the meeting and form a union. With his support, I could persuade many women to come."

Anasuya begins the meeting by explaining SEWA's work with women in the unorganised sector. Then I talk about the benefits of forming a union. The women talk about their problems.

"I work 10 hours a day and earn only five rupees", Hava Bibi says. "My husband has TB and we have four children."

"The contractor gives us less tobacco and we have to make up the deficit from our own earnings", complains Karima Bibi.

"The government has opened a clinic for *bidi* workers but the doctor refuses to treat us," says little Khatun. "I had high fever and my mother took me to the clinic which is right in front of our house. But the doctor said we were not *bidi* workers because we didn't have identity cards. My mother showed my hands, all stained with tobacco, but he still wouldn't believe us. So we had to go to a private doctor, who charged Rs 25."

"The same happened to me", one woman says. Others nod their heads.

"Shall we take up this problem right away?" I ask, "All in favour raise your hands." All hands go up.

"Let us form a committee and go to the clinic", I suggest. The women nominate Zohra Bibi, Hava Bibi and Karima Bibi, Anasuya and me, and we proceed to the clinic.

A board outside a small stone building informs us that this is the *Bidi* Workers' Welfare Centre (under *Bidi* and Cigar Workers Welfare Act). One room is the *bidi* workers' clinic, the rest are offices. We go in and a short, thin, partly bald man looks up nervously. The nameplate on his desk says 'N. Swaminathan, welfare officer.' Mr Swaminathan offers chairs to Anasuya and me and gestures for the Muslim women to sit on the floor. Instead, we share the two chairs among the five of us, each balancing on half a buttock.

The welfare officer tells us that the centre is funded from the *bidi* workers' welfare fund, which is collected from a tax on *bidi*. The clinic is supposed to treat *bidi* workers free. It is also supposed to give scholarships to *bidi* workers' children and subsidies for them to build houses. But all this is only for

bidi workers who have identity cards.

"Nobody in Patan has identity cards", exclaims Zohra Bibi. "Our *maliks* (owners) will never give us such cards!"

"Rules are rules", says Swaminathan, ending the conversation. As we go out we see the doctor asleep on a *charpai* in his empty clinic.

Out in the street, I suggest we go and talk to the *malik*. "You go,

He'll get angry if he sees us", says Karima Bibi.

"We are your representatives. Without you we have no standing," Anasuya insists.

There is a moment of indecision, then Hava Bibi says "I'll go. I'm not afraid of that blood sucker." So we all decide to go to the biggest *malik*, Amritlal Thakker.

Thakker has two shops in the main bazar. One shop sells plastic goods and the other is stocked with



A worker making *bidis*

boxes of *bidis* and chewing tobacco. There is a big green and yellow sign on the awning "Smoke Amrit *Bidi*. They are No. 1", with a painting of a smiling Amritlal. We see Amrit Bhai sitting at his strongbox. He is about fifty, wearing a white kurta and dhoti, and has an unshaven stubble of beard.

"What do you want?" he asks me suspiciously. Then he sees Hava Bibi climbing into his shop. "Down, down, you", he shouts. Hava Bibi scuttles down.

In response to my explanations about the *bidi* clinic he says: "I am only a trader, not an employer. I know nothing about identity cards." He refuses to talk any more.

We return to the banyan tree where the *bidi* women are patiently waiting for us. A few men *bidi* workers have joined them. "The owners don't want to give us identity cards because that will establish an employer-employee relationship and then they will have to pay minimum wages", the men tell us.

I describe what happened and ask what we should do next. "We should go on strike", shouts one of the men. The women are silent. One or two shake their heads.

"Can't the government do anything?" asks a woman timidly. Finally the women decide to present a memorandum to the labour commissioner.

Anasuya and I return to Ahmedabad. We are followed by a frantic letter from Hava Bibi: "My contractor has stopped giving me work. He says if you want work go to SEWA—" Anasuya takes the next bus to Patan. "Hava Bibi is not getting work", Anasuya reports on her return the next day. "Her daughter is ill and her husband" has TB. She has no food in her house. She doesn't even have anything to pawn. I went to see the contractor, Bhure Khan, to persuade him to take Hava Bibi back. But he only shouted at me. "Go back to Ahmedabad. You are spoiling our (Muslim) women with your loose ways."

The other women too are unwilling to help. The atmosphere seems to have changed. "I tried to call a meeting of the *bidi* women but no one came. When I went to their houses they turned their faces away from me", Anasuya says.

Karima Bibi, who has accompanied Anasuya, explains: "Everybody is afraid. The contractors are making an example of Hava Bibi."

What next? Of course, SEWA's lawyer files a case for reinstatement in the labour court. But it will be years before the case is even heard, let alone decided. Meanwhile, what will Hava Bibi and her family eat?

Hava Bibi is no stranger to adversity. Not does she give up so easily. "If I could get a loan, I could do a little business in threading beads", she writes from Patan. A nationalised bank is out of the question since Hava Bibi can offer no security, and anyway it would



No retirement age

be too long before her loan gets sanctioned. Finally, Mahila SEWA Cooperative Bank agrees to give Hava Bibi a loan of Rs 300.

Meanwhile, Elaben presents a memorandum signed by 100 women to the labour commissioner. "...We request you to instruct the *bidi* traders to issue us identity cards immediately..."

"These are not all homeworkers, they are not proper employees", the labour commissioner says doubtfully.

"But the *Bidi* and Cigar Act specifically defines homeworkers as employees", Elaben replies.

"They are all housewives doing some leisure work. If we press the owners, they will stop giving them work and these poor families will have less income", says the labour commissioner and refuses to take any action.

Elaben takes a delegation of women from Patan to Sanat Mehta, the state labour minister. He is sympathetic to the cause of *bidi* workers.

"I started my career organising *bidi* workers into a union in my native Saurashtra", he recalls wisely. "Those days women were always behind *parda* and very exploited." Suddenly he starts singing: "I roll *bidis* all day, behind my veil, for only eight paise, Oh sister."

He phones the labour commissioner and says: "Send an inspector to Patan immediately. Arrange a meeting with the owners and come to some agreement."

Two days later the labour commissioner phones Elaben. He has fixed the meeting, but he insists that since Major Mahajan already has a union we should collaborate with their representative.

The women are not happy with this development. "Oh no, that man is always drunk", says Karima Bibi.

"He is in the pocket of the owners", adds Zohra Bibi. Nevertheless, we agree to "collaborate" with him.

We go to the meeting at the Patan *Bidi* Welfare Centre. Matresses are arranged in the room with bolsters against the walls. The deputy chief labour inspector, Mr I.K. Patel, is already leaning against a bolster. But he shifts uncomfortably from time to time as his trousers are too tight. Swaminathan runs to and fro nervously. Elaben, Hava Bibi, Zohra Bibi, Karima Bibi, Anasuya and I arrange ourselves along one wall. Half an hour later, five *maliks* come in together, wearing starched white kurtas and dhotis. They sit as far from us as possible. Last, the Major Mahajan representative, Govardhan Bhai, staggers in and goes and sits with the *maliks*.

"Shall we begin?" I.K. Patel asks.

"First these women must go out", says Amritlal Thakker, glaring at the three Bibis. "They are our

employees, we won't bargain with them."

"If they leave then we leave too", says Elaben.

Amritlal stands up. We stand up. Swaminathan scuttles over and whispers something to Amritlal. He glares but sits down again.

We begin with a string of complaints: "The *maliks* pay below minimum wages. They don't give identity cards. They dismiss workers who have been with them for 30 years. They don't deal with workers directly but employ contractors."

The *maliks* retaliate: "The women steal tobacco. Their *bidis* are substandard. They are always late with their work."

I.K. Patel steers the discussion to the question of identity cards. "I have only 10 employees", says Amritlal.

"You are a liar, you have over 100", shouts Hava Bibi indignantly.

Amritlal stands up, outraged, and has to be pacified by Patel and Swaminathan.

"We are not opposed to the cards but these workers are not constant", says Bhala Bhai, another owner. "One day a mother comes, next day the daughter, then the daughter-in-law. In whose name can we make a card?"

"On the contrary, you keep changing the names of workers on the rolls so that no one can claim she is permanent", retorts Elaben.

However, the *maliks* agree to identity cards "in principle." So it is agreed that SEWA will give a list of workers to the labour office who will verify it with the *maliks*. Everyone has a cup of tea and the meeting breaks up. We begin an intensive list making campaign, but the women are being intimidated. "The contractor sends messages to my house every night. If I give my name to SEWA, he'll stop giving me work", says a woman.

"Bhure Khan shouts abuse after me when I go out to make the list", says Zohra Bibi. "He has also spread rumours that I am a loose woman."

We manage to make a list of only 400 women, although there are over 2,000 *bidi* workers in Patan. We submit it to the labour office but hear nothing from them for

three weeks. Then the labour commissioner tells us that the *maliks* deny that any woman on the list is their employee.

The workers' enthusiasm is considerably dampened now. Even the men who had wanted to go on strike say "Don't disturb a sleeping giant."

"The women are no longer ready to make a union. Each woman says she will join only after others have joined", says Hava Bibi bitterly.

"They are all afraid of the *maliks*." Anasuya stops going to Patan. Elaben writes to the *bidi* welfare commissioner who is based in Rajasthan, asking him to waive the identity card rule. There is no reply.

Two years pass. SEWA has written 11 letters to the welfare commissioner without a single reply. Hava Bibi has found work with another contractor. Anasuya has learnt shorthand and typing and has taken over SEWA's secretarial work.



Making bidhis at home

One day a question is raised in parliament as to why the *bidi* welfare fund has not been spent. The central labour minister writes an angry letter to the welfare commissioner. The welfare commissioner, Mr Sharma, finally replies to our 11 letters. He is coming to Ahmedabad, can we meet him? He is ready to waive the rule that the owner

should issue identity cards. Can we suggest an alternative?

"Why can't the welfare office issue identity cards? We will help in identifying the workers", Elaben offers.

"I can't take that responsibility alone. The state labour department must cooperate with me", says Mr Sharma.

The labour commissioner agrees to cooperate in issuing cards. It is decided that the cards will be co-signed by a welfare officer and a labour officer. But the chief labour inspector stalls. "It will be my responsibility", he grumbles, "If a wrong name gets in, someone might make a fuss which will affect my promotions." He manages to delay implementation for another six months, but finally we get a letter asking us to accompany two officers to Patan.

We write to Hava Bibi and Zohra Bibi and they come to

Ahmedabad. "We need a full time SEWA organiser in Patan now", Elaben tells them. "Find an educated girl in one of your families."

Zohra Bibi brings her niece, a fiery 19 year old, educated up to tenth class and the daughter of a policeman. She has the same name as her aunt so we call her "little" Zohra. Chaperoned by Hava Bibi,

SPECT

HERALD... bonded labour and take suitable action."

WEDNESDAY MAY 5 1993



BRIEF TENDER NOTIFICATION NO. AS D3/22/93-94

(1.0) Sealed tenders in triplicate duly superscribed as indicated in para 2.0 for the supply, supervision of installation and commissioning of DIGITAL STORED PROGRAMME CONTROLS (SPO) NON-BLOCKING, 200 LINES EPABX SYSTEM EXTENSIBLE IN STAGES, EMPLOYING PCM/TDM TECHNIQUE AND CONFORMING TO COITT RECOMMENDATIONS along with peripherals, tools and spares at SVP-Complex, Jog, are invited from reputed manufacturers who have supplied electronic exchanges of similar type, same or higher capacity, which are successful operation as on date preferably in an environment that applicable in a hydro-power project. (2.0) The tenders shall be submitted in TWO parts viz., Part-I containing technical particulars/literature, commercial terms and conditions and other documents as required along with the required EMD and Part-II containing the price Bid. Part I and Part II shall be furnished separately into two different sealed covers duly superscribed tender for "SUPPLY, SUPERVISION OF INSTALLATION AND COMMISSIONING OF 200 LINES EPABX AND ACCESSORIES - ENQUIRY NO. ASD3/22/93-94 PART NO. 1 - TECHNICAL PARTICULARS/COMMERCIAL TERMS OR PART NO. 1 - PRICE BID" (as the case may be). (3.0) Blank tender forms can be obtained from the office with effect from 10.5.93 against written application, along with a crossed DD for (1) Rs.10 (inclusive of Rs.8 as KST) in case documents are collected personally or through duly authorised representative or (ii) Rs.16 + Rs.20/- in case documents are required to be sent by post in favour of Deputy Controller of Accounts (GP), Karnataka Power Corporation Limited, Jog Falls 577 435 towards the cost of tender forms. No other form of payment other than DD acceptable. Corporation will not take any responsibility for delay in receipt or non-receipt of tender forms sent by post. U date/time of sale of tender documents will be 10.6.93/5.00 p.m. (4.0) Completed tenders accompanied by an EMD of Rs.10,000 in the form of (i) DD or (ii) Bank Guarantee issued by any of the scheduled Banks will be received up to 3.00 p.m. on 24.6.93. PART I - Technical and commercial part of the bids will be open on the same day (i.e. 24.6.93) in the presence of such of the tenders or their authorised representatives who choose to present. The date of opening of Part II - price bid will be intimate to the tenders separately. (5.0) Tenders are liable to be rejected (i) if not accompanied by EMD, (ii) if sent telegraphically, (iii) incomplete and not conforming to the requirements called for the documents, (iv) if received after due date/time either in person or through post. (6.0) Further details can be had from:

EXECUTIVE ENGINEER (MACHINERY, STORES AND PURCHASE), KARNATAKA POWER CORPORATION LIMITED, JOG FALLS 577 435, SHIMOGA DIST.

KERALA STATE

No.02/E & C03-94

QUOTATION

Sealed competitive quotations Address System (Emergency and Under Ground Power House at...

- Conditions:
1. Detailed specification and commercial terms and conditions.
 2. The supplier should remit the order is placed for Rs. 15/-

Whenever you

LABOUR / The law promises beedi workers who control the industry laws are being enforced, but wonders K.

A beedi worker in Kuni-gal found that instead of receiving wages at the end of a whole week's work, she had to pay her employer one rupee out of her own pocket.

Sounds incredible? But such happenings are not at all implausible given the system prevailing in the production of beedis — the poor man's puff.

It is estimated that 200 million beedis are rolled out each day in the country by about 45 lakh pairs of hands. Next to agriculture, beedi rolling provides the maximum amount of employment to the rural masses — to anywhere between three to five lakh people in Karnataka — 90 per cent of whom are women and children.

This labour intensive industry is a highly profitable one — 80 per cent of men and 40 per cent of women in the country consume tobacco in form or another. But making a beedi does not seem to be as pleasant a task as smoking it.

While the tobacco used in beedis is grown in Karnataka and Gujarat, the tendu leaf in which it is rolled is a forest produce of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Orissa. The blended tobacco (the formula of which is a trade secret), the tendu leaves and yarn are supplied by the manufacturer through a network of contractors and sub-contractors to home-based workers.

Generally, 850 g of tendu leaves and 240 g of tobacco are required to roll 1,000 beedis.

The worker first cleans the leaves and cuts them to size. The leaves are then soaked in water to make them malleable. A small amount of tobacco is placed on the leaf which is then rolled, dented, broad at one end and narrow at the other. The edges are pushed in using a small stick and the yarn is tied around. Rehan, who sways rhythmically as he rolls the beedis in a slum in Lingarajapuram, says he works from six in the morning to ten at night to produce 1,000 beedis.

Rehan has a mentally ill wife, six children who do not go to school and a thatched hut that is falling apart, but he is not aware that he is entitled to help from welfare officials.

The contractor specifies an "average" number of beedis that are to be produced from a given quantity of leaves. "This figure," says Mr. Alampalli Venkataram of Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, "is based on the number that an expert leaf-cutter is able to produce, which workers are not able to match."

When the worker falls short of the number, either because she is of a bad quality, or she has to buy tendu leaves from her own pocket, she has to bear the difference. In this, a large number of workers have been rejected, though they do not more than 2



per cent may be charged as wastage. These rejected beedis are also retained by the contractor and not returned to the worker. As a result, workers receive 30 to 40 per cent in some cases, they may have to pay from their own pocket.

Though the Beedi and Cigar Workers (Conditions of Employment) Act was enacted in 1966, beedi workers, who mostly worked at home, had to face a long and

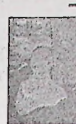
arduous struggle in the courts to have their very status as employees recognised, without which no benefits would apply to them. Manufacturers claimed that home-based workers were "independent contractors" and they themselves were not employers at all but merely marketing organisations.

It was only in 1976 that the Supreme Court upheld the home-based beedi worker's claim to employee status and conferred on him

SPECTRUM

MAY 1, 1983

Why do the best of development projects flop? An analysis points to poor execution. Page II



An artist couple reacts to communal riots. Review of an ongoing exhibition. Page IV

A profile of Bhupen Hazarika, winner of this year's Dadasaheb Phalke award. Page III

A false optimism characterises the portrayal of the proletariat in Kannada drama. Page IV

Ever you take a puff think of us

...nises beedi workers many benefits, most of which do not reach them because of the ...ol of the industry. The Centre has now set up a special task force to look into how the ...g ...forced, but when will life actually become better for the beedi worker, ...wonders KATHYAYINI CHAMARAJ in a May Day piece



Young girls rolling beedis: a 1000 beedis will give them just Rs 18-20

Navroz Contractor

... in the courts to ... as employees ...out which no ... apply to them. ... aimed that home- ... "independent ... they themselves ...yers at all but ... organisations. ... 1976 that the Su- ...d the home-ba- ...'s claim to em- ... conferred on him

the benefits of the beedi act and several other acts relating to payment of wages, maternity benefit, industrial disputes, workmen's compensation, provident fund, etc. In this, beedi workers are luckier than other home-based workers.

But statutory protection has not meant that the benefits have also flowed to them. Employers continue to avoid issuing passbooks and identity cards which alone establish their employee status. Only

about 24 lakh cards are estimated to have been issued so far for a workforce of 45 lakh. Often, the passbook is issued in the husband's name, who does only the transporting, while it is the wife who works at home.

"The husbands are mostly vagabonds," says Mr V J K Nair of the Centre for Indian Trade Union (CITU) which has organised more than 20,000 beedi workers, most of them in Dakshina Kannada.

"They exploit the wife by making her earn and look after the house," he says.

Though there are over 2 lakh women workers in the State, not a single woman was given maternity benefit in 1985. A study by P H Reddy and P J Bhattacharjee has revealed that women who have worked regularly for 160 days immediately preceding the expected day of delivery are entitled to 84 days' leave with wages as maternity benefit.

But contractors manipulate records so that a deliberate break in service is caused and many women become ineligible.

It has been agreed in Karnataka to pay 16.33 per cent of annual earnings as extra wages in lieu of one day of earned leave for every 20 days of work, nine festival holidays and 8.33 per cent bonus, but it is doubtful how many contractors actually pay these amounts to workers.

Beedi workers are also eligible

for pension under the new scheme. "But," says Mr Venkatarao of BMS, "while the scheme is a boon to the older workers, it is a curse to those who are younger as they will lose more than what they gain from it."

Mr Nair of CITU feels that the situation could be remedied if the contract system in vogue is abolished and raw materials are distributed to workers directly by the manufacturers.

A committee was set up during the tenure of Mr S K Kanhaia as Labour Minister to look into this question but things got stalled after the fall of the Janata Government in the state.

The contract system and the fact that the manufacturer has no plant or machinery enable him to shift his area of operations as soon as workers' organisations grow strong enough to demand their rights.

"Manufacturers also deny work as a means of disorganising workers," says Mr Nair. "Three years ago, manufacturers were claiming that there was no work, because of the short supply of tendu leaves, resulting from the state takeover of tendu leaf distribution in Madhya Pradesh. But they were giving work elsewhere, where there was not much unionisation. If guaranteed wages, assured to the worker when the employer fails to provide the raw material, were demanded, work to cover the guaranteed wages was given but was not enough to survive on," he states.

Governments too succumb to employers' threats to shift the industry to other States if wages are not kept low. Besides, they have failed to fix uniform wages. As a result, the standard of living of beedi workers has remained low.

Though there is a belief that beedi workers are prone to tuberculosis, welfare officials for beedi workers state that working in the industry has no occupational hazard. It is only the general insanitary conditions in which beedi workers live, their undernourishment and lack of exposure to sunlight which brings on the disease, they state.

Though studies have shown that workers in tobacco processing factories are prone to asthma, giddiness, lack of appetite, cough, chest pain, etc., because of the high levels of tobacco dust, home-based workers may not be as prone to such disorders.

To provide better housing, health, educational and recreational facilities to beedi workers with a fund created from a cess on tobacco, the Beedi Workers' Welfare Fund Act and Beedi Workers' Welfare Cess Act were passed in 1976.

This cess as well as the excise duty on tobacco were later shifted to branched beedis and as this has resulted in the production of spari-

Beedi workers — 90 per cent of whom are women — are on the warpath. This week they launched an agitation in four states, and it was a big success in Dakshina Kannada. The beedi workers deserve public sympathy because they are one of the most exploited sections of society who can earn barely Rs. 900 a month even if they work about 24 hours a day — unscrupulous beedi brand owners do not keep their service records and company contractors often deprive them of their legitimate dues through devious means. Also, the workers are susceptible to deadly diseases. KENNETH ZINGADE writes on the plight of these workers on the occasion of May Day, which commemorates the Chicago workers' heroic struggle for an 8-hour workday that began a century ago on May 1, 1886

You smoke, they choke



Long working hours to earn a pittance tails on the beedi workers' health

Chandrabas Kotekar

THE working conditions of beedi workers are far from safe. They stay cooped up at their small workplaces for 12 to 14 hours, sometimes even 16 hours a day, with short breaks in between. They are constantly exposed to the pungent smell of tendu leaves and tobacco but are presumably accustomed to it. However, there are far greater hazards confronting them. They are susceptible to diseases like cancer, TB, scabies and asthma, especially after they are 40.

Who should bear the medical expenses of workers affected by these conditions? There have been no examples of beedi company owners or the government making arrangements to help the affected workers. The few exceptions, like the opening of a community health centre in Mysore, are of such marginal use that they cannot be said to have helped the majority of beedi workers.

Over 90 per cent of beedi workers are women and they are paid wages on a piece-rate basis. An average healthy worker can roll up 6,000 to 1,200 beedis. If she works over 14 hours a day. The wage, including DA, paid for 1,000 beedis is a paltry Rs 28. In other words, a worker can earn about Rs 80 per month if she works 14 days and a good part of the night. Some of the workers may earn more if they are very fast in their work. In these days of rising prices, it is the dire need of money that forces these women to work that is monotonous, tiring and injurious to their health. The beedi workers work on all days of the week and can only go on leave with loss of pay. The wages are paid weekly.

The beedi workers' struggle for decent wages and proper working conditions has a long history. Following struggles in the past, the Central and State Governments have been forced to start welfare schemes for them but most of these schemes have all but remained on paper. The benefits of the Beedi Workers' Welfare Fund started by the Central Government are not reaching eligible beedi workers. Also, the State Government has failed to keep its promise of constructing houses for beedi workers — in fact not a single house has been constructed in Dakshina Kannada so far. Indeed the only thing that appears to be guaranteed to these workers is disease and deprivation.

Paradoxically, the beedi workers' problems seem to be increasing even as the beedi industry's profits are rising. The workers are not getting even a part of the extra revenue that is accruing to the beedi industry owners who operate through unscrupulous middlemen called contractors. The owners of a leading beedi company in Mangalore who even export their beedies, have not had the good sense or generosity to increase the wages and bonus of their workers.

Among the beedi workers in the district, there are those who are entirely dependent on beedi making for their livelihood and those who roll up beedis to earn something on the side. For the first category of workers, beedi making is a full time occupation with their entire families or most of them engaged in it. For the second category, it is just a part-time occupation. This difference in the socio-economic status of the two sections of beedi labourers has certainly come in the way of their getting organised. Obviously, the beedi industry does not feel too strongly about the deprivation

> Continued on Page 11

The beedi industry wrought serious socio-economic changes on Dakshina Kannada. There is as yet no definitive assessment of the pros and cons of these changes, writes NARAYANA A.

Boon or bane?



Chandrabas Kotekar
The gains are debatable of benefits.

WHATEVER the inequities and health hazards of beedi-making, the industry has brought about far-reaching socio-economic changes in the Dakshina Kannada. It is one district where more than 10 per cent of the total population is engaged in the cottage industry of beedi making.

Among the beedi workers in the district, there are those who are entirely dependent on beedi making for their livelihood and those who roll up beedis to earn something on the side. For the first category of workers, beedi making is a full time occupation with their entire families or most of them engaged in it. For the second category, it is just a part-time occupation. This difference in the socio-economic status of the two sections of beedi labourers has certainly come in the way of their getting organised. Obviously, the beedi industry does not feel too strongly about the deprivation

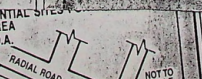
> Continued on Page 11

SING

BDA? Bedappa!

Which is the most hated public institution in Bangalore? Urban and Rural — only 13 per cent of the beedi labourers were found in the eight backward northern districts. This cannot be right, in this system, because poverty and lack of development are some of the primary factors that drive

USED RESIDENTIAL SITES
DERS.F.H.S. AREA
LAYOUT, B.D.A.



Authority

give them just Rs 120

4 lakh cards are estimated to have been issued so far for the house.

They exploit the wife by making her earn and look after the house," he says.

But contractors manipulate records so that a deliberate break in service is caused and many women

to provide health, education facilities to be fund created in beedo, the Beedi Board Act and

Whenever you take a puff ...

Continued from Page 1

ous beedis, there is a cry to shift the duty back to tobacco.

There are several complaints that the administration of the welfare fund has been ineffective. This also seems to be borne out by the fact that there was an unutilised amount of about Rs 28 crore in the consolidated fund at the end of 1991. While receipts for the year were about Rs 12 crore, expenditure was only about Rs 8 crore.

Mr B.S.V. Murthy, Regional Welfare and Cess Commissioner, attributes this limited expenditure to the difficulties involved in identifying beedi workers, since the smaller contractors fail to give them identity cards, without which they are not entitled to benefits from the welfare fund. To overcome this, local authorities have been asked to conduct surveys and register the beedi workers in their areas. The welfare commissioner and officials and doctors in welfare clinics are also authorised to issue identity cards.

The bulk of the money is spent on health. A 30-bed hospital and 22 medical units in areas with a large number of beedi workers have been set up in Karnataka to treat workers and their families free of cost. TB detection camps, reimbursement of costs for various kinds of treatment, payment of subsistence allowance during illness, maternity allowance and group insurance are some of the other schemes.

While money is spent on treatment of diseases, not much appears to be spent on providing drinking water or improving sanitation in existing surroundings, which would go a long way in preventing diseases.

As many as 1,425 houses have been built in Mysore district under the housing schemes. But Mr Nair of CITU states that not many beedi workers are able to make use of the interest-free, house building loans and subsidies because most of them do not possess sites in the first place.

As many as 6,781 scholarships have been awarded in 1992 to children studying from the fifth standard onwards to the level of pro-

fessional courses. However, the lower primary child is entitled merely to a uniform costing Rs 50. Greater incentives need to be given to the lower primary children to prevent their dropping out of school and also to decrease the incidence of child labour.

Though grants are available for building of workshops by workers' co-operatives, these are hardly utilised in Karnataka whereas good use is made of this facility in Kerala which has a number of co-operatives.

