



UNIVERSITETET I AGDER

Social Stratification, Employment and Empowerment among indigenous women in Bangladesh

A study of the Tea Labor Community, Sylhet,



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This thesis is dedicated to the Female tea plantation labors

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to explore the factors which are responsible for creating obstacles for not having the basic rights and empowerment of women tea labors in Bangladesh. However, the overall trend of human rights and women empowerment among the indigenous communities are as like as the countrywide scenario in Bangladesh. Tea labor's community are one of another indigenous group in Bangladesh and they belong to many different caste minority group. They are migrated by British tea Planters in Bangladesh from different Indian state a long time ago and until now they have been leading a very miserable life. In my observation, 'the migration and caste discrimination history' of this people (in my study, I mean- Women tea labor) is one of the crucial reason for their underdevelopment and not empowerment in family & society. In addition, their 'socially excluded group' identity also another most crucial reason for their backward position in society. Moreover, their low purchasing power and in consciousness about their rights in family & employment places are another most important reason of their not empowerment. In my study, I depict their experiences in the tea estates areas to understand the overall socio-economic scenario of tea labors. If the overall situation of these women labors will improve, then it would be possible to increase their empowerment & social acceptance though it's a challenging issue to improve in the context of Bengali society where female is always suppressed by their opposite counterpart.

Keywords: Tea plantation women Worker, Indigenous people, Women Empowerment, Caste and Gender

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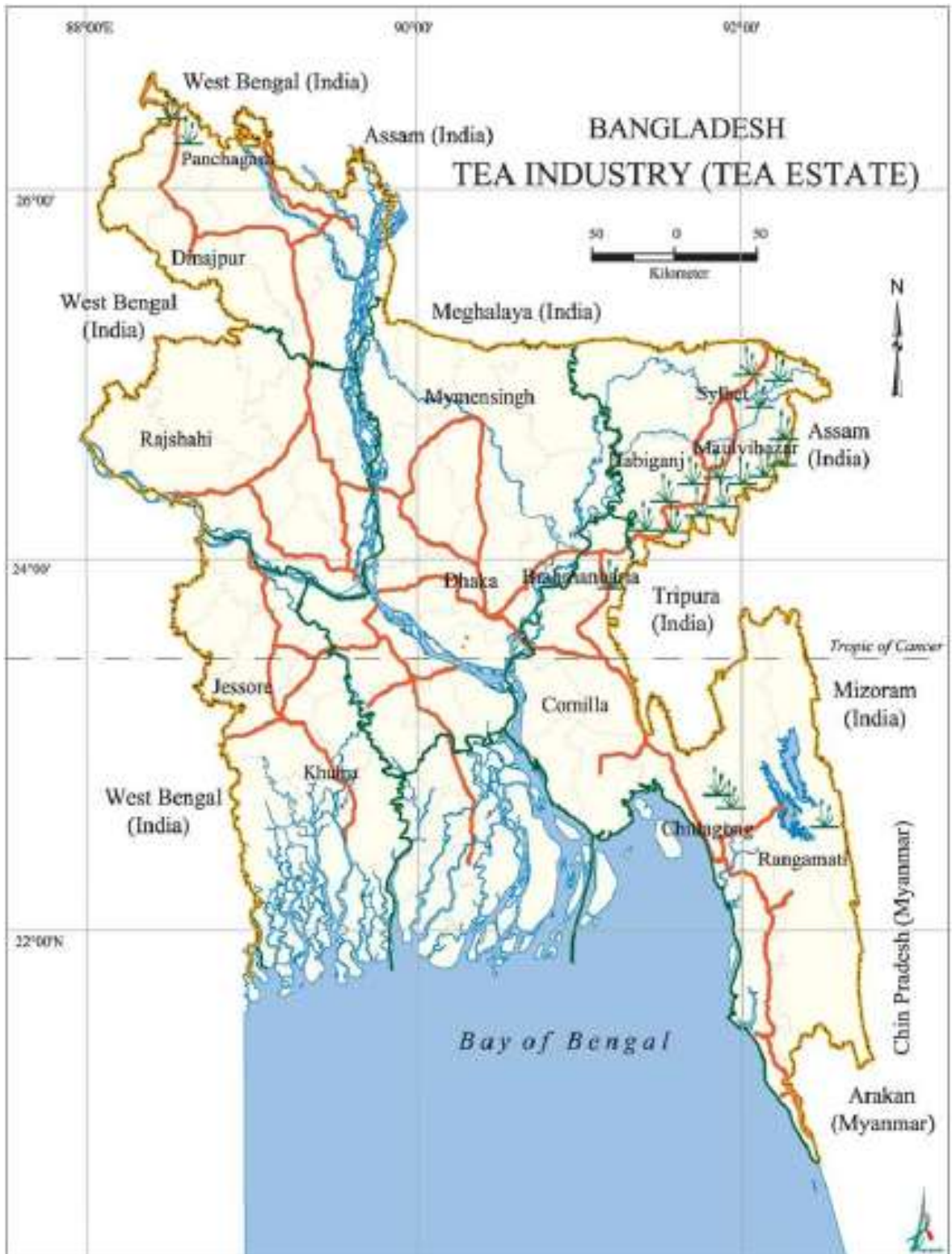


Figure 1 Tea estate in Bangladesh Map

Source: http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Tea_Industry

List of Abbreviation

BCS= Bangladesh Cha Sansad (Bangladesh Tea Organization)

BDT= Bangladeshi Currency

BTA= Bangladesh Tea association

BTB= Bangladesh Tea Board

BCSU= Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union (Bangladesh Tea Labors Union)

BTIMC= Bangladesh Tea Industry Management Corporation

CHT= Chittagong

ILO= International Labor Organization

NGO= Non-Government Organization

PRSP= Poverty Reduction Strategic Paper of Bangladesh

SEZ= Special Economic Zone

SSC= Secondary School Certificate

UN= United Nations

WHO= World Health Organization

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Context

Tea is an important export item in Bangladesh and it is the 10th largest tea producing country in the world. At present, there are 172 tea gardens in Bangladesh (Kazi Muzafar Ahammed, 2012: 3). The tea industry accounts for 3% of global tea production, and employs more than 4 million people (Business Habit, 2017). However, the laborers in the tea industry are brought from Assam, Bihar, Madras, Orissa and other parts of India by the Duncan brothers about 150 years ago. Their destiny is tied to their huts in the 'labor lines' that has been built by themselves (Tea Industry, 2014). They continue to remain as people without choice and entitlement to property. They are tribal people, also called Adivasi (indigenous). I observed and came to know from my respondents that, majority of them follows Hinduism and they are medium in height, physically strong, wavy hair, round features and wide nostrils and high cheek bones.

Living conditions of tea labor are outrageous. In this perspective, Phillip Gain (2009), the Director of Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD), in the labor lines of the tea gardens are not as it supposed to be. Typically, a single room is crowded with people of different ages of a family. Cattle and human beings are often seen living together in the same house or room. The work condition of the tea plantation workers is also not satisfactory. Socially they are isolated, illiterate, underprivileged and detached. They are not aware of their origins. They do not interact much with people of other ethnic identities. They forget their mother tongue and most of them are illiterate. As they are socially excluded group, they are a very easy target for exploitation by the profiteers from the tea industry. Today, about 0.7million people are employed directly and indirectly in tea industry where 75% workers of this industry are female and they are one of the largest marginalized groups in Bangladesh (Mintu Deshwara, 2017). In this perspective, it is necessary to mention that, employers often keep women for taking tea leaves since they do a better job and are paid less than the men. But, they are among the poorest and most deprived section of organized labor.

Moreover, it is commonly known that the women tea workers in Bangladesh live an inferior standard of life compared to that of the major tea producing countries in the world. It is often claimed that the minimum wage levels are highly insufficient to cover basic needs (Sanne van der Wal, 2008:10). They lead a very miserable condition of life compare to other sectors in Bangladesh. On average, their daily salary is only around BDT 85 (US \$ 1.10) now, and they are paid on a weekly basis (Their monthly salary will around BDT 2,380 and family income will be BDT 4,760=US\$ 61) (Mintu Deshwara, 2016). Here, it can say that poverty is the crucial and only reason for this ethnic minorities worker vulnerable situation. Barkat et al, (2009, cited in Nikhil Chakma Mathilde Maitrot, 2016: 2) conducted an analysis on CHT and plain land ethnic minorities in Bangladesh, which classify an achievement gap between national poverty reduction and other ethnic groups' experiences. It is found from the studies that low economic opportunities, specific geographic locations, exclusion, deprivation and dispossession of lands are the main drivers of poverty among the ethnic minorities in Bangladesh (Barkat et al., 2009 cited in Nikhil Chakma Mathilde Maitrot, 2016: 2). It is also found from the studies that economic situation of the plainland adibashis (Indigeneous people) in Bangladesh is significantly worse than that of the overall Bangladesh scenario. A 60 percent of the plainland adibashi people in Bangladesh are absolute poor, whereas 39.5 percent people in rural Bangladesh are absolute poor. Hardcore poverty is also more noticeable among the plainland adibashis than that among the rural Bangladeshis. 24.6 percent of the plainland adibashis are hardcore poor where it is only 17.9 percent in rural Bangladesh. Poverty situation is worse among all the plainland adibashi groups in Bangladesh than the overall rural scenario shows (Barkat et al. 2009a cited in Nikhil Chakma Mathilde Maitrot, 2016: 2. Barkat et al. (2009b) also found in the CHT about 62 percent of households in the CHT region, irrespective of ethnicity, live below the absolute poverty line (below 2,122 k.cal), while about 36 percent are hardcore poor (below 1,805 k.cal¹).

Furthermore, in one way tea female workers are the most vulnerable groups among the worker's class in Bangladesh because of the deprivation of their mentions basic needs described above. On the other hand, they are belonging to one of the 48 different indigenous communities living in the plain lands and hill areas in Bangladesh (Caf Dowlah, 2013 cited in Nikhil Chakma

¹ Kilocalorie - *kcal* is the symbol of kilocalorie

Mathilde Maitrot, 2016:9). In addition, the term 'indigenous peoples' is commonly known as different cultural groups, e.g., 'Adivasis', 'tribal peoples', 'hill tribes'. In Bangladesh, they are treated as 'tribal' (in Bengali we call them “Adivasi”) in official documents (Arif Ahmed, 2016).

1.2 State policy and discourse on identity of the indigenous people of Bangladesh

Dhamai (2014 cited in Nikhil Chakma Mathilde Maitrot, 2016:5) argues that ethnic minorities in Bangladesh are struggling to have their identity recognized by the state even since the independence of Bangladesh in 1971. Ethnic minorities in Bangladesh lives in plains areas and in the Chittagong Hill Tracts areas also. He also states that they are located mainly in the border regions in the northwest (Rajshahi-Dinajpur), central north (Mymensingh - Tangail), northeast (Greater Sylhet), south and southeast (Chittagong, Cox’s Bazar and Greater Barisal) (ibid). However, there is a sharp controversy and debate between indigenous leaders and Bangladesh government on the issue of identity. Ethnic minority groups in the CHT are also popularly known as “Pahari” (meaning hill people) or as “Jumma” (from the common tradition of swidden or ‘jum’ cultivation). The plains land aboriginals, mainly those in the northwestern greater Rajshahi region, used to be generally known as *Adivasi*, meaning aboriginal or indigenous. The term “adivasi” or “indigenous” received little attention from other parts of Bangladesh until 1990 (Roy, 2009 cited in Nikhil Chakma Mathilde Maitrot, 2016:5).

The Bangladesh Government ratified the ILO convention (convention no. 107 of 1957) which is the only international law on the rights indigenous and tribal populations, and covers a wide range of issues, including land, recruitment and conditions of employment, vocational training, handicrafts and rural industries, social security and health, administration, education and means of communication (Nikhil Chakma Mathilde Maitrot, 2016:6). They also state that the Bangladesh Government has declared that there are no indigenous peoples in the country and has preferred to use terms such as “tribe” and “tribal” (“upajati” in Bengali) instead of “indigenous” and “adivasi”. Rather, different names have been used in different legislations. For instance- a finance law in 1995 uses the term “indigenous hillmen”; the East Bengal State Acquisition & Tenancy Act of 1950 uses the term “aboriginal castes or tribes”; the National Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper adopted by the Government of Bangladesh in 2005 (“PRSP-I”) uses

“adivasis/ethnic minorities”; and PRSP-II (in 2008) uses “indigenous communities” and “indigenous people” (Nikhil Chakma Mathilde Maitrot, 2016:6).

The 13th of September 2007 is the day for incredible advancement into the future on the path of human rights because the United Nations and its Member States made their declaration on Indigenous People rights. This is regarded as a breakthrough in terms of indigenous peoples’ rights, where the following was highlighted

- a) the right to self-determination;
- b) the right to be cultural identity;
- c) the right to free, prior and informed consent;
- d) the right to be free of discrimination.

(source: UNICEF report, not dated: 12)

Finally, the government introduced the terms for the identity of the indigenous peoples of Bangladesh as “tribes” (*upajati*), “minor races” (*khudro jatishaotta*) and “ethnic sects and communities” (*nrigoshthi o shomprodai*) in the 15th amendment of the constitution in 2011 (Dhamai, 2014 cited in Nikhil Chakma Mathilde Maitrot, 2016:6). He also describes about the new amendment that all the people of Bangladesh will be known as Bangalees. This has violated the rights of self-determination, determining own identity as Adivasi/Indigenous peoples, instead, forcing the Indigenous peoples to use another identity. The ethnic minorities prefer collectively to use the term “indigenous” in English and “Adivasi” in Bengali (*ibid*).

The data for this thesis is collected from tea gardens of Lakatura Tea Estate in Sylhet. Taking this situation into consideration, this thesis is about the *tea plantation indigenous women’s* struggling/surviving in the family, society and working areas. Gender disparity, vulnerability, discrimination, inequalities in society, lack of human rights, lack of empowerment will be discussed through *tea plantation* indigenous women’s garden job, livelihood in tea estate.

