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Lac Bangle Workers of Hyderabad: A Sociological Study

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the socio-economic and health status of lac bangle workers in Hyderabad. The study also focuses on their work characteristics, wage patterns and working hours. Today there are more than 600 lac bangle workshops spread across Hyderabad employing around 15-20 workers in each workshop. In the lac bangle industry, production organization is complex, some operations are risky and some operations are not. For example, *gota banai* and *gota lagai* involve hazardous tasks, whereas size *banai* involve non-dangerous tasks. Hazardous work has a great impact on workers' health. Workers in the *gota lagai* and gota banai processes are paid salaries and are mostly daily bets. Lastly, the implication of this study is that hazardous work causes deterioration in workers' health, which leads to a decrease in work ability and a decrease in income. Poverty and illiteracy are severe among lac bangle workers in Hyderabad. That is why, instead of sending their children to school, they prefer to send them to work. Therefore, as a matter of policy, technological upgrades may be undertaken to overcome the health risks of the lac bangle industry.

Key Words : Health, Hazardous, Non-hazardous, Workers

INTRODUCTION

The art of bangles making started almost 200 years back but still bangles are considered as an evergreen fashion accessory. Indian women have been wearing bangles for a long time. This can be evidenced by the hands and arms of a bronze statue of dancing girl found at Mohenjodaro in the Indus Valley Civilization.

There are number of cities in India famous for the manufacturing of bangles like Firozabad (Uttar Pradesh) a renowned center for glass bangles, Rajasthan and Hyderabad known for lac bangles. Makers of bangles are known as *manihar.* According to Singh (2005: 937) the word '*manihar*' is derived from *mani* (jewel) and the agent suffix *har*. *Manihar* is also known as *Churihar*, and although this word is derived from *Churi* (bangle), it prefers to be referred to as '*Manihar*'. Also known as *Janhari* or *Lakhera*. *Manihars* are closely associated with bangle making in the Laad Bazaar, surroundings of Charminar in Hyderabad. Most of them have migrated from Rajasthan.

Hyderabad was built by Mohammad Quli qutub Shah in 1591 which is today the fourth largest city in India. It's known as the "City of Pearls," but it's also known for its shiny lac bangles. Laad Bazar or Chudi Bazar is located near the historic Charminar, named after Ladi Begum, wife of Mir Mehboob Khan, the VI Nizam of Hyderabad. At that time, the streets of Laad Bazar were used by the Nizam's concubines for their livelihood. Now their small houses are being used as lac bangle workshops. Today, more than 600 lac bangle workshops have spread in Hyderabad by employing around 15-20 workers in each workshop.

Meaning of Lac:

The meaning of the word lac is "hundred thousand," which refers to the large number of small insects needed to produce lac. Lac is a reddish, sticky secretion of many insect species. In India Jharkhand is the principal producer of Lac, followed by Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Assam, West Bengal, Orissa, Bihar, and

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Uttar Pradesh (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lac#Uses).

Lac Bangle Making Process:

The process of making a lac bangle is very difficult. The glue is melted in a shallow container, mixed with lac powder sourced from the local market, and kneaded into loose dough. Bangle makers then roll the dough into long sticks. It heats up and softens small chunks of the bar and creates a bangle. The lac stuck to a wooden rod and is then slowly heated over a coal burner. It is pressed with a stone or wooden tool at regular intervals. When it is moderately warm and soft, rub the coloured lac stick evenly and cover it with the color of your choice. For this, coloured lac sticks also need to be warm enough, so they are heated on a burner. After the colour is applied to the lac base, use a wooden handle to shape it into a thin coil and cut it out of a regular lac rod. The coil can be heated over a burner to join the ends together to form a bangle. After joining, it is passed through a round wooden beam and adjusted to size.