The success story of the Kerala Dinesh Beedi Workers' Central Co-operative Society in Kannur, Kerala, is now a legend in the history of co-operatives. This co-operative which makes high profits despite paying the highest wages in the country — Rs 31.90 per day, apart from all other statutory benefits.

The CITU too favours the formation of similar co-operatives at all stages of tobacco processing and retention of manufacturers only for procuring and marketing of produce. But Mr Nair says that there has not been much progress in Karnataka in the formation of co-operatives because it has been difficult to get the women to organise themselves.

Though a scheme for the promotion of co-operatives has been on the Centre's anvil since 1984, it is yet to take concrete shape.

The National Commission on Women in the Informal Sector recommends, in addition to the formation of co-operatives, the setting up of tripartite boards with representatives of workers, employers and the Government for better implementation and monitoring of all laws related to beedi workers.

The CITU also demands that the Government should issue tendu leaves and tobacco only to manufacturers who maintain proper records of employment and production.

The Welfare Commissioner states that most of these issues are going to be looked into by a special task force that has been set up by the Centre. Judging by what has happened in the past, it will be an extraordinary task indeed, to get its recommendations accepted.

Continuation of programmes for basic services

ning programmes in all have to take in all. The programme will self-governments in the use of infrastructure and focus on them to implement projects. The key to support-strengthen function-management, mu- physical and environmental, health, urban and economic

mid-level staff of medium and small towns concerned with local development and management. Secretaries, decision-makers at State level, and presidents and councillors at local level will also be addressed to foster appropriate attitudes to urgent issues crucial in the urban environment.

Training will therefore be on many levels and according to Harry Mengers of IHS, Netherlands, who will co-ordinate IHSP 2 in Karnataka: "We hope to reach functionaries on a personal and professional level and enhance their managerial skills to make the urban situation more sustainable."

port of State-level agencies the training each executive and

Still a dream at 21

Twenty-one years after it was conceived, the Amarja medium irrigation project in Gulbarga's Aland taluk is yet to become a reality, writes VENKATESH NAIDU

any

You smoke, they choke

Continued from Page 1

workers appointed by beedi companies are often malicious, and there are any number of cases of such workers cheating innocent workers of leave, maternity benefits and bonus.

Earlier, a beedi worker earned only Rs 900 a month if he works beedis from early morning till late at night. Considerable profits of the beedi company, the wage is worse than a day wage. But what is more galling is that the workers are sometimes even paid this lowly sum in an unscrupulous contractor's pretext that they are substituted and takes them away when surreptitiously gets wages bonus for them under a fictitious name (benami). The contractor pockets the hard-earned money of the poor girls and women without any qualms. However, the contractor too sometimes gets money when the company releases some of the beedi *kattus* applied by him.

As a contractor, it is the contractor who has the power to decide whether a woman worker could be given maternity benefits or not. Thus the workers are completely at his mercy. It is estimated that there are 6 lakh to 7 lakh beedi workers in the state. While about 3 lakh of them are in Dakshina Kannada alone, the rest are scattered in places like Mysore, Tumkur, Kolar and Channarayana. Though the total workforce of the industry is big, it is not properly organised largely because the beedi companies have decentralised the manufacture of beedis. Even in Dakshina Kannada, which has one of the oldest trade union traditions in the state, hardly 30,000, that is 10 per cent of the total workforce, is organised in trade unions, according to one unofficial estimate.

Devious means

The company owners resort to devious means to put down beedi workers' protests. The moment they find signs of an agitation anywhere, they first reduce the piece-work given to workers in the area

and then move their manufacturing activities to another region, sometimes even to a neighbouring State. With this, they often manage to suppress the agitation and carry on their profiteering as usual. They are fully exploiting the lack of a foolproof mechanism to regulate the beedi industry and make it follow labour laws.

Considering that the workers are hardly organised, company owners and contractors resort to all kinds of unscrupulous labour practices. The companies do not maintain the appointment and service records of most workers, and as a precaution against getting caught on this score, they do not even issue wage slips which could amount to evidence of employment. While some workers have been issued with logbooks, most do not have them.

The beedi workers' struggle began well before Independence. The beedi industry was in its infancy in Mangalore then and there were big workshops in which a large number of workers rolled beedis under one roof. Unlike now, the workers then were mostly men. As the beedi industry gradually became highly profitable and prices also rose in the meanwhile, the workers started demanding a salary hike. As the owners refused to concede the demand, the workers took to the path of agitation.

The agitation took such a serious turn that the managements were forced to concede a wage hike. But they were cunning. They struck at the root of the workers' organisation by gradually closing down the large workshops and shifting the manufacturing activities to private homes. Women, who had till then been working in the fields or doing only their domestic chores, started rolling beedis, which is ironically a male addition that they disapprove of. Women took to beedi rolling in a big way because it enabled them to earn some money for their families. Money ultimately overcame their distaste of beedis and later the fear of tobacco-related diseases.

The contractors came into the picture when the beedi companies started mostly employing women workers instead of men. The contractors' job is to employ women workers mostly unofficially, provide them with

the raw materials supplied by the company and collect the beedis from them. The company owners' ploy worked, and now the contractors have a vice-like grip on the workers. With the contractors doing the dirty work for the owners, the workers lost all contact with their real employers.

The popularity of beedis has prompted some entrepreneurs to start the production of small, cheap brands of beedis. There are also others who produce fake beedis of famous brands. Needless to say, the workers who make these beedis are cheated of almost all the benefits that they are entitled to.

It was the Communists who took the initiative to organise the beedi workers in both Karnataka and neighbouring Kerala. In the 1960s, the beedi workers' struggle intensified in Karnataka, and the CPM's trade union wing, the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), later took over the leadership of the struggle. CITU leaders allege that the vested interests in the industry launched a virulent campaign against the struggle, spreading rumours about its leaders and questioning the Communists' left-wing policies. Overcoming a long series of setbacks, the CITU has been consistently exposing the dirty role played by the contractors and the greed of the managements.

On the warpath

Pushed to the wall by exploitation as well as inflation, the beedi workers are on the warpath at present. A big section of them have been on strike since April 25. They plan to stage dharmas at the headquarters of different districts and taluks till April 29. If the dharmas fail, they also plan to go to Bangalore and stage a dharna before the Vidhana Soudha.

The beedi workers are demanding, among other things, a basic piece-work wage of Rs 50 for 1,000 beedis, a uniform wage rate throughout the country, DA at the rate of five paise per every increase of point over 1,300 of the consumer price index, implementation of the recommendations of the Chandraprabha Urs Parliamentary Committee and compulsory issue of wage slips. They have also sought a nation-wide survey

of all beedi workers, maintenance of their employment records at their employer's office and prohibition of shifting of manufacturing activities from one region to another.

Management view

The beedi brand owners are in no mood to concede these demands which they say will ruin the industry. Speaking to this reporter, the owner of Prakash Beedis, Shankar Prabhu, claimed that workers are actually getting Rs 40.25 per 1,000 beedis if one takes their basic wage and other benefits into consideration. In case the workers' demand for a wage of Rs. 50 per 1,000 beedis is conceded, then they would have to be paid Rs. 75 per 1,000 beedis, which was "impossible."

The beedi company owner also brazenly defended shifting of manufacturing activities away from any place where there was a strike. He said there was intense competition within the industry and most of the demand for beedis manufactured here was from other states.

Shankar Prabhu claimed that the companies keep service records and so on but was unwilling to make the industry responsible for the actions of its contractors.

But the whole point here is that the beedi companies operate through contractors and there is no direct link between the beedi workers and the company managements they work for. According to a large number of beedi workers this reporter spoke to, the owners may maintain the service records and issue wage slips to a small number of workers but the overwhelming majority remain unofficial workers.

Interestingly, the Chandraprabha Urs' parliamentary committee consisting of 41 MPs, too took this aspect into consideration. The committee recommended a state-wide survey of areas where beedi workers are concentrated.

The parliamentary committee also recommended that "each and every worker, whether a 'sharkhata' or beedi factory worker, should be given an identity card at the earliest so that he or she is no longer deprived of the benefits of various government schemes.

Aug 1999

REPORT ON THE BEEDI INDUSTRY IN SOUTH INDIA

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS A BEEDI?

"Beedis", also known as the "poor man's cigarettes", are slim, hand-rolled unfiltered cigarettes which resemble marijuana joints. They consist of tobacco rolled in *tendu* leaves, which are less permeable to air than paper, requiring the smoker to inhale more deeply than a regular cigarette.¹

WHY HAS THE BEEDI BECOME A CAUSE FOR CONCERN?

According to the Centre for Disease Control (CDC), a beedi releases 3 – 5 times more tar and nicotine than a regular cigarette, despite containing less tobacco. Beedi smoke also contains more deadly chemicals such as ammonia and carbon monoxide than regular cigarette smoke. It is found to be loaded with cancer-causing, chromosome-damaging, genetic poisons, far more than are found in a regular cigarette.²

In the U.S., these beedis appeal to teenagers in particular as they come flavoured vanilla, chocolate, strawberry, mint and cola.³ These "dessert cum smokes" are cheap and easily available (even over the Internet) to minors.

It seems as if, smoking a beedi has become the latest fad. Says one journalist "They're sweet. They're cheap. They're small and worst of all, they're trendy."⁴ These beedis are essentially exported from India. Although beedi sales in the U.S. are estimated at \$980,000 as compared to the billions spent on cigarettes, they are gaining

¹ Internet document.

² *Infra.*, note 7.

³ Internet document.

⁴ Sally Squires, "The Scourge of Beedis on the Young", <<http://ash.org/august99/08-18-99-1.html>>

popularity because of their low cost.⁵ In India, a beedi is as cheap as Rs. 0.15.⁶ There is also the prevalent misconception that the beedi is a safe alternative to the cigarette. They can even be bought in health stores, as these beedis are considered the “natural” form of tobacco.

It is rumoured that in China, beedis are laced with opium.⁷ “In some provinces of China, puffs from lighted beedis are give to infants and toddlers to stop them from crying.”⁸

However, what is also a major cause for concern is the work environment in which these beedis are produced. Research works have revealed that this product is produced in toxic conditions and even those who have never smoked a beedi, but are involved in the production process, are damaged by the mutagenic and carcinogenic compounds in the air.⁹ The dust mutates the skin of these workers and damages their chromosomes. They get sick and die at alarming rates just from making the beedis.¹⁰

Another cause for concern is that the beedi industry employs child labour.

A study was carried out in South India, in two major beedi-producing areas namely South Kannara and the North Arcot district around Vellore. A large number of beedi workers as well as their employers were consulted. This report is an account of the said study regarding the beedi industry.

⁵ “All Smoke, No Fire, insists bidi manufacturer”, TIMES OF INDIA, February 17, 2000.

⁶ Approximately Rs. 43 is the equivalent of a dollar.

⁷ <<http://www.drgreene.com/990517.html>>

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health, 1992 *in supra.*, note 7.

¹⁰ Journal of Cancer Research and Clinical Oncology, 1994 *in supra.*, note 7.

CHAPTER 1

THE PRODUCTION PROCESS¹¹

The tendu leaves, which are the wrapper leaves, grow wild, particularly in the forests of Gujarat, Bihar, and Madhya Pradesh. Once a year, normally in the month of May, the beedi manufacturers gather for an auction of the tendu leaves. The highest bidder gets access to the forest for that amount of time as is required to harvest the beedi leaves. This stage is labour intensive, as all the leaves are hand-plucked.

The tobacco is mainly grown in the Raichur area...

The leaves are then piled up and wet. They are then stocked and dried and then put into large bags and sent to the factory. The tobacco is grown and harvested separately (usually in a different area) and also sent to the factory. Once in the factory, the manufacturers send the leaves and the tobacco either directly to the beedi-rollers or to the contractors through whom they operate.

These contractors, distribute the tendu leaves and the tobacco to the beedi-rollers and on completion, take the finished product back to the factory. On every 1000 beedis, these contractors earn a commission of between Rs. 1 and Rs. 3.¹² On an average, every beedi-roller rolls 1000 beedis a day, and each contractor has a minimum of 20 workers under him.

The beedi-rolling process itself runs thus. The *tendu* leaf is cut in a rectangle and held in the left hand, while the tobacco is spread evenly over it. The leaf is then rolled into a cone. The lower end is then closed by bending the leaf inward. To facilitate this process, the index finger is closely fitted with a sharp, metallic nail that is heated and clamped onto it, burning the finger everytime. However, the workers say they are "used to their fingers getting burnt". Sometimes, a long metallic object is used and sometimes, the workers do not use anything at all, but merely use their fingers for this step. The uncut and tapering end is tied with a piece of thread.¹³

¹¹ All information in this section has been obtained from a beedi manufacturer who wishes to remain anonymous.

¹² Figures obtained from contractors interviewed

¹³ Anonymous, "Comparative Study of the Beedi Industry in the Private and Co-operative Sectors", Ph.D. dissertation, May 1993.

The finished beedis are tied in bundles of 25. Rolling 1000 beedis takes a minimum of 6 – 8 hours a day, sometimes even 10 – 12 hours. In villages where beedi-rolling is the only occupation of the workers (for example in the villages of the North Arcot district), beedi-rollers roll almost 2000 beedis a day, working an average 12 hours each day.

At the end of the day, the beedi-rollers take the finished products to the contractor whom in turn sorts out the “good” quality beedis from the others, and arrange the bundles in open wooden troughs and dry them.

The beedis are then arranged in large baskets, each containing approximately 150,000 such bundles,¹⁴ (see photograph) and delivers the goods to the factory, where he is paid his commission as well as supplied with more raw material. The contractors usually visit the factory once or twice in a week, and only rarely, more often.

The last stage of the production process is the further drying of the beedis in large ovens, and then labelling the products.

Beedi-rolling is done both in the houses of the workers and in co-operatives. Many workers interviewed preferred working from home as they then saved on the cost as well as on the time spent in travelling to the work place. In the South Kannara region, the workers were mainly women who rolled beedis in order to supplement their husbands' income. In such cases, workers could work at home in addition to looking after household chores and child rearing.

No machinery is employed in the production of beedis. The industry is therefore entirely dependent on labour, thus providing employment to scores of labourers (employment figures are provided in the next chapter).

¹⁴ Figure obtained from interview with a contractor.

CHAPTER 2

EMPLOYMENT AND WAGES

As has already been mentioned, the beedi industry is labour intensive. Every stage of the beedi production is executed with the use of manual labour. Indeed, the industry provides employment to many lakhs of workers. In the South Kannara region, the industry provides employment to over 10 lakh labourers. In the Tirunavelli region in Andhra Pradesh, 14 lakh labourers are involved in the production of beedis.¹³ This industry is one of the largest employment generating industries in the country.

While some workers merely work in this industry in order to supplement income that is earned from other occupations, for many, the beedi industry provides them their daily bread and butter.

One of the main causes of worry is that the beedi industry employs child labour. For this reason, the U.S. has banned the import of products from Indian beedi industry(ies).¹⁶ We talked to beedi workers in and around Vellore, as well as in Jelligude (hardly 8 kilometres from Mangalore). While they all admitted that their children too were involved in beedi production, they said that the children merely "helped" them. Most of the children go to school, or have obtained an education upto the 8th grade.

Under such situations, the employer cannot be accused of having employed "child labour", as it is the parents and not the children who are on the pay rolls. Moreover, this "helping" by the children occurs in the private sphere of the "home", and cannot be interfered with.

Infact, one beedi manufacturer even said "I will not risk employing child labour, as I don't know when I'll have an inspector watching my factory in order to catch me for that very reason. Besides, the fine imposed for employing child labour is Rs. 20,000 a child. We make sure even the *Taiwan* is above the age of 16 I also view the situation as one where I feed another mouth. I may stop employing these children in my

¹³ Figures obtained from interview with a beedi manufacturer.

factory, but that does not mean they won't be compelled to find work elsewhere. It is most often parental pressure which forces these children to work in order to provide for the sustenance of their families.

However, in the more remote villages like Hoskote, child labour is freely employed. There is, one point to be noted in this respect, which is that while the child is on the employer's pay roll, he/she does not receive the wages. The wages only go to the parent [REDACTED].

The wages of beedi-rollers for branded beedis is between Rs. 40 and Rs. 55 for every 1000 beedis rolled. Some workers are only involved in cutting the tendu leaves. Such workers earn Rs. 10 – Rs. 15 a day, generally for having rolled 1 kilogram of tendu leaves.

Most often, the workers do not get in hand, the prescribed wages. They are generally given enough raw material to roll 1000 beedis, but the quality of the tendu leaves is poor, and the shortfall has to be made good by the workers themselves.

In Kaniyambadi, a village just outside the town of Vellore, the workers say their wages on paper are Rs. 55 per 1000 beedis, but they receive only Rs. 40, or sometimes even less, in hand. Rs. 7.50 is kept aside as part of the Provident Fund that these workers are entitled to.

The workers are entitled to benefits such as a pension and their Provident Fund. There are also special government hospitals set up around areas concerned with beedi production. However, the villagers had the same thing to say about these hospitals, and that is that the doctors in these hospitals are irregular. The medicines they are given do not help. They also have to wait hours on end before they can meet the doctor, and none of them has the time to waste waiting for the doctor to arrive.

There is a special provision for government holidays. On these days, the workers need not roll beedis, but receive the wages for that day anyway.

The workers are allowed to take their Provident Fund as a lump sum at any time. However, in such an event, the worker then forfeits his/her right to a pension. Such workers do not give up rolling beedis, as the pension they receive is a mere Rs. 200 or 300 a month, hardly enough to sustain them. They prefer claiming their Provident Fund as a lump sum and continuing rolling at the mercy of the contractor.

¹⁶ *Supra.*, note 5.

When a worker continues to roll even after retirement age, the procedure is thus. He is enrolled under the local contractor, and his holiday wages and the amount that is put aside as part of the Provident Fund; all goes to the contractor. Therefore, what the worker actually receives is a wage for the beedis rolled everyday minus what is put into the contractor's Provident Fund. It now becomes obvious how the contractor stands to gain at every stage!

The workers accept the contractor's position as an inherent part of their occupation. The contractor himself admits that his position may at some level cause a loss to the workers. However, according to him, this is his way of earning his livelihood. It just so happened that he had the money to clinch the contract and now the workers would have to accept his more powerful position.

Infact, when asked why they work for the beedi industry, the workers of North Arcot district unanimously replied that there was no other industry in which employment can be found as the beedi industry is the only industry there.

"The beedi industry in India employs many lakhs of workers", says the interviewed beedi manufacturer, "close it down and all these workers will be left unemployed. Moreover, they are now accustomed to their work and have developed a skill for it. Given any other employment, they will find it hard to learn the trade. Infact, the workers themselves will be outraged to hear any proposition of the industry being forcibly closed down."

CHAPTER 3

HEALTH CONCERNS REGARDING WORKERS IN THE BEEDI INDUSTRY

While it is a popular notion that tuberculosis is largely prevalent among beedi workers, the truth is that while working in tobacco dust does make the worker susceptible to the disease, tuberculosis strikes only when the worker does not eat properly or is an alcoholic. This input came from the beedi workers themselves as well as various doctors interviewed. [REDACTED] This is true of any form of labour involving working with dust, including construction, rolling of incense sticks etc. Infact, of all the beedi workers interviewed, the researcher came across only one worker who was infected with tuberculosis.

Doctors say that the notion of TB being widely prevalent among beedi workers originated in times much earlier, when all beedi workers used to sit together in the same room, which was airtight so moisture did not touch the dried leaves. Under such conditions, if one worker were infected with TB, it would spread to all the others in the room. However, nowadays the workers either work at home or in rooms with circulation, and spreading of TB in the above-mentioned manner does not occur.

TB apart, the workers are however prone to asthma and various other dust related allergies including the skin of their hands peeling off due to excessive work in the dust. In addition, the workers develop bronchial diseases as the posture adopted for beedi rolling exerts pressure on the lower part of the lung leading to such diseases.¹⁷

They also develop chronic back problems due to the posture in which they sit while working and eyesight is affected due to constant gazing at the beedis they are rolling. Fingers also lose sensation and become numb after a prolonged period of beedi rolling.

While the provision of a hospital in every beedi manufacturing area is part of the benefits the workers are entitled to, all the workers say the hospitals are practically

¹⁷ From interviews with affected beedi workers and doctors.

redundant as none of the workers uses these hospitals. Irregularities of the doctors as well as callousness of the doctors are reasons for the abandonment of these hospitals. The workers prefer using private doctors, but end up spending a lot more money that they would have had to if the doctors in the government hospitals were reliable.

Beedi smokers are exposed to more deadly diseases such as oral and lung cancer, which beedi makers are not exposed to directly. But working in the beedi industry may lead to being an addicted beedi smoker, which will then expose these workers to different forms of cancer.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

May 17 - 1999

[Updates | search | today's feature | ask a question | Dr. Greene at adam.com]



Looking for information on acute mountain sickness?

Dr. Greene's HouseCalls

pediatric wisdom for the information age



[home](#) [welcome](#) [reviews](#) [meet Dr. Greene](#) [chat](#) [search](#) [answers!](#)
[mailing list](#) [questions?](#) [events](#) [thanks](#) [links](#) [books & tapes](#)

Bidis are more dangerous than cigarettes.

Q: Dr. Greene, my daughter has started smoking a new kind of chocolate cigarette called a "bidi". She assures me they are all natural and not harmful at all. She says they contain no drugs. Do you know about them? Are bidis safe? She also smokes vanilla and strawberry bidis.
mis-lead of bidis
Concerned Parent
San Francisco, California

A: Bidis are all the rage among teens. Dessert and smoking literally rolled into one! But this makes me rage! People who are trying to make a fortune have succeeded in putting another one over on our kids. Bidis are not new, and they are certainly not safe!

Soon after the Europeans discovered tobacco in the New World, Dutch and Portuguese traders decided to introduce tobacco to India and the East so that they would have highly profitable goods to carry in their ships in both directions.

Tobacco arrived in India in 1605.

For centuries now, the bidi, cheaply made from inferior ingredients, has been the cigarette of choice for those in poverty in India. Called "the poor man's cigarette," the bidi is made from the flakes and dust of dark tobacco leaves. Strong flavoring, such as vanilla, licorice, strawberry, cinnamon, or clove, is added to mask the poor quality of the tobacco. This concoction is then hand-rolled in a green or brown leaf by impoverished laborers in oppressive "factories." The unfiltered final product is a small, slim cigarette, tied at both ends with a colorful thread.

I have not heard of bidis in the United States containing illegal drugs, though I have heard of opium-laced bidis in China. In some provinces of China, puffs from lighted cigarettes are given to infants and toddlers to stop them from crying (*Tobacco Control*, 1993; 2:7-8).

Bidis have long been popular among the poor in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, and India who could not afford regular cigarettes. A single pack of bidis costs up to 40% of their average daily income. Bidis are now more popular than regular cigarettes in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Nepal. Oral cancers have become the leading cause of cancer throughout this region, with 90% attributable to tobacco use (*Tobacco or Health: A Global Status Report*, World Health

Organization, 1997).

India now produces more tobacco than does the United States and is a world leader in oral cancer. (India and the United States taken together produce only a fraction of the amount that world-leader China produces in conjunction with American tobacco companies).

Now bidis are arriving on the shelves of convenience stores and gas stations across the United States. Touted as new, cool, safe, and natural, the bidis are priced right for the teen budget - only \$2.00 for a pack of 20.

Smoking bidis has been independently proven to cause:

- Cancer of the tongue (*International Journal Cancer*, 1989; 44(4):617-621)
- Cancer of the gums (*British Journal of Cancer*, 1989; 60:638-643)
- Cancer of the floor of the mouth (*International Journal Cancer*, 1989; 44(4):617-621)
- Other squamous cell oral cancers (*Indian Journal of Cancer*, 1997; 34:49-58)
- Cancer of the larynx (*International Journal of Cancer*, 1990; 45:879-882)
- Cancer of the esophagus (*International Journal of Cancer*, 1991; 49:485-489)
- Lung cancer (*Thorax*, 1982; 37:343-347)
- High blood pressure (*Journal of the Association of Physicians of India*, 1995; 43:253-258)
- Coronary heart disease (*Indian Heart Journal*, 1989; 41:62-65)

The sweet-smelling smoke of bidis is dangerous--more dangerous than cigarettes. I am angry that they are being marketed to children.

Each bidi cigarette is loaded with cancer-causing, chromosome-damaging, genetic poisons, far more than are found in a regular cigarette. "The safe alternative" also contains two to three times the tar and nicotine of regular cigarettes. In a chilling experiment, smoke from regular cigarettes and bidis was given to Swiss albino mice. Bidi smoke reliably caused cancer in doses small enough that the regular cigarette smoke left the mice apparently healthy (*Journal of Cancer Research and Clinical Oncology*, 1988; 114:647-649).

And our children naively inhale this toxic smoke, without even the benefit of a filter.

But our teens do not care about this. Their sense of invulnerability prevents them from fully appreciating the long-term risks. So, if you have preteen or school-aged children, start talking to them now about bidis. They are still at an age when knowledge of these consequences can prevent them from being duped later on.

Teens might care, though, that when smoked during adolescence, bidis hasten the closure of the growth plates in the long bones--stopping them from ever reaching their full height. Those who smoke as few as two bidis daily for as little as 2.5 years have been proven to end up significantly shorter than their peers (*Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 1980; 34:295-298).

Because of their sense of justice, teens might care about the poor working conditions of the impoverished factory laborers rolling their bidis. This "natural" product is produced in toxic conditions. Even those who never smoke a bidi are damaged by the mutagenic and carcinogenic compounds in the air (*International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health*, 1992; 64:101-104). The dust mutates their skin and damages their chromosomes (*Journal of Cancer Research and Clinical Oncology*, 1994; 120:485-489). They get sick and die at an alarming rate just from making the bidis (*Mutation Research*, 1995; 334:139-144).


Teens might also care that shrewd marketers are playing them for fools. The fiendish, sweet-smelling smoke wafting through teen hangouts is the scent of profit for savvy businesspeople.

The Associated Press reported on May 10, 1999, that 58% of students in four San Francisco High Schools have already tried bidis. This is alarming! Let's get the word out.

Alan Greene, M.D., F.A.A.P.

May 14, 1999

Click Here

Forward to a Friend 

Archive



Today's



Topics



For information about this Website or to arrange public appearances by Dr. Greene, contact the Web Administrator: cheryl@drgreene.com or call (650) 358-8883

*[home](#) [welcome](#) [reviews](#) [meet Dr. Greene](#) [chat](#) [search](#) [answers!](#)
[mailing list](#) [questions?](#) [events](#) [thanks](#) [links](#) [books & tapes](#)*

Notice: All pages and their content are provided as information only. This is not a substitute for medical care or your doctor's attention. Please seek the advice of your pediatrician or family doctor. Dr. Greene's HouseCalls presents this data as is, without any warranty of any kind, express or implied. It is impossible to cover every eventuality in any answer, which makes direct contact with your health care provider imperative.

Copyright: All the content contained herein is copyrighted pursuant to federal law. Duplication or use without the expressed written permission by Dr. Greene's HouseCalls subjects the violator to both civil & criminal penalties.

© Copyright 1995 - 1999. All rights reserved.

4th July 1998

The positive responses during the first two phases (1987-91) created opportunity to expand the programme in 12 more districts of Bangladesh. At present 20 local NGOs are implementing VFFP in four VFFP regions i.e. Dinajpur, Rajshahi Bogra, Jessore. VFFP NGO partners, with financial and technical assistance from VFFP, try to establish village based private nurseries, which are privately owned and commercially run. These nurseries consider local demand in planning their seedling production and out of their entrepreneurial interest, motivate fellow villagers to plant trees. VFFP has established four Regional Service Centres in its working areas to render tree related services to any organisation or individual.