1.3 Purpose of the research

The overall status of women empowerment in Bangladesh is not at all satisfactory. Indigenous women are not exception of it. They are underprivileged and discriminated in all the

phases of life. Even in the matrilineal base family of indigenous people in Bangladesh, the women are deprived and discriminated only because of their race and gender and also even in the work place because of their gender, caste and ethnicity. Almost in sphere of sectors, plainland indigenous women get miserably lower wages than males do. The tea plantation women labors of Bangladesh those who belong to indigenous people in Bangladesh are not out of the gloomy picture of women empowerment. They are one of the most vulnerable group in society. In such a situation, it has become important to carry out research to find some viable strategies to ensure the barriers on the way to their rights and empowerment. The present study is broadly an attempt to explore the factors which are responsible for creating obstacles for not having the basic rights and empowerment of women tea labors in Bangladesh. More specifically the objectives are (i) to investigate the condition of human rights and the level of consciousness about the rights and privileges among female labors. (ii) To explore the overall socio-economic environment of tea garden where they are suppressed. (iii) To find viable strategies to reduce the problems and challenges which they face to the path of empowerment.

1.4 Research questions

- 1 What is the level of access to human rights of female tea labor among the study community?
- 2 What are the socio-economic conditions of female tea labor in the study community? how do they integrate and negotiate with other majority people around their living and working place?
- 3 What are the challenges and major issues that are responsible for not empowering of women tea labors in society?
- 4 How is the work of indigenous women tea laborer viewed by their family, community and does the decision-making power in family change due to their employment?

1.5 Review of literature

Several authors have analyzed the aspect of tea plantation workers in Bangladesh highlighting their overall living conditions. Research particularly also important issue remains largely is unaddressed: the experience of indigenous women labors, particularly women's challenges as laborers in their work place, as gender in family-society-employment, their strategies for subsistence in a different socio-cultural area. Therefore, the study on women tea plantation

labors are ignored. Here, literature on Bangladeshi women tea plantation labors' poverty and human rights issues will be mentioned out for better understanding of the livelihood issues of women workers in tea estates areas in plain land in Bangladesh. The literature also show that this people faces a long-time suppression, harassment, and domination living in tea estates in Bangladesh.

Barkat et al. (2010 cited in A.B. M Enamol Hassan, 2014:123) conducted an assessment on the real position of the children and women in the tea garden of Bangladesh in terms of their health, education, social protection and dignity. The study finds that the conditions of children and women in tea sector are significantly poorer in some areas than their counterparts those are engaged in other sectors of Bangladesh. It is also finds that the infant mortality rate is almost twice as high as the national average and those levels of extreme poverty and of poor nutrition exceeds the national norms. About 74 percent of households fall below the absolute poverty, compared to the national average of 38.4 percent and about 50 percent fall below the hardcore poverty line, compared to the national average of 19.5 percent. Gender parity at primary school is 1.0, which means that there is no gender discrimination regarding attendance in primary school between boys and girls. But primary dropout is relatively higher among girls compared to boys (19.4 percent Vs 15.7 percent). For that reason, women's' literacy is lowest at just 12 percent (ibid). 59.8 percent of the women aged 15-49 are victims of child marriage (ibid).

Sanne Van Der Wal (2011, cited in A.B. M Enamol Hassan, 2014:124) conducted an analysis on working environment of tea companies and it is found that working conditions on tea estates are problematic. Workers are being harassed based on sex, ethnicity and gender. All constituting violation of ILO code of business principles (CBP). It shows that the poor housing conditions for casuals and the casual status of many de facto permanent workers are RA standard² violations. It also shows that the workplace-related human rights of freedom of association and the right to bargain collectively are being hampered. The workers have no job security. In spite of the lack of job security, conditions for casual workers are different from those with a permanent status in that they have fewer benefits. Casual employees who are not married or living with a partner

² Standards are guidelines and/or requirements. Standard systems include not only standards but can include monitoring, verification and certification.

are required to share estate houses if they are at all available. It shows that five casual workers share a two-room house. No efforts are taken to provide single housing units for casual workers who are living with their children. Because of the sharing of houses, casual workers are infested with bed bugs, permanent workers do not have to share houses (ibid). In the focused group discussion, it was said that workers who are members of the union face harassment from the management when they attempt to push any agenda that the management does not agree with. They have to face this annoyance frequently in the form of false accusations of impropriety, false quality judgements by the quality inspectors or the reassignment to heavy tea picking duty if one was assigned lighter duties (ibid). It also shows that all the female respondents who were interviewed noted that before they were employed they were subjected to pregnancy tests. The respondents stated that pregnant women were never employed instead their medical cards would be stamped as unfit (ibid). One of the workers interviewed stated that sexual harassment is a serious problem because all the supervisors are men, some of them want you to go beyond your work obligations and satisfy their sexual needs and if you don't do that, they fake other charges against you or give you too much work or allocate you lonely or dangerous plucking zones (ibid).

Sarma (2007 cited in A.B. M Enamol Hassan, 2014: 124) finds that the tea-tribes of Assam are among the backward and most exploited tribes in India, though their newer generation is comparatively educated and now it has intellectuals and professionals in various fields. The tea tribes who are mainly laborers have to live inside tea-estates. These estates are in interior places and this contributes to the backwardness and exploitation of tea laborer by the tea planters (ibid). The workers, in a way, have to live with the basic facilities provided by the tea-planters. The tea-planters, usually exploit the tea tribes in every possible way. Violence and agitation of laborers against the management is common, where the state machinery normally protects the tea-planters. The main problems in the tea laborers Sharma (2007) finds that illiteracy, poverty, beer-addiction of males, low living standard and health facilities. He mentions that tea authority doesn't provide any drugs in case of workers are dying out of epidemics.

Tulshi Kumar and Zakirul (2006: 36) reveal the different aspects of human rights condition of the tea garden workers, focusing on some significant issues of social, economic, political and cultural life of those people. The study found (Ibid: 37) that the condition of the workers' houses

is run-down with lack of sanitation, lack of sufficient source of pure drinking water and miserably low wage of labor. Most of the houses are small, living more people than their accommodation capacity and therefore lacking privacy of the family members. Most people hardly have idea on their basic rights, tolerating everything that may be termed as human rights violation. They also find that child labor is very common. The workers of the tea gardens are too poor to children are forced to work for supporting the family financially. Moreover, they are unable to fulfill their basic needs as their socio-economic condition is very poor.

Saeed Shalman (2008, cited in A.B. M Enamol Hassan, 2014: 124) discuss about the relationships of tea workers with their supervisors. He found that there is distance of the tea workers with their supervisors including the managers is much broader. He also mentions out that *Francis Rolt*, a British writer, gives a vivid description of the severe discriminatory conduct of the hierarchy towards the tea workers: “the tea gardens are managed as an extreme hierarchy: the managers live like gods, distant, unapproachable, and incomprehensible. Some even begin to believe that they are gods, that they can do exactly what they like.” He also denotes that *Dan Jones*, a British human rights activist told that “managers have anything up to a dozen laborers as their personal, domestic servants. They are made to tie the managers shoe lace, to remind them that they are under managerial control and that they are bound to do whatever they are asked”.

1.6 Theoretical and conceptual framework

The research is considered on the theory of Empowerment. I will also give emphasis on social segregation based on class, caste, gender and ethnicity. The concept of empowerment is relevant to my study because I will explore how the tea plantation women worker experienced a lacking empowerment by violating their rights in family & employment areas and how their employment impact in their decision-making power in their family. They stay far from the mainstream Bengali society. To realize the level of their decision-making power within family and work place this study would be very supportive. Regarding this, theory of intersectionality would be suitable to explain the oppressed minority Indigenous women in Bangladesh. This theory refers the oppression of women within society. The tea plantation women are the marginal group within the Bengali mainstream society. Moreover, they belong to the most sufferer group in society from

all aspect of life and they face domination by their male counterpart in the Bengali culture. Not only this, but they are the most disadvantaged group in society because of their gender and ethnic status.

Within the framework, several concepts have been used to guide the analysis of the study. For clarity, these key concepts are defined in the following way;

1.6.1 Theory of empowerment and Women Empowerment

When we talk about empowerment we normally mean it women empowerment, because women need to empower in society as they are the most vulnerable group who face gender-race based violence. However, women's Empowerment refers economic empowerment which is the ability for women to enjoy their rights to control and benefit from resources, assets, income and their own time, as well as the ability to manage risk and improve their economic status and wellbeing (Women Empowerment, 2017). According to the United Nations (United Nations, 2017) women's empowerment mainly has five components:

- a. Generating women's sense of self-worth.
- b. Women's right to have and to determine their choices.
- c. Women's right to have access to equal opportunities and resources.
- d. Women's right to have the power to control their own lives, within and outside the home.
- e. Women's ability to their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.

Therefore, women empowerment is the acknowledgement of their basic rights and creating an environment to access for all resources. The concept of empowerment is advocated by Naila Kabeer. According to UN Women, empowering women by participating in economic life thoroughly across all sectors is essential to build stronger economies, achieve internationally agreed goals for development and sustainability, and improve the quality of life for women, men, families and communities (UN WOMEN, 2017).

Rosalind Eyben, Naila Kabeer and Andrea Cornwall (2008: 6) argue that '*empowerment happens when individuals and organized groups are able to imagine their world differently and to realize that vision by changing the relations of power that have been keeping them in poverty*'. They also consider empowerment as paths out of poverty. Staying poor in today's world is an effect of world history that adversely incorporates poor people into the current global political economy. It is also an effect of locally embedded processes through which individuals or groups are wholly or partially excluded from full participation in the society within which they live (ibid:7).

Occupations which are predominantly undertaken by women tend to have grading systems that compress jobs into a narrow range of grades offering fewer opportunities for promotion. Furthermore, labor markets fail to acknowledge the contribution of unpaid reproductive work to the economy (Elson, 1999 cited in *Shahra Razavi, Camilla Arza, Elissa Braunstein, Sarah Cook and Kristine Goulding, date not given: 5*). The empowerment of women is usually affected by the Caste system, Class, Gender and Ethnicity. Oppression of women is being operated through the interconnected nodes of class, caste, and gender. The vulnerable situation of women tea workers in Bangladesh (my case study) is an example of this oppression. In this perspective, it is necessary to mention about the opinion of one of my women respondent that they are oppressed three times than others in society because of their religion, ethnicity and gender. This make them incredibly vulnerable to violence, abuse and exploitation. Thus, by this way I also would like to keep my attention on this possibility and the factors that may contribute to women's oppression in their employment.

1.6.2 Social Stratification: Class, Caste, Gender and Ethnicity

The society has experienced tremendous transformation since its evolution. It has been greatly affected and influenced by several factors. Extreme diversity is one of them. The diversity occurred in the form of caste, class, religion, language, ethnicity etc. People's political and cultural orientations are greatly affected by those forms of diversity and significantly affected levels of developmental process of human society. This social stratification, based on caste, class, ethnicity etc., is also inseparable in the perspective of tea plantation industry and its worker. In this

perspective, Jayaseelan Raj (2013: 470) argues that various aspects of the tea plantation production system and its socio-political institutions are inseparable as they are complementary processes in the plantation system; for example, the use of caste system to maintain class order in the plantation.

1.6.2.1 Caste

Caste is a form of social stratification characterized by endogamy, hereditary transmission of a lifestyle which often includes an occupation, status in a hierarchy, and customary social interaction and exclusion (Caste, 2017). I belong to a Hindu family and for me it's not a big issue. But, still now it's a vital issue for some poor and illiterate people in India and Bangladesh. This caste system creates "untouchability" which is the reason for various type of exploitation and suppression of those belonging to lower castes. I observed this stratification system exist in tea estate. The tea labors normally face this caste and class problem in their daily life when they need to interact with other Bengali counterparts or superior. It is a major burden for economic and social development. People can't take any occupation what he/she wants to do because of his/her caste. It is an impairment in the path of national unity, solidarity and brotherhood. It does not give equal rights and opportunities to all and creating false prestige among higher caste and makes them to believe that they are better in every sphere than other castes.

1.6.2.2 Class

Class is another type of social stratification system. Social class (or, simply, class), as in class society, is a set of concepts in the social sciences and political theory, centered on models of social stratification in which people are grouped into a set of hierarchical social categories, the most common being the upper, middle, and lower classes (Class, 2017). Here, the categories indicate economic prosperity in a society. For example- if a person has sound education, earns handsome salary, owners of grand house and vehicle of a particular brand he/she seems to be as an elite class. On the other hand, if a person who has no land of his own, no earning source, no any vehicle or house is seems to be as lower class. Thus, the economic prosperity defines a person's class.

1.6.2.3 Gender

The term Gender is used to refer to the socially constructed differences between men and women. The most appropriate meaning of gender for me is defined by WHO. Gender refers to the socially constructed characteristics of women and men – such as norms, roles and relationships of and between groups of women and men. It varies from society to society and can be changed. While most people are born either male or female, they are taught appropriate norms and behaviors – including how they should interact with others of the same or opposite sex within households, communities and work places (WHO, 2017). For example- some cultures have specific gender roles that can be considered distinct from male and female, such as the hijra ³(chhaka) of India and Pakistan.

1.6.2.4 Ethnicity

Ethnicity is also mostly relevant for my study. Glazer and Moynihan (1975) cited in Eriksen (2002: 4) that “ethnicity is modern aspect”. The US Sociologist David Riesman in 1953 initiated this idea of aspect. Eriksen (2001:262) describes that the new aspect of idea is the consequences of cultural varieties and it happens when cultural differences arise when interact with other culture people. Elaboratively say, ethnicity becomes more important the greater the cultural differences are, and that the phenomenon is caused by the fact that different groups have lived in relative isolation from each other and have developed socio-culturally in very different directions. Moreover, ethnicity does not necessarily entail conflict: it may be expressed in quite undramatic ways through everyday definitions of situations, through impression management, in religious cults and other peaceful phenomena. The phenomenon of ethnicity is, in other words, a complex one. In anthropology, the expression ‘ethnic group’ may also be used to describe majority groups, and ethnicity concerns the relationship between groups whose members consider each other culturally distinctive (ibid:262).