Bangles of different shapes and sizes are made by men, and then decorated with sparkling artificial stones, beads and glass by women. Bangle decoration work is mainly done by women. This activity is technically known as *Chipai* (embedding colored stones, beads and glass into bangles). Place the sequins on tin foil and heat over a burner. They are picked up one at a time and glued to the bangle. Carefully attach these small pieces to a warm one-inch lac base. Wages paid to female workers in *Chipai* (embedding colored stones, beads and glass into bangles) are low-wage workers, and they only make traditional designs. They are uneducated. They don't try new designs. Concentrate only on routine tasks. A basic bangle set can be made in about 25 to 30 minutes. During the entire process, the material is repeatedly heated over coals to keep it ductile. Melting and mixing is done on a kerosene stove. This industry is all about small bucks. Around 200 bangles are made from 1 kg of lac powder purchased for Rs. 400. The colour costs around Rs. 250 per kg and is available for nearly 1,000 bangles.

Objectives of the Study :

- To identify the social and economic status of lac bangle workers of Hyderabad
- To explore their issues *i.e.* nature of work, wage patterns and working hours
- To examine the health status of lac bangle workers

METHODOLOGY

The data and relevant information regarding lac bangle workers were collected through primary and secondary sources. Primary data was collected in the month of June 2023 by using structured interview scheduled of 50 respondents. Secondary data gathered from books, research papers, census survey reports, magazines, articles etc. Collected data and information have been organised, explained, analysed and tabulated as under.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data in Table 1 indicates that 14% of workers are 5-14 years old, 62% are 15-35 years old, 22% are middle-aged, and 2% are elderly.

Table 1 : Age Status of Workers

Sr. No.	Age Group	Frequency	%
1.	Child (5-14)	07	14
2.	Young age (15-35)	31	62
3.	Middle age (36-60)	11	22
4.	Old age (61 and above)	01	02
	Total	50	100

Source: Field work

Table 2 reflects the small proportion of female workers in the lac bangle industry in Hyderabad at 48% compared to male workers (52%).

Table 2 : Gender Status of Workers

Sr. No.	Gender	Frequency	%
1.	Male	26	52
2.	Female	24	48
	Total	50	100.0

Source: Field work

Table 3 shows that 52% of workers were illiterate, 12% were at post-primary level, and 36% were at primary level.

Table 3 : Educational Level of Workers

Sr. No.	Educational Level	Frequency	%
1	Post primary	06	12
2	Primary	18	36
3	Illiterate	26	52
	Total	50	100.0

Source: Field work

It is extended in Table 4 that 46% of workers stay in *semi pakka* houses, 34% of workers stay in *kachcha*

houses, and 14% and 6% of workers stay in *pakka* houses and slum thatched houses, respectively.

Table 4 : House Status of Workers

Sr. No.	Type of House	Frequency	%
1.	Pakka	07	14
2.	Semi Pakka	23	46
3.	Kachcha	17	34
4.	Slum thatched	03	06
	Total	50	100.0

Source: Field work

Size *banai, gota lagai* and *gota banai* are the three main steps in the lac bangle making process. According to Table 5, only 4% of workers are engaged in the first step, namely Size Banai. In the second and third stages, gota lagai and gota banai, 56% and 40% of workers participate, respectively. *Gota lagai* and *gota banai* are risky processes that affect the artisan's eyesight and chest-related problems.

Table 5 : Occupational Pattern of Workers

Sr. No.	Occup. Pattern	Frequency	%
1	Size Banai	02	04
2	Gota Lagai	28	56
3	Gota Banai	20	40
	Total	50	100.0

Source: Field work

The data in Table 6 clearly shows that 30% of workers are paid on a monthly basis, 24% on a weekly basis, and 46% on a daily basis.

Table 6 : Payment Basis of Workers

Sr. No.	Payment Basis	Frequency	%
1.	Monthly	15	30
2.	Weekly	12	24
3.	Daily	23	46
	Total	50	100.0

Source: Field work

In Table 7, only 26% of workers do not do hazardous work, while 74% of workers are engaged in hazardous work.

Table 7 : Work Hazardous among Workers

Sr. No.	Work Hazardous	Frequency	%
1.	No	13	26
2.	Yes	37	74
	Total	50	100.0

Source: Field work

According to Table 8, 20% of workers have no occupational hazards, 6% are adversely affected by lac-related causes, 28% have fire sources, and 46% are affected by both lac and fire sources.