The potential niches for tree plantation are homestead and crop land. Planting tree in homestead is a traditional practice. But planting trees in homestead has its spatial limit. What about planting trees in crop land? One may be taken aback. But cropland tree-planting does not mean sacrificing crops for tree. It means planting trees in combination with crops. Will it not negatively affect crop yield? VFFP research proved that if proper management practices like branch pruning, root pruning etc. are followed then shade effect, competition for soil nutrient can be minimised.

VFFP research findings reveal that crop loss under the canopy of sissou, mahogany, goda neem is 4 per cent-25 per cent (Quddus, 1997). Let's take an example, if you plant three different species of trees such as, sissou, mahogany, and goda neem, in one acre land, with 8mx8m spacing, which accommodates 54 trees, you will get return of Tk. 11000, 13000 and 1100 respectively for each tree after 20 years, 25 years and 10 years with your regular crop. Against the above extra financial benefit, the crop loss due to the presence of the tree in the crop field is for sissou - 91 taka for 20 years, mahogany - 300 taka for 25 years and for goda neem - 58 taka for 10 years. So, you could easily count the loss and benefit of crop land tree planting.

Now the choice is yours. Many farmers in different geographical locations in Bangladesh are practising the tree-crop cultivation. The implication of the programme is more pronounced across the western parts of the country. Crop land plantation could be one potential area for larger intervention for solution of ever increasing demand for fuel wood, timber and problems of decreasing soil fertility.

The writer is a development worker

[\[Top\]](#)[\[Home\]](#)[\[Onirban Online\]](#)

Bidi sells Good in LA

Lisa Tsering writes from Los Angeles

PRABHJIT Singh Bajwa, owner of New India Sweets and Spices here, is amused. "Why do you want to write about bidis?" he asks.

His store, in a predominantly African-American neighbourhood of Los Angeles, has been selling the hand-rolled leaf cigarettes, called bidis in the subcontinent, for years. But these days, business is growing.

A study released recently shows a disturbing trend in the popularity of bidis in the minority and youth communities. According to Ebonne Smith, project coordinator for the Booker T. Washington Community Centre in San Francisco, 58 per cent of students surveyed at four San Francisco high schools admitted to trying bidis at least once. Of them 40 per cent had been smoking them for over a year.

"In the lower income areas, they're much more popular and easier to buy," Smith told the California newspaper India-West. "In upscale neighbourhoods, the merchants haven't even heard of them."

Bidis, considered in India to be the "poor man's smoke," cost around Rs. 5 a pack (about 13 cents) in India while here they cost \$1.25 (Rs. 52).

Smith, with a research team of seven local teens, compiled the data for the Tobacco Free project, an organisation funded by the city's department of public health.

The most popular brand was found to be Mangalore Ganesh 501 Pinks, with a market share of 82 per cent. Although the plain variety is the most popular, flavoured varieties including mango, clove, chocolate, vanilla and strawberry are gaining popularity as well, Smith said. She released her findings in a formal complaint registered with the Federal Trade Commission.

Over a span of ten months, the team surveyed young bidi smokers, the majority of whom were between 17 and 18 years old. Latinos - immigrants from South America - were found most likely to smoke bidis (36.9 per cent), followed by blacks (27.7 per cent). Despite being under the legal age of 18 years, 24 per cent of youths surveyed said they had no trouble purchasing them.

The ease with which they're available, combined with a price tag as low as \$1.25 per pack compared with an average \$2.50 per pack of cigarettes, has been key to their popularity, she said.

Smith's study found that 45 per cent of bidi smokers surveyed were female. Although it's not uncommon to find working class women smoking bidis in India, it's not a widespread habit there, she said.

Also notable was the range of popular misconceptions about bidis. Alarmingly, nearly half of the respondents (49 per cent) believed that bidis wouldn't give them cancer, even though the San Francisco Department of Public Health asserts that each bidi contains seven to eight per cent nicotine, compared to one to two per cent as found in American cigarettes.

- India Abroad News Service

[\[Top\]](#)[\[Home\]](#)[\[Onirban Online\]](#)

The Daily Star Internet Edition, is jointly published by the Daily Star with the technical assistance provided by Onirban. If you have questions or comments about the Daily Star: Internet Edition or the Daily Star site please contact the [Webmaster](#) at Onirban.

Page generated on : July 04, 1998

Bidi industry joins swadeshi club, to oppose MNCs

FCO1997083002

Ashu Kumar

NEW DELHI 30 AUGUST

IN ANOTHER case of domestic industry opposing the entry of multinational brands, the Indian bidi manufacturers have also joined the 'swadeshi club' and strongly opposed the government's move to allow multinational cigarette brands to enter into the country.

All India Bidi Industry Federation, an apex body of the bidi manufacturers of the country, has recently conveyed to the government that the entry of multinational cigarette brands should be discouraged as it is not in the national interest. The demand of the federation has also been supported by the members of Parliament (MPs).

The federation demanded that the entire bidi industry, which currently has an annual turnover of Rs 5,000 crore and employs around 56 lakh workers, should be protected by the government. "The bidi industry is a traditional industry of the country which will be badly hit by the entry of these multinational brands," said a federation representative.

The federation is of the view that the entry of multinational brands would adversely affect the bidi industry in long term. "The cigarette companies earn very handsome profits on their premium brands and this profit will be used to subsidise their low end brands of small cigarettes to make a dent into the bidi market," he said.

The federation demanded that the entire bidi industry, which currently has a annual turnover of Rs 5,000 crore and employs around 56 lakh workers, should be protected by the government

The federation has also opposed the payment of royalty to the foreign companies for introducing their brands in the country. Referring to the ITC's proposal for asking the government's approval to pay five per cent royalty to BAT for 20

years, a member of the federation said, "Why should the country pay royalty to a foreign company which is already being allowed to enter our local market. They are selling their products in our country and they want us to pay them royalty."

Moreover, ITC is asking the permission to pay royalty for a period of 20 years. "It would be very unfortunate if the government allows such a permission after relaxing its own guidelines to a company which is under the clouds for excise evasion," he added.

The federation has asked the government to take a pragmatic view of the situation, and to not give permission to such proposals which are not in the national interest.

There is already a very low excise on micro cigarette segment and the price gap between bidi and non-filter micro cigarettes has already been narrowed down in last three years hurting the bidi industry, he said adding that the bidi market is shrinking day-by-day.

The government should increase the excise on low end cigarettes to keep a substantial gap between bidi and cigarettes to protect the bidi industry. Cigarette manufacturers are selling small cigarettes at a very low margins to attract the bidi smokers and as the difference of cost of manufacturing for bidis and small cigarettes is not much, it is not possible for bidi manufacturers to keep their prices low, he added.

ಬೀಡಿ ನಿಷೇಧ
ಪಾಂಚ್ಚನ ಬಾರತದಿಂದ

ಅಮೆರಿಕದಿಂದ ನಿರ್ದಿಷ್ಟ ಪ್ರಾಂತ್ಯದ ಬೀಡಿಯನ್ನು ಅಮೆರಿಕಕ್ಕೆ ನಿಷೇಧಿಸಿದೆ. ಬೀಡಿ ಉತ್ಪಾದನೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ಭಾರತಾರ್ಥಿಕವಾಗಿ ಮುನ್ನಡೆಸಿಕೊಳ್ಳಲಾಗುತ್ತಿದೆ ಎಂಬುದು ಇದಕ್ಕೆ ಕಾರಣ.

ಗಣೇಶ್ ಬೀಡಿಯನ್ನು ಬಹು ಕುಟುಂಬಗಳಿಂದ ಬಂದ ಮಕ್ಕಳು ಸುತ್ತುತ್ತಾರೆ ಎಂದು ತೋರಿಸುವ ಸಿಬಿಎಸ್ ಚಿತ್ರವೊಂದನ್ನು ನೋಡಿದ ಬಳಿಕ ಅಮೆರಿಕದ ಕನ್ಸುಮ್ ಕಮಿಷನಲ್ ಡಾಯ್ ಕೆಲ್ಲಿ ಅವರು ಆ ಸಂಸ್ಥೆಗಳಿಂದ ಬೀಡಿಗಳನ್ನು ತಡೆಹಿಡಿಯುವಂತೆ ಆದೇಶ ನೀಡಿದರು. ಈ ಆದೇಶದ ಪ್ರಕಾರ ಈ ಬೀಡಿಯನ್ನು ಅಮೆರಿಕದಲ್ಲಿ ಮಾರುವಂತಿಲ್ಲ.

ವಿಶೇಷವಾಗಿ ಬೀಡಿಗಳು ಅಗ್ಗವಾಗಿರುತ್ತವೆ ಎಂದು ಹಾಗೂ ಹೆಚ್ಚಿನ ಆಫವಾ ಬಾಕೀಲೇಟಿನ ಸುವಾಸನೆಯನ್ನು ಹೊಂದಿರುವುದರಿಂದ ಅಮೆರಿಕದಲ್ಲಿ

ಹೆಚ್ಚು ಹೆಚ್ಚು ದನವು ಮಾರಾಟವಾಗುತ್ತಿದೆ. ತಮಿಳುನಾಡಿನಲ್ಲಿರುವ ಬೀಡಿ ಉತ್ಪಾದಕರು ಭಾರತದಲ್ಲಿ ಬೇತಗಾರಿಕೆಯಿಂದ ವಿಮೆ ಟಿವಿ ಚೀಪ್‌ಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ತೋರಿಸಲಾಗಿತ್ತು ಹಾಗೂ ಈ ಆರೋಪವನ್ನು ಬೇತಗಾರಿಕೆಯ ವಿರುದ್ಧ ಹೋರಾಡುತ್ತಿರುವ ಓರ್ವ ಅಧಿಕಾರಿ ಮಾತ್ರವಲ್ಲದೆ

ಮಕ್ಕಳು ಕೂಡ ಸಮರ್ಥಿಸಿದ್ದರನ್ನಲಾಗಿದೆ. ಕ್ರಮ ತೆಗೆದುಕೊಳ್ಳಲು ಬೇಕಾದಂತಹ ಸಾಕ್ಷ್ಯ ಆ ಚಿತ್ರದಲ್ಲಿ ಎಂದು ಕೆಲ್ಲಿ ಹೇಳಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ತಾನು ಮೊದಲು ತನಿಖೆ ಮಾಡುತ್ತಿದ್ದಾಗ ಭಾರತಕ್ಕೆ ಭೇಟಿ ನೀಡಿದ್ದ ಆದರೆ ದಾಖಲಾತಿ ಕಷ್ಟತೆಯ ಪ್ರಕಾರ ತಾನು ಮೊದಲು ಸರ್ಕಾರಕ್ಕೆ

ತಿಳಿಸಬೇಕೆಂದು ಹಾಗೆಯೇ ಮಗೂ ಉದ್ದಮೆ ಸ್ಥಾನಗಳಿಗೆ ಹೋದಾಗ ತನ್ನನ್ನು ಅಲ್ಲಿ ತಿರುಗಾಡಿ ಎಲ್ಲವೂ ಸರಿಯಾಗಿದೆ ಎಂದು ತೋರಿಸಲಾಯಿತು. ಆದರೆ ಸಿಬಿಎಸ್ ಚಿತ್ರವು ತನ್ನ ಗುಮಾನಿಯನ್ನು ದೃಢಪಡಿಸಿದ ಪ್ರಥಮ ಸಾಕ್ಷ್ಯವಾಯಿತು ಎಂದು ಅವರು ವಿವರಿಸಿದರು. **B-6**

All smoke, no fire, insists bidi manufacturer

WASHINGTON: An Indian bidi manufacturer has rebutted charges by US customs department that the industry employs child labour. a senior official in the Indian embassy here has said.

The manufacturer, from whom a large consignment of bidis was impounded by the department recently, made the rebuttal in its reply to the charges, minister (economic) in the embassy, Ajay Malhotra, told reporters on Tuesday.

The department has promised to study the matter before releasing the seized consignment, Malhotra said. Bidi sales in the US are estimated at \$980,000 against billions spent on cigarettes. However, bidis are gaining popularity among students because of their low cost. —PTI

17.2.2000

101

Everything for People Concerned About Smoking & Nonsmokers' Rights
FIRST on the Internet for Smoking News and Documents



Action on Smoking and Health
A National Legal-Action Antismoking Organization
Entirely Supported by Tax-Deductible Contributions

Info About ASH | ash.org | To Join ASH

The Scourge of Bidis on the Young [08/18-1]

Excerpts from **Imported Cigarettes Draw Teens, Criticism Appealing Flavors, Packaging Belie Bidis' High Levels of Nicotine and Other Substances**

By Sally Squires, Washington Post [08/17/99]

They're sweet. They're cheap. They're small and worst of all, they're trendy. Bidis, tiny flavored cigarettes from India, are luring a new generation of young smokers to tobacco and raising alarms among public health officials and anti-smoking groups.

In a new study scheduled to be published in the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, Massachusetts state public health researchers will report high rates of bidi use among urban youth there, a pattern of use that experts say likely reflects use elsewhere also.

While the study's results are embargoed until publication, Massachusetts Public Health Commissioner Howard Koh said the findings point to a serious new threat to anti-smoking efforts among youth in grades seven to 12. "The study found that the prevalence of bidi use was disturbingly high," Koh said. "This is catching hold."

Bidis are slim, hand-rolled cigarettes that have been sold in the United States for more than 20 years. These unfiltered cigarettes resemble marijuana joints, but instead of paper, they are wrapped in tendu leaves, which are less permeable to air and require the smoker to inhale more deeply. Pronounced beedies, these appealing cigarettes are packaged in a variety of colorful boxes or come wrapped in small cone-shaped paper packages. They cost between \$1.50 to \$3.50 per pack and are sold in tobacco shops and so-called "head shops." Even some health food stores have jumped into the market, selling bundles of bidis tied with string as a so-called "natural" form of tobacco.

Numerous studies show that bidis deliver greater amounts of nicotine, tar and carbon monoxide than standard cigarettes. The most recent analysis, released last week by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), found that 11 out of 12 brands of bidis analyzed contained higher concentrations of nicotine than the unfiltered cigarette American Spirit. The tests, which were conducted for NIDA by Murty Pharmaceuticals of Lexington, Ky., also found that the average nicotine concentration of bidis was about 28 percent higher than that found in American Spirit.

"Studies in the U.S. and in India have found that bidis have three times more carbon monoxide and about five times the amount of tar compared to filtered cigarettes," said epidemiologist Samira Asma at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Office of Smoking and Health. "They also contain more phenol, ammonia, nitrosamines and hydrogen cyanide."

Teens who smoke bidis often mistakenly consider them to be a safer alternative to cigarettes. "Kids seem to have the impression that bidis are not as addictive and that they are safer than commercial cigarettes," said Wallace Pickworth, a clinical pharmacologist at NIDA. "That is part of their appeal."

The taste of bidis also seems to draw many young smokers. In India, bidis contain plain tobacco with no flavoring. In the United States, however, they are sold in candy-store flavors such as cinamon, mango,

orange, chocolate, watermelon, raspberry, vanilla and menthol.

"They are flavored so that some of the noxious elements are muted or blunted," said Edward A. Jacobs, chair of the American Academy of Pediatrics' committee on substance abuse. "They are potentially quite harmful and quite alluring because of the flavors."

Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) last week asked the Food and Drug Administration and the Federal Trade Commission to crack down on youth access to bidis. "This disturbing trend is further evidence that immediate action is needed to protect our kids from the lies and deception of the tobacco industry both in the U.S. and overseas," Harken said.

[click here to return to ASH's Home Web Page: http://ash.org](http://ash.org)

[click here for more information about Action on Smoking and Health \(ASH\)](#)

[click here to learn the many benefits of joining ASH on-line, over the Internet](#)

**Presented as a public service by Action on Smoking and Health (ASH),
2013 H Street, N.W., Wash., DC 20006, USA, (202) 659-4310.**

**ASH is a 31-year-old national legal-action antismoking and nonsmokers' rights organization
which is entirely supported by tax-deductible contributions.**

Please credit ASH, and include ASH's web address: <http://ash.org>

Documents from the Internet
on the Bidis Industry

Working together to reduce alcohol, tobacco, and other drug problems in our communities
Statement to the Media

Fact Sheet

STATEMENT TO THE MEDIA:

TRENDY, DANGEROUS "BIDIS" GAINING POPULARITY AMONG YOUTH;
TOBACCO-FREE KIDS AND SENATOR HARKIN REACT

Tiny smokes pack three to five-times the nicotine punch as cigarettes—

Washington, DC (August 13, 1999) - Buying bidis doesn't get much easier than on the Internet. With just a credit card and a computer, a carton of bidis can be bought for under \$40 - with no proof of age.

Bidis (also spelled "beedies") are small, flavored, filterless cigarettes made in India that contain more tar and nicotine than regular cigarettes - but less actual tobacco. They consist of shredded tobacco rolled in dried tendu leaves (a broad-leafed plant native to India) and are secured with string. In addition to Strawberry, Cherry and Cinnamon, teens can have their choice of "exotic flavors" - as termed by the Darshan brand - like Black Licorice, Mandarin Orange and Mango. Many think also that bidis resemble marijuana.

While bidis have been imported into the United States for at least 20 years, they seem to have become popular among young people only recently.

Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) in a letter yesterday to the Food and Drug Administration asked the organization to expand its youth access efforts to control the sale of bidis to minors and to engage in compliance checks of retailers that sell bidis.

In addition, Harkin sent a letter to the Chairman of the Federal Trade Commission questioning him on several issues related to bidis including the sale of the product on the Internet and the enforcement of existing regulations.

"We strongly believe that these companies are creating flavored bidis to entice children," said CAMPAIGN FOR TOBACCO-FREE KIDS President Bill Novelli. "It's not the first time a tobacco company has done this."

In 1993, candy flavoring was added to Skoal Long Cut smokeless tobacco. In industry documents, a former United States Tobacco sales representative said, "Cherry Skoal is for somebody who likes the taste of candy, if you know what I mean."

In addition to being sold on the Internet to underage buyers, bidis may also be easier for kids to purchase in convenience and tobacco stores. A recent study conducted in San Francisco found that bidis were sold to minors without age identification twice as often as regular cigarettes.

According to federal product definitions, bidis are considered cigarettes and should be subject to all existing laws and regulations regarding tobacco products. "This means packs of bidis must display the Surgeon General's Warning," said Novelli. Most importantly this means that it is illegal for retailers to sell bidis to anyone under 18. More must be done to stop the sale of bidis to kids," said Novelli. "We welcome the efforts of Senator Harkin to address the growing problem of bidis." The San Francisco research project also found that almost 7 out of 10 packs had no health-warning label. "This strongly suggests that bidis have not been rigorously subjected to the relevant health regulations," said Novelli.

Novelli emphasized that bidis are not a "safe" alternative to cigarettes. "The research available on bidis shows that their users run the risk of developing oral and lung cancers, just like that of cigarette smokers," said Novelli.

Unlike most cigarettes smoked by kids, bidis are unfiltered and may, in fact, have more deleterious health effects. According to the Centers for Disease Control, an unfiltered bidi releases three to five times more tar and nicotine than a regular

Pl. Street a Reserve File
on Bidis Industry - India/Karnataka.

JN

cigarette, despite containing less tobacco.

It is difficult to determine the exact number of bidis that are imported into the United States every year, but it appears to be increasing dramatically. Between 1994 and 1995, when bidis were reclassified from "cigar" to "cigarette," the value amount of cigarette imports from India increased by more than 500 percent, suggesting that bidis make up the bulk of imported Indian cigarettes. Since then, the value amount of cigarette imports from India has continued to rise dramatically, increasing by more than 400 percent between 1995 and 1998.

Despite a 1991 Indian Supreme Court ruling that child labor in their tobacco industry should be prohibited, more than 325,000 children work in the bidi industry. According to the Human Rights Watch, children as young as ten roll 1,500 to 2,000 bidis each day, six and a half days a week. Bidi rollers suffer from lung disease from inhaling tobacco dust and have high rates of tuberculosis, asthma, and other lung disorders.

BIDI FACT SHEET:

Bidis (also spelled "beedies") are small, flavored, filterless Indian cigarettes that have seemingly been gaining popularity among America's teenagers. They consist of shredded tobacco rolled in dried tendu leaves (a broad-leaved plant native to India) and secured with string. They are produced in a variety of flavors, including chocolate, vanilla, cherry, licorice, menthol, and mango.

Prevalence

There are currently no national statistics on the prevalence of bidi use in the United States. In India, where bidis are known as the "poor man's cigarette," more than 500 billion bidis are produced and consumed each year.

It is difficult to determine the exact number of bidis that are imported into the United States every year, but it appears to be increasing dramatically. Between 1994 and 1995, when bidis were reclassified from "cigar" to "cigarette," the value amount of cigarette imports from India increased by more than 500 percent, suggesting that bidis make up the bulk of imported Indian cigarettes. Since then, the value amount of cigarette imports from India has continued to rise dramatically, increasing by more than 400 percent between 1995 and 1998.

Health Effects of bidis

Bidis are not a "safe" alternative to cigarettes. Available scientific research indicates that bidi smokers run the risk of developing oral cancers, lung cancers, and other health problems - just like cigarette smokers.

Unlike most cigarettes smoked by kids, bidis are unfiltered and may have more deleterious health effects. According to the CDC, an unfiltered bidi releases three to five times more tar and nicotine than a regular cigarette, despite containing less tobacco. Bidi smoke also contains more deadly chemicals such as ammonia and carbon monoxide than regular cigarette smoke.

Appeal of Flavored Tobacco Products

While bidis have been imported into the US for at least 20 years, they seem to have only recently become popular among young people. Tobacco industry documents have long suggested that flavored tobacco products might appeal specifically to young teenagers. In fact, cherry flavoring was added to one spit (smokeless) tobacco starter product in 1993. As one former US Tobacco sales representative described it, "Cherry Skool is for somebody who likes the taste of candy." As early

as 1972, a Brown & Williamson document on the project "Youth cigarette - new concepts" listed cola, apple, and sweet flavor cigarettes as suggestions and stated, "It's a well-known fact that teenagers like sweet products." Flavorings may therefore account for some of the recent popularity of bidis. Bidis may also be easier for underage smokers to buy. A recent study conducted in San Francisco found that bidis were sold to minors without age identification twice as often as regular cigarettes. In addition, bidis are regularly sold on the internet.

Regulation

According to the tobacco product definitions of the Federal Trade Commission, the Food & Drug Administration, and the Master Settlement Agreement, bidis fall under the definition of cigarettes. Therefore:

- 1 Packs of bidis must display the Surgeon General's Warning
- 2 It is illegal for retailers to sell bidis to individuals under the age of 18
- 3 Bidis must be taxed at the same rate as cigarettes, and must bear tax stamps where required

The San Francisco research project found that 41 percent of the bidis purchased had no tax stamp, and almost 7 out of 10 packs had no health warning label. This strongly suggests that bidis have not been rigorously subjected to the relevant health and customs regulations.

Child Labor

Despite a 1991 Supreme Court (India) ruling that child labor in tobacco should be prohibited, more than 325,000 children labor in the bidi industry in India. Older children (over ten) roll 1,500 to 2,000 bidis each day, six and a half days a week. For their labor, they may earn as little as four rupees a day. In comparison, the government-set minimum wage for bidi rolling is 30.9 rupees per 1000 bidis rolled. Bidi rolling is classified by the (India) Child Labor Prohibition and Regulation Act as hazardous because the working position produces chronic back pain, interferes with normal growth patterns, and causes physical deformation. Bidi rollers also suffer lung disease from constantly inhaling tobacco dust. They have high rates of tuberculosis, asthma, and other lung disorders.

Human Rights Watch, "The Small Hands of Slavery: Bonded Child Labor in India" 1996 In 1995, the exchange rupee/dollar exchange rate was approximately 34 rupees to the dollar. Minimum wage for bidi rolling was approximately 89 cents per 1000 bidis rolled.

The Scourge of Bidis on the Young [08/18-1]

By Sally Squires, Washington Post [08/17/99]

They're sweet. They're cheap. They're small and worst of all, they're trendy. Bidis, tiny flavored cigarettes from India, are luring a new generation of young smokers to tobacco and raising alarms among public health officials and anti-smoking groups. In a new study scheduled to be published in the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, Massachusetts state public health researchers will report high rates of bidi use among urban youth

there, a pattern of use that experts say likely reflects use elsewhere also. While the study's results are embargoed until publication, Massachusetts Public Health Commissioner Howard Koh said the findings point to a serious new threat to anti-smoking efforts among youth in grades seven to 12. "The study found that the prevalence of bidi use was disturbingly high," Koh said. "This is catching hold."

Bidis are slim, hand-rolled cigarettes that have been sold in the United States for more than 20 years. These unfiltered cigarettes resemble marijuana joints, but instead of paper, they are wrapped in tendu leaves, which are less permeable to air and require the smoker to inhale more deeply. Pronounced beedies, these appealing cigarettes are packaged in a variety of colorful boxes or come wrapped in small cone-shaped paper packages. They cost between \$1.50 to \$3.50 per pack and are sold in tobacco shops and so-called "head shops." Even some health food stores have jumped into the market, selling bundles of bidis tied with string as a so-called "natural" form of tobacco.

Numerous studies show that bidis deliver greater amounts of nicotine, tar and carbon monoxide than standard cigarettes. The most recent analysis, released last week by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), found that 11 out of 12 brands of bidis analyzed contained higher concentrations of nicotine than the unfiltered cigarette American Spirit. The tests, which were conducted for NIDA by Murty Pharmaceuticals of Lexington, Ky., also found that the average nicotine concentration of bidis was about 28 percent higher than that found in American Spirit. "Studies in the U.S. and in India have found that bidis have three times more carbon monoxide and about five times the amount of tar compared to filtered cigarettes," said epidemiologist Samira Asma at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Office of Smoking and Health. "They also contain more phenol, ammonia, nitrosamines and hydrogen cyanide."

Teens who smoke bidis often mistakenly consider them to be a safer alternative to cigarettes. "Kids seem to have the impression that bidis are not as addictive and that they are safer than commercial cigarettes," said Wallace Pickworth, a clinical pharmacologist at NIDA. "That is part of their appeal."

The taste of bidis also seems to draw many young smokers. In India, bidis contain plain tobacco with no flavoring. In the United States, however, they are sold in candy-store flavors such as cinnamon, mango, orange, chocolate, watermelon, raspberry, vanilla and menthol.

"They are flavored so that some of the noxious elements are muted or blunted," said Edward A. Jacobs, chair of the American Academy of Pediatrics' committee on substance abuse. "They are potentially quite harmful and quite alluring because of the flavors."

Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) last week asked the Food and Drug Administration and the Federal Trade Commission to crack down on youth access to bidis. "This disturbing trend is further evidence that immediate action is needed to protect our kids from the lies and deception of the tobacco industry both in the U.S. and overseas," Harkin said.

IL: Co. Board Revokes No-Smoking Ordinance [08/18-4]

Excerpts from COUNTY REVOKES SMOKING BAN AFTER NURSING HOME DISPUTE

Steve Stanek, Chicago Tribune [08/18/99]

The McHenry County Board on Tuesday revoked its no-smoking ordinance and amended its building-use ordinance to allow residents at the county-run Valley Hi Nursing Home outside Woodstock to smoke.