However, the two concepts of minority and majority, which are also used in the theory of ethnicity. An ethnic minority may be defined as a group which is politically nondominant, and

³ (in South Asia) a person whose birth sex is male but who identifies as female or as neither male nor female.

which exists as an ethnic category. Although the term ‘minority’ usually refers to inferior numbers, in the professional literature it denotes political submission. A great number of peoples in the world may therefore be seen as minorities. For example- the tea plantation labor is one of the most marginalized ethnic group in Bangladesh. Their relationship to the nation-state nevertheless varies, as do the strategies of the nation-state towards these minorities (ibid:282). A combination of segregation, assimilation and integration may occur in the most empirical cases of majority–minority relationships. Assimilation may well take place at an individual level, even if the chief tendency might be segregation or ethnic incorporation (ibid:285). For instance, despite the fact that the Sami of northern Scandinavia have in recent decades moved towards a stronger ethnic incorporation and chosen segregation, there are still individuals who are assimilated to a majority ethnic identity. I will find to explore, how the ethnic minority (tea laborers) become a victim of negative stereotypes, social detraction, and segregation.

1.7 Intersectionality Theory

Michele Tracy Berger & Kathleen Guidroz (2009: 1) argue that race, class, and gender were once seen as separate issues for members of both dominant and subordinate groups. Now scholars generally agree that these issues (as well as ethnicity, nation, age, and sexuality) — and how they intersect — are integral to individuals’ positions in the social world (Andersen and Collins 2006; Arrighi 2001; Collins 1993; Cyrus 1999; Ore 2000; Rothman 2005; Weber 2004). They also state that “these intersections are referred to as the race-class-gender matrix, the intersectional paradigm, interlocking systems of oppression, multiple axes of inequality, the intersection, and intersectionality; like most authors, we use the term “intersectional approach” to refer to the research application of these concepts”. However, theories of intersectionality developed through the writings of women of color during the 1960s and 1970s. It is used as a tool for gender and economic justice (Symington, 2004 cited in Gina Miranda Samuels, Fariyal Ross-Sheriff, 2008:5).

Intersectionality Theory was initiated by Kimberle Crenshaw (1991) for addressing the marginalization of Black women within not only antidiscrimination law but also in feminist and antiracist theory and politics. She advocated Intersectionality to highlight the ways in which social

movement organization and advocacy around violence against women elided the vulnerabilities of women of color, particularly those from immigrant and socially disadvantaged communities (Devon W. Carbado, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Vickie M. Mays, Barbara Tomlinson cited in Du Bois, 2013: 303-304).

Moreover, scholars and theorists who approve this theory must attend to myriad overlapping and mutually reinforcing oppressions that many women face in addition to gender (Gina Miranda Samuels, Fariyal Ross-Sheriff, 2008:5). They also argue that “intersectionality calls on us to consider women as whole beings; to recognize that not all women experience their womanhood in the same ways; many women face multiple forms of oppression, and not all women are rendered powerless. In fact, many women manage their multiple identities and challenges well and lead fulfilling lives (ibid: 6). Moreover, in the perspective of tea plantation workers Jayaseelan Raj (2013: 469-470) observed this intersectionality of caste, class and ethnicity. He states that “various aspects of this plantation production system and its socio-political institutions are inseparable as they are complementary processes in the plantation system; for example, the use of caste system to maintain class order in the plantation”.

1.8 Significant of the study

Tea industry is one of the largest exporting goods of Bangladesh. The reputation of the tea industry has attained by the hard works of women tea workers. A.B. M Enamol Hassan (2014: 123) argues that it is very wretched that there is no special priority in giving facilities to female laborers of tea garden where 75% of labor forces are women and many of them are victimized both inside and outside of family. A.B. M Enamol Hassan (2014: 123) mention about the story of “*Lakshmi*”, who is only 30, but her weather-beaten face is lined and crumpled. Long hours, between 10 and 12, spent in the sun, laboring up and down hill slopes plucking tea leaves and sorting them out, have aged her prematurely. She eats poorly too because her husband, though a tea garden worker, wastes all his salaries on alcohol and gambling”. However, many researches have been conducted and given importance on the bio-socio & economic aspects of tea plantation and the marketing of tea but study on tea garden workers especially women, is still a depriving matter for research. It is common scenario like ‘*Lakshmi*’ that women tea workers don’t get actual assessment in terms of financial and social aspects through giving hard working whole day long. They are unconscious about their rights such as property rights, decision making power,

(Mohorana⁴) right of marriage separation, rights in their wage, lacking knowledge on country's labor law, policy on harassment, suppression and domination. Their improvement of livelihood status, fulfillment of their rights, the empowerment situation in society should be research as they are the majority part of workers.

1.9 Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter discusses about the background of study on indigenous tea plantation worker and their overall situation of indigenous people in Bangladesh, the state policy and discourse on identity of the indigenous people of Bangladesh. The research questions; the purpose of the research, literature review and the conceptual and theoretical framework is also discussed in this chapter. It will then go to describe the study areas and study population details and the methodology part in the second chapter. The third chapter to chapter six is the main section of the study that will discuss about the findings and analysis of the data. Finally, the last chapter will make some recommendation on the research findings and concluding remark will be drawn as to end the discussion.

⁴ Also, known as "*Mahr*" (just like dowry but not). In Islam, a Mahr is a mandatory payment, in the form of money or possessions paid or promised to pay by the groom, or by groom's father, to the bride at the time of marriage, that legally becomes her property. While the *Mahr* is often money, it can also be anything agreed upon by the bride such as jewelry, home goods, furniture, a dwelling or some land. Mahr is typically specified in the marriage contract signed during an Islamic marriage. The terms "dowry" sometimes incorrectly used to translate Mahr, but Mahr differs from dowries in many other cultures. A dowry traditionally refers to money or possessions a woman brings forth to the marriage, usually provided by her parents or family; bride price to money or property paid by the groom or his family to the parents of a woman (but not to the woman herself) upon the marriage.

Chapter two

Study Area and Methodology

This chapter describes the study area and details methods applied in this study to address the research objectives. This chapter begins with an overview of tea estates in Bangladesh and the next section describe the description of the case study area and study population. In the third section describes detail methodology for the research is illustrated. The research used several sampling methods, social survey and in depth interviews for data collection.

2.1 Tea Garden in Bangladesh

There are a little more than 172 tea estates in Bangladesh. Among those, 133 tea estates locate in Greater Sylhet, where the tea capital of Bangladesh “Srimangal” is also locate. This place commonly known as “Surma valley”. Moreover, 23 tea estates locate in Chittagong and Chittagong Hill Tracts known as “Halda Valley” of Country’s famous tea growing areas. Tea cultivation is also started in 16 tea estates in Panchagarh, the northern district of the country, in 2000 (Kazi Muzafar Ahammed, 2012: 4). Moreover, the north-eastern region of the Bangladesh (Sylhet division) is motherland of the many tea gardens because of its geographical position. Tea plantations in Bangladesh are mainly situated in the hilly zones like Sylhet, Moulvibazar, Habiganj, Brahmanbaria and Chittagong. Like other third world countries, the tea estates in Bangladesh are owned by a host of both foreign and local companies. Among 172 tea garden, while four Sterling companies are the owner of 27 estate, Bangladeshi companies and individuals are owner the rest of the tea gardens. The four foreign companies are James Finlay, Duncan Brothers, Deundi Tea Company and The New Sylhet Tea Estate.

All the 172 tea estates are managed by five different categories of management:

- (i) Sterling companies
- (ii) National Tea company
- (iii) Bangladesh Tea Board

(iv) Bangladeshi Private Limited Companies

(v) Bangladeshi Proprietors

(Saeed Shalman, 2008)

2.2 Case Study: Lakatura Tea Estate (LTE)

National tea company (NTC) limited is one of the major tea producing company in Bangladesh. NTC Public Limited Company formed in the year 1978. Government and its financial organizations hold major shares of the company. It has 12 (Twelve) Tea Estates having 10,949.58 hectares of land, out of which more than 50% area is under tea plantation. Lakatura Tea Estate (LTE) is a tea garden under NTC. It is one of the oldest tea estate in Bangladesh with plantation area of **1293.30 hectare**. It is one of the largest tea estates in Bangladesh producing 500,000 kg of tea every year. The year of establishment in 1875 by Octivious Steel & Co. This tea garden was managed by M/s McLain & Company, Calcutta from 1934 to 1965. Later, in the year 1965 it was declared as Vested (Enemy) property and subsequently in 1966 it was procured by M/s Pakistan Commodities Ltd. [Adamjee] where the managing agent was Duncan brother. After the independence of Bangladesh in 1972 this garden was declared as Abandoned Property and handed over to BTIMC and this garden is under the management of NTC from 1st July 1978 (National tea company limited, 2017).

2.2.1 Location

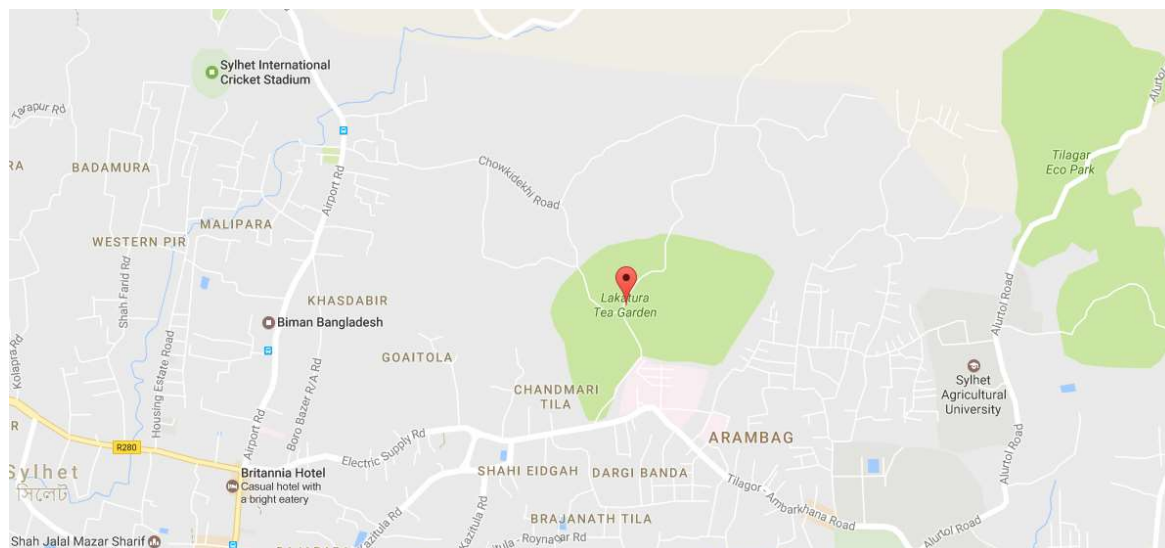


Figure 2: The location of research tea estate

Source: Google map

(<https://www.google.fr/maps/place/Lakatura+Tea+Garden/@24.9116377,91.8517074,13z/data=!4m5!3m4!1s0x375054c0d0ea1d97:0xa9e1f846ffc80bac18m2!3d24.9116329!4d91.8867263?hl=en>)

Lakatura tea estate is a company-owned tea garden. It is very close to Sylhet Agricultural University and Osmani International Airport. The location of this tea company is inside the Sylhet metropolitan town also known as Jalalabad, is a metropolitan city in northeastern Bangladesh which is renowned for tea production in Worldwide. Sylhet is situated between 24° and 25° N latitude and 91° and 92° East longitude. Geologically, the region is complex having diverse sacrificial geomorphology; high topography of Plio-Miocene age such as Khasi and Jaintia hills and small hillocks along the border. It is bordered by the Meghalaya, Assam and Tripura states of India to the north, east and south, respectively; and by the Bangladesh divisions of Chittagong to the southwest and Dhaka to the west. The area covered by Sylhet Division is 12,569 km², which is about 8% of the total land area of Bangladesh (Sylhet, 2017). The economy of Sylhet is the third largest in People's Republic of Bangladesh. The province is known as the Agricultural Capital of Bangladesh due to vast natural resources. Sylhet is also seen as the future economic engine of Bangladesh due to its vast economic prospects. The province is home to the world's largest tea plantations, both in terms of area and production. However, the Province is more known for its business boom and investment in luxurious hotel, and real estate. As of 2014, Sylhet's Gross state product is \$21.60 Billion in Nominal terms and \$49.6 Billion in terms of Purchasing Power Parity, equivalent of countries like Nepal and Afghanistan. Sylhet covers 23% of total economy of Bangladesh. The hinterland of the Sylhet valley is the largest oil and gas-producing region in Bangladesh. It is also the largest hub of tea production in Bangladesh (The economy of Sylhet, 2017).

2.2.2 Profile of Land

The garden has an area of 1293.30 hectares' land. Of this land, 300 hectares is under tea cultivation. Paddy land inside the garden is 90 hectares and area under rubber plantation is 66 hectares. There is also a significant area of the garden is under the natural forest and grass land.

Use of land	Hectares
Tea Cultivation	750.47
Factory/Office/Go-down/Bungalow/Staff Qrts/Labour Housing/Dispensary etc	95.37
Paddy Land	130.39
Roads/Tanks/Drainage/Ditch/Ponds	57.31
Area Under Forest and Jungle	160.45
Area Under Infrastructure (Temple/mosque/school/hospital/ labor welfare center etc.)	74.31
Area Suitable for Extension	25.00
Grand Total	1293.30

Table- A summary of land use in Lakatura tea garden
Source: Management office records



Figure 3: Mature tea bushes of the garden and tea pluckers
Source: field survey

2.2.3 Population and Labor force

The garden has a total of 711 number are permanent workers and 374 numbers are temporary workers and among them almost 77.8% labors are female. It is found that there is a manager and two assistant managers, four medical staffs, 15 clerical staffs, 16 artisan staffs, two drivers. An MBBS doctor visits the garden twice a week to treat the sick persons. According to office records, the average number of workers employed daily is 782. Number of workers estimated as actually required by the estate at the highest of the season is 1137. Pick harvesting season is from June to September in the tea garden. However, it is observed from the field work

that the tea plantation job is inherited from the occupation of their parents those worked in tea estate. It is mandatory for the tea garden authority to employ at least one of the sons/daughters of a worker in the garden by agreement. The tea garden authority has employed all of the sons/daughters of a worker in the tea garden if he/she is willing to work in the garden. Moreover, it is also appeared that there are more than 13 castes among the tea workers those who follow Hindu religion and all of them are indigenous people. The castes are: Oraon, Munda, Nunia, Bonaz, Monipuri, Khasi, Baraik, Bauri, Urang, Kormoker, Bunargy, Gatuar, Mridha, Kurmi, Gual etc. There are also workers those who belong to Bengali mainstream society and majority of them belong to Muslim religion and some belong to Christianity. Interestingly it is also found that some workers, those who belong to Bengali mainstream society, come from poor families of villages in the Greater Sylhet.

