

People on the Fringe

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Our Excluded and Marginalised Should Not Be Left Behind

– Speakers say at a national workshop



Photo: Saydur Rahman

The guests and speakers at the inaugural session of the workshop.

There are a great number of excluded and marginalized communities in Bangladesh. The excluded and marginalized communities can be put into two categories. The first category remaining excluded for their beliefs, ethnic identities, occupations, languages, history and locations include ethnic and tea communities, sweepers or Harijans and Rishis, Kawras (Kaiputra), Bede (gypsies), Jaladas (water slaves), sex workers and Biharis.

The second category of excluded groups include potters, fishermen in general, blacksmith, goldsmith, bamboo and cane product manufacturers, carpenters, barber, sweet manufacturers, Teli (oil presser), Napit (barber), Dhopas (washer-man), Tati (weavers from Pakistan who speak Urdu), Darji (tailor), Hajam

(unqualified doctors for circumcision), Mazhi/Khotta (boatmen), Behara (carrier of bridal carriage), Kasai (butcher), etc. No matter whatever category an excluded group belongs to, in most case, exclusion is generational and unending.

Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD), Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC), Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCDB) and Gram Biksah Kendra (GBK) organized a national workshop to discuss the issues of these marginal and excluded communities on 22 August 2016 at LGED auditorium. It was part of a three-and-a-half-year project, "Defining the excluded groups, mapping their current status and strengthening their capacity and partnerships" funded by European Union and ICCO Cooperation.



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The key message the workshop communicated was these excluded communities—around eight million citizens of Bangladesh—shall not be left behind in Bangladesh’s race for development.

The workshop brought together the high government officials, economists, development actors, human rights defenders as well as community representatives. The day-long workshop engaged participants in sharing information and insights, delving into the causes of exclusion and developing recommendations.

Dr. Gowher Rizvi, Adviser for International Affairs to Honourable Prime Minister, the chief guest at the workshop, shared his frank thoughts. “Our existing laws are discriminatory to the excluded communities in many instances and their needs are not addressed in the right perspective. So these communities remain marginalized and excluded,” said Rizvi.

Dr. Rizvi’s message was clear—Bangladesh has attained significant progress in various areas and the government would address other issues one after another. He advised the organizers to create a forum for those who are yet to be heard. “We’ve to listen to what these people want to say and what kind of help they need,” said the foreign affairs adviser to the prime minister. Talking on the helplessness of the tea garden workers about their land rights, the adviser trusted that a simple amendment to the law could solve this problem.

In his introductory speech Philip Gain, director of SEHD gave a map of excluded communities to be addressed under the initiative and explained how painstaking and significant it is to map and define the excluded groups and their current status. He shared the findings of SEHD’s mapping of the tea and ethnic communities and sex workers. “SEHD’s findings—80 communities in the tea gardens and 37 ethnic communities on top of those in the tea gardens, Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and government records—set benchmark for mapping exercise on the excluded groups,” said Gain.

Dr. Hossain Zillur Rahman, the keynote speaker, further elaborated on the excluded groups and together with Gain set the tone of the workshop. “Leaving no one behind is a pledge that all the countries have taken under SDGs,” said Rahman. “Bangladesh has successfully reduced general poverty and extreme poverty in the last several decades. But poverty still keeps a class of people trapped into exclusion and marginalization; this exclusion is not only economical or infrastructural, this is about social perception.” Rahman suggested that the excluded people raise their voice and shared the plan of organizers to establish a national resource centre to address the issues of the excluded communities in right contexts.

Dr. Harishankar Jaladas, an eminent writer and a representative of the Jaladas community shared his personal experience and insights about the roots of exclusion and marginalization. He said, “The so-called elites of the society themselves created social stratification and deprived us.” He suggested that the excluded communities be given impetus for themselves to be united and become capable of raising their voice.

