

The Process of Social Exclusion of Tea Garden Workers: A Study on Sylhet City Corporation, Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Previous literature suggests that tea garden workers of Bangladesh are excluded from social, political and economic aspects. Therefore, this research work aimed to exploring the process of social exclusion of tea garden worker. All the tea gardens within Sylhet City Corporation have been selected as the study area and empirical data has been collected from selected respondents by Survey and In-depth interview methods. The field data show that tea garden workers are excluded in main three ways. They are deprived from social and political rights and have a very small control on their material world. Such deprivations made them incapable and create a cycle of poverty which leads them to social exclusion. Moreover, tea garden owners and managers play a peculiar role to exploit them from their basic socio-political and economic rights. In such a way, tea garden workers become excluded from the main stream people and living inhuman life.

Keywords: Poverty, Capability deprivation, Social Exclusion

INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh is a small country of South Asia. The economy of Bangladesh is based on agricultural. Tea is one of the most important crops of this country. Tea is the second highest foreign currency earners sector of this economy. The history of tea cultivation is not so much old. In 1840, tea was first cultivated in Bangladesh. And from 1857 tea was cultivated commercially in Bangladesh. Now most of the tea garden of this country is situated in Sylhet division. There are total 163 tea garden in this country; among them 91 tea gardens are situated in Moulovibazar, Sylhet. First tea garden of this country is Malnicherra Tea Estate of Sylhet City Corporation. There are also 22 tea gardens in this district.

A lot of tea garden workers work in these gardens. But tea garden workers do not get enough facilities from Tea Garden Companies. Tea garden workers have a pathetic history of disadvantage, deprivation, exploitation and alienation (Barkat, et.al 2010). They are deeply trapped in such a way that they depend merely on the companies for food,

medicine, accommodations, education, etc. They have no choices about their life and services; they have no social standing in Bangladesh. Their low wages, long working hours, poor housing conditions, social discrimination deprive them of many basic human needs and rights (Das & Islam, 2006). They live an inhumane life. They are excluded from planned-land society.

Social exclusion is relatively new term and there is not enough field research on social exclusion and tea garden workers. From previous research work we could understand that social exclusion is the process through which individuals or groups are wholly or partially excluded from full participation in the society in which they live (Kabeer, 2000 & 2006). As (Sen, 2000) thinks excluded people are excluded from their Permanent Employment, Credit and Loan, Housing and Land, Minimal Consumption Level, Health Care, Health Knowledge, Education, Rituality, Family & Sociability, Respect, Citizenship and legal Equality, Electoral Participation, Use in public goods. Social exclusion is the cause of Social polarization (Schurmann, 2009; EU-2010). The lower part of polarized society does not get opportunity of enjoying different social facilities. So, social exclusion is wide range of social and economic problems. Different researches show that the particular cause of social exclusion is poverty (Sen 2000). Without thinking of money; poverty excluded everything from a human. When a man or a group of people feel the lack of money for their livelihood they forgot their social, political right. Even they excluded their self from their family and community (UNESCO). Not only poverty is the only cause of social exclusion. There may be many other causes. (Estivill, 2003) refers some other causes and some others group who are socially excluded and those are -mentally and physically handicapped, suicidal people, aged invalids, abused children, substance abusers, delinquents, single parents, multi-problem households, marginal, asocial persons, and other social 'misfits' (Kamruzzaman & Islam, 2015).

Previous literatures show that the tea garden workers of Sylhet, even in whole Bangladesh are not getting all the opportunity as like as others citizens. Their living condition and health are very poor (Majumder, 2002). There is a large income inequality between tea garden workers and officials. Tea garden workers quarters are not suitable for live. The total nutrition of a worker or his/her family is never fulfilled by the given monthly ration. Sanitation is unhygienic and drinking water supply is not available (Das & Islam, 2006). Again, the tea garden works are not literate. Their wages is not enough for ensuring their livelihood. They are not literate and they do not get any other jobs outside the tea garden. Most miserable think is that the other people do not show them respect and honor. They do not have equal citizenship rights. They have no or somewhat participation in election. So they are excluded from their economic, social and political rights and activities (Kamruzzaman & Islam, 2013).

It is clear that tea garden workers are exploited, they are hunted by the tea garden owner and officials, and they are excluded. In this situation it is important to find out the main causes and process by which they became excluded. It is important to find out the social facts of social exclusion and release them from this exclusion. They are poor Bangladeshi people and they have the right of enjoying socio-political benefits of Bangladesh Government. So, this research work has searched the way of escaping this social exclusion.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

This paper has reexamine that how tea garden workers became excluded from economic, Social and political participation. And a central question is that-

- Without poverty, is there any other fact or factors which excluded tea garden workers from their family, community and country?
- How tea garden worker became excluded from social, political and economic sectors?