2.3 Methodological part

2.3.1 The Source of the study

A research design relates to the criteria that are employed when evaluating social research. It is, therefore, a framework for the generation of evidence that is suited both to a certain set of criteria and to the research question in which the investigator is interested (Bryman, 2012: 45). Thus, this study is conducted having evidence and the research question set up having motive to seek the answer of research question. However, Creswell (2014: 39) argues that individual researchers have a freedom of choice. In this way, researchers are free to choose the methods, techniques, and procedures of research that best meet their needs and purposes. Therefore, this study is directed with both qualitative and quantitative research methods to keep having the practical view in mind. He also describes that the pragmatist researchers look to the *what* and *how* to research based on the intended consequences where they want to go with it. Mixed methods researchers need to establish a purpose for their mixing, a rationale for the reasons why quantitative and qualitative data need to be mixed in the first place (Creswell, 2014: 40). Thus, for the mixed methods researcher, pragmatism opens the door to multiple methods, different worldviews, and different assumptions, as well as different forms of data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2014: 40).

2.3.2 Research design

The study is prepared with a combination of both qualitative and quantitative forms. The combination of both qualitative and quantitative forms of research is called mixed methods research. It involves philosophical assumptions, the use of qualitative and quantitative approaches, and the mixing or integrating of both approaches in a study (Creswell, 2014: 293). He also argued that Mixed methods research resides in the middle of this continuum because it incorporates elements of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The overall strength of a study of mixed method approaches is greater than other study where followed either qualitative or quantitative research (Creswell, 2014: 32). Creswell (2014: 44) also suggest about explanatory sequential mixed method because of study's better output than other method in the perspective of big community. He states that explanatory sequential mixed method is one in which the researcher first conducts quantitative research, analyzes the results and then builds on the results to explain them in more detail with qualitative research. It is considered explanatory because the initial quantitative data results are explained further with the qualitative data. It is considered sequential because the initial quantitative phase is followed by the qualitative phase. However, the study was started with sampling from a big community, interview survey, followed by in-depth interviews involving detailed exploration on some specific issues. Women tea plantation labors mentioned about sexual harassment, family planning issue which is tough to find out in the context of Bangladesh where social norms and other obstacles are existing in society, for example- this research will point out the opinion of one shy young women tea labor about family planning and sexual harassment issue in the respecting part. However, to find out the answer is only possible by detailed exploration through in-depth interviews. Explanatory sequential mixed method is an appropriate approach in this regard.

2.3.3 Time frame of the fieldwork

The fieldwork was conducted in Sylhet district (also known as Jalalabad, a metropolitan city) in northeastern Bangladesh which is renowned for tea production in Worldwide. The data is collected for two months from 1st March, 2016 to 30th April, 2016 from Lakatura tea garden in Sylhet. Majority of tea garden are situated in Sylhet district in Bangladesh and as well as tea plantation labor.

2.3.4 Participant of the study

Married and un-married Women tea plantation workers from selected tea garden are crucial participants of the study. The tea garden manager, assistant manager and other office staff of tea garden is also selected for the study. The panchayat head, NGO workers those worked with tea garden women workers are also part of the study for data source.

2.3.5 Accessing into the Tea Garden

Tea garden is accessible for everybody. Anyone can enter tea garden for travelling purposes and enjoy the natural beauty of tea garden. But, it's a difficult task for one to do research on respective tea garden without the valid permission of tea garden management. When went to Bangladesh for doing my research on tea garden women labors, there was strike movement⁵ going on by the tea garden labors almost all of tea garden in Sylhet division against low wage, unsafe working environment, housing issues, SEZ issues⁶ etc. The newspapers were dominated by the news of the strike movements. Thus, it was very difficult for me to get permission from the management of the tea garden management. But, after facing a lot of harassment I able to take permission from them.

Tea women labors are normally very busy during their working hours and they don't have enough time to talk with me as they have daily target to fill up, otherwise they will face penalty. Before the interview I informed to the participants about the aim of my study to ensure a better understanding of my study. They agreed to give time to me during the lunch break and after their working hours.

2.3.6 Research assistant and Key informer

As a non-indigenous young male Bengali speaking researcher from mainstream society, it was difficult for me to conduct the study by the Bengali language since the tea labors have a mixed language with Oriya⁷ and Hindi⁸, and they almost all are unable to communicate thoroughly in the

⁵<http://www.thedailystar.net/country/habiganj-tea-workers-go-strike-against-sez-199354>
<http://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/tea-garden-workers-chase-pro-sez-men-203032>
<http://www.thedailystar.net/country/tea-workers-strike-1396399>

⁶ Bangladesh government was planning to set up a special economic zone (SEZ) on the rice farm of Habiganj tea estates. This land is important for the workers of the tea estate.

⁷ State language of *Odisha, India*

⁸ It's the official language in India

Bengali language. In addition, I also need to organize in-depth interview about gender sensitive issue like family planning and sexual harassment issues for my study. Consequently, seven female interviewers from the tea workers' community were recruited to conduct the interview survey, namely- *Shamoli, Joli, Rani, Nipa, Shanta, Shouli, and Gouri*. These interviewers have 6 to 8 years of schooling and they are bilingual, speaking their own language and Bengali languages fluently. One male labors named *Bhuson, Works in tea factory*, very obedient to management (very close to management) assigned by management for accompanying with me who is also as an interpreter and guide. These interviews were instantly translated and recorded into Bangla language and later transcribed into Bangla by the interpreter as well and all of interviews were transcribed by my wife *Shilpi*.

2.3.7 Sampling

The study is conducted to know the answer of question: whether the tea plantation women workers are empowered by their employment or not and what is the obstacle to the pathway of their empowerment? To know the answer, this study try to discuss out the overall socio-economic situation of women tea workers in their work, family and society at all. There are a lot of labors work in tea estate and among them most of workers are female worker. For example- there are about more than thousand workers working in my research tea garden and among them about 750 workers are female. Among them 100 numbers of female workers are purposefully selected for the face to face interview survey using suitable sampling technique. Thus, the output from the study and the generalization will be on the study population rather than on the whole community due to non-probabilistic sampling technique.

2.3.8 Mode of Data collection

2.3.8.1 Social survey

Social Survey is comparatively an effective method for collecting data from many cases and produced data. The content of social survey is social and it deals with human behavior, knowledge, attributes, beliefs and attitudes (Jupp, 2006: 284). Czaja and Blair (2005:33) mentions that until recently, the most useable survey approaches are mail survey, telephone survey, internet survey and face to face survey. In the study, face to face interview survey was conducted among

married and unmarried women labors working more than five years to know the overall status of their tea garden for example- their socio-economic life, their sufferings and harassment in tea garden, sufferings in their employment sector etc.

2.3.8.2 In depth interview

In depth interview is another effective data collection method. As like qualitative interview this one sometimes refers to an unstructured interview but more often refers to both semi-structured and unstructured interviewing (Bryman, 2012: 213). In the study, this method was conducted to know women related issues like- family planning, sexual harassment etc. among married tea plantation women labors. There were conducted four in-depth interviews among them for the study.

2.3.8.3 Data Collection Tool

There is no methodical research-based information on women tea plantation labors empowerment. Thus, a face to face interview survey was employed using a structured interview schedule. The interview schedule comprised of close-ended questions, which were set for fulfill the objectives of the study. The interview schedule covered the following issues such as socio-demographic life in tea garden, cultural and religious variables, access to health care supporting from tea garden, labor law, education, socio-economic rights, working environment, sanitation and safety issues in employment place, harassment, salary, relationship status in employment, decision making power in family and community etc. opinion/suggestions for removing the obstacles for empowerment. For in-depth interviews, different interview guides were developed for different kinds of participants.

2.3.9 Ethical consideration

For the study, I maintained some ethical considerations, such as, assurance of confidentiality and anonymity. That means the privacy of the informants and respondents is ensured. I have changed the details of the participants. I informed to respondents about the study purposes, my contact number in Bangladesh. These procedures offered them to know about my research plan and they can give me the original information.

2.3.10 Limitation of the study

The situation of Indigenous people in Bangladesh is a sensitive issue whether they live in hill tracts or plainland areas. Thus, it was very difficult to research on this topic especially on women, as a male researcher. During the fieldwork, there were several limitations I didn't overwhelm such as entry in the tea factories inside. Also, I was being guided by the management authorized employee and thus, I didn't able to talk with the labors easily and missed actual feedbacks and answers from them.

Findings and Analysis of Data

Chapter three

The changing aspect of indigenous tea plantation women's live

This chapter firstly discuss about the general historical background of the tea industry in Bangladesh. After this chapter shows how indigenous tea workers have been migrated from India's poor state by the British government a long time ago and their overall sufferings in tea estates. The chapter point out the reasons of moving to big cities of Bengali mainstream poor students from rural areas of the greater Sylhet rather completed of their study due to their poverty. This chapter depicts some of the issues which help to explain tea plantation employer preference for tribal women.

3.1 Historical background of tea industry in Bangladesh

Tea is a cash crop which later being become as an industry. It is now part of today's Bangladesh during the time of the colonial government. The job in a tea plantation was difficult and needed manual labor. However, the most of the colonial Bengal's labor force was engaged in agriculture. To meet the new demand of tea plantations, the colonial British government deployed indentured immigrants and gradually the tea Industry developed in the 19th century by this British planter. Moreover, initially the British planters initiated the cultivation of tea on the slopes of the hillocks of Sylhet and the highlands of Assam. Later, some Indian entrepreneurs (Prince Dwarakanath tagore, Babu Motilal Sil, Haji Hashem Ispahani and others) purchased tea gardens from their European owners. Indian entrepreneurs also came forward to develop new plantations. In 1839, tea started to be grown for commercial purposes in the Assam forests, which has ideal soil and climatic conditions for the crop. Here, Assam Tea Company started the first commercial efforts in organized tea growing in 1839 (Tea industry, 2014; Philip Gain, 2009). Tea cultivation in Bengal developed concurrently with that in the northeastern part of India during the early nineteenth century. The Assam indigenous tea plant was established in Chandkhani Hills of Sylhet in 1855. At about the same time, wild tea was found along Khashi and Jainta Hills. Tea plantation started in Chittagong in 1840 with few China plants from the Botanical gardens in Calcutta and seeds from Assam as well as those imported from China. The first commercial tea plantation was introduced in the eastern part of Bengal in 1854 at Malnicherrea in Sylhet (Tea industry, 2014).

Since the British period, the tea industry has gone through a few historical inversions; among them the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 and the Independence War of Bangladesh in 1971 are notable.

Pakistan Period

After 1947, the tea industry entered a new phase. Its major part gradually fell into the control of West Pakistani capitalists. The Hindu capitalists are dislocated due to the result of partition and consequently most of them left for India. At this stage, the West Pakistani capitalists came forward to seize the opportunity (Tea Industry, 2014; Shaila Islam and Istiaque Ahmed, not dated).

Bangladesh period

The tea industry faced several damages during the war of liberation in 1971. The Bangladesh government appointed a committee in 1972 to investigate into the problems faced by the tea planters. Some useful suggestions were: (a) to raise productivity, (b) to reduce cost of production, and (c) to promote and strengthen the process of marketing. Later, in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s overseas firms remained in the dominant position both in area and in production. The gardens owned by foreign sterling companies were generally about three times bigger than the locally owned gardens and the production per acre was higher. Through these historical changes, the ownership of tea gardens also changed hands. However, the system of tea gardens remained unchanged and still follows the rules practiced by British companies (Shaila Islam and Istiaque Ahmed, not dated).

3.2 Tea plantation workers in Bangladesh

Tea industry is treated to top among the highly labor oriented industry. It can barely be thinking without it's labor. Many worker is necessary in this industry for land preparation, plantation, nursing the plant, pesticide, picking tea leaves, tea process in multi stages. It is often only see the worker in tea leaf picker. But in various sections from seed bed to consumption of tea thousands of tea workers involve here (Roy & Sattar, 2015: 71). Sivram (1996) cited in ibid (2015: 72) that the workers' requirement in the tea industry can be classified into three categories: those for plucking, those for field maintenance and those for capital field development.

- a. The operation of plucking, which includes the bulk of labor absorption, accounts for as much as seventy percent of total workdays. My data confirms Sivram (1996) claims that plucking is mainly done by women. Sometimes men are employed in this job in peak season. Men are generally employed in the field maintenance and capital development. For example- my informant *Shamoli, Joli* (tea women labor) informed me that they usually do the plucking and other field jobs in tea estate area where, the key jobs of *Bhuson* (tea male labor) are in the factory.
- b. The job of field maintenance includes fertilizing, weeding, pruning, mulching, spraying insecticide and irrigation. Women are also sometimes employed in these operations, particularly in fertilizing, weeding and pruning.
- c. Capital field development involves three activities: new planting, replanting and filling of vacancies. Generally, men are employed in all these activities.