The ordinances effectively banned smoking by the nursing home's 117 residents, but state nursing home regulators blocked nursing home officials from enforcing the ban, arguing that a resident's desire to smoke takes precedence over local ordinances that ban smoking in public places.

With the County Board's action, the county now follows the state's Illinois Clean Indoor Act, which allows smoking in designated areas of public buildings.

Smoking at Valley Hi has been a touchy issue since last April, after a divided County Board voted to join a lawsuit against the state to recover part of a \$9.6 billion settlement with the nation's

tobacco companies.

WHY IS THE CITY COUNCIL ASKING FOR
AN INVESTIGATION OF BIDIS?
And... What Are Bidis Anyway?

Berkeley, CA (Monday, November 1, 1999) - Bidis are hand rolled cigarettes from India, which come in candy flavors like chocolate, strawberry, mango and licorice. These skinny, unfiltered cigarettes are wrapped in a eucalyptus-type leaf (Tendu) and tied with two small threads. Youth in cities across America and here in Berkeley have had much greater access to bidis in recent months and this has public health officials and the Berkeley City Council worried.

Bidis (pronounced beedies) contain about three times as much nicotine carbon monoxide and five times as much tar as smoke from regular, filtered cigarettes, according to a new study by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. This same report states that "like all tobacco products bidis are mutagenic and carcinogenic. Bidi smokers risk coronary heart disease, cancers of the oral cavity, pharynx, larynx, lung, esophagus, stomach and liver. Perinatal mortality is also associated with bidi use during pregnancy."

On October 12, 1999, the Berkeley City Council took the bold step of recommending that the City Attorney research whether an outright ban on the sale of bidis can be imposed in Berkeley. They also adopted the recommendations of Community Health Commission, which asked that the City staff to:

1. Encourage the federal legislative effort to investigate bidis.
2. Support Berkeley Police Department "sting" operations to determine if merchants are selling tobacco to minors.
3. Share this information and concerns with the Berkeley Unified School District.
4. Require the posting of information about the tobacco content of bidis. (This item has also been referred to the City Attorney)

Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Representative Lloyd Doggett (D-TX) are urging the FTC to investigate possible deceptive advertising and tax evasion by bidi importers and want assurances that bidis have warning labels. The San Francisco Tobacco Free Project has asked the U.S. Custom's Department to investigate whether bidis are made with "forced or indentured child labor." Children in India work ten hours a day, six days a week and earn 30 cents per day to roll these poisonous products.

The City of Berkeley Tobacco Prevention program sent a letter to all tobacco merchants in Berkeley notified them that bidis contain tobacco and therefore cannot be sold to minors. The Berkeley Unified School District and the City's Tobacco Prevention Program are both letting teens know that there is no such thing as a "natural" cigarette, including bidis, Winstons or American Spirits.

The lost children of Vellore

There isn't anything to distinguish Mettuparai from the other villages of Tamil Nadu's Vellore in north Arcot district. It has the same quiet, the same peacefulness and, yes, the same look of deprivation.

But, at the main entry point, you will find something unique. Prominently displayed is a warning which, translated from the native Tamil, roughly reads: 'Anyone who takes our children for bonded labour will be severely punished.'

More than a decade ago, Mettuparai was one of the several villages which was actively engaged in beedi rolling. The industry was the villagers's mainstay. And the worst casualties, obviously, were the children. They were mortgaged to work long hours by cash-bereft parents who had no option but do that -- for, such was the poverty that plagued the locale.

But now, Mettuparai does not have even a single bonded child worker. And for this transformation, the villagers have the Indian Council for Child Welfare to thank.

In 1985, the ICCW had selected 16 villages in the district for 'adoption' under its Child Labour Relief Project. Mettuparai was one of those.

"Last year, we released 17 children from bonded labour here," says ICCW's honorary secretary (Vellore chapter) Tihilagavathy Ramaiah, "When we started work 11 years ago, people used to pledge their children at the slightest difficulty. But not anymore."

It took years of patient counselling, door-to-door surveys and direct person-to-person appeals to parents and agents alike to yield this promising result.

Researcher Dr R Vidyasagar holds that the north Arcot district is home to some of the most extensive bondage of child beedi rollers in the country. Of the 150,000 beedi workers in the district, an estimated 30,000 to 45,000 are bonded child labourers.

The local administration also claims to have made a mark in efforts to erase the menace. Under the 1995-launched Child Labour Abolition Support Scheme, mothers of bonded children have been motivated to come together and form small self-help groups.

"They are given loans to buy cows," says District Collector Davidar. "They also receive revolving funds to encourage their savings." The scheme has also undertaken group housing for families engaged in beedi work. In Perumugai village, for instance, 63 houses have been built for such families. Since July 1996, a non-formal education school -- with 29 students -- has also been functioning there.

But unfortunately, the children continue to roll beedis at home. "There is not much we can do about it," says Davidar "But at least we have got them out of the contractor-mortgage nexus."

Though the children are encouraged to pursue further education, many parents press them to work. The logic is simple: what guarantee is there that the child will get employment if he earns a bachelor or masters degree?

Ramaiah says though her organisation has been instrumental in freeing many children from bondage, preventing them from working at home is a different matter altogether. Of the 800 children attending ICCW's 13 night schools, 350 work at home.

The Working Women's Forum, a nationally renowned union of women workers in the informal sector, has also been making inroads into this area -- they have launched night schools for children and credit schemes for mothers. The WWF project covers 160 areas in Vellore. "Our project began in December 1983," says the credit-in charge Shiv. "There are 38,172 women enrolled in the scheme, but only 16,500 are credit members."

A 1997-survey undertaken by the WWF identified 134 bonded child laborers in its area of operation in Tamil Nadu. As the credit scheme has its financial limitations, liberating all the labourers look a mammoth task.

what is to be done?

Seventeen-year-old Vasantha's plight is a case in point. Mortgaged by her mother Rani when she was 12 for Rs 2,000, the girl has been rolling beedi ever since. For 14 hours every day. Thanks to the exorbitant rates of interest prevalent in such dealings, the initial amount has mounted to Rs 10,000 now.

"How can I ever get such a large amount," Rain asks, "The credit society will give me a maximum loan of Rs 3,000. Where will I get the remaining money?"

Child workers are mostly engaged in rolling beedi, sorting and sticking on labels. Though rates vary at different units, the children generally get Rs 2 for every 1,000 beedis they roll or label. On an average day, a child would roll around 2,000 beedis.

Which means he earns all of Rs 4 for 14 hours of labour!

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

explore further impact will

SOLAPUR, Oct 1: More than a hundred bidi factories all over the State have given a bandh call from October 2 and have decided to close their shops to protest against the hike in the minimum wages of the bidi workers. They are against the one-sided decision of the State Government to hike wages without taking them into confidence.

The State Government decision to increase the minimum wages from Rs. 27 - 69 per thousand bidis to Rs. 39.40 has annoyed them to the point of a revolt. The cases lodged against the factory owners for not implementing the directives of the Government has further added salt to their injuries.

Talking to The Indian Express here on Thursday, the Solapur Bidi Industry Association president Govind Tiwadi said that after a meeting of all the bidi factory owners in the State they had to unwillingly force the indefinite shutter down. He said that more than 3 lakh bidi workers would suffer by the bandh call giving full stop to the production of 30 crore bidis daily. He said that Rs. 1 crores turnover of the bidi industry will get affected due to the bandh and added that the State Government will be responsible for the outcome of the bandh and about 31 lakh bidi rollers, packers and related persons have to bore the brunt of state government's false policy. Meanwhile, when the bidi factory owners are all set for the bandh the bidi workers are divided over the issue whether they should demand the wage hike or not. The centre of trade union state vice-president and the CPM MLA Narsayya Adam is of the view that the minimum wages decision taken by the government is favourable for the both workers and bidi manufacturers. A newly-ormed union by the Vishnu Karampuri under the Shiv Sena banner is favouring the bidi owners and has demanded the old wages pattern and is against want any wage hike. Even he has alleged that the CITU is taking the bidi workers for a ride in Solapur.

Kerala court ban on cigarettes ignites industry anger

D Jose in Thiruvananthapuram

The Rs 12 billion tobacco industry is up in arms against the anti-smoking drive launched by the police in the wake of the Kerala High Court ban on smoking in public places.

The beedi (leaf-rolled raw cigarette) workers and petty shop owners affected by the ban have already hit the street as the sales have plummeted in urban areas since the implementation of the ban from July 12.

While the major beedi manufacturers are planning to move the Supreme Court against the ban, the beedi workers and shop-owners are preparing for a state-wide agitation. Various beedi and tobacco workers' unions affiliated to the Centre for Indian Trade Unions are scheduled to meet at Kannur in north Kerala on July 31 to chalk out a plan for the proposed statewide agitation.

The Kerala Dinesh Beedi and the Sathoo Beedi, two leading beedi manufacturing industries, are in touch with legal experts to file a review petition in the Supreme Court against the High Court directive. Chief Minister E K Naynar has already hinted government's support to the move. He said that it would not be possible for the government to rehabilitate the beedi workers, who are likely to be rendered unemployed by the ban.

The tobacco industry in the state provides direct employment to over 100,000 people. The number of retail traders, including cigarette vendors depending on tobacco for livelihood is estimated to be over 150,000. The total income generation to small traders from tobacco sales is to the tune of Rs 900 million to Rs 950 million a day, according to the Kerala Cigarette and Tobacco Dealers Association.

The bulk of the beedi workers in the state are concentrated in the cooperative sector. The Kerala Dinesh Beedi, which is the major cooperative venture, has 22 primary societies and as many as 301 worksheds employing 45,000 persons.

The Tobacco Dealers' Association said that the ban bringing all open places within its ambit has hurt the industry the most. The definition of "public places" includes hospitals, restaurants, bars, shops, industrial establishments, cinema houses, parks, bus stops, bus stations, railway stations, trains, buses and other public vehicles, highways, stadiums and other places where people gather.

The police are forced to apprehend as many people as possible as they are supposed to file a report before the High Court a month after the implementing the ban. The actual number of smokers held by the police throughout the state is not available. However, the unofficial estimates put the number of those caught by the police in the past one week at more than 4,000.

The smokers have learnt to resist the temptation for a puff on the street as the police action against smoking in public places has given it the complexion of a criminal offence. A smoker caught by the police would have to face an imprisonment of one month or pay a fine up to Rs 500 or both as cases are filed on the basis of Section 290 of the Indian Penal Code, which relates to public nuisance.

The police chase against the smokers has hit the petty shopowners who survive mainly on sales of these products. The sales of beedi and cigarettes have recorded a 30 to 50 per cent fall in urban areas since the imposition of the ban, according to trade sources.

Sadasivan Nair, a shop-owner at Thiruvananthapuram said that the sales of cigars and beedis in his shop had drastically come down following the anti-smoking drive. He said that his turnover had plummeted from Rs 6,000 a day prior to the ban to Rs 2,000 at present.

He said most of his customers were employees and workers who puffed a smoke after a tea or soft drink. After the ban, such customers have vanished.

Shiv Kumar, a beedi distributor in the city said that the sharp drop in sales had eroded his income. "It was our breadwinner and we will be driven to starvation if the ban continues," he added.

501 Mangalore
Ganesh Beedis
www.google

The ban has come at a time when the beedi industry was struggling hard for survival due to steep competition from small-size cigarettes and the anti-tobacco agitation.

Barring a small minority, the ban has been welcomed widely. Even many of the smokers have praised the court order which they hoped, would help them wriggle out of the grip of nicotine.

Women have found the ban most relieving. Subha Unnikrishnan, a lecturer in a private college at Thiruvananthapuram, hoped the move would help end the practice of smoking in trains and buses.

She said that the court order would help the society to recognise that passive smoking was a serious health hazard.

The ban on smoking was imposed by a division bench of the high court on a public interest litigation filed by Monamma Kakkad of the Bishop Choolapparambil College in Kottayam and Amruthayi Ramakrishnan of Ramantattukara Vaidyanangadi in Kozhikode.

Tobacco Industry

Breather for Choked Lungs

Driven by taxmen and derided by health lobbies, cigarette-makers head northeast for survival

When tobacco giant ITC announced a Rs 525-crore investment plan for cigarette production in Assam, the reason seemed logical. After all, the market leader, reeling under the dual impact of dwindling sales and increased pressure from the who and World Bank on tobacco-related health issues, was desperately seeking a platform to escape the excise dragnet and gain marketshare with a low-priced product. But ironically enough, the thought process is not confined to the precincts of Virginia House - the Calcutta headquarters of itc - but other cigarette majors like Godfrey Phillips India (gpi) and the Indonesian giant Gudang Garam Tabak. All have pushed in applications for manufacturing cigarettes in the northeastern tax haven, little realising that India's annual demand is 100 billion sticks while applications total 180 billion.

The proposed relocation may not cure all ills. Tobacco majors will do well to remember the failed Sikkim experiment. Insiders claim the Rs 27,276-crore tobacco industry - of which cigarette accounts for Rs 10,500 crore - is passing through its worst-ever phase because of steep excise duties, state luxury taxes and increased curbs on consumption of cigarette and chewing of tobacco. A whopping 55 per cent excise duty is factored in while fixing the base retail price of a stick. Tobacco accounts for 12 per cent of the total excise revenue. Estimates suggest tobacco contributed Rs 6,537 crore to the excise kitty in 1998-99, about 87 per cent of which came from cigarettes. This pressure, industry insiders admit, is forcing companies to rethink strategies for what many say could be a completely changed scenario in the subcontinent's tobacco business.

Almost all major players are working on a dual strategy of diversification and modernisation to sustain bottomlines and develop refined products. At ITC, sources claim that planners are chalking out strategy for the tobacco division and stem the decline of sales, mainly in the price-sensitive mini segment. ITC insiders admit there are plans for exports, especially of the oriental type of tobacco, the demand for which is rising globally. ITC plans to modernise its green leaf tobacco processing division and has pledged an estimated Rs 350 crore, half the sum it reserved for development of brands over the next five years.

GPI chief Ram Poddar wants the government to spell out its tobacco policy. He feels the pressure is crushing on those who can't diversify. "It's diversification strategy has been based upon sound business priorities which will enhance shareholder value in India. The issue is not whether pressure from anti-tobacco lobbies is increasing but whether there's a complete understanding of various aspects of the tobacco business," remarks Kurush Grant, executive vice-president (marketing), ITC. Recently, while addressing the company's annual general meeting, chairman Y.C. Deveshwar expressed concerns over increasing excise duties, consumption restrictions and continued smuggling of international brands that registered an outflow of foreign exchange worth Rs 500 crore. "Besides, the punitive taxation regime - both at the central and state levels - has made consumption unaffordable to the majority of tobacco consumers," rued Deveshwar in his address. ITC chairman Deveshwar holds the punitive tax regime responsible for putting cigarettes beyond most consumers' reach

It's worries are understandable. The restrictive environment and high taxes have heavily eroded the bottomlines of most players in the market. Figures for April-August '99 show that it's sales dropped to an all-time low of 26,296 million sticks (22 per cent lower than the 28,565 million sticks sold in the corresponding period of the previous year) in the mini segment. Worse, the Hyderabad-based Vazir Sultan Tobacco (vst) recorded a 25 per cent drop, while gpi recorded a 3.9 per cent drop in the same segment. These three make up 95 per cent of the total domestic sales.

"This is worrisome because the decline is continuing since March this year. Also, there's no sign of a revival," says C.K. Sharma, vice-president (corporate affairs and marketing), vst. "We need to respond to these pressures to check the falling sales margin," Sharma adds. Agrees Ram Poddar, gpi head and chairman of the Tobacco Institute of India (tii): "The government needs to clearly spell out its policies for the tobacco industry. Otherwise, there's little ray of hope. Companies with surplus funds will diversify. We are into tea, sportsgear and continue to increase such investments. But that's not the answer. This way, the government will kill the tobacco industry. And what about those who don't have surplus funds?" Concur tobacco analyst and chief executive of the Rs 400-crore Dharampal Premchand (makers of Baba zarda), Raj Sujan: "The industry is poised for a major shake-up. If companies can maintain their northeastern streak, you will see mini cigarettes being phased out and there will be a dominance of king-size filters." Sujan, who earlier headed vst and was a director with ITC, says the diversification was only for enhancing brand appeal (for example, the ITC and gpi sportsgear) and offering a cornucopia of tobacco blend choices to consumers. "They are not diversifying because of pressure from the World Bank or who. Rather, because such earnings will augment their modernisation. The consumer must be offered products that are constantly upgraded if the industry has to counter the health lobby," says Sujan. Sources told Outlook that not just cigarette-makers but almost everyone linked to the industry feel the pressure. Recently, a delegation of the Tobacco

Board and the ministry of agriculture wrote a petition to senior officials of the finance ministry highlighting the woes of tobacco farmers burdened with surplus crop. "The finance ministry officials were told that it was not easy telling farmers to stop cultivation because of dwindling demands and excess crops. And that the government needs to first work out a comprehensive programme for the farmers. After all, it's not just a handful of farmers, an estimated 26 million people are involved in the industry," Poddar adds. Besides cigarettes, other segments feeling the pressure are the bidi and chewing tobacco sectors. Sample this: the Kannur-based Kerala Dmesh Bidi Workers' Central Co-operative Society has started trial runs at its coconut ice-cream and pickle manufacturing units as the first step towards diversification. Sources say the move is aimed at shifting the large workforce from the bidi industry reeling under competition to alternative sources of employment.

In the chewing tobacco segment, the Kotharis of Paan Parag are into ball-point pens, mineral water and greeting cards, while the Dharampal Premchand group has planned a Rs 100-crore investment in foods, which is over and above its foray into salt, curry powder and rice under the Catch brand. The Malpani group is into tea and edible oil, while the Dhariwals of the Manikchand group are into oxy-acetylene cylinders, electric switches, mineral water and packaging. "Those interested in modernising will have to diversify to make ends meet. Even bidis and chewing tobacco must be upgraded as their largest market is the subcontinent," says Sujan.

Sources say few Indian companies are looking into the process of developing tobacco pouches on the lines of the ones produced by the multinational Swedish Match (which has taken over Wimco). Like loose khaini (chewing tobacco), the packed tobacco is retained between the inner lip and one's teeth and the packet thrown out once the juice is sucked in. Some others are negotiating for licences to manufacture nicotine gum. "If you notice, both products counter the smoke factor and avoid the spitting menace many associate with chewing tobacco," the sources say.

But is diversification for continued modernisation the only answer? Analysts are divided. One dominant section maintains shifting operations to the northeast is not the remedy. The ti recently told the finance ministry that such operations would result in huge differentials in excise duties and jeopardise the ministry's estimated Rs 6,537-crore revenue collections.

Besides, the government notification means tensions for small-time cigarette-makers who don't have the money to set up shop in the northeast. "Once manufacturing units shift, we as contract manufacturers for companies like ITC will find ourselves with no orders to fulfill," says a representation from the Bhopal-based Reliable Cigarette and Tobacco Industries Pvt Ltd. ti cited the case of Sikkim which had lured cigarette-makers pledging similar benefits but suffered once New Delhi imposed excise duties. "History will inevitably repeat itself. This will be particularly devastating at a time when cigarette volumes for this fiscal to date are already depressed," the institute says. But is anyone listening?

*diversification -
will alternative
as much as yield
the tobacco
industry?*

*for
as
govt as well
priv individuals*

Socio-demographic characteristics			
Population			
	1990	1995	2025
Total	850,638,000	935,744,000	1,392,086,000
Adult (15+)	542,391,000	606,250,000	1,071,802,000
% Urban	25.5	26.8	45.2
% Rural	74.5	73.2	54.8

Health Status

Life expectancy at birth, 1990-95 : 60.4 (males), 60.4 (females)

Infant mortality rate in 1990-95 : 82 per 1,000 live births

Socio-Economic Situation

GNP per capita (US\$), 1991 : 330, Real GDP per capita (PPP\$), 1991 : 1,150

Average distribution of labour force by sector, 1990 - 92 : Agriculture 62%; Industry 11%; Services 27%

Adult literacy rate (%), 1992 : Total 50; Male 64; Female 35

Tobacco production, trade and industry

Agriculture In 1993, 417,700 hectares were harvested for tobacco, down from 436,600 hectares in 1985.

About 0.2% of all arable land is used for tobacco growing.

Production and Trade In 1992, 578,800 tonnes (7.0% of world total unmanufactured tobacco) was produced in India, making it the world's third largest tobacco-growing country. In 1992, India produced about 767,436 million manufactured cigarettes and bidis, accounting for 13.5% of the world total. About 2,100 million cigarettes were exported. Only 30 million manufactured cigarettes were imported. In 1990, India's earnings from tobacco exports totalled US\$ 127.7 million, compared with US\$ 122.2 million in 1985. Import costs of cigarettes rose tenfold in the same period to US\$ 3.0 million.

Industry In 1993, 3.4 million people were estimated to be engaged full-time in tobacco manufacturing. This accounts for 11.7% of all manufacturing work. Almost 0.9 million people (full-time equivalent) work in growing

and curing tobacco.

Tobacco consumption

Annual consumption of manufactured cigarettes declined between 1984 and 1992 from around 90 billion to about 85 billion. In 1992, 6.1% of world total unmanufactured tobacco and 1.5% of world total manufactured cigarettes were consumed in India. Only about 20% of the total tobacco consumed in India (by weight) is in the form of cigarettes. Bidis account for about 40% of tobacco consumption (about 675,000 million bidis), with the rest divided among chewing tobacco, pan masala, snuff, hookah, hookli, chutta dhumti, and other tobacco mixtures featuring ingredients such as areca nut. Chuttas and dhumtis are also smoked in reverse fashion, with the lighted end inside the mouth. Consumption patterns of tobacco show major differences across regions.

Consumption of Manufactured Cigarettes

Annual average per adult (15+)

	Cigarettes	Bidis	Total
1970-72	170	840	1,010
1980-82	180	1,130	1,310
1990-92	150	1,220	1,370

*Using these figures
will be helpful
with the studies...*

Tar/Nicotine/Filters In 1990, tar levels of cigarettes ranged from 18.0 - 28.0 mg, and nicotine levels from 0.9 - 1.8 mg. Tar levels of bidis are much higher at 45-50 mg. In 1990, 51% of the cigarettes sold were filter-tipped, however, there is little difference in nicotine yields of filter and non-filter cigarettes manufactured in India.

Prevalence

Adequate national data on tobacco prevalence of tobacco is not currently available. However, based on estimated per capita consumption figures, it appears that bidi smoking has risen substantially during the last three decades. Cigarette smoking increased up to the 1970s, remained stationary or declined somewhat during

the 1980s. Other forms of tobacco use have declined considerably over the years.

Tobacco use among population sub-groups It is estimated that 65% of all men use some form of tobacco. (about 35% smoking, 22% smokeless tobacco, 8% both). Prevalence rates for women differed widely, from 15% in Bhavnagar to 67% in Andhra Pradesh. However, overall prevalence of bidi and cigarette smoking among women is about 3%. The use of smokeless tobacco is similar among women and men. About one-third of women use at least one form of tobacco. Differences in tobacco use also vary among other groups; Sikhs do not use tobacco at all, and Parsis use very little, while tobacco use is permissible among Hindus, Moslems and Christians. Smoking rates tend to be higher in rural areas than urban areas. Smoking is a status symbol among urban educated youths, but most appear to be unaware of the hazards of smoking.

Mortality from Tobacco Use

Tobacco is responsible for a significant amount of morbidity and mortality among middle-aged adults. India has one of the highest rates of oral cancer in the world, and the rates are still increasing. Tobacco-related cancers account for about half of all cancers among men and one-fourth among women. Oral cancer accounts for one-third of the total cancer cases, with 90% of the patients being tobacco chewers. Clinical observations in some areas have revealed that over 60% of heart disease patients under 40 years of age are tobacco users; over half of the patients aged 41-60 are also smokers.

Tobacco Control Measures

Control on Tobacco Products Tobacco advertising has been banned in state-controlled electronic media, but continues without restriction in newspapers, magazines, on posters, billboards, and in the video cassettes of Indian films. A proposal for a total ban on advertising and sponsorship of all tobacco products is under consideration by the Indian Government.

Health warnings are required on cigarette packets since the "Cigarette Act" of 1975. The government has appointed a full-time coordinator of tobacco control activities. However, also in 1975 the government dropped restrictions on package size and contents for cigarettes, cigars and 22 other products, and initiated a Tobacco Development Board for promoting tobacco by offering direct subsidies and a price support system to farmers.

Taxes are levied on tobacco products, at varying rates and with varying degrees of effectiveness. Between 1987 and 1992, excise duty on many Indian cigarettes increased between 64% - 112%. Cigarette taxes represent about 75% of the retail price. Taxes are much lower on packaged chewing tobacco and are rarely collected on bidis and unpackage tobacco products. Regulatory control and the application of retail taxes on these products is extremely difficult as there is a large sector which operates outside of official control. For example,

*effect of 1 of
taxes on
bidis / gutka*

Reviewing copy?

the bidi industry is highly decentralized and many manufacturers are unlicensed. Much of bidi manufacturing is one in cottage industry. Often whole families, including women and children, are engaged in bidi production.

High taxes on manufactured cigarettes and low taxes on bidis and other tobacco products are encouraging substitution of bidis and other products for manufactured cigarettes.

Protection for non-smokers In 1990, through an executive order, the government implemented a prohibition on smoking in all health care establishments, government offices, educational institutions, air-conditioned railway cars, chaircars, buses, and domestic passenger flights.

Health education There is no organization currently working at the national level for tobacco control. Several non-governmental organisations and committed individuals at the local levels are also involved, but to date, no perceptible attitudinal changes among tobacco consumers have been found.

September 17, 1999 / 48(36);796-799

Bidi Use Among Urban Youth -- Massachusetts, March-April 1999

Tobacco use is the leading preventable cause of death in the United States. Bidis are small, brown, hand-rolled cigarettes primarily made in India and other southeast Asian countries (1) consisting of tobacco wrapped in a tendu or temburni leaf (*Diospyros melanoxylon*). In the United States, bidis are purchased for \$1.50-\$4.00 for one package of 20 and are available in different flavors (e.g., cherry, chocolate, and mango). Anecdotal reports indicate that bidi use was first observed during the mid-1990s and seems to be widespread among youth and racial/ethnic minority adolescents. This report summarizes preliminary data collected from a convenience sample of adolescents surveyed during March and early April 1999 in Massachusetts on the prevalence of bidi use among urban youth; these data indicate that of 642 youth surveyed, 40% had smoked bidis at least once during their lifetimes and 16% were current bidi smokers.

The Massachusetts Tobacco Control Program conducted a pilot study to assess adolescents' knowledge and use of bidis. A convenience sample included a school- and community-based survey of youth from a large metropolitan area in Massachusetts. Peer leaders from a local tobacco-use prevention program and their adult advisors were granted access to three middle schools and seven high schools through professional networks (e.g., contact with the principal, health teacher, and nurse). Participants were given a set of standardized instructions and informed consent was obtained. Students surveyed in school were from health, science (e.g., biology, chemistry, and computer science), language (e.g., English or English as a second language), and history classes. After completing the surveys, participants were briefed about the intent of the survey. Peer leaders also assessed youth who attended local schools in several community neighborhoods. Data gathered in the community were from areas frequented by students (i.e., neighborhood stores, after-school programs, and bus and subway stations).

Community respondents were compared with school respondents. A greater proportion of community respondents reported heavy and past-month bidi use than school respondents. Community respondents also were more likely to be Hispanic and less likely to be white than school respondents. Analyses conducted by grade and race/ethnicity on two results (current and heavy bidi use) indicated no significant differences.