Therefore, to find out the answers of this research questions this empirical study aimed following objectives-

- To depict the situation of tea garden workers of Sylhet, Bangladesh.
- To explore the major area of Social exclusion of tea garden workers.
- Analyzing the main causes and process of social exclusion.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

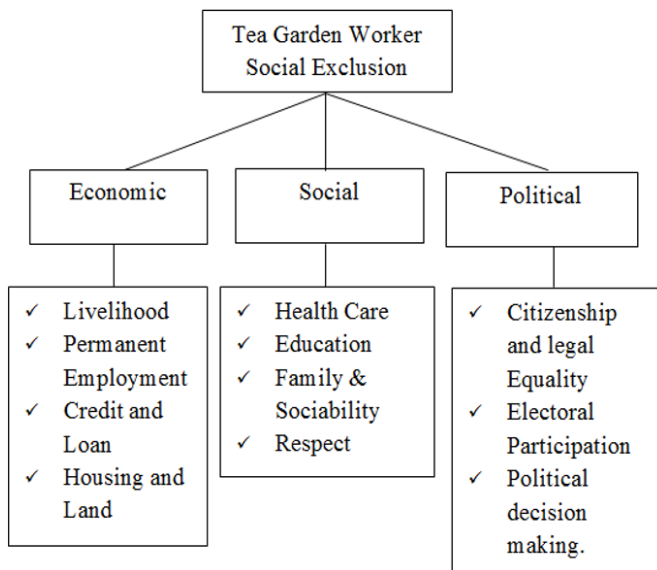


Figure 01: Conceptual framework of Social exclusion of tea garden worker.

In this research paper, social exclusion of tea garden worker have been analyzed by three main aspects. These aspects are economic, social and political. Here, economic aspects of exclusion related with Livelihood, Kind of job (Permanent/ temporal), credit & loan and Housing & Land. Social aspects of exclusion related with Heath facilities, Education, Family & Sociability and respect of outsider of garden. Again, political aspects of exclusion are related with citizenship & legal equality, electoral participation and political decision making. Indeed, tea garden worker are excluded from these general aspects. They are separated or discriminated from these aspects so they are theoretically excluded from economic, social and political sectors. And in this paper we were examined all these aspects of social exclusion.

METHODOLOGY

Descriptive research design has been followed to examine our objectives. Triangulation methods (quantitative and qualitative) have been used for ensuring the real scenario of the tea garden workers. Quantitative data have represented the current status of tea garden worker whereas qualitative data have emphasized on the process of social exclusion. Unite of analysis of this research is each tea garden worker. The research area of this study is all

the tea gardens of Sylhet City Corporation. And all workers are the population of this study. List of workers is unavailable therefore Sample has been selected by purposive sampling. And data collection methods were survey and in-depth interviews. There were 35 respondents who participated in survey and 10 in-depths interviews were taken intensively from those respondents. Survey method fulfills the demand of quantitative data and In-depth interview provided qualitative information. Semi structured questionnaire was used as survey tool and guide questionnaire was used as in-depth interview tool. Percentage and central tendency have used to analyze the empirical data. Both SPSS and MS-Excel have used to statistical analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULT DISCUSSION

Among all the respondent 62.9% were male and 37.1% were female. Youngest worker of the study area was 17 years old and most eldest worker of the study was 55 years old. 40% workers are belonging in 26-35 age group. 22.9% workers were belonging in each age group 36-45 and 46-55 and 14.3% respondents were belonging in 16-25 age group. 71.4% respondents were Hindu and 28.6% were Muslim. 94.3% were married and rests of them are unmarried. They are not educated enough, only 14.3% respondent just crossed primary education. There were not a single respondent who complete 10 years of schooling and 51.4% respondents did not have any academic education. 48.6% workers individually earn livelihood for their family whereas there were 37.1% respondents who said they and their spouse earn livelihood for their family. Again there were only 5 respondents who said that, in their family there are three earning member.