However, the laborers who run the tea industry in Bangladesh active are from British India. The British companies brought the laborers from various states of India about 150 years ago (Shaila Islam and Istiaque Ahmed, not dated: 119). A number of people from the lower castes of the Hindus like Oraon, Munda, Nunia, and Bonaz from Assam, Bihar, Madras, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and other states of India were tempted with the promise of a golden job opportunity in tea gardens in this region (Gain, 2009; Shaila Islam and Istiaque Ahmed, not dated: 119). The misfortunes of these indentured laborers began with their journey. One third of the workers died due to their long journey to the tea gardens and due to the tough jobs and living condition (ibid, 2009). These laborers were given new identities as “Collies⁹” after they had started their journey in tea estate and were turned into the property of the tea estate authorities. These workers belonging to many ethnic identities cleared jungles, planted and tended tea saplings, planted shady trees, and built luxurious bungalows for the tea planters (Shaila Islam and Istiaque Ahmed, not dated: 119). In this perspective, Roy & Sattar, (2015: 71-72) also claim like Gain (2009) that once upon a time tea worker are defined as ‘Collies’ which means Indian or Chinese rental labor. Literarily Coolie means the unskilled labor from India and China who works temporarily with low wages. Term

⁹ Meaning is Labor but, negative aspect with negligence

Collies was then known to Assam Bengal Railway labors who also engage in Chittagong railway too.

In addition, their destiny was tied to their huts in the labor lines (residential space) that they built themselves on land provided by the authority (Shaila Islam and Istiaque Ahmed, not dated). The social and economic distance of the tea workers from their managers or supervisors is unparalleled (*discussed in literature review part of Saeed Shalman, 2008*). Now the work/labor force in the tea plantation industry in Bangladesh, those are deployed by the colonial British government in 19th century, is the *fourth generation* of those tribal and Dalit immigrants. Regrettably, they continue to be treated much like slaves. Mir Raisa Rakiba (2014) argues that these people are basically trapped into the social stigma which they inherited from their ancestors and living an inhumane life which is no less than an animal. Even their basic needs are not properly ensured although they are living within the territory of Bangladesh. Very sadly, these poor people lack their basic rights. Philip Gain (2009) have the similar observation of Mir Raisa Rakiba (2014) that these misfortunate workers came here with a four-year contract and that was the commencement of their enslavement. A century and half later, four generations of slavery have passed. They continue to remain people without choice and entitlement to property. Detached from their origins as well as abandoned by the local people, their life in captivity with the estate is miserable (Gain, 2009; Shaila Islam and Istiaque Ahmed, not dated). They also state that the tea labors are born in labor lines, continue their life in labor lines and finally end their life in labor lines. Being citizens of Bangladesh, they remain untouched by the local people of the Northeast districts (Sylhet, Moulvibazar, Habiganj & Brahmanbaria districts) where 132 gardens exist. In this perspective, my informants also agree with the statement of Gain (2009). My informants are agreed that they generally isolated from the mainstream society for their historical and ethnic background. In the labor lines of a tea estate, they seem to be living in islands -- isolated from the majority Bengali community who sometimes treat them as untouchables. They claimed that *poverty is one of the important reasons for their social segregation*. It is important to find out their living conditions, poverty level and how they could be aggregated with the national aspiration of a well-judged society, and an inclusive nation where everybody has equal opportunities of education, health and other basic needs of a human being.

Furthermore, the tea communities are one of the most vulnerable people of Bangladesh having hardly human rights. Gain (2009) claims that the tea labor deserves special attention of the State, not just equal treatment. But unfortunately, they continue to remain socially excluded, low-paid, overwhelmingly illiterate, deprived and disconnected. One of the Shardar/leader of tea labor (Mukta Borai) was explaining their rights by giving a symbolic example that

"As a Bangladeshi citizen, we have voting rights, rather we are among the most deprived people in the country". She also added that "the national salary for tea labor is fixed by BTA is BDT 85 in 2015. The management didn't pay such amount money but BDT 69. Now after a long time strike we have able to get our original salary as per BTA as a minimum daily salary which is the lowest amount in the world".

They have also lost their original languages in most part, culture, history, education, knowledge and unity. Without fertilization of minds, they have lost dignity in their lives. These are the actual scenery of tea owners to continue exploitation of the tea workers. Deprived, exploited and alienated, the majority of the tea workers live an inhuman life (ibid, 2009). For example- the wages, daily or monthly is the single most concern. The maximum daily cash pay for the daily rated worker in 2008 was BDT 32.50 (less than half a US\$), though now it's BDT 85 (US \$ 1). This is a miserable pay having a severe effect on the daily lives of the tea workers. Although the workers get rations at a concession, a family can hardly have decent food items on their plate. They indeed have very poor quality and protein-deficient meals. Their physical appearance tells of their malnourishment. Along with the wages, which is miserably low, they also get some fringe benefits. Gain (2009) also denotes that the houses in the labor lines are given by the employer that comes first on the list of fringe benefits. One worker gets one house that is supposed to be maintained by the employer. Bangladesh Tea Workers Union locally known as BCSU that represents the workers and BTA that represents the employers sign a memorandum of agreement every two years to fix the wages (ibid, 2009).

3.2.1 Migration of tea laborer and settlement

The discussion is on my interviews with tea laborers in the tea estate. It is found from the interviews that the majority indigenous tea workers got the job as it is inherited from their ancestors and their ancestors were brought by British planter from India as it is already discussed in earlier. However, the rest of all tea labor informants those who live also under poverty line from the rural areas of the Greater Sylhet come to Sylhet city for job purposes and they don't have any option for easy access rather than tea plantation job. It is necessary to mention that the research tea garden is near the metropolitan area of Sylhet city. However, my respondents are mostly belonged to poor family and they came to the urban areas without finishing of their education. The overall situation of primary and secondary education in rural Bangladesh is not satisfactory as it is common scenario of high dropout rate of children. Most of the poor families cannot afford the educational expenses of their children after fulfilling of their daily basic needs. Thus, these students move to city for better future. When they come to the town areas for their future settlement, mostly they do not have enough economical support to could not bear of their belongings. After finishing of their money, they ask for more support from their families back home, but poor family can hardly provide economically support their children in city.

On the other hand, my informants informed me that they cannot return their village, because they think this is a prestige issue for them. Economic inability is a source of shame for them. This types situation compel them to look for a job in the city with their unfinished education. This intention helps them to get an easy access in tea factory in comparison to the mainstream labor force. Majority of them informed me that they will finish their study after saving enough money from their tea plantation job. For example- my informants *Champa*, *Tumpa*, *Ela* and *Farid* migrated into city because they fail in their SSC examination. *Koli*, *Juma*, *Lila*, *Khela* unable to finish grade/class vi- vii although they informed me that they have intention to study in future. When *Champa* could not pass the SSC exam she became frustrated and she was unable to manage a job in her rural areas. Moreover, she doesn't have any option in her family.

3.2.2 Gender and Ethnicity based priorities on employment

I have observed and known from the tea estate management personnel that tea plantation indigenous women labor is hard worker, honest, sincere, obedience, loyal and in certain case they

are among the people those usually don't ask for their rights. The Indigenous women's manageability is rarely seen among Bengali women's labor force. Not only this but, this women labors have more priority than their Bagnoli counterparts as they born in tea estate, grow up in tea estate. They inheritably know about the tea planation job from their family. Most importantly, they are well known for their hard-working ability, plucking ability and these all abilities help them mainly to get job in tea factories compared to Bengali women. One of the personnel from tea estate states that

“this tribal people know very well about how to climb the hills to collect the tea leaves by tolerating rains & sunshine in summer season where the Bengali women can hardly do this jobs. It is obvious that this tribal worker is much more hard worker than Bengali workers.”

In addition, they are available in tea garden as I mentioned earlier that they grow up in tea garden. The availability is harmful for this indigenous woman as they are treated as cheap labor because they have fewer choices. Moreover, several interviewed personnel explained about the “honesty” qualities of indigenous women workers. One of personnel states that

“The women normally are honest as of their gender rather than men and they belong to ethnic communities. They always think they have to do this work as they have little chance to get job outside of tea garden because of their ethnicity and don't have the skills or opportunities to seek alternative employment outside of tea estate. So, they have to loyal of their employer and this helps them to stay honest in their work place”.

Furthermore, religion is an important reason for getting the jobs of indigenous women in the tea factories. Majority of tea workers in my research garden belong to “Dalit” or minor caste Hindu community. However, Bengali Muslim workers normally tend to do three/four times prayer during the working hours, they also pray their Jummah¹⁰ in Mosque. They want to return home from working place earlier during the month of Holy Ramadan¹¹(fasting) and they ask for festival

¹⁰ weekend prayer in Friday

¹¹ is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and is observed by Muslims worldwide as a month of fasting (Sawm) to commemorate the first revelation of the Quran to Muhammad as Islamic belief.

leave during their religious festivals. This types of tendency for leave or early leaving is hardly seeing among other religious workers. Thus, tea estate recruiters or managers give the recruiting priority to the other religions.

Chapter four

Socio-Economic Life scenery of tea workers in tea estates



Figure 4: Tea labor Catches Fish for Subsistence

Source: Field Survey

The socio-economic condition of the indigenous women tea labor is comparatively lower than other indigenous people in Bangladesh, which might be one of the crucial reason for their not empowerment. Their livelihood mainly depends on tea plucking jobs in tea garden. They pluck tea leaves about six months in a year, and the rainy season between mid-April and September is the peak time for tea leaf collection. During the rest of the time, they nurse the plants by decorating them, and cutting away dead or overgrown branches and stems, to increase their growth from November to January. They collected the leaves and later they bring their tea leaves-load to be weighed by a supervisor. One of my female respondent informed me that if they meet their daily target, then they are considered to have a full-day's wages. The workers' daily targets can range between 18-25 kg of leaves. The target differs from tea garden to garden, but for them it is 22 kg.

If they fail to pluck that much, the supervisor deducts BDT 3.50 from their daily salary (BDT 85). But if one plucks more than that they get an additional pay of 2-3 Taka per Kg. They get their salary on Thursday on a week. On average, now they daily get only around BDT 85 (US\$ 1.10) as salary, and they are paid on a weekly basis (Their monthly salary is around BDT 2,380).

In this section, I would like to explore the overall socio-economic life of women tea workers in their livelihood areas. I will mainly emphasis on whether they are sufferer or not. Moreover, I will also try to find how they survive with their lowest purchasing power in now a day; how they are deprived from their rights in family because of their illiteracy; how they are sufferer in their family and community rather most of them are equal earner with their partner in a family, in some case only earning member; how they are unempowered as like as Bengali Muslim women living in rural areas due to their overall problem mentioned above.

4.1 Livelihood situation

The housing condition of tea workers is very painful and outrageous for them. The worthless housing conditions are a serious problem for them as it is the source of many diseases among the workers. *Tea Plantation Labor Rules 1977*¹² makes it obligatory for the owners of tea gardens to provide standard housing to each tea worker and his/her family. Here, according to rule the housing facility is provided by the garden authority. But the housing facility of the tea workers are not satisfactory for them. Mukta Borai, a leader of tea workers, shared her opinion like the following,

“Although the tea workers are supposed to get minimum residential facility from the tea estate (by the job agreement) for their job but some permanent workers only get this facility”.

I found that this permanent worker only receives limited support of raw materials for building their house and they need to build their house themselves. A few houses constructed by garden management are built by tin and bricks. But, maximum houses constructed by workers and they built those houses with tin, log and mud. It is also observed that the permanent workers get

¹² http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/print_sections_all.php?id=552

their daily payment during they build their resident place. although they build their houses but they don't have the ownership of those houses because the house is in the garden territory and the land is not under worker's ownership. Moreover, the house repairing facilities are dissatisfactory and garden managements are unaware about the services. For example-Joba Borai explained her experienced like the following

"I gave a lot of complain about my house shed. It is made by tin and they are licked. Rain water come through the licking areas of tin and inundate my bed on rainy time, but still now I have little response from the authority".

I observed this housing repairing problem harassment of tea workers is common among almost all workers. Luckily, some permanent workers have a housing facility though they have many complains. On the hand, temporary workers do not have any housing facility. Many of this temporary worker are working for a long time in gardens. It is also observed that where only three to four people can accommodate in a house, but there they live ten persons with crowded situation. The walls are generally made up of mud and the roof of bamboo and sun grass. Moreover, some permanent workers also informed me that they don't have house provided by the garden authorities. The observation of Philip Gain (2009) is found to be appeared among my respondent also. He explained that typically a single room [in the line house] is crowded with people of different ages of a family. Cattle and human beings are often seen living together in the same house or room. My respondent also confirmed that they need to live together in the same house with cattle because they don't have any assigned house. While describing the living conditions, one of the temporary worker name *Shila* shared her opinion like the following:

"The living place of Boro Babu's (They called the manager as boro Babu because they think boro Babu is their GOD) dog is better than their living place. Although they have been working in this tea estate for long time, but Boro Babu is indifferent about their living situation. Majority of us who is temporary worker, having eight to ten members' family and need to live in a room very crowded with different ages of family members, have to sleep on the floor with jute mattress".

Furthermore, she also mentioned that

“Most of us (Temporary workers) have been waiting for our permanent status of our job. We got this temporary job after the retirement of our family members who worked as permanent workers. There is a rule in tea estate that authority must provide a job to the family members after retirement of his/her job, if one work as permanent basis. We also have our own family and still now we need to live with our father’s house (a house belongs to worker who worked as a permanent worker in the garden) where there has a limited capacity, but we don’t have any option and have to live with a suffering”.

However, the sufferings of living condition are not finished at all. They need to pass their days whether they have good relation with management or not. Otherwise, they face harassment for eviction from their house. Despite the labors and their families who lived in a house where they have been living since long time (about more than hundred years), it is the management who controls their house and their homestead. I found that the security of tenancy is not guaranteed in their job agreement and also not in the labor law 2006 relating to standards of housing. The ownership of land on which the workers live is belong to the management/tea garden owner. They don’t have any legal tenure right. The management personnel have the power to evict any worker currently out of work. The workers do their duty with very miserable salary and under terrible working conditions by which they can maintain their house. Women workers are more vulnerable in this situation than male worker as male workers can change their job for better wages. The job switching for male tea workers is also not easy for them. Women and the elderly people prefer to live in the house where they have been living since long time. For example- *Bhuson* expressed his feelings are as followed

“The Bengali people don’t give day labor job to us easily because of our ethnicity. They called us ‘coolie’. When they don’t have option for other day labor, they recruit us with low salary. Sometimes it’s tough to switch to other tea garden, Boro babu (tea garden manager) has very good linked with other Boro Babu, if we do this we could evict from our houses”.