Table 8 : Causes of Occupational Hazards in Lac Bangle Industry

Sr. No.	SOH	Frequency	%
1.	None	10	20
2.	Lac	03	06
3.	Fire	14	28
4.	Fire and Lac	23	46
	Total	50	100.0

Source: Field work

In Table 9, 50% of the workers are free of disease, and 4% have diabetes, kidney, heart, and B.P. problems, 16% had tuberculosis, asthma and chest pain, and 30% had eye and spine problems, fever, head and body aches.

Table 9 : Type of Disease among Workers

Sr. No.	Type of Disease	Frequency	%
1	No	25	50
2	Kidney, Heart, Diabetes and High blood pressure	02	04
3	Tuberculosis, Asthma and Chest pain	08	16
4	Eye, Back bone problem, fever, head and body ache	15	30
	Total	50	100.0

Source: Field work

Table 10 clearly reflects that 50% workers don't take any medical help, 32% take Allopathic, 2% Homeopathic, 2% Spiritual Healing and 14% take Unani treatment.

Table 10 : Medical Treatment among Workers

Sr. No.	Medical Practices	Frequency	%
1.	Homeopathic	01	02
2.	Spiritual Healing	01	02
3.	Unani	07	14
4.	Allopathic	16	32
5.	None	25	50
	Total	50	100.0

Source: Field work

Discussion and Analysis:

I have referred ten tables related to socio-economic and health issues of lac industry workers of Hyderabad.

The data clearly reveals that in this industry child labour is rampant. Children are engaged in size *banai* and *gota lagai* process that affects their eyes and spine. Most workers are illiterate. Further, it may be pointed out here that in lac bangle industry the organization of production is complex some works are hazardous and some are non-hazardous. For example, *Gota banai* and *Gota lagai* entails hazardous work, whereas, size *banai* involves non-hazardous work. Hazardous work greatly affects the health conditions of the workers. The workers engaged in *gota lagai* and *gota banai* process get their monthly payment and most of them are daily wagers.

Data also reveals that some diseases are peculiar to Hyderabad related to lac bangle industry. For example: tuberculosis, back ache and shoulder ache, asthma and eye soring are common health problems of the lac bangle workers. The worker's orientation and attitudes towards medical treatment may be taking into consideration for improving and increasing the medical infrastructure of traditional and modern *viz.,* allopathic and *unani* medicines. I have pointed out that a sizeable number of workers are opting for traditional medical care viz. *unani* system. Therefore, adequate resource allocation for alternative medical care system may be given for dealing these lac workers. Besides, the large numbers of diseased workers in lac bangle industry do not undergo medical treatment owing to insufficient resources under their control. Therefore, public funded health care infrastructure meets to be made available for improving the health conditions of the lac bangle workers.

It is evident from the above discussion that hazardous work in lac industry adversely affects the health status of workers in general and marginal workers in particular. Therefore, it is extremely important to upgrade technology in a way that hazardous conditions of working in lac industry can be reduced gradually.

Conclusion/ Recommendations:

It has been concluded that poverty and illiteracy is acute among the lac bangle workers of Hyderabad. That's why instead of sending their children to schools they prefer to send their children to work. However, it has been stated by Nasir and Swalehin (2011:109). According to them NGOs, along with other civil society organizations are in the forefront to creating awareness about compulsory primary education which is an important policy measure for ending child labour. The specific health problems both hazardous and non-hazardous are closely tied to lac bangle production processes at a specific stage/s. No wonder why backache, tuberculosis, respiratory and eyesight problems are common in lac bangle industry. It has also been pointed out that some health hazardous work may be reduced by up gradation of technology or introduction of a new technology. Finally, the implications of the study realized that hazardous works result into health degradation of the workers, due to which their incapacity of work reduces their income. Reduction in income is a major cause of sustained diseases and marginalized position of the workers which not only prevents him or her to work but also perpetuates their poverty and destitution. Therefore, as a policy matter technological up gradation may be undertaking to overcome the health hazards of the lac bangle industry.

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