A total of 822 respondents participated in the study; 108 surveys with incomplete or inconsistent responses were eliminated. Of those 642 participants whose self-reported grade was seven through 12 (Table 1), 342 (55%) girls and 282 (45%) boys completed surveys (18 respondents did not report sex); 341 (53%) were surveyed in schools and 299 (47%) were surveyed in the community (two surveys were missing setting information); 232 (36%) were Hispanic, 220 (34%)

were black (non-Hispanic), 82 (13%) were white (non-Hispanic), and 108 (17%) were other.* Current bidi users were defined as having "smoked more than one bidi in the last 30 days." Lifetime bidi smokers were defined as having "smoked a bidi, even just one or two puffs." Heavy bidi smokers were defined as having "smoked more than 100 bidis in their lifetime." Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 7.5. Prevalence of bidi use was compared by sex, race/ethnicity, grade, and overall (Table 1). Two hundred fifty-six (40%) of the respondents had ever smoked bidis, 100 (16%) were current bidi users, and 50 (8%) were heavy bidi users. There were no significant differences in bidi use by sex, grade, or race/ethnicity. Responses (n=280) to the question why bidis were smoked instead of cigarettes included bidis tasted better (63 [23%]), were cheaper (49 [18%]), were safer (37 [13%]), and were easier to buy (33 [12%]). Other reasons included "just to try it" (20 [7%]), "to improve my mood" (17 [6%]), "it makes me look cool" (16 [6%]), "my friends smoke them" (four [1%]), "smoke them in place of cigarettes or marijuana" (four [1%]), "like the flavor" (three [1%]), and other (34 [12%]).

Reported by: C Celebucki, PhD, DM Turner-Bowker, PhD, G Connolly, DMD, HK Koh, MD, Massachusetts Dept of Public Health; Tobacco Control Program, Boston, Massachusetts. Office on Smoking and Health, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, CDC.

Editorial Note:

When tested on a standard smoking machine, bidis produced higher levels of carbon monoxide, nicotine, and tar than cigarettes (1-3); one study found that bidis produced approximately three times the amount of carbon monoxide and nicotine and approximately five times the amount of tar than cigarettes (4). Because of low combustibility of the tendu leaf wrapper, bidi smokers inhale more often and more deeply, breathing in greater quantities of tar and other toxins than cigarette smokers (2-6). Like all tobacco products, bidis are mutagenic and carcinogenic (6). Bidi smokers risk coronary heart disease (7), cancers of the oral cavity, pharynx, larynx (1), lung (8,9), esophagus, stomach, and liver (1). Perinatal mortality is also associated with bidi use during pregnancy (10).

The findings in this report are subject to at least five limitations. First, the external validity of this study may be limited by convenience sampling and may not represent the prevalence of bidi use among all students in these schools and communities. More representative surveys are needed to develop precise estimates of bidi use and to monitor trends over time. Second, participants surveyed in the community may have been subject to selection bias; peer leaders may have been more likely to approach those similar to them in age and race/ethnicity. Because most peer leaders were racial/ethnic minorities aged less than 16 years, the convenience sample surveyed in the community reflects these demographics. Third, the extent of underreporting and overreporting of bidi use cannot be determined. Fourth, the number or characteristics of students who refused to participate is not known. Finally, the sample was drawn from one large metropolitan area and may not represent persons from other urban areas in Massachusetts or the rest of the United States. This investigation was the first in the United States to estimate the prevalence of bidi smoking among students in grades seven through 12. Preliminary findings from this study support the need for additional research on bidis, particularly on smoking prevalence among youth from differing geographic, educational, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The knowledge, attitudes, and behavioral patterns of bidi smokers also must be assessed to understand this phenomenon and to curtail use. Research should assess the psychosocial and contextual factors affecting bidi use, the influence of peer pressure, how bidis are smoked (as an initiation to smoking or following cigarette smoking), and whether bidis are smoked instead of cigarettes or to mask the use of other substances.

Adolescents in this study reported their preference for the taste of bidis over cigarettes and their belief that bidis are less expensive, easier to buy, and safer than cigarettes. The findings on prevalence, knowledge, and attitudes, especially if they are replicated in other communities, may demonstrate the need for actions to curtail youth access to bidis similar to measures for limiting access to cigarettes and smokeless tobacco. Adolescents should be alerted to the high toxicity of bidis to dispel the notion that bidis are safer to smoke than cigarettes. Additional research is

needed to assess other factors affecting the use of novel tobacco products such as bidis, including how restrictions on access and advertising are being enforced, how pricing affects use of these products, the application of federal and state excise taxes, and appropriate labeling of these products with the Surgeon General's health warnings regarding tobacco use.

Table 1

TABLE 1. Percentage of middle and high school students surveyed who reported bidi use, by sex, race/ethnicity, and grade -- Massachusetts, 1999

Characteristic	Lifetime*		Current+		Heavy&	
	No.	No. (%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)
Sex						
Female	342	121 (35)	43	(12)	18	(5)
Male	282	127 (45)	54	(19)	32	(11)
Race/Ethnicity						
White, non-Hispanic	82	32 (39)	9	(11)	5	(6)
Black, non-Hispanic	220	88 (40)	30	(14)	17	(8)
Hispanic	232	95 (41)	49	(21)	21	(9)
Other@	108	41 (38)	12	(11)	7	(6)
Grade						
7	92	29 (31)	13	(14)	1	(1)
8	113	39 (34)	21	(19)	10	(9)
9	138	61 (44)	19	(14)	11	(8)
10	182	76 (42)	23	(13)	14	(8)
11	90	39 (43)	18	(20)	10	(11)
12	27	12 (44)	6	(22)	4	(15)
Overall	642	256 (40)	100	(16)	50	(8)

* Smoked at least once in lifetime (ever smoked, even one or two puffs).

+ Smoked one or more in the last 30 days.

& Smoked ≥ 100 in lifetime.

@ When presented separately, numbers for other racial/ethnic groups were too small for meaningful analysis.

NEWS - Pamela D'Mello: Anti-tobacco campaign

Date: Mon, 08 Jun 1998 15:07:53 +0100

Panaji- Taking the cue from nuke blasts and the language of kilotonnes and moratoriums, pro-health campaigners have demanded a "freeze on licences to produce more tobacco products and a moratorium on investments in the tobacco industry".

Goa-headquartered National Organisation for Tobacco Eradication (NOTE India) told Prime Minister Vajpayee that "unless we halt this non-nuclear trade of mass destruction, there is no escape for our youth for being addicted".

Said NOTE India chairperson Dr Sharad G Vaidya: "558 kilotonnes of tobacco (1 kiloton of tobacco=1000 tonnes) is a greater danger to the country than all the nuclear hazards and perceived threats. Every additional ton of tobacco eventually kills about 1.4 persons."

Dr Vaidya asked the government to start by withdrawing all concessions to tobacco.

Tobacco causes incurable diseases, NOTE pointed out, blaming it for about 40% of cancers, 25% of fatal heart attacks, 66% of chronic obstructive lung diseases. Can a government be a partner in this "criminal activity", asked NOTE, in connection with World No-Tobacco Day (May 31).

It added that the addiction that tobacco causes is more severe than even heroin or alcohol and success rate of de-addiction is not more than 33% in the best of hands.

Yet, it said between 1991-92 and 1994-95, the number of factories in manufacturing sector of all types of tobacco have increased 22.7%, from 827 to 1015.

Highest growth -- twenty-seven percent -- had been reported in the Pan Masala or Gutkha (chewing-tobacco) sector with 69 factories up from 54. Productive investment in 6693 Bidi factories has grown 28% to Rs. 306 crores from Rs. 239 crores.

India's Agriculture Ministry also has plans to increase tobacco production 25% in the next decade, NOTE said.

In India, production for 1997 is forecast at 604,500 tonnes, which is up seven percent from the revised crop estimate of 562,750 tonnes in 1996, according to a special commodity report.

NOTE said the higher forecast crop in 1997 is the result of higher plantings which, in turn, are the result of increased export demand and higher domestic prices.

NOTE charged that three Acts of Parliament "directly support" tobacco promotion in India -- The Excise Act of 1944, the Tobacco Board Act, 1975 with its amendments and the Cigarette Act of 1975.

Other laws and rules like the Debt Relief Act, Finance Acts from time to time, Indo-British Partnership Initiative (IBPI), Foreign Direct Investment Board also "help promote tobacco".

India's government considers tobacco an agricultural product and grants tobacco farmers all subsidies applicable to food crops, when "in fact tobacco should be treated as narcotic".

"For example tobacco farmers pay only Rs. 60 per acre as water charges for irrigation when the actual cost is a Rs. 8125 per acre... making the tobacco subsidies run into about Rs. 2500

crore per year only for irrigation," said Dr Vaidya.

Health for All would be a mirage in the 21st century too, let alone by the year 2000, unless the government puts a moratorium on the investment in the tobacco, a freeze on issuing new licences for more factories removes subsidies and scraps the Tobacco Board Act, NOTE said.

Behind a Hot Smoke, Hard Labor:
Women Toil to Supply Bidi Cigarette

Behind a Hot Smoke, Hard Labor: Women Toil to Supply Bidi Cigarette

by MIRIAM JORDAN Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

INDIA: Source: The Wall Street Journal Interactive Edition, Tuesday, 8/17/99

AHMEDNAGAR, India -- Surekha Suram sits on the floor of her one-room shack, rolling a reddish-brown leaf filled with tobacco flakes and then tying one end with a thread. On a good day she makes about 1,000 of these minicigarettes, or bidis, earning about 80 cents.

Smoking bidis has become a hot fad among young American hipsters. Exports to the U.S. of the cheap, fruit-flavored cigarettes (pronounced "beedees") have doubled in the past year. Behind the trend is a global supply line that starts half a world away, in impoverished homes in rural India where underpaid women labor long hours to keep the goods flowing. Since the turn of the century, when Indians began smoking hand-made cigarettes in large numbers, illiterate women have eked out an existence much as Ms. Suram does today. Nowadays, bidi-making employs about five million Indian women, making it second only to farming. It is often carried out under exploitative conditions, and the cigarettes may pose health risks for the rollers as well as the smokers.

The bidi, which is filled with locally grown, sun-cured tobacco, looks something like a marijuana joint. It rarely carries a filter and is skinnier and shorter than a white stick cigarette. "It tastes better" too, says 19-year-old Salvador Rasco as he buys a couple of packs at Ye Ole Tobacco Shop in Savannah, Ga. The only drawback, he says, is "you gotta keep smoking them, or they go out on you," a result of the poor combustibility of the tendu leaf the tobacco is wrapped in.

Bidi manufacturers say they are performing a national service by providing work for the women. "If they didn't do this, what other job would these women do?" asks Praful Patel, who employs 50,000 women across eight states and is a member of parliament. In terms of worker comfort, "it's just like knitting," he says. "It's a fine-tuned, nice job."

Labor activists accuse manufacturers of keeping wages low and turning a blind eye to exploitation. Since most rollers work at home, it is tough to enforce worker-protection laws or prevent child labor. "Bidi workers can't sustain a struggle with employers because they're living hand-to-mouth," says R.K. Ratnakar, general-secretary of the All India Bidi Workers and Tobacco Workers Federation, of which Ms. Suram is a member. Labor-ministry officials acknowledge many bidi rollers enlist their young daughters, though child labor is illegal.

Deccan Herald
Feb 2nd - letter to
the editor

Canada - compulsory
to show a picture
of a tobacco-related
disease on the cigar-
ette pack eg picture
of diseased lungs
caused from tobacco
etc

Surekha Suram, who ekes out a living in rural India rolling bidi cigarettes by hand from 9 a.m. to 11 p.m., lines up at a warehouse to have her output inspected by checkers.

Ms. Suram, 43 years old and a widow, says she started rolling bidis when she was 13. Her two teenage daughters roll as well. Ms. Suram earns about \$18 a month. That is low for India, where the average monthly household income is \$40.

Her day begins at 5:30 a.m., when she fetches cooking and bathing water from a well at the end of a squalid lane where she lives. She cooks a breakfast of flatbread and vegetables, and tidies up her dank, windowless one-room home, in which she eats, works and sleeps on a rope cot.

By 9 a.m., Ms. Suram is sitting on the ground indoors, rolling bidis. She works until 11 p.m., completing a bidi every 25 seconds, except for an hour when she walks to a warehouse nearby to drop off her bidis and pick up her pay and more tobacco flakes, tendu leaves and thread for the next day.

No Breaks

"I can't afford to take a break," she says, eyes focused on the large metal tray on her lap where she works. "I have to fill my stomach and that of my children."

Though there is no proof that rolling causes respiratory diseases, the incidence of tuberculosis and bronchial asthma among bidi rollers is higher than that among the general population, according to research by the Factory Advisory Services and Labor Institute in Bombay, a unit of the Labor Ministry. Ms. Suram and her colleagues in this western Indian town complain of back strain and neckaches, and they cough from the dust they inhale.

Bidis are a fixture in India, where eight are consumed for every conventional cigarette. Annual sales are around \$1.4 billion. Despite a surge in demand from the U.S. and other Western markets during the past two years, exports account for less than 1% of sales, according to the bidi-industry federation of India.

Bidis in India aren't candy-flavored, and it isn't clear who first had the idea to add flavors for Western markets. Sable Waghire & Co., an Indian manufacturer that exports bidis in 18 flavors to the U.S., says it began experimenting with flavoring about four years ago and decided to target the overseas market after flavors flopped in India. Large U.S. importers, such as Kretek International Inc., Moorpark, Calif., tout aromas from strawberry and mandarin orange to vanilla and black licorice on their Web sites.

The Atlanta-based Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says bidis are more harmful than regular cigarettes because they contain at least three times more tar and nicotine. Some U.S. lawmakers are concerned that bidis are being sold illegally to minors.

In India, where bidis are deemed the poor man's cigarette, a bundle of 25 costs about eight cents. A pack of name-brand regular cigarettes sells here for about \$1. By contrast, in the U.S., a pack of 20 bidis costs at least \$2, while regular cigarettes can cost more than \$3 a pack. Sable Waghire pays its 60,000 women rollers, including Ms. Suram, about 80 cents per 1,000 bidis, according to co-owner Sanjay Sable. That wage is stipulated by Maharashtra, a relatively prosperous state where he operates.

It's twice as much as some competitors in states with lower minimum wages or more lenient supervision, Mr. Sable says. He also contributes to pension and welfare plans for his workers, a federal-government

requirement fulfilled by fewer than half of India's bidi employers, according to the union.

'Offers Work'

Twice in the past three years, Mr. Sable and other manufacturers in Maharashtra have closed their operations to protest a state order to raise wages. The government backed down both times. "The bidi sector offers work to such a large number of people," says S.K. Das, director general of the Labor Ministry. "We have to make sure it keeps going."

For rollers, much of the trouble is caused by middlemen, who are contracted by big firms to keep track of the far-flung labor pool. Bidi rollers and human-rights groups say middlemen sometimes dodge the minimum wage, paying as little as 30 cents a day. Another ploy is to undersupply tobacco, leaves or thread and then make deductions for shortfalls in production.

What's more, as much as one-fifth of a roller's daily production is typically rejected as defective, with the value cut from the worker's wages.

Ms. Suram and some colleagues recently took to the streets to protest the poor quality of leaves they receive, to no avail. All told, women often end up earning "half their entitlement," says a 1999 report prepared by the International Labor Organization.

On a recent afternoon, the Sable Waghire warehouse where Ms. Suram and other bidi workers take their output was crowded with about a thousand women amid piles of leaves and gunny sacks of tobacco. Clad in bright saris, they stood in long queues, trays in their arms, waiting to have their day's work inspected by a barefoot bidi checker, who sat on a wooden table against the wall. He quickly sifted through each woman's bundle, chucking defective bidis -- those with slightly torn or discolored leaves -- into a reject pile on the floor.

One disgruntled bidi roller, dressed in a pink sari with a ponytail hanging to her waist, was shouting at a bidi checker. The previous day, she had sent her daughter to deliver her production, and the checker had rejected 10% and cut her pay. "I sent my daughter because I couldn't come, and you tricked her," roars the woman, who gives her name as Nirmala. "My bidis are good quality! I am an experienced bidi roller!"

Ms. Suram had a better day. After lining up to have her bidis inspected, she breathed a sigh of relief: Not a single one was rejected. The bidi checker jotted down her production on a card, which Ms. Suram carried to another line. There she was given 80 cents in coins and tattered bills.

Smoking issue: AITUC's plea (fwd)

Smoking issue: AITUC's plea

by Our Special Correspondent

Source: Hindu Online, Thursday, 9/30/99

CHENNAI, SEPT. 29. The State unit of the CPI-affiliated AITUC has urged the State Government to go slow on the issue of banning smoking in public places, though it was a laudable move.

A meeting of the state and district level office-bearers of the AITUC held in Chennai said the Government would do well to ponder the pros and cons of a ban on smoking in public places as any such action would particularly hit the beedi industry and the 20 lakh workers dependent on

pol parties' encouragement.

it for their livelihood.

The meeting, in which the AITUC's State President, Mr.S.C.Krishnan and its General Secretary, Mr.S.S.Thyagarajan were among those who participated, in a resolution said any such ban on smoking should be implemented only after providing alternate employment to the existing beedi industry workers.

Already, efforts were being made by the tobacco MNCs' to take a lion's share of the domestic cigarettes market, which would only impact the beedi industry, the AITUC pointed out.

Condemning the alleged termination of "loadmen" who have been working for the past 15 years with the Tamilnadu State Marketing Corporation (TASMAC) at Madurai and awaiting regularisation, after having shifted the TASMAC godown to a nearby place, the AITUC in another resolution said this practice of replacing existing "loadmen" with new hands "said to have proximity to ruling party members", should be given up immediately.

Referring to the Government's announcement in May this year of providing a monthly relief of Rs.250 to workers of select closed industrial units, the AITUC regretted that the scheme was yet to take off.

The Government should simplify the procedure for making payments as no sick industry has come forward so far to open a common bank account as stipulated in the scheme, it said and urged that the monthly relief be enhanced to Rs.1000.

The Government setting apart Rs.100 crore to activate the welfare board for work-force in the unorganised sector and raising the minimum bonus payable to workers from 8.33 per cent to 12.50 per cent were among the other resolutions adopted at the meeting.

To press for these demands, the AITUC would organise state-wide processions on October 15, it added.

Re: Women in the homebased workforce

Dear Friends,

I am Rekha Pande, teaching in the History Department of the University of Hyderabad, India.

I am interested in Gender Issues, and most of my work is related to Women and Children in unorganised sectors. I have done a project on Women and Children in the Beedi industry and today I want to share this work with you. Beedi, an indigenous cigarette, requires tobacco to be rolled in a tendu leaf and tied with cotton thread. This product is now also becoming popular in developed countries. In the popular imagination, beedis represent the working class of India. Although beedis are made by home-based piece rate workers (women and girls, working at home), men handle the packaging, transportation and sales activities. This is a very "gendered" industry because only women and girls make beedis: it is regarded as "women's work". Boys and men work in factories and are involved in packaging, transportation etc. Boys only make beedis if they are less than ten years of age. This is also a very caste and class-based industry because only lower levels of castes and people living below poverty line make it. Beedi making is an extremely labour intensive, back breaking and strenuous

occupation but women and children do it for lack of any other means of livelihood.

These women work fourteen to fifteen hour a day, but since this industry falls within the unorganised, small scale industry, manufacturers shun their responsibilities and get away with paying workers a pittance. Women are paid Rs.21 (about 0.50 US\$; Rs. 44= 1 US\$) for making 1000 thousand beedis.

The social and cultural constructs of gender relations, the existing power relations in society along with the disadvantages of putting out system all combine to create an exploitative situation. The beedi making women live and work in a male dominated industry where the manufacturer, the contractor and the consumer of the goods are all male and only the worker is female.

Unfortunately, in economic analysis, many data gathering systems, policy makers and administrators generally ignore these kinds of structural exploitations.

Thanking you.

Rekha Pande

*Public Interest -
lack of knowledge*

BOARDS: Smoking & other WNT topics LIVE

Different Smokes

By Dr. Timothy Johnson

ABCNEWS.com

B O S T O N, July 15 — As the cost of cigarettes rises, a young generation of smokers is being hooked by a growing trend: bidi smoking.

Bidis are hand-rolled, unfiltered cigarettes — with pure tobacco — imported from India.

"These are good," one youth says as he smokes on a street corner in Boston. "They got flavor to them, and that's the whole thing."

Bidis are also cheaper than regular cigarettes. In some places, they can cost half the price of regular cigarettes. One reason they are so cheap is because they are manufactured by child laborers in India.

A study conducted by Massachusetts health officials also confirmed that bidis are even more toxic than regular cigarettes.

"We found twice to three times the amount of tar and carbon monoxide and seven times the amount of nicotine per gram," says Dr. Greg Connolly of the Massachusetts Department of Health.

Nationwide Concern

Massachusetts is not the only state that should be

worrying about what its kids are smoking.

Since last year's tobacco settlement began driving up the price of regular cigarettes, the bidi phenomenon appears to be spreading to other states. So far, Arizona is the only state to draft legislation making them illegal for underage smokers.

By producing bidis in several flavors, manufacturers have found another way to attract young smokers.

"I've had strawberry, grape, I've heard they have vanilla," says one teen smoker.

Although they might like the flavors, many young bidi smokers know very little about what they are inhaling, according to a high school survey conducted by teens in San Francisco.

"Half of the youth they spoke to actually thought that bidis couldn't give you cancer," says Susanna Hennessey-Toure of the San Francisco Department of Health.

In fact, many thought bidis were herbal cigarettes with no tobacco. Seven out of 10 packages purchased in the survey carried no warning labels, which are required on regular cigarettes.

Easy Access for Teens

Easy access is another concern. The survey found minors were able to purchase bidis in almost a quarter of the stores they went into. Bidis' availability on the Internet makes them that much more attainable to curious teens.

"It's kind of like when a new pair of Jordans comes out or something," explains teen volunteer Frederick Johnson. "Everybody wants to get them. They see a new something to smoke come out [and] say, 'I want to try it.'"

But unlike Jordans, bidis are a fad that has the potential to kill.

flavoring processes

Sunday 5 December 1999
Posted at 0130 hrs IST

US attorneys general seek ban on India's bidis

PHOENIX: Attorneys general from throughout the United States want to ban the sale of small but strong cigarettes from India.

The hand-rolled cigarettes known as bidis have more than three times the amount of nicotine and more than five times the amount of tar as "regular cigarettes," do, the officials say.

Additionally, they are flavored with chocolate, lemon-lime, strawberry, cloves, mint and other tastes to make them more appealing to young people, the National Association of Attorneys General said Friday.

All 50 of the U.S.'s attorneys general approved asking federal authorities to halt the marketing and sale of the oddly shaped cigarettes.

The association also said the cigarettes are made by young indentured children. The U.S. Customs Service recently banned importation of Mangalore Ganesh brand bidis because of that practice, the association said.

"We are writing to Congress and to the federal agencies to urge that the federal government do everything possible to enforce laws to ensure that bidis are not available to children and youth in the U.S.," Arizona Attorney General Janet Napolitano said in a letter on behalf of the association.

Napolitano, who alerted the U.S. earlier in the week to a free-samples promotion by R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Holdings Inc. she said violates the multistate tobacco settlements, was asked to head a committee intended to help curb minors' access to tobacco products.

The cigarettes typically are sold by service stations, convenience stores, liquor stores, smoke shops and some health food stores, the association said. The group said bidis also may be purchased by phone and via the Internet.

Studies indicate that bidis smokers are twice as likely to get lung cancer as those who smoke Indian filtered cigarettes, the association said. (Associated Press)

Bidis: What the Kids Are Saying... and the Doctors [08/10-2]

Excerpts from CALIFORNIA AND THE WEST; AS YOUTHS LIGHT UP, HEALTH ACTIVISTS FUME OVER BIDIS; TOBACCO: THE SWEET-FLAVORED, READILY AVAILABLE CIGARETTES ARE THE RAGE AMONG UNDERAGE SMOKERS. OFFICIALS WARN THAT THEY POSE GREATER RISKS THAN REGULAR

BRANDS.

By KATE FOLMAR, Los Angeles Times [08/10/99]

Ask 16-year-old Anna why she smokes bidi cigarettes and she'll glance down at her clunky platform sandals, look up knowingly and smile: They're the latest trend. They give a real buzz, adds 15-year-old Erika, with her pierced navel and lace-trimmed tank top. Strawberry bidis are best, say the two friends, lounging at a Starbucks after a day at the Huntington Beach pier. Or maybe the vanilla ones.

"A cigarette calms you down," Anna said. "Bidis have a nice rush to them. I think it's the closest thing to illegal drugs you can buy legally."

Actually, like all cigarettes, the imported bidis cannot be legally sold to those under 18. But that hardly seems to be impeding some teenagers.

Bidis, which resemble marijuana joints and come in flavors like mango, wild cherry and chocolate, have become so popular among urban youths that alarmed health experts are warning that they are more dangerous than regular cigarettes.

Later this month, a study expected to be published in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report will show that bidis contain five times the tar and three times the nicotine of name-brand cigarettes.

Anti-tobacco activists also fear that their candy-like appeal will lure youths into smoking, as did the now-outlawed Joe Camel.

Bidis (sometimes spelled beedies or beadies) are hand-rolled, often unfiltered cigarettes filled with finely flaked tobacco bundled in a fuzzy leaf and bound tight with a colored thread.

Imported from India, the stubby sticks are about half the diameter of major-brand cigarettes. But, public health officials warn, bidis can pack twice the cancer-causing punch.

Caught off-guard by the trend, public health officials from Massachusetts to California are scrambling to produce accurate data on bidi usage and find ways to warn teenagers about their health dangers.

Arizona has specifically banned the sale of bidis to minors. Federal trade officials are cracking down on bidi packages without warning labels.

Bidis are "gaining rapid popularity among urban youth in the U.S.," said Dr. Howard Koh, health commissioner of Massachusetts, whose Public Health Department is about to publish a study of bidi use among 650 urban teenagers that cites a "disturbingly high" level of bidi smoking.

"This is a problem for communities," Koh said. "It's a problem for urban youth. It's a problem for communities of color."

Despite the concern, teenagers say bidis are easy to procure: You can get them as party favors or buy them at swap meets. Some convenience and tobacco stores sell them for \$ 2.50 to \$ 4 a pack, up to a dollar less than conventional brands. Some teenagers and young adults mistakenly believe bidis pose less health risk than such cigarettes as Camels or Marlboros because they're "natural."

As tobacco products, bidis are illegal for minors to buy; Arizona legislators recently took the additional step of specifically banning bidi sales to youth and increasing penalties for illegal sales. Concerned Los Angeles public health officials expect to add a bidi question or two to their upcoming tobacco survey of 3,000 homes; the state is doing likewise. In Orange County, alarm about the bidi craze prompted one mother to warn other parents about them in a widely distributed PTA newsletter.

Starting this fall, thousands of Ventura County sixth-graders will be warned about snuff, cigarettes and bidis in a tobacco education class. The message: No matter how appealing the bidi packaging, the smokes are still tobacco. Whatever the form, tobacco is dangerous.

Long-term studies in India show that bidi smokers have twice the lung cancer risk of smokers of filtered cigarettes. That is partly a result of the nonporous nature of the tendu, or ebony, leaves that serve as bidi wrappers, said Dr. Samira Asma, an epidemiologist with the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta. To keep the sticks lit, smokers must take deep drags more often.