Thus, the female workers continue to work without any switching planning to other job sector, without protesting for better salary. Otherwise they may evict from their homes.

4.2 Situation of Sanitation facilities

Not only the above-mentioned sufferings they face for housing but, they don't have even basic sanitation facilities in their houses. Half of my respondent agreed that they and their family members usually go to the open field for defecation as the tea garden is situated in hilly areas with forest. The rest of respondent informed me that they use sanitary latrine which is very unhygienic (ordinary type) constructed by them using ring-well and digging big hole like *kua*¹³ with no roof sharing 15-20 families. They also shared with me that the authority is reluctant to construct suitable and durable sanitary latrine for all families because it is expensive for company. This types practice has adverse effect on their health and the garden environment as well. Similarly, the lack of access to satisfactory sanitation facilities both at home and at work also has serious impact on women as women are physically and socially unable to urinate and defecate in open space likely as men do and often are victims of gender-based violence. The suffering is not ended in here. It is found that the workers have lack of access to pure drinking water and most of them aren't aware of the necessity of using pure water. There have a few tube-wells made by local NGO in here sharing for whole workers and most of them is out of order with founding arsenic water. Majority of workers collect drinking water from tea factories where the distance between their house and tea factories is about 3.5 kilometers and the responsibility, assigned by their husband/father, to collect water belong to women/girl member in a family which is burden for them. But they have to travel a lot to collect water in dry season by walking and wait for long hours to get sufficient water. They also noted that in rainy season they usually collect the rain water as for using drinking purposes. Thus,

¹³ Kua (English literally meaning is dug well) is a traditional method of obtaining water. which is constructed by digging a big hole in land and normally it's deep in size with no cover.



Photo Source: <https://previews.123rf.com/images/tkbaripada/tkbaripada1307/tkbaripada130700018/21267920-village-dug-well-Stock-Photo.jpg>

they informed me that most of them avoid to travel this distance for drinking water but to collect water from the nearby chhara¹⁴ (canals) and Kua which is responsible for endemic dysentery, diarrhea and hookworms, diseases caused by polluted water.



Figure 5: Women worker is collecting the canals water using pipe

Source: Field Survey

4.3 Situation of health status

All the above-mentioned conditions of living increase the vulnerable situation of workers to diseases. Similarly, I observed that women workers do the tea plucking jobs and tea plucking in hilly areas is very difficult and hazardous job in tea garden. for example- *Shanta Borai* explained her experiences as followed

“I have severe backpain problem which is a common problem for tea plucking workers. Because, my job is standing job, I need to standby on my foot for hours until end of tea plucking and carry tea-collection Juri¹⁵ on my back”.

It is interestingly known from her that regularly she and her others colleague can carry more than 30 kg green leaf on their back. She also informed me that the fractures problem due to falling (from

¹⁴ It's a source of water which is usually seen in hilly areas. It is a canal in mountain or hills

¹⁵ One kind of basket made from bamboo. The use of this basket is very important in their daily job life..

height) are also common, they face, because of the uneven hilly areas and vertical slopes on which tea is picked up. In addition, they face also severe weather conditions (hot, cold, wet), bites of pesticides, mosquitoes and other insects, and poisonous snakes as well which is very dangerous for their health.



Figure 6: Women workers plucking tea leaves by carrying basket in hilly slope tea garden.

Source: The independent¹⁶, 2016 (<http://www.theindependentbd.com/arcprint/details/72108/2016-12-12>)

Moreover, the hospital and dispensary in tea garden are under-staffed, run-down, and not get proper treatment. Many labors complain that all of them don't get free medication that supposed to get and especially temporary workers are discriminated against in accessing medical facilities. There are no scientific and modern delivery systems in the tea gardens. Tuberculosis, leprosy and malaria are also common among them. Due to the non-availability of medical facilities within the garden, they have to go government hospitals which are usually far-distanced and thus cost extra money for the journey. These situations effect on their family feeding and therefore lead to further worsening of their health status especially for women workers. They are effected mostly. In the situation for pregnant and lactating women the work in tea garden and domestic, are hard, extensive and unsafe.

Besides above problem, my respondents explained the violations of their maternity protection rights for example-pregnancy, maternity leave benefits, breastfeeding breaks, and pre-natal and post-natal care. Throughout their pregnancy, they have to continue their duty, some

¹⁶ The Independent is an English-language daily newspaper published in Dhaka, Bangladesh. It has also online version.

mentioned, until their eighth month of pregnancy. They requested to decrease their workload in their pregnancy period, but they had to do their job as like before. They got maternity leave about four months long at best where the leave condition is two months after the delivery. This picture is different for temporary workers. One of women worker *Gouri Mridha*, who is being new mother, expressed her opinion as followed

“I am new mother; the baby’s age is three months and she totally depends on breastfeeding. But don’t get any breastfeeding breaks once I come to work. We have to wait long time with long queue after working hours for weighting of the tea leaves that picked from tea garden. Also, my all colleagues shared with me that they, along with me, are often harassed by the management personnel”.

These long waits have a great impact on them and their children. Because they come to work morning time and return their house in evening though they have inadequate time to breastfeed their children during the lunch breaks. I observed from their discussion that during the whole pregnancy time, the pre-natal care and post-natal care are insufficient, in the worst case it’s unavailable in tea garden. It is also observed that many pregnant women from tea gardens suffer from nutritional deficiency from insufficient and low-quality food, and a high number of them die due to labor (pregnancy) complications in child birth time.

4.4 Low quality ration supporting facilities

Ration is a supporting from tea plantation authority by giving rice, wheat in a very cheap rate BDT 1.30 kg. The employers procure the ration commodities from the government at subsidized prices. As per Labour Manual 1984 circulated by BCS (Bangladesh Tea Organization), each worker is provided a simple ration card giving his/her personal details; size of paddy land holdings and weekly ration entitlement. My respondent informed me that they should get 3.5 kg. of rice or wheat per week and they get this supporting based on their family members, for instance- if they have two or more workers in the family, each of them are supposed to get the allocated ration. In-depth interviews with the workers it is satisfactory news that, most of the families having two to four members who also work in the garden, whether they are permanent or temporary, get

ration supporting from the tea garden. Thus, they don't have to buy food grains from market. But, the quality of ration is not satisfactory. One of my informant *Shamoli* expressed her opinion like the following

“We get the worst quality rice and wheat and sometimes it's tough to eat. The quality of rice/wheat is worse than the that of people give to homeless people. We often complain about the quality but, it's garden management choice to provide which quality ration they will provide”.

Though the low-quality ration supporting is enough to meet the demand of food-grain but, they also need to buy all other essentials foods and things from market which is also very expansive for them as they belong to one of the lowest income generating groups.

4.5 Situation of physical harassment in family

Physical harassment is another factor for the evaluation of the social status of the women workers in society. It's common in our society that women often harass by their male guardian or partner, either the guardian is her father or husband, even she is educated or not. Women tea workers are not exception of it. In my interviewed with them, tea women workers shared this types scenery with me. My data confirm A.B. M Enamol Hassan (2014) claim that either married or unmarried or adolescent are being very much victimized physically by the male members of family especially by husband or eldest one. This harassment is being occurred beating by husband, father and even by eldest brother. One women worker *Shouli* shares her opinion about extreme harassment with her educated cousin *Shuma* (Bagnoli mainstream society). She stated that like the following

*“My cousin, Shuma, is university graduate (Masters) and she recently married with the consent of her family with one man. The marriage was arranged marriage by their family. Shuma's husband met and talked with Shuma before marriage and they agreed to marry. Though Shuma is educated but, not looking beautiful (body's color). After marriage, Shuma has been facing mental and physical harassment by her husband because of her body's color. She often faced this types insulting talking- **other girl is beautiful than you (He means body' color white/black)**”.*

This is common scenery in our society. If educated women face this harassment, then we could imagine what would be the situation of tea plantation women workers. My respondent informed me that they would like to do work as normal working hours but, their husband wants to do work overtime also, by which she can earn extra money. They have to work overtime against their willingness though its payment is very low. If they do not agree to do work, they face various kinds of torturing. In depth interview with them by my *key informants, who are also my research assistant*, on some issue based in-depth interview, I have informed that they face extreme physical harassment for example- abnormal sexuality. This types physical harassment is also avail in some Bengali mainstream lower society (Slum people in Dhaka city). I observed this types behavior in my field-work with slum dwellers in Dhaka city on the issue of “overall health situation of female slum dwellers in Dhaka city”, a project of ICDDR, B¹⁷., where I worked as research assistant.

4.6 Situation of human rights and gender disparity

Human rights and gender equality is another factor for evaluation of women social status in society. Women face the violation of human rights and gender equality. Women workers of tea garden often face this in their family and work place. It is already discussed in earlier section about the duty of women and men tea labors in tea estate. Male workers who normally work in clerical and management positions in the tea garden and get better salary than women tea plucker. Women tea workers work almost exclusively as tea pluckers are hardly get any promotional opportunities. I observed that there are not any training facilities, even no other extra training beyond their plucking job, from employer in tea garden. That’s why they can’t increase their skills. This inability to perform other tasks deter them from taking any opportunities for higher wages. This matter severely hamper of the realization of women’s rights in tea estate. Similarly, the number of temporary women is significantly more than the temporary male workers. I already explained several situations in my discussion on earlier section that in practice these temporary contractual workers are not entitled to the same benefits as permanent workers. That’s why deliberately the

¹⁷ The International Centre for Diarrheal Disease Research, Bangladesh (**icddr,b**) is an international health research organization located in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

employer doesn't make the women tea workers as permanent employee though these employees have been working in tea garden since long time. This status has an impact on every aspect of their lives, including their ability to access basic social services. It is also observed that there are no women supervisors and hardly any women doctors in the tea gardens. Thus, women workers complained that the male supervisors often asked for taking sexual advantage from them by promising more extra benefit, otherwise they will face repercussions, such as being assigned for too much workload or being sent to work in lonely or dangerous plucking zones. Moreover, it is also appeared the gender discrimination in tea garden on the trade union section. There are eighty nine percent female workers but, there is not any female trade union member.

4.7 Perspective and attitude to household work

I observed that there is division of labor in the perspective of household work among the families of some tea workers as like Bengali families. However, some families are totally different as like other indigenous people living in plainland and Chittagong hill tracts areas where there is no division of work in their household works. It is appeared on those families that tea women labors continue to play the main and crucial role in some family's household and agricultural activities. Permanent tea workers can get some abandoned paddy land on lease basis, if they want, from tea estate authority where they can cultivate crops. For example- my respondent *Rani* cultivates rice in her leased land. She works in her paddy land in her weekly holiday. Not only this, but the women tea workers do other physically challenged job for them. Besides, they equally work with their husbands digging hard soil without any tractor, sowing seed, weeding, watering, harvesting when they cultivate rice in their lease land and carrying into their homes. Moreover, it's not only a female job of daily food preparation but their husbands also help them in tea worker's families. This is hardly seen in Bengali mainstream Muslim families (conservative) living in villages though this practices are changing day by day in some families in villages with the changing of time being. The urban families are exception of it. This is my personal experiences I have gained in my field work in rural Bangladesh on some substantial issues when I worked with ICDDR, B as research assistant. It is also appeared that both husband and wife shared their job

during the festival time. I have noticed this culture practicing in my interview session with the tea workers in their family.

Chapter five

Overall situation of work place



Figure 7: Female tea labors in their duty place

Source: Field survey



Figure 8: Female tea labors are in long row to measure weight after work to fulfill their daily target

Source: Field survey

This chapter is about the working situation of tea workers. In this section, I would like to depict how the Bangladesh labor law is violated in tea plantation areas such as- how tea labors are discriminated with their salary by the tea estate management, tea labors recruitment process, their working conditions, their working environment, their physical and mental harassment, their rights to justice etc.

5.1 Violation of tea garden women worker's right at work place

5.1.1 Recruitment process

The recruitment system of tea workers is also volatile system as like as their wage system. The violation of their rights starts form their recruitment process because of not following the labor law of Bangladesh. The labor law (2006, clause-1) suggest that the employer should provide the appointment letter and valid identity card to workers. But, I have found in my research tea garden that only permanent factory workers have just valid ID card, but, they don't have any appointment letter. Even the women workers, who mainly engaged with the most difficult tea plucking job in uneven hilly areas, haven't any valid ID card wearing in their duty place. They are employed by registering their name into garden management's register book where the management have all information about workers. But, the case of temporary workers is different. They had to wait until their permanent job status. If they want to be permanent, they have to be replaced in the position of his/her family member position after retirement or death or first blood kin who worked as a permanent worker of the estate. Otherwise it's barely possible for them to be permanent. They just do their duty assigned by the garden authority. This is the recruitment process in my research garden.

5.1.2 Wage discrimination and sufferings

Tea worker (Permanent or temporary) gets only BDT 85 as wage in a day against his/her eight-hour service in my research tea garden. But, it differs on situation sometimes. For instance- the daily target for my respondent is 22 kg. If they fail to pluck that much, the supervisor deducts BDT 3.50 from their daily salary (BDT 85). But if one plucks more than that they get an additional pay of BDT 2-3 per Kg. They get their salary on Thursday on a week. On average, now they daily get only around BDT 85 (US\$ 1.10) as salary, and they are paid on a weekly basis. Garden

authority charges money for housing service, ration, medical service, provident funds Subscriptions etc. from worker's weekly salary. Apparently, we see that workers get salary BDT 85 but in reality, they receive less amount than what we know. After charging all utilities, management give them not more than BDT 320 in a week. Most of the workers expressed their dissatisfaction over the daily wage and discriminatory wage structure. For example- *Shamoli Baraik* expressed her feelings as followed

“Our wage calculation is not fair. The authority set up daily target for plucking tea leaves and based on that they provide our salary. But they often charge one to two kilos extra leaf from us in the name of weight machine. They give us salary not for 22 kilos leaf but 25 kilos. I often miss my money for extra plucking leaf. As I have been collecting leaf for 10 years, I have idea of the weights of plucking leaf. But when they make weight they make it less weight by deceiving. How can they increase production without improve the living of us? How can we survive?”