Table 01: Socio-demographic data form study area

| | | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Sex | Male | 22 | 62.9 |
| | Female | 13 | 37.1 |
| Age | 16-25 | 5 | 14.3 |
| | 26-35 | 14 | 40.0 |
| | 36-45 | 8 | 22.9 |
| | 46-55 | 8 | 22.9 |
| Religion | Muslim | 10 | 28.6 |
| | Hindu | 25 | 71.4 |
| Marital Status | Married | 33 | 94.3 |
| | Unmarried | 2 | 5.7 |
| Years of Schooling | 0 | 18 | 51.4 |
| | 1-5 | 12 | 34.3 |
| | 6-10 | 4 | 14.3 |
| Earning Member of Family | Self | 17 | 48.6 |
| | Self + Husband/Wife | 13 | 37.1 |
| | Self + Others | 5 | 14.3 |

Source: Field data 2016

Economic Aspects and Exclusion:

Tea Garden worker are living under extreme poverty. 97.1% respondents said that they are unable to arranging sufficient livelihood. And all respondents said that, their salary is not sufficient for arranging livelihood. The salaries of the tea garden workers are limited in 40-70 taka per day only. One of the respondents said that-

“Our salary is too little that we are unable to arrange sufficient livelihood for our family”

97.1% respondent address that their salary is not sufficient for purchasing three times meal. All of the tea garden workers are not permanent in their job; in our study 51.4% respondents said that their job is permanent rest of them said that there job is not permanent. 65.7% respondents said that they got early two times bonus, but the bonus is also too little. The sum of the two times bonus is also between 1000 to 1300 taka. 60% respondents said that if they ask for lone form the company, the tea garden company gave them lone but the amount of loan is not enough big too. 54.3% respondents said that beside the job of tea garden work they are able to get the opportunity to do extra/part time job but jobs of outside the garden is limited for them. Among them some of the respondents said though they have the chance to do extra job but they do not have any knowledge and skills for doing any other jobs. Therefore, basically they are unable to do others jobs. A respondent accept that they stole some goods and products from tea garden and sell those in local market. But this kind of immoral activities is done only for their surviving. They address that they have the chance to take lone and credit from bank but they have no legal documents and property for getting lone from the bank. 82.9% respondents' address that they have no personal house and they live in the company made house within the tea garden boundary. Again, none of the respondents has any land property. 97.1% respondents claim that their salary is not adequate for making new house and buying new land property.

Table 02: Economic conditions of tea garden workers

| | Yes | No |
|--|------------|------------|
| Arranging Sufficient Livelihood | 1 (2.9%) | 34 (97.1%) |
| Job is enough for arranging Livelihood | 0 (0%) | 35 (100%) |
| Job permanent or not | 18 (51.4%) | 17 (48.6%) |
| Opportunity for taking extra credit and lone | 21 (60%) | 14 (40%) |
| Opportunity of doing extra job | 16 (45.7%) | 19 (54.3%) |
| Chance of taking lone/ credit from Bank | 19 (54.3%) | 16 (45.7%) |
| Have any house | 6 (17.1%) | 29 (82.9%) |
| Have any land property | 0 (0%) | 35 (100%) |
| Salary in enough for making new house | 1 (2.9%) | 34 (97.1%) |
| Salary is sufficient for purchasing three times meal | 1 (2.9%) | 34 (97.1%) |
| Get yearly bonus | 23 (65.7%) | 12 (34.6%) |

Source: Field data 2016

Social Aspects and Exclusion:

Empirical data show, tea garden workers are unable to manage three times meals in a day. Total 60% workers said that they do not take three times meals regularly. In a response of this issue a worker said that-

“Actually there is nobody who can manage three time meals in a day regularly; if they take one time meals, he/she suffer for hunger for two times.”

Children form tea garden worker family has little chance to take primary education. In our study areas there was only one government primary school. There were also few NGO school but there is no chance for secondary education.

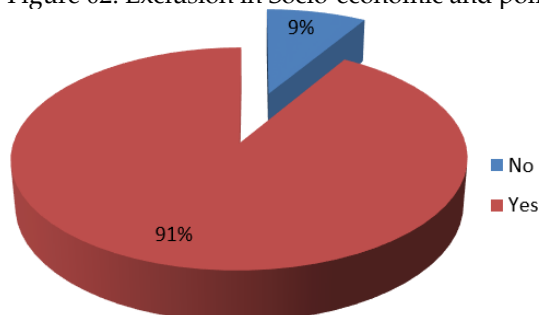
Table 3: Social aspects of tea garden workers

| | Yes | No |
|--|------------|------------|
| Taking three times meals in a day | 14 (40%) | 21 (60%) |
| Facility for children education | 20 (57.1%) | 15 (42.9%) |
| Close relationship with family | 1 (2.9%) | 34 (97.1%) |
| Job of tea garden affected family relationship | 21 (60%) | 14 (40%) |
| Good interaction with family | 20 (57.1%) | 15 (42.9%) |
| Outsider of tea garden show proper respect | 16 (45.7%) | 19 (54.3%) |
| Getting equal citizenship right | 10 (28.6%) | 25 (71.4%) |
| Proper opportunity from govt. office | 15 (42.9%) | 20 (57.1%) |
| Excluded from many sectors (social/political/economical) | 32 (91.4%) | 3 (8.6%) |
| Excluded from many sectors cause by tea garden | 30 (85.7%) | 5 (14.3 %) |