While exact numbers of U.S. bidi smokers are not known, imports are trending upward, said Darryl Jayson, vice president of the nonprofit Tobacco Merchants Assn., an industry trade group in Princeton, N.J.

In 1998, he estimated, 76.6 million bidi cigarettes with an import value of \$ 642,000 were shipped to American distributors. In the first four months this year, 28.3 million bidis arrived, valued at \$ 308,000. It is difficult to say precisely how many bidis enter the country, because they are lumped into several different tariff codes. The bidis are a mere fraction of the United State's \$ 51-million cigarette market, Jayson said.

"It is growing, but compared to the overall market, it's still less than a droplet," he said. organization which is entirely supported by tax-deductible contributions.

Please credit ASH, and include ASH's web address: <http://ash.org>

US bans Karnataka firm's bidis

The US Customs Service has ordered that hand-rolled Indian bidis manufactured by a particular company be seized at the border pending investigations over the company's reported use of child labour, officials said.

"The use of forced, convict or bonded labour, especially the forced labour of children, is morally, ethically and legally wrong," Customs Commissioner Raymond Kelly said yesterday. "The US Customs Service is committed to ensuring that products that enter this country were not made by exploiting those unable to fend for themselves."

The cigarettes affected are those made by the Mangalore Ganesh Beedi Works of Karnataka.

Kelly said the decision came as a result of a US television news programme which on Tuesday aired a videotape taken at the Mangalore factory and alleged the company was using forced or indentured child labour.

A dollar figure for imported Mangalore bidis was not available, but customs officials said all imported bidis from India during fiscal 1999 amounted to about 1.28 million dollars.

UNI

This article is a quote from the October 28, 1996 issue of Time Magazine:

Tobacco Fashions: Veni, Bidi, Vici

This is the little cigarette that could: it came, it saw, it conquered. The trendiest smoke on college campuses these days emanates from Indian imports called beedies (from the Hindi bidi). About half the diameter of regular cigarettes and hand rolled in tendu (Indian ebony leaves), they look slightly like microcigars. Beedies, however, pack a much more powerful punch: up to 8% nicotine, versus the 1% to 2%

in American cigarettes. The imports are composed of a species of tobacco different from that most commonly used by U.S. manufacturers. They also come in flavors: clove, menthol and even strawberry. Popular brands include Mangalore Ganesh and Kailas. Despite the buzz the beedies deliver, FDA analysis finds they contain no hallucinogens. Says Suresh Talapati, a native of India and a tobacco scientist at the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms: "Perhaps the fact that they look like joints interests the young people." Beedies cost from \$2.50 to \$3.00 per pack of 20. (A pack of unfiltered Camels can range from \$1.25 to \$3.15.) Why the expense for such tiny smokes? In 1994 the ATF reclassified beedies as cigarettes rather than cigars, thus imposing a tax rate about 10 times as high as was previously charges. Though they may have cult status in America, beedies have little cachet back in India, where more than 800 billion are smoked each year. They remain what they have always been, says Talapati, "the poor man's cigarette".

Surgeon General Warning: Quitting smoking now greatly reduces serious risk to your health.

INDIA ABROAD

December 3, 1999

HEALTH

On basis of TV report, Customs suspends import of bidis from Ganesh Beedi Works

BY AZIZ HANIFFA

WASHINGTON -- On the strength of an investigative report on CBS Television's "60 Minutes II" broadcast from Tamil Nadu on Nov. 23, titled "Tobacco Slaves in India," the U.S. Customs Service the following day suspended the import of bidis -- hand-rolled, unfiltered cigarettes -- produced by Mangalore Ganesh Beedi Works.

Layne Lathram, a spokeswoman for the Customs Service, told India Abroad that it was reviewing evidence provided by "60 Minutes II" and until its investigation was completed as to whether Mangalore Ganesh may have used forced child labor to produce the bidis, they would be barred from entering the United States.

It is illegal to import any products into the U.S. made with any kind of forced labor, child labor, indentured labor or convict labor.

The "60 Minutes II" segment, which was reported by correspondent Scott Pelley from Tamil Nadu, alleged that Mangalore Ganesh uses "children sold into bonded servitude" in the manufacture of its bidis that are exported to the U.S.

According to Customs officials, it had already been investigating allegations of forced or indentured child labor in the manufacture of bidis by Mangalore Ganesh when the "60 Minutes II" report surfaced.

These officials said that a videotape of the program, which clearly showed child labor being used by the company, had been turned over to Customs, and would be part of the "hard evidence" the service would use in its investigation against the Indian bidi manufacturer.

The officials acknowledged that the CBS report had provided the "sufficient evidence" Customs had been looking for all these months to go after Mangalore Ganesh and other bidi manufacturers in India that allegedly use bonded child labor and other kinds of forced or indentured labor to produce these cigarettes that have now become a fad among the youth in the U.S., particularly

since some are sweetened with an assortment of flavors.

Latham said that Customs Commissioner Raymond Kelly has been on record saying that "the use of forced, convict or bonded labor, especially the forced labor of children, is morally, ethically and legally wrong."

She said that she could not say when the investigation into Mangalore Ganesh would be completed and said that the bidis the company had already shipped to the United States would either have to be put in storage or it would have to make arrangements to get them reshipped back to where they came from.

The spokeswoman asserted that there was no case of any of the bidis that had already arrived in the U.S. being grandfathered so that they could be distributed across the country to wholesalers or retail outfits.

She said no bidis from Mangalore Ganesh would be allowed to be released until the investigation is completed.

Customs officials had no information on the quantity or value of bidis exported to the United States by the company. However, it is estimated that the total value of all bidis imported into the country, including those manufactured by Mangalore Ganesh, in fiscal year 1999 ended on Sept. 30 was \$1.28 million.

This was an increase from the \$915,000 that was shipped to the U.S. in fiscal year 1998.

The "60 Minutes II" program began by saying, "There was a time that some of the tobacco products sold in America were made by slaves. On the eve of the 21st century, this is still true." It said Pelley had found "child slaves" in India "who make cigarettes for America."

The report said the bidis, besides being a fad in the U.S., were "also cheap, because they are hand rolled by kids who are tobacco slaves, children sold into bonded servitude."

The report said that despite India being the "world's largest democracy, children are still sold into bonded servitude."

It said that most often "children are bonded for many years, laboring anonymously in their own homes as childhood passes them by." The report quoted Special Commissioner P.W.C. Davidar, an Indian government official fighting bonded labor in Tamil Nadu, as saying, "We've had children from age 5, 6, 7, 10, 12. It's all ages. As soon as you can... and you know how to roll bidis, you are an eligible candidate."

It also said that, according to Gary Haugen, an American lawyer who has devoted himself to rescuing children from illegal bondage, the average price for a child is \$25 to \$50, and the length of service can last from a few years to a lifetime.

Haugen had once prosecuted crooked cops for the U.S. Department of Justice. He then led the United Nations' investigation of war crimes in Rwanda. Now he heads up a nonprofit group of investigators he calls the International Justice Mission.

The report said when the Customs Service sends investigators into India, it has to follow diplomatic protocol, warning the Indian government. The investigators are then taken to places where there is no bonded labor, it said.

It quoted a frustrated Kelly as saying, "We need the cooperation of foreign governments, and we don't always get it."

The report said that at the Mangalore Ganesh Beedi Works, there were bidis that were ironically wrapped with the U.S. Surgeon General's warning, a requirement for export to the United States. "60 Minutes II" said it had shown some of its footage to Kelly, who had said the pictures provided enough evidence to legally bar imports of Mangalore Ganesh bidis into the U.S.

*What about
same rolling?*

Indonesian Cigarettes Provide Unique Flavors, Risks

COLUMBUS, Ohio -- They are smaller than a Salem, less expensive than a pack of Marlboros and taste like a strawberry. It is no surprise that bidi cigarettes are becoming more popular, but they are more dangerous than some think.

Once available only in tobacco specialty shops, these Indonesian hand-rolled smokes can now be purchased in many convenience stores across the country.

Bidis are made from an all-natural leaf, wrapped around a small amount of tobacco and tied with a string. They are made in a variety of flavors including strawberry, vanilla, chocolate and grape. Bidis contain less tobacco than regular cigarettes, but unfiltered varieties have two to three times more tar and nicotine.

"Bidis were originally designed in India to be a quick smoke," said Mark Cassar, vice president of Kretek International, a leading specialty tobacco distributor. "They're popular because they're an alternative smoke in an alternative flavor."

According to Cassar, Kretek International, which imports the Darshan brand of bidis, has doubled their sales in the last year to year and a half.

Phillips and King, an importer of Kalai brand bidis, has also experienced increased demand, especially in the past three months.

Chuck Yoho, a freshman natural resources major, occasionally smokes bidis "just for something different." While the disparities in size and flavor are obvious, Yoho found other differences.

"The first thing I noticed is that they don't have a filter," Yoho said.

"Everything you smoke goes directly into you."

Yoho said bidis are a novelty item, and that while one or two would not hurt you, smoking them as often as nicotine cigarettes could be dangerous.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the incidence of lung cancer in India is higher among bidi smokers than cigarettes smokers.

Bidis pose other hazards as well.

"The problem is that they are attracting younger kids," said Michelle Chippas, project director for Tobacco-Free Ohio. "You start with candy cigarettes, and then move up to bidis and cigarettes."

Chippas said children as young as 9-years-old are using bidis. People who would not normally be attracted to smoking become interested because of the flavors.

"It's a stepping stone to becoming a committed tobacco user,"

Chippas said. "It's gaining popularity. It's very scary."

In a released statement by the CDC, experts warned potential consumers of bidis.

"Bidis represent a significant health risk and should not be considered a safe alternative to cigarette smoking and other tobacco products."

According to Reina Sims, director of program services and minority health research at the Central Ohio Breathing Association, the Federal Trade Commission is conducting an investigation into the labeling

practices of bidi cigarette manufacturers in India. Many bidis are being sold in the United States without a surgeon general's warning on the label, which is against current FTC regulations.

Warnings or not, bidis are selling well in area stores.

Tom Pellican, owner of Smokers Preferred, said the strawberry, vanilla and clove bidis are the best sellers of the more than 20 flavors he stocks. He has noticed that they have grown in popularity in the last two years, especially among 20- to 30-year-olds.

"I think it's just a very unique taste," he said. "It's definitely for the younger people. We don't get any senior citizens buying them."

-- 05/13/1999

for Ms. Zebra

157th Feb 2000



Clove Cigarettes Indian Beedies Cigars Cigar-Ask Pyramid Other Products



MADE IN INDIA



MINT BIDIS

THE IN-BETWEEN SMOKE
NON-TOBACCO



15th Feb 2000

Bidis

[Home](#)[Bidis](#)[Rolling Papers](#)[Product List](#)[How to Order](#)

This article is a quote from the October 28, 1996 issue of Time Magazine:

Tobacco Fashions: Veni, Bidi, Vici

This is the little cigarette that could: it came, it saw, it conquered. The trendiest smoke on college campuses these days emanates from Indian imports called beedies (from the Hindi bidi). About half the diameter of regular cigarettes and hand rolled in tendu (Indian ebony leaves), they look slightly like microcigars. Beedies, however, pack a much more powerful punch: up to 8% nicotine, versus the 1% to 2% in American cigarettes. The imports are composed of a species of tobacco different from that most commonly used by U.S. manufacturers. They also come in flavors: clove, menthol and even strawberry. Popular brands include Mangalore Ganesh and Kailas. Despite the buzz the beedies deliver, FDA analysis finds they contain no hallucinogens. Says Suresh Talapati, a native of India and a tobacco scientist at the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms: "Perhaps the fact that they look like joints interests the young people." Beedies cost from \$2.50 to \$3.00 per pack of 20, (A pack of unfiltered Camels can range from \$1.25 to \$3.15.) Why the expense for such tiny smokes? In 1994 the ATF reclassified beedies as cigarettes rather than cigars, thus imposing a tax rate about 10 times as high as was previously charges. Though they may have cult status in America, beedies have little cachet back in India, where more than 800 billion are smoked each year. They remain what they have always been, says Talapati, "the poor man's cigarette."

Smoker's choice brings you Shiv Sagar and Irie Brand Bidis made from Pure Natural Indian Tobacco.

[Home](#)[Next](#)



೨೫ ನವರು ಬೀಗ ಇಳಿದ ವಾಕ್ಯ. ಬಾಹ್ಯಾ ಕೂಟದ ಮೇಲೆ ಬೀಗ ಇಳಿದು ಮೃತರ ಸಂಖ್ಯೆ ೨೫ ಆಗಿತ್ತು. ಇವರ ಸಂಖ್ಯೆ ೨೫ ಆಗಿತ್ತು. ಇವರ ಸಂಖ್ಯೆ ೨೫ ಆಗಿತ್ತು. ಇವರ ಸಂಖ್ಯೆ ೨೫ ಆಗಿತ್ತು.

ದನಿ ಎತ್ತ ಬೇಕಾದ ಬೀಡಿ ಕಾರ್ಮಿಕರು

೨೪.೧೦.೭

ಬೀಡಿ ಕಾರ್ಮಿಕರು ಬೇಡಿಕೆಗಳನ್ನು ಮುನ್ನಡೆಸುತ್ತಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ಬೇಡಿಕೆಗಳನ್ನು ಮುನ್ನಡೆಸುತ್ತಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ಬೇಡಿಕೆಗಳನ್ನು ಮುನ್ನಡೆಸುತ್ತಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ಬೇಡಿಕೆಗಳನ್ನು ಮುನ್ನಡೆಸುತ್ತಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ಬೇಡಿಕೆಗಳನ್ನು ಮುನ್ನಡೆಸುತ್ತಿದ್ದಾರೆ.

ಬೀಡಿ ಕಾರ್ಮಿಕರು ಬೇಡಿಕೆಗಳನ್ನು ಮುನ್ನಡೆಸುತ್ತಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ಬೇಡಿಕೆಗಳನ್ನು ಮುನ್ನಡೆಸುತ್ತಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ಬೇಡಿಕೆಗಳನ್ನು ಮುನ್ನಡೆಸುತ್ತಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ಬೇಡಿಕೆಗಳನ್ನು ಮುನ್ನಡೆಸುತ್ತಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ಬೇಡಿಕೆಗಳನ್ನು ಮುನ್ನಡೆಸುತ್ತಿದ್ದಾರೆ.



ಬೀಡಿ ಕಾರ್ಮಿಕರು

ಬೀಡಿ ಕಾರ್ಮಿಕರು ಬೇಡಿಕೆಗಳನ್ನು ಮುನ್ನಡೆಸುತ್ತಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ಬೇಡಿಕೆಗಳನ್ನು ಮುನ್ನಡೆಸುತ್ತಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ಬೇಡಿಕೆಗಳನ್ನು ಮುನ್ನಡೆಸುತ್ತಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ಬೇಡಿಕೆಗಳನ್ನು ಮುನ್ನಡೆಸುತ್ತಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ಬೇಡಿಕೆಗಳನ್ನು ಮುನ್ನಡೆಸುತ್ತಿದ್ದಾರೆ.

ಬೀಡಿ ಕಾರ್ಮಿಕರು ಬೇಡಿಕೆಗಳನ್ನು ಮುನ್ನಡೆಸುತ್ತಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ಬೇಡಿಕೆಗಳನ್ನು ಮುನ್ನಡೆಸುತ್ತಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ಬೇಡಿಕೆಗಳನ್ನು ಮುನ್ನಡೆಸುತ್ತಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ಬೇಡಿಕೆಗಳನ್ನು ಮುನ್ನಡೆಸುತ್ತಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ಬೇಡಿಕೆಗಳನ್ನು ಮುನ್ನಡೆಸುತ್ತಿದ್ದಾರೆ.

M25

6/10/95

BUSINESS

■ BIDI INDUSTRY

Smoked Out

Faced with a declining market, labour problems and diminishing political clout, Madhya Pradesh's bidi barons are moving out in search of greener pastures

By BHARAT DESAI

FRIDAYS ARE SMOKING DAYS for Baburao Pimplapure. As he settles down with a heap of bidis before him in the study of his sprawling mansion in Sagar, the 65-year-old winces as his lungs—which remain smoke-free for the remaining six days of the week—take a pounding. An hour later, with two dozen bidis reduced to ashes, he arrives at the right blend of tobacco for No. 207, the favourite bidi of nearly 15 lakh smokers in the country.

But it's not just the mixture of tar and nicotine that leaves a bad taste in Pimplapure's mouth after the routine he has been religiously following every week for the last 30 years. Business hasn't exactly been on fire for him or the other bidi barons of Madhya Pradesh, which accounted for nearly

half the country's production of bidis till some years ago. Faced with a declining market, labour problems and diminishing political clout, more and more manufacturers are now moving out of the state in search of greener pastures and greater returns.

"Almost 30 per cent of the business has already shifted out," says Pimplapure, who is also president of the Madhya Pradesh Bidi Manufacturers' Association. The new destinations are the poor pockets of West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu

and Karnataka where labour is cheaper and workmanship of a better grade. The absence of plants and machinery has made the shifting easy. The migration recently forced Chief Minister Digvijay Singh to press the Central Government to formulate a national policy and wage structure for the bidi industry, a long-standing demand of the unions representing 20 lakh workers in the state.

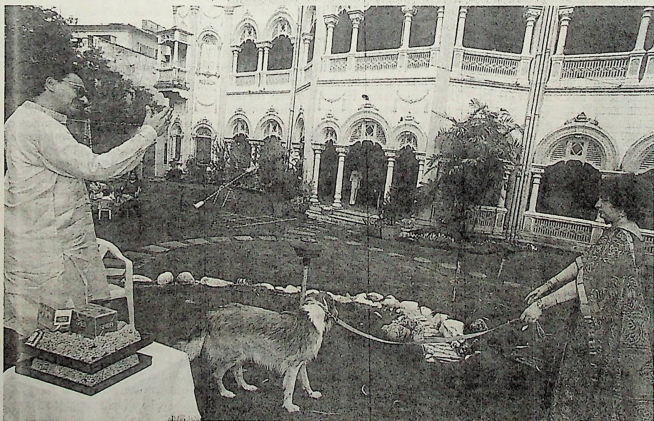
The exodus began in 1989 when the then chief minister Arjun Singh announced the nationalisation of

SIDDHARTHBHAI PATEL

Brand name: Sher Chaap. **Production:** Down from 3 crore bidis per day in 1992 to 1.25 crore bidis per day now.

Political background: Brother Shrawanbhai, an ex-MP and former minister; father Parmanandbhai, former state Congress treasurer.

New base: Diversified interests in Bihar, Bengal, Orissa, Karnataka.



Photographs by DRIP BANERJEE



POLITICAL JAIN

Brand name: Dholak Chaap. **Production:** Down from 2 crore per day in 1992 to 1 crore per day now.

Political background: Son Sunil Jain, a Congress MLA from Sagar. **New base:** Shifted operations to Orissa and West Bengal. Has diversified into paper-making and newspapers.

tendu leaf collection. As a consequence, the price of the leaves shot up from Rs 5 to Rs 30 per kg. It picked up momentum last year after the state Government directed that the workers be paid Dearness Allowance (DA) at the rate of 2 paise per point, taking their wages to Rs 30 for every 1,000 bids rolled. But the manufacturers contended that this would push up the total cost of rolling 1,000 bids to Rs 82.45, as against Rs 65.97 in West Bengal, Rs 64.22 in Bihar and Rs 58.22 in Orissa. The DA was then reduced to 1 paise a point only to be legally challenged by the bidi workers.

The issue is pending before the Madhya Pradesh High Court, but even so manufacturers say the operational costs in the state are so high that it is cheaper to transport raw material to other states and get the bids rolled there. The slimmer, finer bids from the south and east have overtaken sales of those produced by adopting conventional methods in Madhya Pradesh's Bundelkhand belt comprising Sagar, Damoh and Jabalpur districts. Last year, the annual bidi production in the state fell to 5,200 crore from a peak of 7,700 crore in 1984. Even popular brands like No. 207 have been hit—its daily production is down to 2 crore from 3.5

crore a decade ago.

The declining market, according to manufacturers, is largely because of the changing smoking habits in the countryside—whether it is greater awareness about health or simply a growing preference for cigarettes and *paan masala*. Added to this, the collection of tendu leaves in the state, which accounts for nearly 60 per cent of the country's supply, was rather low at 40 lakh bags before the monsoon broke out. Over the past three months, manufacturers and traders have boycotted auctions of the leaves in Bhopal, alleging that the bags contain much less than the stipulated 1,000 bundles of 50 leaves each.

Though the total expenditure incurred in wages paid to leaf pluckers has jumped from Rs 50 crore in 1988 (before nationalisation) to Rs 150 crore today, the collection of leaves in the same period has dropped by a

third. The quality too has deteriorated. "There is mismanagement and corruption at every level of collection," says Siddharthbhai Patel, manufacturer of Sher brand bids:

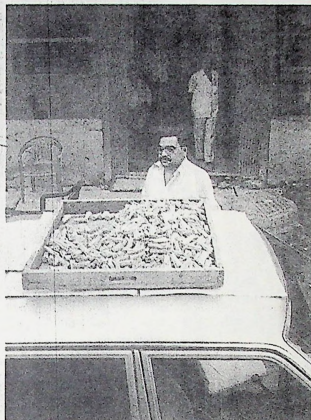
A decade ago, summers were the busiest season for the manufacturers and tendu contractors. Recalls Anilbhai Patel, manufacturer of the Phool Chaap brand: "When everybody else was holidaying, we used to slog it out in the sun." But post-nationalisation, things have changed. With the collection of leaves done by pluckers' cooperatives, says Patel, "we can all go to hill stations during summers now".

Some even take vacations abroad. Many believe that it is the craving for a lavish lifestyle, in sharp contrast to the abject poverty of the bidi rollers, that has been the undoing of the barons. Manufacturer and former minister Vitthalbhai Patel candidly says, "We haven't given the workers their due and some of us have adopted questionable means of making

Despite falling profits, the barons continue to live in palatial bungalows with fleets of the best of cars.

**BABURAO PIMPLAPURE**

Brand name: No. 207. **Production:** Down from 3.25 crore per day in 1992 to 2 crore now. **Political background:** Father ex-Congressman. **New base:** Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa. **Planning** pharmaceuticals business.

**HARMAM SINGH RATHORE**

Brand name: Top (Cannon). **Production:** Down from 1.25 crore in 1992 to 1 crore now. **Political background:** Former BJP MLA, now president of Sagar BJP unit. **New base:** Orissa. **Into** agriculture, PVC pipes.

money." Over the years, the sullied image has cost the barons their political power as well. The money-fed bidi lobby was once strong enough to block the entry of any large industry into Bundelkhand in order to perpetuate the dependence of the region's poor on bidi manufacturers. It's no coincidence that three treasurers of the Madhya Pradesh Congress Committee—Parmanandbhai Patel, Dalchand Jain and Arvindbhai Patel—have been bidi bigwigs.

While not a politician himself, Pimplapure recalls, "Many politicians used to come to my father Chintamanrao for donations, and tickets to contest elections were there for the asking." Successive barons have also been MPs, MLAs and ministers. But today, barring the lone representative in the state Assembly, Sunil Jain, they have little political reckoning. No wonder Jain says, "Business is on

the decline and so our political clout too has declined."

Despite these realities, the bidi manufacturers continue to live in palatial bungalows, littered with fleets of Honda Accords and Civics, Contessas and Cielos. Marriages are grand events with lavish gifts being showered upon guests. Those who have been in the bidi business for the last five decades are worth anywhere between Rs 50 crore and Rs 100 crore each. One baron smokes an Indian Lights cigarette, though with a Japanese filter which reduces the tar content to a fraction of what his bidi contains. In fact, some of them like Pimplapure and Vitthalbhai Patel openly admit that there is a stigma attached to making bidis. They say that they are "distinctly uncomfortable in the industry". It is an exploitative industry where there is little supervision, child labour difficult to

eliminate and the end-product proven injurious to health.

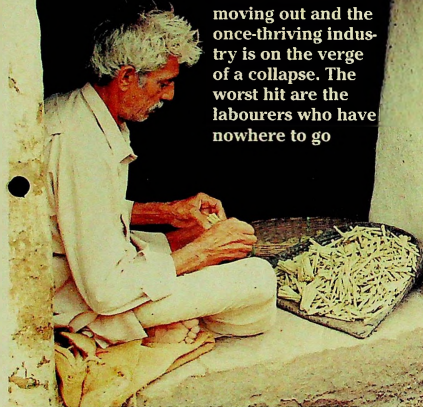
But guilt pangs don't make business sense. Especially if it's a business that has helped roll megabucks for almost half a century. Union leader Ajit Jain sees the flight of bidi capital as just a means by which the barons are blackmailing the Government to provide incentives to the industry, so they can continue to make money.

The point is not so much the declining fortunes of the barons—that's something they are already setting right in their new-found bidi bases, even diversifying into areas like finance, real estate and agriculture—as the plight of the lakhs of bidi workers they are leaving behind. Arvindbhai Patel, who makes the mass-selling No. 27 brand, may tell you that he "dreads the day the bidi industry will bid a final good-bye to Bundelkhand, where people have no other means of livelihood". But ask him what he plans to do about it, and the question draws a blank, for he has himself shifted base. ■

Some barons admit there's a stigma attached to bidi making and are distinctly uncomfortable about it.

Up in smoke

The bidi seths are moving out and the once-thriving industry is on the verge of a collapse. The worst hit are the labourers who have nowhere to go



WHEN Rama Bai, a bidi worker, one of almost 20 lakh in Madhya Pradesh, refused to participate in a rally organised to demand better working conditions wages no one was surprised. She is not alone in her decision. Thousands of other bidi workers have joined Rama Bai and refused to claim what is theirs by law. They prefer working in difficult conditions to not working at all.

Over 60 per cent of the bidis manufactured in the country are made in Madhya Pradesh and most of this manufacturing is done in the two districts of Sagar and Damoh. However, over the last three years most of the bidi manufacturers have been shifting operations to other states because of political rivalry and unfriendly policies are threatening the very existence of the industry in Madhya Pradesh.

Those who are staying are taking the precaution of diversifying, to stay alive. Leading bidi manufacturers like

Chotta Bhai Jetha Bhai and Bhagwan Das Shobhalla have ventured into the soyabean oil business.

The bidi industry has been very active in politics. Nearly all the manufacturers, or bidi seths as they are known, are active members of political parties and have been MPs or MLAs. Some like the maker of Dhokak brand bidis play it doubly safe by having links with all the major political parties. One of his sons, Sunil Jain, is a Congress MLA and another, Shaileendra Jain, is a BJP member.

And until 1988 their influence was such that they could keep out any other big industry that posed a threat to them. It Virendra Kumar, the MP from Sagar, is to be believed, in 1987 they sabotaged the chances of an ordinance factory being opened in Sagar.

But in 1988 the then chief minister Arjun Singh delivered a near crippling blow to the bidi seths by bringing tendu leaf collection under the cooperative sector.



Eighty per cent of the tendu leaf collection in the country is done in Madhya Pradesh and the jungles of tendu leaf used to be auctioned by the government to bidi manufacturers who then plucked the leaf. The manufacturers kept the best leaf and sold the rest to the other states involved in bidi manufacturing. This guaranteed that the best bidis were made in Madhya Pradesh.