According to Bangladesh Labor Law, 2006 (Clause- 141, page-67), the factors should be considered for fixing of salary: “In making its recommendation the Wages Board shall take into consideration cost of living, standard of living, cost of production, productivity, price of products, business capability, economic and social conditions of the country and of the locality concerned and other relevant factors”. But in reality, all of the this factors are ignored for fixing salary of tea workers. In this perspective, Gain (2009) refers that the salary is fixed by the memorandum of agreement signed between employers represented by BTA and the tea plantation workers represented by BCSU. But this is not applicable in not all tea garden. It should mention that the BTB is the main government body of Bangladesh tea industry and they are mainly responsible for tea worker's welfare issues. But, they don't interfere with tea labors salary which is fixed by the memorandum of agreement signed between employers represented by BTA and BCSU. For example- official personnel of my research tea garden unofficially informed me, by the condition of not mentioned of his name. His opinion is as followed

“Government law is not appropriate in garden management. Wage and facilities depend on the agreement between BTA and BCSU. From the owner's side BTA negotiate with BCSU to fix

workers wage and other welfare issues. The agreement is fixed for next two years and our industry is operating in this way.”

Tea worker's low income make them as poor purchasing power individual. While a day labor outside of tea garden gets BDT 200-300 in per day but, tea workers only get BDT 85. Here, I would like to mention the price of essential ingredients of some food menu in Bangladesh, for example- per kilo normal rice (BDT 30-35), per kilo potato (BDT 15-20), per kilo onion (BDT 20-30), per kilo Dal¹⁸ (BDT 40-60), etc. As this is the price situation of daily essential commodities in Bangladesh as it can easily imagine of the purchasing power of tea workers. Poor purchasing power compels them to buy only cheapest vegetables (for example, potatoes) available on the market. They can also hardly eat meat and fish which is beyond their purchasing power. They often have to choose between buying food or paying for medication or their children's education . Due to unavailability of adequate and sustainable alternative means of income, they solely depend on their terribly low wages to feed themselves and their families. But, from some issue based in-depth interview, in response to give answer of my question in their survival story with low income, I have known that some lucky workers have some extra way of income. One of them, *Joba Borai*, informed me that she and her husband work also outside of tea garden as day labor in their weekly holiday and religious holidays. Thus, they both can earn extra daily BDT 400 for maintaining of their livelihood. if they can work and find work outside of tea garden as day labor. But not all workers can take this opportunity because there is scarcity of job as day labor outside of tea estate.

The unproven misconducts of management, as I discussed in above, lead to additional wage deductions from worker's salary. This issues decrease the capacities of the workers to sustain their livelihood. They informed me that most of them therefore turn to lend money from lenders and subsequently find themselves highly indebted and they are turning around inside the cycle of debt. This types debt makes them frustrated and finally raising their suicidal tendency though there is not any occurrence in Lakatura tea garden. However, this types crime are rising day by day among other tea garden in Sylhet, Bangladesh. Monwar Zahan Chowdhury (2014) argues that

¹⁸ Dried and split pulses (that is, lentils, peas, and beans). it is one important menu in daily food routine (lunch or dinner) among Bangladeshis eaten with flat-breads or with rice. Locally the combination of rice and lentils are commonly known as *dal bhat*. Dals are high in protein relative to other plants.

the incidents of crime and anti-social activities like murder, unnatural death and suicide are increasing among the tea garden workers in three districts of Sylhet division at an alarming rate. At least 21 incidents of murders, 34 suicides and an unnatural death held among the family members of the tea garden workers during January 2013 to December 2013 and the number of such incidents in 2012 was lesser than the last year. Jayaseelan Raj (2013: 472) mentions about this types incident occurred in South Indian tea garden areas. He argues that “the plantation workers are subjected to serious socio-cultural transformations as the crisis dealt a severe blow to the everyday routines of plantation life. There have been 8 cases of suicide incidents and 12 deaths due to starvation and denial of medical care since the crisis in the tea industry began”.

5.1.3 Working condition (leaves, allowance, bonus and other benefits)

The labor law (2006, clause-117.1. b) suggest that “*every adult worker, who has completed one year of continuous service in an establishment, shall be allowed during the subsequent period of twelve months leave with wages for a number of days calculated at the rate of one day- in the case of tea plantation, for every twenty-two days of work, (117.2.b) for every not adult tea plantation worker it’s every eighteen days of work.* Moreover, the law (118.1) also suggest that *every worker shall be allowed in a calendar year eleven days of paid festival holiday* (Bangladesh Labour Act 2006, page-59-60). Officially the weekend is on Sunday. Formally as per labor law, all workers who has completed one year of continuous service in an establishment have the option to get twenty-four days leave with pay in a year but, it totally depends on garden authority and my respondents informed me that, the garden management hardly follow the rule properly. They allow workers leave by their choice. Most of respondent informed me that garden management don’t allow them to take any leave and if any worker make any absent without the permission of management, his/her ration and other services will be deducted and the deduction rate will be two times than their daily rate. Besides, as per labor law a permanent tea worker has yearly ten days with wage festival leave for celebrating their religious festivals. In reality, this also depend on garden management choice. In this regards, my respondent informed me that garden management gives some donations to workers to celebrate their religious festivals. Where labor law recommends these leave facilities are applicable for all workers who work continuously one year with salary, but temporary labors are out of these leave facilities. However, there is a formal leave management system in paper for permanent workers, but in reality, the permanent workers as well

as temporary workers do their duty as a day labor. Because they are not eligible for their holidays and leave as per the leave management system. Rather it depends on Tea authority's choice.

Moreover, there are four months' maternity leave for women workers with daily wage for maximum two children. The leave condition is only two months after the delivery. But, they seemingly do not take the full length of maternity leave. They work till the eighth month of pregnancy. After delivery, they quickly come back to work and maximum time takes the newly born baby with her. It is also observed that some mother's carrying their baby behind their back where they usually carry the basket for tea leaf in their work place.

5.1.4 Working Environment

They work through a long time with a short break in a day. The women worker mainly does tea plucking job as I mentioned earlier. They need to do their duty in uneven hilly areas with vertical slopes and sometimes in forests to clean areas with facing harsh weather conditions (under the scorching sun or getting soaked in rains), bites of pesticides, mosquitoes and other insects, and poisonous snakes as well which is very dangerous for their health. They need to finish their daily target fixed by management. Thus, they have to work hard and continue to do their until they have achieved their target. My majority respondent told me that they can't finish their duty within selected hours, they have to work extra 2 more hours. But they only get selected hours' salary which is BDT 85. However, the more regrettable matter is that they spend almost all their working hours in standing by carrying a basket in their head which is full of tea leaf. They usually work from morning to evening (7-8 hours excluding 20 minutes' lunch- break) from Monday to Saturday. Sunday is the weekly holiday. Though some of them notified me that they have a chance to work less time in a day, but they intentionally work more time for more income as I have mentioned earlier that they earn BDT 2-3 per extra Kg. Moreover, I also observed that the women workers who are not only suffering the health issue just in their home but in their job also. The authority doesn't provide any protective clothing and equipment and washing facilities (water) in the field for those workers who are engaged in pesticides spraying which has adverse and severe health impacts on the workers.

Additionally, it is also observed *lack of sanitation facilities* for women tea plucking workers in working areas. As women tea plucking workers work in hilly areas, they go to the open field for defecation or urine purpose as the tea garden is situated in hilly areas with forest which is very dangerous for their health and for job environment. The management unable to provide sanitation facilities at working place. Sanitation facilities are only seen in the tea factories where tea leaf is processed. The tea factory is about 2 to 3 kilometers far from the tea gardens. But, it's impossible to travel for them about 2 to 3 kilometers to go to factories for using toilet. Besides, the mixing of chemicals for pesticides spraying is seen near the tube well/water pumps which contaminate the sources of drinking water.

5.1.5 Condition of Physical harassment at work place

Women tea workers are harassed in different ways by the management personnel. When asked about “harassment and exploitation”, most of my respondents stated that they experienced physical and mental harassment, and the rest of them sometimes harassed and forced to work without payment or adequate payment. For example- They mentioned common types of harassment such as the harassment with abusive language, sexual jokes by male counterparts, spectators, unwelcome sexual behavior through physical contact. They reported that their supervisor mostly use dirty words, and behave rudely. In depth interview with the workers by my female key informants, who are also my research assistant, on some issue based in-depth interview (in this context asking about “sexual harassment”), I found that most respondents are not familiar with the term “sexual harassment” or “*jouno hoirani*¹⁹”. As like as the study of Sanne Van Der Wal (2011) when my research assistant explained the details on sexual harassment, majority of my respondents replied that they face sexual harassment at their workplace. For example- the male supervisors often asked for taking sexual advantage from them by promising more extra benefit, otherwise they will face repercussions, such as being assigned for too much workload or being sent to work in lonely or dangerous plucking zones.

¹⁹ Bangla translate of sexual harassment.

5.1.6 Observation and Perspective of access to Justice

My respondents have limited opportunity of access to justice. Most of them even don't have any idea about their rights. Most of them have no idea of national law including Bangladesh Labour Act 2006. They just do their duty with expecting their low salary. The rules & regulations of garden are recognized as a law for them. But, some workers for instance *Tumpa and Somon* denoted that, they listen that there is a national law but they don't know details about it. They (*Tumpa and Somon*) also mentioned that they can complain to their 'Sardars'²⁰, if there is any job-related issue. Sometimes they can report also to their Chuto Babu²¹ and hardly ever to the Boro Babu²². This is their limitation to report any complain about any job issue though they hardly report complain due to fear ness of penalty. Because, their daily target for tea plucking job depends on management choice and they fear whether they face a penalty task or not for complaining to the authority. *Nipa, Shanta, Shouli, and Gouri* expressed their feelings with a deeply breath

“There is nobody to listen our problems and nobody care about us, thus we have to follow the garden's rules-regulations to save our job and livelihood. We listen about labor law from Tumpa, but we don't benefit from it, where it is, may be the law is in Dhaka. Garden system is the law for us.”

They also stated that

‘We also listen from Tumpa that there is an organization (BCSU) who negotiate our rights with management but, we don't know how they negotiate. How they can negotiate of our salary without listening of our problem from us. We have been working in here for last ten years, but, haven't met any personnel from BCSU.’

It is also observed that there is a local judiciary body name *Pancayet*²³, just like village court²⁴ system in Bangladesh, to judge and solve the tea worker's common family problems like

²⁰ working group leaders

²¹ Garden assistant manager

²² Garden Manager

²³ traditional community justice panel

²⁴ Ensuring access to justice for rural poor and vulnerable groups who cannot afford the expenses of cases, Bangladesh government has initiated a 5-years long (2009-2013) project 'Activating Village Courts Project in Bangladesh' with

quarrels, fighting, marriage, separation etc. It is deep-rooted traditional judiciary system and commonly known as the most powerful community level judiciary system in tea garden. But in case of major crimes like murder or rape, the local police are the authority to control the situation.

5.1.7 Interactions and Relationships at the Work Place- (Social condition)

The tea workers are socially excluded people. They are overlooked, sometimes treated as untouchables and are kept at a distance by the local mainstream Bengalis. I observed that the Bengali workers do not interact much with the indigenous tea workers during lunch breaks or on their way back home. My respondent informed me that the Bengali tea workers normally don't gossip with them in work or after finish their job time. The tea labors and the Bengali tea labors have just formal relationship only at the work place inside of the tea factory. The Bengali tea labors think that they are from a better environment; they can speak better Bengali which is their mother tongue, they can switch their job any time. Also, the Bengali tea workers, those who are minority in tea garden, do not live within the labor lines of the non-Bengali tea workers. They think that they are superior to the indigenous tea workers and indicate that they don't belong to the labor lines, a filthy place. This is a demonstration of disrespectful attitudes and intolerance to the indigenous tea workers. However, the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh guarantees its citizens by an equal treatment in the Article 27, "*All citizens are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection of the law*". Besides article 28(1) refers that "*The state shall not discriminate against any citizen on ground of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth*". But, the state is unable to establish this equity for tea garden workers. This is a culture that the tea estate authorities have failed to establish among the tea workers who come from different cultural background.

the partnership of European Commission (EC) and UNDP Bangladesh. Now it's second phase is running (endorsed its duration four years (2016-2019) instead of five years.

Chapter Six

Employment, Social stratification structure and Empowerment

Wage from employment and the social stratification structure have an effective influence in women empowerment just like the case of tea plantation women workers. In this chapter, I try to find how the women workers utilize their salary in their daily life. I will mainly emphasis on whether they have savings or not for their family. Moreover, I will also try to find whether their purchasing power help them to select their life partner, decision making in family, their mobility etc. Finally, I will define how their job are being regarded by the family and how their job increase their empowerment in family and society.

6.1 Perspective of Economical Decision Making Power on family affairs

The ability to earn an income is often linked to women's empowerment and independence and it is an important predictor of empowerment. Working women independently can take some decisions on family matters such as daily groceries, small family needs, what food will be cooking, etc. But normally they are not able to independently take decisions on property related issues, mobility, children's education, family recreation etc. In a word if they need to spend big amount, the working women need family consultation, especially with a male member (Husband/father) of the family. Even in cases where the male family member (spouse for married women and father for unmarried women) does not have job, they take the big decisions. For example-the decision-making power of a family in Bengali society belong to male/father/husband or the head of a family as our society is a patriarchal dominant society. Tea worker's family are not exception of it. In the case of my respondent, most of them are bound to give their salary to their husband as like A.B. M Enamol Hassan (2014) study. Otherwise, they are being rebuked and mentally harassed by their husband. One of my married female respondent *Joba Borai* states that,

“if I don't give my money to my husband, my husband will try to underestimate me and always humiliate me by telling many abusive words”.

In the case of some participant I have known that they are accustomed to see this custom practiced in their families and they are used to it. Although this scenery is also hardly seen in some families among unmarried women tea workers. It is observed that in most cases they are the only earning member in their families. Most women workers think that they don't have any self-control over their income and the rest of women workers think that they have freedom to spend their money as per of their choice. Sometimes they have to give money to their husband for unusual purposes and sometimes for husband's collection of drug, alcohol, canvas and so on. Moreover, unmarried female workers are exception of it though they need to contribute for their family expanses.