Source: Field data 2016

Tea garden workers pass a long time in garden, but they think this time duration do not imply any impact on their relationship with family members. 97.1% workers think that they have close relation with their family members. But in another question 40% respondents said that, job of tea garden affected their family relationship in many ways. Again 42.9% respondents think that after working time period, they sometimes unable to maintain good interaction with all family members. And many of them think that people of outside of the tea garden have no good impression about tea garden worker. 54.3% respondents address that outsider of the tea garden do not show proper respect to them. They are also discriminated in getting proper citizen right. 71.4% respondents said that they do not get equal citizenship right. 57.1% respondents do not get equal opportunity from government office. Actually they are discriminated in every way. 91.4% respondents believed that they are socially, politically and economically excluded. And 85.7% respondents think that they are excluded in many ways because of their job status.

Figure 02: Exclusion in Socio-economic and political Sector



Source: Field data 2016

Nowadays tea garden workers get medical facility from Tea Garden Company. 80% respondents agree that they got medical facility from Tea Garden Company. And most of the tea garden has Medical Center. But they complain that treatment is less costly but medicine is highly costly there. And they do not get any bonus or extra money for medical treatment.

Table 04: Health/ Medical aspects of tea garden workers

| | Yes | No |
|--|------------|----------|
| Medical facility in tea garden | 34 (97.1%) | 1 (2.9%) |
| Health care facilities from Tea Garden Company | 28 (80%) | 7 (20%) |
| Medical center or Hospital in Tea garden | 28 (80%) | 7 (20%) |
| Yearly bonus for Health | 0 (0%) | 35(100%) |

Source: Field data 2016

Political Aspects and Exclusion:

Like socio-economic aspects tea garden workers are also somehow excluded or separated from political activities. About half of the respondents cast their vote in local or national election. Among them 42.9% workers object that they have faced influences by tea garden Company in making electoral decision. And 60% respondents said, they do not get equal opportunity in using public goods.

Table 05: Political aspects of tea garden workers

| | Yes | No |
|---|------------|------------|
| Casting vote in all election | 17 (48.6%) | 18(51.4%) |
| Electoral decision without any others influence | 20 (57.1%) | 15 (42.9%) |
| Get equal opportunity to use public goods | 14 (40%) | 21 (60%) |

Source: Field data 2016

CONCLUSION

Tea is the second cash crop of Bangladesh. There are many tea gardens in this country and thousands of people work in those tea gardens. But from a long time they are discriminated from many social, political and economic aspects. And they are still excluded from these aspects. Actually they are not properly educated and they are not skilled to do any other jobs. For this reason, they sell their labor in the garden for a very little wage. This little wage is not sufficient for managing their livelihoods. Most of the time, they are fighting against hunger. They are unable to arrange three times meals for their family. Their job is not always permanent. And their salary is not enough for making new house and buying new property. They have a little chance for taking credit and maintaining extra job. So all these situations make them poor. They are facing poverty very hard. And poverty excluded them from social and political activities. Their children do not get proper education and for the cause of poverty they are unable to arrange secondary and higher education for their children. These annoying situations force their children to work garden again. The health condition of tea garden worker and their family member is also very poor. Although there is a medical center in each tea garden but the cost of treatment is very high. And they do not get any extra money with their salary for medical treatment. They work hard a long time in the garden and this working period affected their interaction with their family members. Job in tea garden as a worker is not socially respectful. Workers are socially not accepted everywhere. Outsiders of the tea garden do not show enough respect to the tea garden worker. So they are excluded from the world of tea garden. Their colony, medical center and work place is in the same place, so they visit outside world shortly and they have a very little knowledge about the world outside the garden. They are not care full about their civil rights. So they have no proper excess in government offices. They always stay inside of the garden so they are excluded from using public goods. They are also excluded from local and national political

activities. Most of them have no interest on politics. Sometimes they participated in electoral system by the influence of Tea Garden Company. Local and national politics do not have any impact on them. They are bounded in the tea garden and they are fall in a circle; the circle of poverty. Not only economic conditions but also the mechanism of tea companies made them incapable to be educated, healthy and skilled one. Therefore they became excluded from social, economic and political activities.

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