But under the new tendu policy exactly the reverse is happening. The better quality leaf is sold to the other states and the inferior leaf is all that remains for the local manufacturers. The overall quality of the leaf has also declined because once it is plucked the labourers do not pay any attention to properly processing the leaf.

The new policy was bitterly opposed by the bidi manufacturers who even issued full-page advertisements in the newspapers that read, "Hamari rajiniki pratibadhatu kuch bhi ho, hamari yanyarik pratibadhatu ek hal." (Whatever our political interests may



be, our business interests are one.) All in vain.

According to Gopal Bhargava, BJP MLA from Rehli-Garhakota, the real reason for the introduction of the tendu leaf policy "was not the welfare of tendu leaf pluckers (most of whom are tribals), but the vested interests of Arjun Singh".

Lakhi Ram Agarwal, the then state President of the BJP, was the biggest tendu leaf merchant in the country, collecting about 25 lakh bags of tendu leaf every year. "Arjun Singh's real aim in implementing the policy was to ruin the flourishing business of Lakhi Ram Agarwal," Bhargava told THE WEEK.

The net effect of this policy, however, was the migration of the bidi manufacturers to other states. Former minister and Congress leader Vitthal Bhai Patel, who is also a bidi manufacturer, claims that "40-50 per cent of bidi units have migrated to other states and still more are in the process of moving out".

Facing a bleak future: Bidi labourers at work in Sagar

BJP leader and owner of the Tope brand bidi. "The cost of production is only Rs 58.22 per 1,000 bidis whereas in Madhya Pradesh, it is as high as Rs 82.43 per 1,000."

If a bidi manufacturer wanted to shift his operations to West Bengal, Orissa or Andhra Pradesh, all that he had to do was contact the labour union of that area. The union decided the wages and made all the arrangements required.

"They want employment, so they help us," said Rathore. "We don't even have to pay provision fund and other funds that have become mandatory in Madhya Pradesh. The labour unions are so eager for new industries that they even fix the wages for the labour far below the official rate in the state."

The sufferers are the exploited bidi labourers in Madhya Pradesh. The *sattedar* or commission agent of the bidi firm cannot give work as before because he does not have tendu leaf and *zarda* (tobacco) as before. The workers, including children, now get work only for three days a week. Most of them do not know the reason for this, but believe that it is the government that is forcing the bidi workers to close down their business.

Obviously, quality has suffered, giving the manufacturers another reason to migrate. "Bidi-making here is a part-time affair. The labour is unskilled and a lot is wasted," said Vishnu Bhal, manager of Parbhoo Das Kishore Tobacco Products, the biggest bidi firm in Madhya Pradesh. "In Tamil Nadu, a bidi worker can roll 2,200 bidis out of one kilogram of tendu leaf but in Madhya Pradesh they only make 1,300 out of the same quantity. And the quality is poor."

According to the secretary of the Madhya Pradesh Bidi Udyog Sangh, Anand Dubey, the industry is on the verge of collapse because of the myopic policies of the government. "The excise duty curbs on small size cigarettes and the new tendu leaf policy have left the industry high and dry."

Meanwhile bidi labourers like Rama Bai, 85 per cent of whom develop lung disease, remain unemployed with few other skills and no alternative source of income, victims of political rivalry and the bidi seths' business sense.

DEEPAK TIWARI



Working in other states is more profitable: H.S. Rathore, BJP leader and owner of the Tope bidi

PHOTO: PRAKASH HATWAL

Aug 1999

PH-11.

REPORT ON THE BEEDI INDUSTRY IN SOUTH INDIA

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS A BEEDI?

"Beedis", also known as the "poor man's cigarettes", are slim, hand-rolled unfiltered cigarettes which resemble marijuana joints. They consist of tobacco rolled in *tendu* leaves, which are less permeable to air than paper, requiring the smoker to inhale more deeply than a regular cigarette.¹

WHY HAS THE BEEDI BECOME A CAUSE FOR CONCERN?

According to the Centre for Disease Control (CDC), a beedi releases 3 – 5 times more tar and nicotine than a regular cigarette, despite containing less tobacco. Beedi smoke also contains more deadly chemicals such as ammonia and carbon monoxide than regular cigarette smoke. It is found to be loaded with cancer-causing, chromosome-damaging, genetic poisons, far more than are found in a regular cigarette.²

In the U.S., these beedis appeal to teenagers in particular as they come flavoured vanilla, chocolate, strawberry, mint and cola.³ These "dessert cum smokes" are cheap and easily available (even over the Internet) to minors.

It seems as if, smoking a beedi has become the latest fad. Says one journalist "They're sweet. They're cheap. They're small and worst of all, they're trendy."⁴ These beedis are essentially exported from India. Although beedi sales in the U.S. are estimated at \$980,000 as compared to the billions spent on cigarettes, they are gaining

¹ Internet document.

² *Infra*, note 7.

³ Internet document.

⁴ Sally Squires, "The Scourge of Beedis on the Young", <<http://ash.org/august99/08-18-99-1.htm>>

4466

Bidi file
the 24/5/2000

popularity because of their low cost.⁵ In India, a beedi is as cheap as Rs. 0.15.⁶ There is also the prevalent misconception that the beedi is a safe alternative to the cigarette. They can even be bought in health stores, as these beedis are considered the "natural" form of tobacco.

It is rumoured that in China, beedis are laced with opium.⁷ "In some provinces of China, puffs from lighted beedis are give to infants and toddlers to stop them from crying."⁸

However, what is also a major cause for concern is the work environment in which these beedis are produced. Research works have revealed that this product is produced in toxic conditions and even those who have never smoked a beedi, but are involved in the production process, are damaged by the mutagenic and carcinogenic compounds in the air.⁹ The dust mutates the skin of these workers and damages their chromosomes. They get sick and die at alarming rates just from making the beedis.¹⁰

Another cause for concern is that the beedi industry employs child labour.

A study was carried out in South India, in two major beedi-producing areas namely South Kannara and the North Arcot district around Vellore. A large number of beedi workers as well as their employers were consulted. This report is an account of the said study regarding the beedi industry.

⁵ "All Smoke, No Fire, insists bidi manufacturer", TIMES OF INDIA, February 17, 2000.

⁶ Approximately Rs. 43 is the equivalent of a dollar.

⁷ <<http://www.drgreene.com/990517.html>>

⁸ Ibid.


⁹ International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health, 1992 *in supra.*, note 7.

¹⁰ Journal of Cancer Research and Clinical Oncology, 1994 *in supra.*, note 7.

CHAPTER I

THE PRODUCTION PROCESS¹¹

The tendu leaves, which are the wrapper leaves, grow wild, particularly in the forests of Gujarat, Bihar, and Madhya Pradesh. Once a year, normally in the month of May, the beedi manufacturers gather for an auction of the tendu leaves. The highest bidder gets access to the forest for that amount of time as is required to harvest the beedi leaves. This stage is labour intensive, as all the leaves are hand-plucked.

The tobacco is mainly grown in the Raichur area... 

The leaves are then piled up and wet. They are then stocked and dried and then put into large bags and sent to the factory. The tobacco is grown and harvested separately (usually in a different are) and also sent to the factory. Once in the factory, the manufacturers send the leaves and the tobacco either directly to the beedi-rollers or to the contractors through whom they operate.

These contractors, distribute the tendu leaves and the tobacco to the beedi-rollers and on completion, take the finished product back to the factory. On every 1000 beedis, these contractors earn a commission of between Rs. 1 and Rs. 3.¹² On an average, every beedi-roller rolls 1000 beedis a day, and each contractor has a minimum of 20 workers under him.

The beedi-rolling process itself runs thus. The *tendu* leaf is cut in a rectangle and held in the left hand, while the tobacco is spread evenly over it. The leaf is then rolled into a cone. The lower end is then closed by bending the leaf inward. To facilitate this process, the index finger is closely fitted with a sharp, metallic nail that is heated and clamped onto it, burning the finger everytime. However, the workers say they are "used to their fingers getting burnt". Sometimes, a long metallic object is used and sometimes, the workers do not use anything at all, but merely use their fingers for this step. The uncut and tapering end is tied with a piece of thread.¹³

¹¹ All information in this section has been obtained from a beedi manufacturer who wishes to remain anonymous.

¹² Figures obtained from contractors interviewed.

¹³ Anonymous, "Comparative Study of the Beedi Industry in the Private and Co-operative Sectors", Ph.D. dissertation, May 1993.

The finished beedis are tied in bundles of 25. Rolling 1000 beedis takes a minimum of 6 – 8 hours a day, sometimes even 10 – 12 hours. In villages where beedi-rolling is the only occupation of the workers (for example in the villages of the North Arcot district), beedi-rollers roll almost 2000 beedis a day, working an average 12 hours each day.

At the end of the day, the beedi-rollers take the finished products to the contractor whom in turn sorts out the “good” quality beedis from the others, and arrange the bundles in open wooden troughs and dry them.

The beedis are then arranged in large baskets, each containing approximately 150,000 such bundles,¹⁴ (see photograph) and delivers the goods to the factory, where he is paid his commission as well as supplied with more raw material. The contractors usually visit the factory once or twice in a week, and only rarely, more often.

The last stage of the production process is the further drying of the beedis in large ovens, and then labelling the products.

Beedi-rolling is done both in the houses of the workers and in co-operatives. Many workers interviewed preferred working from home as they then saved on the cost as well as on the time spent in travelling to the work place. In the South Kannara region, the workers were mainly women who rolled beedis in order to supplement their husbands' income. In such cases, workers could work at home in addition to looking after household chores and child rearing.

No machinery is employed in the production of beedis. The industry is therefore entirely dependent on labour, thus providing employment to scores of labourers (employment figures are provided in the next chapter).

¹⁴ Figure obtained from interview with a contractor.

CHAPTER 2

EMPLOYMENT AND WAGES

As has already been mentioned, the beedi industry is labour intensive. Every stage of the beedi production is executed with the use of manual labour. Indeed, the industry provides employment to many lakhs of workers. In the South Kannara region, the industry provides employment to over 10 lakh labourers. In the Tirunavelli region in Andhra Pradesh, 14 lakh labourers are involved in the production of beedis.¹⁵ This industry is one of the largest employment generating industries in the country.

While some workers merely work in this industry in order to supplement income that is earned from other occupations, for many, the beedi industry provides them their daily bread and butter.

One of the main causes of worry is that the beedi industry employs child labour. For this reason, the U.S. has banned the import of products from Indian beedi industry(ies).¹⁶ We talked to beedi workers in and around Vellore, as well as in Jelligude (hardly 8 kilometres from Mangalore). While they all admitted that their children too were involved in beedi production, they said that the children merely "helped" them. Most of the children go to school, or have obtained an education upto the 8th grade.

Under such situations, the employer cannot be accused of having employed "child labour", as it is the parents and not the children who are on the pay rolls. Moreover, this "helping" by the children occurs in the private sphere of the "home", and cannot be interfered with.

Infact, one beedi manufacturer even said "I will not risk employing child labour, as I don't know when I'll have an inspector watching my factory in order to catch me for that very reason. Besides, the fine imposed for employing child labour is Rs. 20,000 a child. We make sure even the *Taiwan* is above the age of 16 I also view the situation as one where I feed another mouth. I may stop employing these children in my

¹⁵ Figures obtained from interview with a beedi manufacturer.

factory, but that does not mean they won't be compelled to find work elsewhere. It is most often parental pressure which forces these children to work in order to provide for the sustenance of their families.

However, in the more remote villages like Hoskote, child labour is freely employed. There is, one point to be noted in this respect, which is that while the child is on the employer's pay roll, he/she does not receive the wages. The wages only go to the parent [REDACTED].

The wages of beedi-rollers for branded beedis is between Rs. 40 and Rs. 55 for every 1000 beedis rolled. Some workers are only involved in cutting the tendu leaves. Such workers earn Rs. 10 – Rs. 15 a day, generally for having rolled 1 kilogram of tendu leaves.

Most often, the workers do not get in hand, the prescribed wages. They are generally given enough raw material to roll 1000 beedis, but the quality of the tendu leaves is poor, and the shortfall has to be made good by the workers themselves.

In Kaniyambadi, a village just outside the town of Vellore, the workers say their wages on paper are Rs. 55 per 1000 beedis, but they receive only Rs. 40, or sometimes even less, in hand. Rs. 7.50 is kept aside as part of the Provident Fund that these workers are entitled to.

The workers are entitled to benefits such as a pension and their Provident Fund. There are also special government hospitals set up around areas concerned with beedi production. However, the villagers had the same thing to say about these hospitals, and that is that the doctors in these hospitals are irregular. The medicines they are given do not help. They also have to wait hours on end before they can meet the doctor, and none of them has the time to waste waiting for the doctor to arrive.

There is a special provision for government holidays. On these days, the workers need not roll beedis, but receive the wages for that day anyway.

The workers are allowed to take their Provident Fund as a lump sum at any time. However, in such an event, the worker then forfeits his/her right to a pension. Such workers do not give up rolling beedis, as the pension they receive is a mere Rs. 200 or 300 a month, hardly enough to sustain them. They prefer claiming their Provident Fund as a lump sum and continuing rolling at the mercy of the contractor.

¹⁶ *Supra.*, note 5.

When a worker continues to roll even after retirement age, the procedure is thus. He is enrolled under the local contractor, and his holiday wages and the amount that is put aside as part of the Provident Fund; all goes to the contractor. Therefore, what the worker actually receives is a wage for the beedis rolled everyday minus what is put into the contractor's Provident Fund. It now becomes obvious how the contractor stands to gain at every stage!

The workers accept the contractor's position as an inherent part of their occupation. The contractor himself admits that his position may at some level cause a loss to the workers. However, according to him, this is his way of earning his livelihood. It just so happened that he had the money to clinch the contract and now the workers would have to accept his more powerful position.

Infact, when asked why they work for the beedi industry, the workers of North Arcot district unanimously replied that there was no other industry in which employment can be found as the beedi industry is the only industry there.

"The beedi industry in India employs many lakhs of workers", says the interviewed beedi manufacturer, "close it down and all these workers will be left unemployed. Moreover, they are now accustomed to their work and have developed a skill for it. Given any other employment, they will find it hard to learn the trade. Infact, the workers themselves will be outraged to hear any proposition of the industry being forcibly closed down."

CHAPTER 3

HEALTH CONCERNS REGARDING WORKERS IN THE BEEDI INDUSTRY

While it is a popular notion that tuberculosis is largely prevalent among beedi workers, the truth is that while working in tobacco dust does make the worker susceptible to the disease, tuberculosis strikes only when the worker does not eat properly or is an alcoholic. This input came from the beedi workers themselves as well as various doctors interviewed. [REDACTED] This is true of any form of labour involving working with dust, including construction, rolling of incense sticks etc. Infact, of all the beedi workers interviewed, the researcher came across only one worker who was infected with tuberculosis.

Doctors say that the notion of TB being widely prevalent among beedi workers originated in times much earlier, when all beedi workers used to sit together in the same room, which was airtight so moisture did not touch the dried leaves. Under such conditions, if one worker were infected with TB, it would spread to all the others in the room. However, nowadays the workers either work at home or in rooms with circulation, and spreading of TB in the above-mentioned manner does not occur.

TB apart, the workers are however prone to asthma and various other dust related allergies including the skin of their hands peeling off due to excessive work in the dust. In addition, the workers develop bronchial diseases as the posture adopted for beedi rolling exerts pressure on the lower part of the lung leading to such diseases.¹⁷

They also develop chronic back problems due to the posture in which they sit while working and eyesight is affected due to constant gazing at the beedis they are rolling. Fingers also lose sensation and become numb after a prolonged period of beedi rolling.

While the provision of a hospital in every beedi manufacturing area is part of the benefits the workers are entitled to, all the workers say the hospitals are practically

¹⁷ From interviews with affected beedi workers and doctors.

redundant as none of the workers uses these hospitals. Irregularities of the doctors as well as callousness of the doctors are reasons for the abandonment of these hospitals. The workers prefer using private doctors, but end up spending a lot more money that they would have had to if the doctors in the government hospitals were reliable.

Beedi smokers are exposed to more deadly diseases such as oral and lung cancer, which beedi makers are not exposed to directly. But working in the beedi industry may lead to being an addicted beedi smoker, which will then expose these workers to different forms of cancer.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

REPORT ON
THE BEEDI INDUSTRY
IN
KARNATAKA

Based on a survey by:
Ms. Zebaysh Hirji
Student, National Law School of India university.

While placed with:
Community Health Cell
(Society for Community Health Awareness, Research and
Action)

February – March, 2000.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

At the onset of this report, I would like to express my thanks to Dr. Thelma Narayanan, Coordinator, Policy Research and Evaluation, Community Health Cell; Dr. J.P. Muliyaal and Ms. Akhila, CHAD, Vellore, and Ms. Jacinta D'souza and Mr. Joslin Lobo, Roshini Nilaya, Mangalore, for extending their help and co-operation during the collection of data for this report.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	1
INTRODUCTION	3
CHAPTER 1: THE PRODUCTION PROCESS	5
CHAPTER 2: EMPLOYMENT AND WAGES	7
CHAPTER 3: HEALTH CONCERNS REGARDING WORKERS IN THE BEEDI INDUSTRY	11
CHAPTER 4: A BRIEF NOTE REGARDING THE RELEVANT LAWS RELATING TO BEEDI WORKERS IN INDIA	13
CONCLUSION	15

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Aim and Objectives: The WHO wished for a study of the working of the Beedi industry in Karnataka, one of the major beedi producing areas of the country, wherein the controversial Ganesh Beedis is also located. The survey was conducted not only in Karnataka, but also in the neighbouring state Tamil Nadu to provide a clear picture of the beedi industry.

Sites of Data Collection: this survey was conducted in the Jelligude village of Mangalore District, with inputs from Ph.D. dissertations with regard to the same; and also from villages in the North Arcot district of Tamil Nadu. A little information was gathered from Hoskote, a village situated near Bangalore, Karnataka.

Mode of Data Collection: Beedi rolling is essentially carried out in the workman's home. Data was collected by visiting the homes of various beedi rollers as well as visits to the contractors of the area. 5-6 households were visited in Jelligude, and approximately 25 households were visited in the North Arcot region. 5 contractors were consulted in totality. Further, data from Ph.D. dissertations has also been relied on. Data used in this report is essentially primary data, derived from interviews with beedi workers, social workers, beedi contractors and one beedi manufacturer¹.

Research Questions: before the researcher began data collection, the following were the guidelines based on which data was collected:

- ◆ How a beedi is produced;
- ◆ What are the wages of a beedi worker;
- ◆ Employment concerns in the beedi industry;
- ◆ Health concerns of the beedi workers

- ◆ Some of the prevailing laws pertaining to the beedi industry.

Chapterisation: Based on the research questions for data collection, this report accordingly consists of the following chapters:

- A general introduction to what exactly a beedi is and why it has become a cause for concern;
- The production process with regard to beedis;
- Employment and wages in the beedi industry;
- Health concerns regarding workers in the beedi industry;
- Relevant laws pertaining to beedi workers and the industry.

Note: This report does not have a Bibliography as it is based entirely on primary data

¹ The concerned beedi manufacturer wishes to remain anonymous

INTRODUCTION

What is a Beedi?

"Beedis", also known as the "poor man's cigarettes", are slim, hand-rolled, unfiltered cigarettes, which resemble marijuana joints. They consist of tobacco rolled in *tendu* leaves, which are less permeable to air, than paper is, requiring the smoker to inhale more deeply, while smoking a beedi, than is require for a regular cigarette.²

Why has the beedi become a cause for concern?

According to the Centre for Disease Control (CDC), a beedi releases 3 - 5 times more tar and nicotine than a regular cigarette, despite containing less tobacco. Beedi smoke also contains more deadly chemicals such as ammonia and carbon monoxide than regular cigarette smoke. It is found to be loaded with cancer causing, chromosome damaging, genetic poisons, far more than are found in a regular cigarette.³

In the U.S., these beedis appeal to teenagers in particular as they come flavoured vanilla, chocolate, strawberry, mint and cola, and a host of other flavours.⁴ These "dessert-cum-smokes" are cheap and easily available (even over the Internet) to everybody, minors included.

It is almost as if, smoking a beedi has become the latest fad for many. Says one journalist, "They're sweet. They're cheap. They're small, and worst of all, they're trendy."⁵ These beedis are essentially exported from India. Although beedi sales in the U.S. are estimated at a mere (sic) \$980,000 as compared to the billions spent on

² Internet document.

³ Internet document, infra., note 7.

⁴ Internet document.

⁵ Sally Squires, "The Scourge of Beedis on the Young", <http://ash.org/august99/08-18-99-1.htm>.

cigarettes, they are gaining popularity because of their low cost.⁶ In India, a beedi is as cheap as Rs. 0.15.⁷ There is also the prevalent misconception that the beedi is a safe alternative to the cigarette. They can even be bought in health stores, as the beedis are considered the "natural" form of tobacco.

It is rumoured that in China, beedis are laced with opium.⁸ "In some provinces of China, puffs from lighted beedis are given to infants and toddlers to stop them from crying".⁹

However, what is also a major cause for concern is the work environment in which these beedis are produced. Research works have revealed that this product is produced in toxic conditions and even those who have never smoked a beedi, but are involved in the production process, are damaged by the mutagenic and carcinogenic compounds in the air.¹⁰ The dust mutates the skin of these workers and damages their chromosomes. They get sick and die at alarming rates just from making the beedis.¹¹

Another cause for concern is that the beedi industry employs child labour, an aspect dealt with in the survey.

A study was carried out in South India, in two major beedi producing areas namely South Kannara (Mangalore District) and the North Arcot district in and around Vellore. A large number of beedi workers as well as their employers were consulted. This report is an account of the said study regarding the beedi industry.

⁶ "All Smoke, No Fire, insists bidi manufacturer", TIMES OF INDIA, February 17, 2000.

⁷ Rs.41 approximately makes up a dollar.

⁸ <http://www.drgreene.com/990517.html>

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health, 1992 *in supra.*, note 7.

¹¹ Journal of Cancer Research and Clinical Oncology, 1994 *in supra.*, note 7.

CHAPTER I

THE PRODUCTION PROCESS¹²

The tendu leaves, which are the wrapper leaves, grow wild, particularly in the forests of Gujarat, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. Once a year, normally in the month of May, the beedi manufacturers gather for an auction of the tendu leaves. The highest bidder gets access to the forest for that amount of time as is required to harvest the beedi leaves. This stage is labour intensive, as all the leaves are hand plucked, and as is evident, the demand for workers in the beedi industry, starts from this point.

The tobacco for beedi production in Southern India, is grown in the Raichur area.¹³

The leaves are then piled up and wet. They are then stocked and dried and then put into large bags and sent to the factory. The tobacco is grown and harvested separately (usually in a different area) and also sent to the factory. Once in the factory, the manufacturers send the leaves and the tobacco either directly to the beedi rollers or to the contractors through whom they operate.

These contractors, distribute the tendu leaves and the tobacco to the beedi rollers and on completion, take the finished product back to the factory. On every 1000 beedis, these contractors earn a commission of between Rs. 1 and Rs. 3.¹⁴ On an average, every beedi roller rolls 1000 beedis a day, and each contractor has a minimum of 20 workers under him.

The beedi rolling process itself runs thus. The tendu leaf is cut in a rectangle and held in the left hand, while the tobacco is spread evenly over it. The leaf is then rolled into a cone. The lower end is then closed by bending the leaf inward. To facilitate this process, the index finger is closely fitted with a sharp, metallic nail that is heated and

¹² All information in this section has been obtained from a beedi manufacturer who wishes to remain anonymous.

¹³ Aspects of tobacco growth have not been dealt with in detail.

¹⁴ Figures obtained from contractors interviewed.

process?

rollers
wash?

clamped onto it, burning the finger every time. However, the workers say they are "used to their fingers getting burnt". Sometimes, a long metallic object is used and sometimes, the workers do not use anything at all, but merely use their fingers for this step. The uncut and tapering end is tied with a piece of thread.¹⁵

The finished beedis are tied in bundles of 25. Rolling 1000 beedis takes a minimum of 6 – 8 hours a day, sometimes even 10 – 12 hours. In villages where beedi rolling is the only occupation of the workers (for example in the villages of the North Arcot district), beedi rollers roll almost 2000 beedis a day, working an average of 12 hours each day.

At the end of the day, the beedi rollers take the finished products to the contractors, who in turn sort out the "good" quality beedis from the others, and arrange the bundles in open wooden troughs and dry them.

The beedis are then arranged in large baskets, each containing approximately 150,000 such bundles,¹⁶ and delivers the goods to the factory, where he is paid his commission as well as supplied with more raw material. The contractors usually visit the factories once or twice in a week, and only rarely, more often.

The last stage of the production process is the further drying of the beedis in large ovens and then labelling the products. Beedi rolling is done both in the houses of the workers and in cooperatives. Many workers interviewed preferred working from home as they then saved on the cost as well as on the time spent in travelling to the work place. In the South Kannara region, the workers were mainly women who rolled beedis in order to supplement their husbands' income. In such cases, workers could work at home in addition to looking after household chores and child rearing.

No machinery is employed in the production of beedis. The industry is therefore entirely dependent on labour, thus providing employment to scores of labourers.¹⁷

¹⁵ Anonymous, "Comparative Study of the Beedi Industry in the Private and Cooperative Sectors", Ph.D. dissertation, May, 1993.

¹⁶ Figures obtained from interview with a contractor.

¹⁷ Employment figures are provided in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2

EMPLOYMENT AND WAGES

As has already been mentioned, the beedi industry is labour intensive. Every stage of the beedi production is executed with the use of manual labour. Indeed, the industry provides employment to many lakhs of workers. In the South Kannara region, the industry provides employment to over 10 lakh labourers. In the Tirunelveli region in Andhra Pradesh, 14 lakh labourers are involved in the production of beedis.¹⁸ This industry is one of the largest employment generating industries in the country.

While some workers merely work in this industry in order to supplement income that is earned from other occupations, for many, the beedi industry provides them their daily bread and butter.

One of the main causes of worry is that the beedi industry employs child labour. For this reason, the U.S. has banned the import of products from Indian beedi industr(ies).¹⁹ We talked to beedi workers in and around Vellore (in Tamil Nadu) as well as Jelligude (hardly 8 kilometres from Mangalore). While they all admitted that their children too were involved in beedi production, they said that the children merely "helped" them. Most of the children go to school, or have obtained an education upto the 8th grade.²⁰

In the village of Hoskote, the children do not go to school. They are directly employed by the companies, which most of the time make unbranded beedis, and therefore, the wage rate is much lower than what is paid to the workers working for

¹⁸ Figures obtained from interview with a beedi manufacturer.

¹⁹ *Supra.*, note 6.

²⁰ Prior to 1991, the children of the North Arcot district were held as bonded labourers, but the situation has now been remedied.

branded companies.²¹

Under such situations, the employer cannot be accused of having employed "child labour", as it is the parents and not the children, who are on the pay rolls. Moreover, this "helping"²² by the children occurs in the private sphere of the "home", and cannot be interfered with.

In fact, one beedi manufacturer even said "I will not risk employing child labour, as I don't know when I'll have an inspector watching my factory in order to catch me for that very reason. Besides, the fine imposed for employing child labour is Rs. 20,000 a child. We make sure that even the *chatwala* (person who brings in the mid-morning tea) is above the age of 16. I also view the situation as one where I feed another mouth. I may stop employing these children (through their parents) in my factory, but that does not mean they won't be compelled to find work elsewhere. It is most often parental pressure which forces these children to work in order to provide for the sustenance of their families."