6.2 Perspective of Awareness about socio-economic rights

Awareness on socio-economic status is one kind factor of women's empowerment in society. Living decently with happiness is mostly depend on level of consciousness about the living standard. Living standard depends on the income. For example- if we can have a look between the living standard of Bangladesh and Norway, we can appear that the big difference. In the perspective of my respondent, they are one of the lowest income generating group as well as garment's worker in Bangladesh. Thus, the level of consciousness of my respondents about their wage structure is generally low. They only know how much money they will get from garden, even they don't compare their salary with that of others tea garden's workers on national level or what is the salary structure, are fixed by Bangladesh government in the labor law act of 2006, or in the declaration of ILO. They even don't know that they are living under the poverty level. They do their job with just expecting the salary after week as they get salary on weekly basis. However, I found that two SSC passed tea labor *Tumpa* and *Somon* only have the consciousness that there is huge gap between their current salary and their needs.

Bangladesh government introduced "Nari-O- Shishu Nirjatan Daman Ain"²⁵ in 2000 (law on the Suppression of Violence Against Women and Children) in the case of oppression of women

²⁵ This law is specialized for women and children. Therefore, a person accused under this law is arrested immediately. Sexual assault and sexual harassment have been made punishable offences under this Act.

and children in society and “Druto Bichar Tribunal Ain²⁶” in 2002 (law on speedy trial tribunal) due to the rapid justice for all citizens irrespective of ethnicity, class, caste and gender. But in the perspective of my respondent, they also unknown about this topic. It’s common for them because of their illiteracy. It is necessary mention that the most of tea workers, I interviewed, is uneducated. I found that majority of my respondent only passed primary school level (fifth grade), even they prefer to give their children for work to tea factory rather than sending to School. A large number of my respondent think that their husband/father is the head of their family and the words from the “family head” are unchangeable while the rest of them think that they have equal rights in family issues. Here, some unusual matters are found among those respondents who believe in “family head issue”, for example- the matter of reproduction- (when they should take of their baby, how many babies they will take), children’s schooling/working, even whether they will attend in religious/social festival or not, is also depend on their husband. This types issues are visible among Bengali mainstream women living in rural areas, also uneducated & religious women (especially Muslim). I have known this from my real experience in my field work as research assistant in rural areas in Bangladesh. But, the reverse situation is found in some other indigenous women in Chittagong hill tracts in Bangladesh. The most of their families are matriarchal and there is less gender disparity, supremacy, subservience, gender hierarchy, no division of labor in household and agricultural work, more freedom of movement and choice, more decision-making power than their Bengali counterpart. The inter gender interaction is also different than Bengalis and more liberal.

For example- *Tumpa* is exception of this thinking and she also have knowledge on labor laws and the mentioned laws of Bangladesh which are enacted by government for protecting their economic and social rights are not satisfactory. She expressed her thinking like followed

“These laws exist only paper but in reality, it doesn’t have any implication at all. Although the discussed laws are against suppression but, not against the person who does this.”

²⁶ It is specialized for rapid trial in any case especially sensitive issue.

From the observation of topic based interview with female labors it is found that they are also not aware about their rights as wife or daughter in family. I would like to mention about “dowry²⁷” system which is still prevailing in Bangladesh. In marriage, it’s basic rights for women whatever the religion is. In the perspective of my respondent, they are not benefited properly from this type of rights because of their illiteracy & unawareness about their rights and most of them have little knowledge what kinds of facilities they should get from parents by hereditably or what kinds of facilities they enjoy from husband after marriage, such as – equal rights in baby adoption, no division of labor in household works, equal rights on sexual life etc.

6.3 Perspective of Commitment to Family planning

This is one of the important factor for women empowerment as it increases their power of opinion. In the case of my informants, they want to keep family in small size though some informants are unaware about family planning issue and don’t have any idea about family planning. It is found that some local NGOs work in tea estate about reproductive issues of women by which the workers are conscious and aware about this issue. But the husband of female workers hardly want to maintain family planning. It’s a sensitive issue for female tea workers for sharing with me, as a man interviewer. That’s I take help from my women research assistant. When asking for the information on family planning issue in issued based in-depth interview, one shy young women tea worker *Nipa Bouri* exhibited her opinion differently as like followed

“I don’t want to share these things. It’s my family issue and totally private matter and I am happy with whatever the situation I have been facing. I am really feeling shy to discuss about this mayeli bepar (female personal issue) with others, I normally don’t even directly say to my elders that I am pregnant”.

²⁷ Dowry (also known as trousseau or tocher) is the cash money, golds, goods, or estate that is given to a woman at the time of her marriage from her father family or from her husband family depending on the religion. A dowry creates a fund for her support in case her husband dies.

Although this is uncommon in indigenous women, but the Bengali women are as like as this shy female worker. However, most of them expressed that as per advice from NGO madam's advice it is necessary to use contraception for keeping small size of family. However, maximum husbands of female workers of tea garden are not interested to use this contraception method because of chancing the decrease of pleasure and sensation.

6.4 Women's freedom of movement (local mobility)

Freedom of movement means the extent of physical movement of women by themselves or with permission of their husband or senior member of the household for their education, training, earning, meeting, buy or sell products, visiting health center etc. Ensuring the participation of women in socio-economic and cultural activities, frequent movements to different places are needed which are known as socio-economic and cultural hubs. Bangladesh where traditional social norms are highly pronounced, women's mobility is a crucial empowerment indicator. In the context of my respondent, some of them can move independently, while the mobility status is not satisfactory level for the maximum number of my respondents as like as Bengali Muslim women living in rural area. The Bengali Muslim women are not allowed to go to market freely for buying products as they have a *Pardah*²⁸ culture and their guardians do not allow them to move freely. Because, Bangladesh is a Muslim majority based society where 'freedom of movement' outside the homestead is of special interest because of its association with purdah. This Pardah culture also deter women from seeking jobs outside their homestead. Moreover, there are other traditional socio-cultural norms and other safety issues those do not allow women to go outside of the village alone as it is a solely male reserved activity in Bengali Muslim society. In this perspective, Cleland et al. (1996: 210) argues that, these variables and what women experienced in their real life have a deep influence on their mentality and outlook by strictly restricting them to interact with the outside world and exposure to new ideas and models of behavior.

But, some my respondent believes that, they can freely take their decision to buy their product and have the right on their own earned money. They can decide on some normal family

²⁸ Also known as burkah, is a religious and social practice of female seclusion.

related issues like- cooking, buying groceries etc excepting big family issue or property issue. The Bengali Muslim women can't take decision solely because they do not income, even they can't do due to their social and family obstacles. It is observed that there is lack of empowerment among the tea plantation women workers in this context.

6.5 Situation of Marital status with empowerment

Woman's marital status is the most crucial predictor of her empowerment. Unmarried women are more empowered than the married women because of having opportunity to spend the income on their own purposes. After discussing all of factors mention in earlier section my observation is that unmarried women workers enjoy their income for own, they have decision making power within their family, employment opportunity make them change their marriage strategies. Most of my unmarried respondents prefer to a delay of marriage. Unmarried tea women labors are independent and they have better opportunity to select their life partner. Most of respondents want to switch to other tea garden or other job sector though it's very tough as it would increase their salary structure which has improved their priority and power to choose a marriage partner. They also informed me that they have started their journey for surviving from their early age because of their parents prefer to do job for earning and contributing in family's income rather than go to school. Thus, they prefer to earn some money by their employment which help them to enjoy more freedom rather than being burden in husband's family. For example- *Tumpa, an unmarried female worker*, has secondary education (SSC degree) and due to unavailable of job on her village she migrated to Sylhet city and get job as temporary worker in tea garden for earning some money which will enhance her chance to choose marriage partner. The stories of the young and single tea plantation women labor reveals that they are dreaming of a better future though they prefer delayed marriage.

6.6 Empowerment in their family

The wages from the employment of women tea workers are mostly used for everyday consumption such as grocery shopping. Some of my respondents informed me that they give their

whole salary to their husband/father for contributing to the income of the household which will increase their bargaining power in family. This is because of their employment opportunities where the situation of Bengali Muslim women has little bargaining power. As they are not allowed to go outside without their male guardian, they can't do any job, thus they have little opportunities to contribute in family. But, *Champa, Tumpa, Ela* are totally different from this though they also come from rural Bangladesh. They are from Bengali Hindu mainstream society and they don't have any problem to do job outside. For example- *Champa, Tumpa two sisters* use to give their money to their family for their youngest brother's education and to buy livestock (Cattle, chicken etc). Their family bought cattle, from the saving money those the two sisters' give their family, which has reproduced some cattle and goats. They would get cash money from the cattle and goats by selling them they rear after a year. In this way, they made a significant role in their family. Family members appear to be obliged to them and they can play an important role in family decision making, for example- decisions about sending their brothers to school, renovating the house, sisters' marriage, buying cattle and so on are greatly influenced by them.

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Chapter Seven

Conclusion and Recommendation

Bangladesh ruling Awami League government declared in 2008 ‘Vision 2021’²⁹ and ‘digital Bangladesh’ and country’s goal to be a middle-income country by 2021 (Vision 2021, 2017). The main goal of this vision 2021 is reducing poverty which is the main obstacle to become a middle-income country. Among other goal One of the crucial goal of government is ‘empowerment and equal rights for women’. However, it is impossible to achieve the goal without depriving a large portion of indigenous people in society (tea workers) from ensuring their human rights and make them backward position in society. Here, it should be noted that the overall situation of indigenous people is same as like as Tea Planation workers. It’s high time to ensure the basic rights of all the other indigenous communities also. Otherwise, this portion of our society will remain backward and we would not be able to fulfill the dream of an inclusive society.

This thesis is started to find the reasons for suffering of indigenous women tea labors and their human rights condition and the kind of empowerment experiences in their family and community. The causes of tea planation indigenous women’s migration from India to the Sylhet hilly areas in ancient the British period by the British Government to cleared jungles, planted and tended tea saplings, planted shady trees, and built luxurious bungalows for the tea planters for establishing the tea business in Bengal and still now they are living under poverty lines and are the underprivileged group in society. The migration and caste discrimination history of them is one of the crucial reason for facing inequitable wage and facilities in past and most of them are still existing in the practical aspect. In addition, their ‘socially excluded group’ identity, as Gain (2009) mentions also in his writing, mostly impact negatively upon them to raise their voice in local aspect. Thus, their (Socio-economic condition) living conditions and working conditions in the tea

²⁹ Vision 2021 was the political manifesto of the Bangladesh Awami League party before winning the National Elections of 2008. It stands as a political vision of Bangladesh for the year, the golden jubilee of the nation. The policy has been criticized as a policy emblematic of technological optimism in the context of Bangladesh and the state repression of media, low internet penetration, inadequate electricity generation. The Vision 2021 is an articulation of where this nation needs to be in 2021 – the year which marks the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh’s independence.

estate; the violation of their basic rights and gender discrimination on the basis of their identity in family, community and employment places; overall their empowerment issues were the main concerns of this study. The situation of the decision-making power in their family and community due to their employment are also the basic focus of the thesis.

The social life of women tea laborers is totally different, chaotic and uncommon than the normal life of other workers engaged in various job sectors in Bangladesh. Their social structure is also different than that of the other indigenous group in Bangladesh. The situation of social life of tea workers is very wretched and miserable as a result of living long time with lacking education, employment, health and other necessities. Thus, they remain stay at backward position in society. Though Government have declared of digital Bangladesh in 2008, they are completely out of this new era of digitalization, fully isolated and separate from the mainstream of Bengali culture. Their salary is one of the most concern in this context as Gain (2009) mentions out. Their daily present salary is only BDT 85 (\$ 1.10) which is very miserable pay having a severe effect on the daily lives of the tea workers. Although the workers get rations at a concession, a family can hardly have decent food items on their plate (Gain, 2009). Not only their low salary but, they don't have any job security, not justice or no housing tenure agreement etc. However, their purchasing power is considerably very low. They hardly can eat nutritious food. Most of the workers I interviewed have lacking nutrition and this malnutrition reduces the capacity of them to work and increases the risk of diseases, reduces even further the capacity to work.

However, due to the lack of adequate wages, accumulated by poverty, indebtedness, and lack of education, the right to freely choose or accept work is a distant view for most of them. Most of married women workers, I talked with don't have any freedom and they are not aware of the fact that they should open their voices against of suppression and oppression in family. Even they don't know about country's law on the respective issues on women (for instance, Nari-O- Shishu Nirjatan Daman Ain-2000) and as well they don't know about labor law (Labor act. 2006). Thus, the profiteers are using them and get benefitted as much as they can without the improvement of their living and social condition. Tea management and Government (For instance, BTB) don't give focus on them to fulfill the basic demands of female workers.

The Study findings can be used to remove the obstacles in the pathway to ensuring equal gender rights in society for all citizens and ensuring their empowerment. To ensure that, first of all, government should take the leading and most crucial role as well as other non-governmental organization (NGO). The government body BTB should active role in tea workers' welfare as well as interfere in tea worker's salary fixing and also should compel the tea garden management for ensuring education to this underprivileged group. It should also ensure the dignity of life along with increasing their purchasing power capacity by ensuring minimum level of wage structure with the consistent of market and other facilities too. Furthermore, the most crucial is labor law. Government must implement the labor law as it is written in paper not in reality as like other law and compel the tea garden management to follow the labor law thoroughly. All in all, their consciousness about their rights should be increased by Government and NGO. If the overall situation of these labors will improve, then it would be possible to increase their empowerment & social acceptance. It is also a big challenging issue to improve in the context of Bengali society where female is always suppressed by their opposite counterpart.

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Appendix ii

Some pictures from fieldwork



Picture: The children of tea workers are playing near the slopes of hillocks



Picture: Women Tea pluckers are taking rest in their lunch time



Picture: Women tea plucker are working in their duty place in the slopes of hillocks



Picture: Temple of Jagannath (Hindu temple)



Picture: Green tea leaf are in the big bowl waiting for processing inside the tea factory



Picture: The children of tea labors are preparing the paddy land for rice cultivation