However, in the more remote villages like Hoskote, child labour is freely employed. There is, one point to be noted in this respect, which is that while the child is on the employers' pay roll, s/he does not receive the wages. The wages only go to the parent.

The wages of beedi rollers for branded beedis is between Rs. 40 and Rs. 55 for every 1000 beedis rolled. Some workers are only involved in cutting the tendu leaves and some with closing the open end of the beedi after it has been filled with the tobacco. Such workers earn Rs. 10 – Rs. 15 a day, generally for having cut 1 kilogram of leaves or having closed and tied 1000 beedis respectively.

Most often, the workers do not get in hand, the prescribed wages. They are generally given enough raw material to roll 1000 beedis, but the quality of the tendu leaves is poor, and the short-fall has to be made good by the workers themselves.

²¹ Horror stories have been heard about the villages of Hoskote and the district of Bellary, wherein, ganja is used in the beedis. Since these villages are far off the main road, no real tabs can be kept on the activities carried out here. Moreover, these villages are strongly monitored by the underworld Mafia.

²² "Helping" in this sense is known as "child work" by various social workers, and is not banned by law.

In Kaniyambadi, a village just outside of Vellore, the workers say their wages on paper are Rs. 55 per 1000 beedis, but they receive only Rs. 40, or sometimes even less, in hand. Rs. 7.50 is kept aside as part of the Provident Fund that these workers are entitled to.

The workers are entitled to benefits such as a pension and their Provident Fund. There are also special government hospitals set up around areas concerned with beedi production. However, the villagers had the same thing to say about these hospitals, and that is that the doctors in these hospitals are irregular. The medicines they are given do not help. They also have to wait hours on end before they can meet the doctor, and none of them has the time to waste waiting for the doctor to arrive.

There is a special provision for government holidays. On these days, the workers need not roll beedis, but receive a wage anyway. However, this benefit is only given to workers rolling branded beedis.

The workers are allowed to take their Provident Fund as a lump sum at any time. However, in such an event, the worker then forfeits his/her right to a pension. Such workers do not give up rolling beedis, as the pension they receive is a mere Rs. 200 or Rs. 300, hardly enough to sustain them. They prefer claiming their Provident Fund as a lump sum as continuing rolling at the mercy of the contractor.

When a worker continues to roll even after retirement age, the procedure is thus. He is enrolled under the local contractor and his holiday wages and the amount that is put aside as part of the Provident Fund, all goes to the contractor. Therefore, what the worker actually receives is a wage for the beedis rolled everyday minus what is put into the contractors' Provident Fund. It now becomes obvious how the contractor stands to gain at every stage!

The workers accept the contractor's position as an inherent part of their occupation. The contractor himself admits that his position may at some level cause a loss to the workers. However, according to him, this is his way of earning his livelihood. It just so happened that he had the money to clinch the contract and now the workers would have to accept his more powerful position.

In fact, when asked why they work for the beedi industry, the workers of North Arcot district unanimously replied that there was no other industry in which employment can be found as the beedi industry is the only industry there.

"The beedi industry in India employs many lakhs of workers", says the interviewed beedi manufacturer, "close it down and all these workers will be left unemployed. Moreover, they are now accustomed to their work and have developed a skill for it. Given any other employment, they will find it hard to learn the trade. In fact the workers themselves will be outraged to hear any proposition of the industry being forcibly closed down." The older workers themselves said that they had been trained to roll beedis from a very young age and will now find it extremely difficult to learn any other kind of work.

CHAPTER 3

HEALTH CONCERNS REGARDING WORKERS IN THE BEEDI INDUSTRY

While it is a popular notion that tuberculosis is largely prevalent among beedi workers, the truth is that while working in tobacco dust does make the workers susceptible to the disease, tuberculosis strikes only when the worker does not eat properly or is an alcoholic. (This input came from the beedi workers themselves, as well as the doctors interviewed). This is true of any form of labour involving working with dust, including construction, rolling of incense sticks etc. In fact, of all the beedi workers interviewed, the researcher came across only one worker who was infected with tuberculosis (TB).

Doctors say that the notion of TB being widely prevalent among beedi workers originated in times much earlier, when all beedi workers used to sit together in the same room, which was airtight so moisture would not touch the dried leaves. However, nowadays the workers either work at home or in rooms with proper ventilation, and spreading of TB in the above-mentioned manner, does not occur.

TB apart, the workers are however prone to asthma and various other dust related allergies including the skin the skin of their hands peeling off due to excessive work in the dust. In addition, the workers develop bronchial diseases as the posture adopted for beedi rolling exerts pressure on the lower part of the lung leading to such diseases.²³

They also develop chronic back problems due to the posture in which they sit while working and eyesight is affected due to constant gazing at the beedis they are rolling. Fingers also lose sensation and become numb after a prolonged period of rolling beedis.

²³ From interviews with affected beedi workers and contractors, and concerned doctors.

While the provision of a hospital in every beedi manufacturing area is part of the benefits afforded to the workers, all the workers say the hospitals are practically redundant as none of the workers use these hospitals. Irregularity of the doctors as well as callousness and carelessness on the part of the doctors are reasons for the abandoning of these hospitals. The workers prefer using private doctors, but end up spending a lot more money than they would have had to if the doctors in the government hospitals were reliable.

Beedi smokers are exposed to more deadly diseases such as oral and lung cancer, which beedi workers are not exposed to directly. But working in the beedi industry may lead to being an addicted beedi smoker, which will then expose these workers to different forms of cancer.

CHAPTER 4

A BRIEF NOTE ON THE RELEVANT LAWS RELATING TO BEEDI WORKERS IN INDIA

[The] Child Labour (Prohibition Regn.) Act, 1936.

Part B (1) of the Schedule of this Act expressly prohibits the employment of children under the age of 14 in "bidi-making".

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

The "Statement of Objects and Reasons" for the institution of the Act reads as follows:

The working conditions prevailing in the beedi and cigar establishments are unsatisfactory. Though at present, the Factories' Act, 1948 applies to such establishments, there has been a tendency on the part of the employers to split the concerns, into smaller units and thus escape from provisions of the Act. a special feature of the industry is the manufacture of beedis through contractors and by distributing work in private dwelling houses where the workers take the raw materials given by the employers or contractors. Employer - employee relationship not being well defined, the application of the Factories Act has met with difficulties. The labour is unorganised and not able to look after its interests.

One or two State governments passed special Acts to regulate the conditions of work of these workers but found themselves unable to enforce the law owing to the fact that the industry is highly mobile and tended to move on to an area where no such restrictive laws prevailed. It became necessary therefore to have Central Legislation on the subject..... (provides) for the

regulation of the contract system of work, licensing of beedi and cigar industrial premises and matters like health, hours of work, spread over, rest periods, overtime, annual leave with pay, distribution of raw materials, etc.

Accordingly, the Act provides for all mentioned in the Statement of Objects and Reasons

[The Beedi Workers' Welfare Cess Act, 1976.]

This is an Act to provide, for the levy and collection by way of cess, a duty of excise on manufactured beedis.

[The Beedi Workers' Welfare Fund Act, 1976.]

This is an Act to provide for the financing of measures to promote the welfare of persons engaged in Beedi establishments.

CONCLUSION

Although this survey was supposed to be conducted in Karnataka alone, the researcher also collected data from the North Arcot district in Tamil Nadu to bring out the differences in the two places. In South Kannara, agriculture and fishing are the main occupation of the men-folk. The women normally roll beedis in order to supplement their husbands' income. Beedi rolling is an annual job, while agriculture and fishing are seasonal activities. Thus beedi rolling provides for a regular income through the year. This accounts for the better standard of living in the South Kannara region.

In the North Arcot district, the beedi industry is the only industry, which provides employment, and all the labourers depend on this industry for their income. Therefore, the standard of living of the people in the North Arcot district is far inferior to that of those in the South Kannara district.

In today's globalised society, the beedi industry remains one of the few industries which still employs such a large number of workers. With India's prevailing unemployment problem, unless the workers were given alternative means of employment in order to sustain themselves, it would indeed be a disadvantage to all those employed in the beedi industry, if the industry were to close down. Thus, just as there is a flip side to every coin, the advantage of the beedi industry is that it does provide an income, however meagre it may be, to the lakhs of people engaged in this industry.

Kind attention: Sengupta/Chakravorty
2204154. Mohan

[KARNATAKA ACT] No. 30 OF 1963.

(First published in the '[Karnataka Gazette]' on the
Seventh day of November, 1963.)

**THE '[KARNATAKA]' PROHIBITION OF SMOKING IN SHOW
HOUSES AND PUBLIC HALLS ACT, 1963.**

(Received the assent of the Governor on the
Twenty-third day of October, 1963.)

**An Act to prohibit smoking in show houses and public halls in the
[State of Karnataka].**

WHEREAS it is expedient to prohibit smoking in show houses and public
halls in the '[State of Karnataka]';

Be it enacted by the '[Karnataka]' State Legislature in the Fourteenth Year
of the Republic of India as follows:—

1. Short title, extent and commencement.—(1) This Act may be called
the '[Karnataka]' Prohibition of Smoking in Show Houses and Public Halls
Act, 1963.

(2) It extends to the whole of the '[State of Karnataka]'

(3) It shall come into force at once.

2. Definitions.—In this Act, unless the context otherwise requires,—

(a) "public hall" means a chamber or hall used ordinarily or occasionally
as a place of public assembly or meeting;

(b) "show house" means any building or any roofed and enclosed
structure, used ordinarily or occasionally for the demonstration or exhibition
to the public, whether on payment or otherwise of cinematographic films,
dramatic, pantomime, musical performances, dances, physical feats of
human beings or animals, conjuring tricks or sleights of hand;

(c) "smoke" means inhalation and exhalation of the smoke of tobacco.

3. Prohibition of smoking in show houses and public halls.—(1) If
any demonstration, exhibition, assembly or meeting is held in a show house

1. Adapted by the Karnataka Adaptations of Laws Order, 1973 w.e.f. 1.11.1973.

or public hall, then no person shall, during the prohibited period as defined in sub-section (2), smoke either---

- (a) on the stage except in so far as smoking may be part of the demonstration or exhibition, or
- (b) in the auditorium, that is to say, in that portion of the show house or public hall in which accommodation is provided for audience or the spectators.

(2) For the purposes of sub-section (1), 'prohibited period' means the period commencing thirty minutes before the beginning or the demonstration, exhibition, assembly or meeting and ending with the termination thereof.

(3) Any person who contravenes the provisions of this section and who on being asked by a police officer to desist from smoking persists, shall be liable to be removed from the show house or public hall by such police officer and shall also, on conviction, be punished with fine which may extend to fifty rupees.

(4) A person removed from the show house or public hall under sub-section (3) shall not be entitled to the refund of any payment made by him for admission to the demonstration, exhibition, assembly or meeting or to any other compensation.

4. Management to post notices or exhibit slides.—(1) Every person responsible for the management of a demonstration or exhibition in a show house and every person who is in charge of the arrangements of a public assembly or a meeting in a public hall, shall bring to the notice of the audience or the spectators by posting notices prominently or by exhibiting slides, that any person who smokes during the prohibited period, either on the stage or in the auditorium reserved for the audience or spectators, shall be liable to be ejected summarily and also to payment of fine.

(2) Whoever contravenes the provisions of sub-section (1) shall, on conviction, be punished with fine which may extend to fifty rupees.

5. Power to exempt.—(1) The Government may having regard to the duration of any demonstration, exhibition, assembly or meeting, by order direct either generally or with respect to any particular case or class of cases, that the provisions of this Act shall not apply or that the said provisions shall

not apply during such part of the prohibited period as may be specified in the direction.

(2) Every general order under sub-section (1) shall be laid as soon as may be after it is issued before each House of the State Legislature while it is in session for a total period of thirty days which may be comprised in one session or in two or more sessions and if before the expiry of the said period, either House of the State Legislature makes any modification in the order or directs that the order shall not have effect and if the modification or direction if agreed to by the other House, the order shall thereafter have effect only in such modified form or be of no effect, as the case may be.

6. Repeal.—The Mysore Prohibition of Smoking in Show Houses and Public Halls Act, 1952 (Mysore Act XXIX of 1952), as in force in the Mysore Area, and the Coorg Prohibition of Smoking (Show Houses and Public Halls) Act, 1953 (Coorg Act VI of 1953), as in force in the Coorg district, are hereby repealed.

THE KARNATAKA PROHIBITION OF SMOKING IN SHOW HOUSES AND PUBLIC HALLS (AMENDMENT) BILL,1999

A Bill to amend the Karnataka Prohibition of Smoking in show houses and public halls Act, 1963.

Whereas it is expedite to amend the Karnataka Prohibition of smoking in show houses and public halls Act, 1963 (Karnataka Act 30 of 1963) for the purposes hereinafter appearing;

Be it enacted by the Karnataka State Legislature in the Fiftieth year of the Republic of India as follows:-

1.Short Title and Commencement

- (I) This act may be called the Karnataka Prohibition of smoking in show houses and public halls (Amendment) Act, 1999.
- (II) They shall come into force on the date of publication in the official Gazette.

2. Amendment of the long title and preamble: -

In the long title and preamble of the Karnataka Prohibition of smoking in show houses and public halls Act, 1963 (Karnataka Act 30 of 191963) (hereinafter referred to as the principal Act) for the words, "Show houses and Public Halls" shall be substituted.

3. Amendment of section 2.

In section 2 of the principal Act, clause (a) shall be renumbered as clause (aiv) and before clause (ai) as so renumbered the following shall be inserted namely:-

(ai) "Education Institution" means an institution defined as such in clause (14) of section 2 the Karnataka Education Act, 1983 (Karnataka Act 8 of 1998) and includes any institution under the management of University or Central Government or a Tutorial Institution;

(aii) Medical Institution means an institution imparting medical education includes a medical college whether under the management of private institution or State Government, Private Nursing Home and any laboratory where medical investigation is undertaken and such other institution as may be notified by Government;

(aiii) "Public Place" means and includes all medical institutions, educational institutions and such other place as the State Government may, by notification in the official Gazette notify for the purpose of this act

4. Amendment of section 3

In section 3 of the Principal Act,- (1) in the heading, before the words "show houses and public halls" the word "public place" shall be inserted:

(ii) Section (1) shall be renumbered as sub-section (1A) and before sub-section (1A) as so renumbered, the following shall be inserted namely,-

"(1) No person shall smoke in a public place"

(iii) For sub section (3) the following shall be substituted, namely,-

"(3) Any person who contrivances the provisions of this section and who is found smoking or on being asked by the police officer, head of the medical institution as the case may be, or on being asked by the police officer as may be specified in this behalf, to desist from smoking, persists, shall be removed immediately from such public place, public hall and show house and shall also on conviction, be punished with a fine which may extend to one thousand and five hundred rupees"

Dr.B.S.Ramesh
Trustee

REPORT ON THE BEEDI INDUSTRY IN SOUTH INDIA

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS A BEEDI?

"Beedis", also known as the "poor man's cigarettes", are slim, hand-rolled unfiltered cigarettes which resemble marijuana joints. They consist of tobacco rolled in *tendu* leaves, which are less permeable to air than paper, requiring the smoker to inhale more deeply than a regular cigarette.¹

WHY HAS THE BEEDI BECOME A CAUSE FOR CONCERN?

According to the Centre for Disease Control (CDC), a beedi releases 3 - 5 times more tar and nicotine than a regular cigarette, despite containing less tobacco. Beedi smoke also contains more deadly chemicals such as ammonia and carbon monoxide than regular cigarette smoke. It is found to be loaded with cancer-causing, chromosome-damaging, genetic poisons, far more than are found in a regular cigarette.²

In the U.S., these beedis appeal to teenagers in particular as they come flavoured vanilla, chocolate, strawberry, mint and cola.³ These "dessert cum smokes" are cheap and easily available (even over the Internet) to minors.

It seems as if, smoking a beedi has become the latest fad. Says one journalist "They're sweet. They're cheap. They're small and worst of all, they're trendy."⁴ These beedis are essentially exported from India. Although beedi sales in the U.S. are estimated at \$980,000 as compared to the billions spent on cigarettes, they are gaining

¹ Internet document.

² *Infra.*, note 7.

³ Internet document.

⁴ Sally Squires, "The Scourge of Beedis on the Young", <<http://ash.org/august99/08-18-99-1.html>>

LB

popularity because of their low cost.⁵ In India, a beedi is as cheap as Rs. 0.15.⁶ There is also the prevalent misconception that the beedi is a safe alternative to the cigarette. They can even be bought in health stores, as these beedis are considered the “natural” form of tobacco.

It is rumoured that in China, beedis are laced with opium.⁷ “In some provinces of China, puffs from lighted beedis are give to infants and toddlers to stop them from crying.”⁸

However, what is also a major cause for concern is the work environment in which these beedis are produced. Research works have revealed that this product is produced in toxic conditions and even those who have never smoked a beedi, but are involved in the production process, are damaged by the mutagenic and carcinogenic compounds in the air.⁹ The dust mutates the skin of these workers and damages their chromosomes. They get sick and die at alarming rates just from making the beedis.¹⁰

Another cause for concern is that the beedi industry employs child labour.

A study was carried out in South India, in two major beedi-producing areas namely South Kannara and the North Arcot district around Vellore. A large number of beedi workers as well as their employers were consulted. This report is an account of the said study regarding the beedi industry.

⁵ “All Smoke, No Fire, insists bidi manufacturer”, TIMES OF INDIA, February 17, 2000.

⁶ Approximately Rs. 43 is the equivalent of a dollar.

⁷ <<http://www.drgreene.com/990517.html>>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health, 1992 *in supra.*, note 7.

¹⁰ Journal of Cancer Research and Clinical Oncology, 1994 *in supra.*, note 7.

CHAPTER 1

THE PRODUCTION PROCESS¹¹

The tendu leaves, which are the wrapper leaves, grow wild, particularly in the forests of Gujarat, Bihar, and Madhya Pradesh. Once a year, normally in the month of May, the beedi manufacturers gather for an auction of the tendu leaves. The highest bidder gets access to the forest for that amount of time as is required to harvest the beedi leaves. This stage is labour intensive, as all the leaves are hand-plucked.

The tobacco is mainly grown in the Raichur area...

The leaves are then piled up and wet. They are then stocked and dried and then put into large bags and sent to the factory. The tobacco is grown and harvested separately (usually in a different area) and also sent to the factory. Once in the factory, the manufacturers send the leaves and the tobacco either directly to the beedi-rollers or to the contractors through whom they operate.

These contractors, distribute the tendu leaves and the tobacco to the beedi-rollers and on completion, take the finished product back to the factory. On every 1000 beedis, these contractors earn a commission of between Rs. 1 and Rs. 3.¹² On an average, every beedi-roller rolls 1000 beedis a day, and each contractor has a minimum of 20 workers under him.

The beedi-rolling process itself runs thus. The *tendu* leaf is cut in a rectangle and held in the left hand, while the tobacco is spread evenly over it. The leaf is then rolled into a cone. The lower end is then closed by bending the leaf inward. To facilitate this process, the index finger is closely fitted with a sharp, metallic nail that is heated and clamped onto it, burning the finger everytime. However, the workers say they are "used to their fingers getting burnt". Sometimes, a long metallic object is used and sometimes, the workers do not use anything at all, but merely use their fingers for this step. The uncut and tapering end is tied with a piece of thread.¹³

¹¹ All information in this section has been obtained from a beedi manufacturer who wishes to remain anonymous.

¹² Figures obtained from contractors interviewed.

¹³ Anonymous, "Comparative Study of the Beedi Industry in the Private and Co-operative Sectors", Ph.D. dissertation, May 1993.

The finished beedis are tied in bundles of 25. Rolling 1000 beedis takes a minimum of 6 – 8 hours a day, sometimes even 10 – 12 hours. In villages where beedi-rolling is the only occupation of the workers (for example in the villages of the North Arcot district), beedi-rollers roll almost 2000 beedis a day, working an average 12 hours each day.

At the end of the day, the beedi-rollers take the finished products to the contractor whom in turn sorts out the “good” quality beedis from the others, and arrange the bundles in open wooden troughs and dry them.

The beedis are then arranged in large baskets, each containing approximately 150,000 such bundles,¹⁴ (see photograph) and delivers the goods to the factory, where he is paid his commission as well as supplied with more raw material. The contractors usually visit the factory once or twice in a week, and only rarely, more often.

The last stage of the production process is the further drying of the beedis in large ovens, and then labelling the products.

Beedi-rolling is done both in the houses of the workers and in co-operatives. Many workers interviewed preferred working from home as they then saved on the cost as well as on the time spent in travelling to the work place. In the South Kannara region, the workers were mainly women who rolled beedis in order to supplement their husbands' income. In such cases, workers could work at home in addition to looking after household chores and child rearing.

No machinery is employed in the production of beedis. The industry is therefore entirely dependent on labour, thus providing employment to scores of labourers (employment figures are provided in the next chapter).

¹⁴ Figure obtained from interview with a contractor.

CHAPTER 2

EMPLOYMENT AND WAGES

As has already been mentioned, the beedi industry is labour intensive. Every stage of the beedi production is executed with the use of manual labour. Indeed, the industry provides employment to many lakhs of workers. In the South Kannara region, the industry provides employment to over 10 lakh labourers. In the Tirunavelli region in Andhra Pradesh, 14 lakh labourers are involved in the production of beedis.¹³ This industry is one of the largest employment generating industries in the country.

While some workers merely work in this industry in order to supplement income that is earned from other occupations, for many, the beedi industry provides them their daily bread and butter.

One of the main causes of worry is that the beedi industry employs child labour. For this reason, the U.S. has banned the import of products from Indian beedi industry(ies).¹⁶ We talked to beedi workers in and around Vellore, as well as in Jelligude (hardly 8 kilometres from Mangalore). While they all admitted that their children too were involved in beedi production, they said that the children merely "helped" them. Most of the children go to school, or have obtained an education upto the 8th grade.

Under such situations, the employer cannot be accused of having employed "child labour", as it is the parents and not the children who are on the pay rolls. Moreover, this "helping" by the children occurs in the private sphere of the "home", and cannot be interfered with.

Infact, one beedi manufacturer even said "I will not risk employing child labour, as I don't know when I'll have an inspector watching my factory in order to catch me for that very reason. Besides, the fine imposed for employing child labour is Rs. 20,000 a child. We make sure even the *Taiwan* is above the age of 16 I also view the situation as one where I feed another mouth. I may stop employing these children in my

¹³ Figures obtained from interview with a beedi manufacturer.

factory, but that does not mean they won't be compelled to find work elsewhere. It is most often parental pressure which forces these children to work in order to provide for the sustenance of their families.

However, in the more remote villages like Hoskote, child labour is freely employed. There is, one point to be noted in this respect, which is that while the child is on the employer's pay roll, he/she does not receive the wages. The wages only go to the parent [REDACTED].

The wages of beedi-rollers for branded beedis is between Rs. 40 and Rs. 55 for every 1000 beedis rolled. Some workers are only involved in cutting the tendu leaves. Such workers earn Rs. 10 – Rs. 15 a day, generally for having rolled 1 kilogram of tendu leaves.

Most often, the workers do not get in hand, the prescribed wages. They are generally given enough raw material to roll 1000 beedis, but the quality of the tendu leaves is poor, and the shortfall has to be made good by the workers themselves.

In Kaniyambadi, a village just outside the town of Vellore, the workers say their wages on paper are Rs. 55 per 1000 beedis, but they receive only Rs. 40, or sometimes even less, in hand. Rs. 7.50 is kept aside as part of the Provident Fund that these workers are entitled to.

The workers are entitled to benefits such as a pension and their Provident Fund. There are also special government hospitals set up around areas concerned with beedi production. However, the villagers had the same thing to say about these hospitals, and that is that the doctors in these hospitals are irregular. The medicines they are given do not help. They also have to wait hours on end before they can meet the doctor, and none of them has the time to waste waiting for the doctor to arrive.

There is a special provision for government holidays. On these days, the workers need not roll beedis, but receive the wages for that day anyway.

The workers are allowed to take their Provident Fund as a lump sum at any time. However, in such an event, the worker then forfeits his/her right to a pension. Such workers do not give up rolling beedis, as the pension they receive is a mere Rs. 200 or 300 a month, hardly enough to sustain them. They prefer claiming their Provident Fund as a lump sum and continuing rolling at the mercy of the contractor.

¹⁶ *Supra.*, note 5.

When a worker continues to roll even after retirement age, the procedure is thus. He is enrolled under the local contractor, and his holiday wages and the amount that is put aside as part of the Provident Fund; all goes to the contractor. Therefore, what the worker actually receives is a wage for the beedis rolled everyday minus what is put into the contractor's Provident Fund. It now becomes obvious how the contractor stands to gain at every stage!

The workers accept the contractor's position as an inherent part of their occupation. The contractor himself admits that his position may at some level cause a loss to the workers. However, according to him, this is his way of earning his livelihood. It just so happened that he had the money to clinch the contract and now the workers would have to accept his more powerful position.

Infact, when asked why they work for the beedi industry, the workers of North Arcot district unanimously replied that there was no other industry in which employment can be found as the beedi industry is the only industry there.

"The beedi industry in India employs many lakhs of workers", says the interviewed beedi manufacturer, "close it down and all these workers will be left unemployed. Moreover, they are now accustomed to their work and have developed a skill for it. Given any other employment, they will find it hard to learn the trade. Infact, the workers themselves will be outraged to hear any proposition of the industry being forcibly closed down."

CHAPTER 3

HEALTH CONCERNS REGARDING WORKERS IN THE BEEDI INDUSTRY

While it is a popular notion that tuberculosis is largely prevalent among beedi workers, the truth is that while working in tobacco dust does make the worker susceptible to the disease, tuberculosis strikes only when the worker does not eat properly or is an alcoholic. This input came from the beedi workers themselves as well as various doctors interviewed. [REDACTED] This is true of any form of labour involving working with dust, including construction, rolling of incense sticks etc. Infact, of all the beedi workers interviewed, the researcher came across only one worker who was infected with tuberculosis.

Doctors say that the notion of TB being widely prevalent among beedi workers originated in times much earlier, when all beedi workers used to sit together in the same room, which was airtight so moisture did not touch the dried leaves. Under such conditions, if one worker were infected with TB, it would spread to all the others in the room. However, nowadays the workers either work at home or in rooms with circulation, and spreading of TB in the above-mentioned manner does not occur.

TB apart, the workers are however prone to asthma and various other dust related allergies including the skin of their hands peeling off due to excessive work in the dust. In addition, the workers develop bronchial diseases as the posture adopted for beedi rolling exerts pressure on the lower part of the lung leading to such diseases.¹⁷

They also develop chronic back problems due to the posture in which they sit while working and eyesight is affected due to constant gazing at the beedis they are rolling. Fingers also lose sensation and become numb after a prolonged period of beedi rolling.

While the provision of a hospital in every beedi manufacturing area is part of the benefits the workers are entitled to, all the workers say the hospitals are practically

¹⁷ From interviews with affected beedi workers and doctors.

redundant as none of the workers uses these hospitals. Irregularities of the doctors as well as callousness of the doctors are reasons for the abandonment of these hospitals. The workers prefer using private doctors, but end up spending a lot more money that they would have had to if the doctors in the government hospitals were reliable.

Beedi smokers are exposed to more deadly diseases such as oral and lung cancer, which beedi makers are not exposed to directly. But working in the beedi industry may lead to being an addicted beedi smoker, which will then expose these workers to different forms of cancer.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]