Professor Wahiduddin Mahmud, former adviser of the caretaker government regretted that the people are living in a state of deprivation due to colour and ethnicity and occupational backgrounds. He mentioned that a key reason for Bangladesh’s massive poverty reduction is that even the poor believe “poverty is not a destiny”.

“It is possible to statistically hide the people who are close to 10 million in number while highlighting Bangladesh’s progress in poverty reduction. But that would not be any

‘Our existing laws are discriminatory to the excluded communities in many instances and their needs are not addressed in the right perspective.’

— Dr. Gowher Rizvi

human development,” the economist said. “If we want to present ourselves as a model for development, we must bring these people into the mainstream development activities in the most humanitarian manner. That would be a civilized approach to development upholding human rights,” added Wahiduddin Mahmud.

Rambhajan Kairi, general secretary of Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union highlighted the insurmountable difficulties the tea workers of Bangladesh face. “Our weekly wage is too low to meet our minimum need. The garden owners have forced us to a poor life without proper food, education and treatment. So, it is unrealistic for us to dream a better life for our children,” said Kairi. He gave an account of a tea worker’s weekly income that includes wages and fringe benefits (ration at a subsidy), which is Taka 895. “The minimum weekly expenditure of a five-member family is Taka 2100. This income and expenditure disparity keep the tea workers hungry,” said Kairi.

Import of Sri Lankan and Indian inferior quality tea at a cheap price has further degraded the situation in Bangladesh tea industry and has a negative impact on the lives of tea workers, elaborated Kairi.

Dr. Dipankar Roy, joint director of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics informed that Bangladesh government has undertaken a project to identify all the ethnic and excluded people of the country. “The government cannot do everything. So, the NGOs, civil society and other actors should assist us in our endeavour.”

Dr. Hameeda Hossain, Vice-chairperson, Research Initiatives Bangladesh (RIB); M. Abdul Karim, managing director, Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF) also spoke at the workshop as special guests.

Representatives from sex workers’ groups, Bede community, Biharis, Adivasi people, Harijans, tea workers, sweepers, etc. shared their problems and experiences in the second session of the workshop. *By Quazi Monzila Sultana and Samantha Shahrin.* □

THE PROJECT

Defining the excluded groups, mapping their current status, strengthening their capacity and partnerships



Photo. Philip Gain

The Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD) in partnership with Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC), Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCDB) and Gram Bikash Kendra (GBK), with support from the European Union and ICCO Cooperation, launched the three-and-half-year project in February 2016 to define the excluded groups, map their current status, and strengthen their capacity and partnerships. The ultimate mission of the initiative is to set up a national resource centre to address the issues of excluded communities with intellectual clarity and prudence.

Key activities: Participatory research, survey, investigations and analysis; capacity building of the journalists, final beneficiaries and their organizations; monitoring of implementation of international instruments and national laws that provide safety nets and political protection to the excluded communities; promotion of legal actions for retention and recovery of commons and land; organizing conventions, festivals, dialogues and advocacy; publications and production of books, documentary films, photography exhibitions, newsletter, posters, etc. and initiating a national resource centre to serve alliances, organizations and any entity dealing with excluded

communities and to document best practices.

The project is a participatory initiative. The implementing organizations will carry out the activities together with the associates that represent the final beneficiaries, project staff, scholars, other targets, and the final beneficiaries.

A combination of research, investigation, dissemination of knowledge products and sharing skills and efforts to promote participation and representation of the socially excluded groups of Bangladesh will not only ensure effective mapping of the excluded groups but will also help to put into sharper focus their specific predicaments and requirements. A challenging activity will be to initiate a national resource centre focused on exclusion.

The excluded groups attended under the project include

Ethnic communities of the plains: Outside the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and the tea gardens there are as many as 50 ethnic communities concentrated in 16 districts in the Northwest, seven districts in the North-centre and two districts in the Northeast. Only 13 of these communities are on the government record.

Tea communities: There are as many as 80 communities on the tea estates. Of these large number of communities 9 are on the government record.

Harijans and Rishis: Also known as Dalits, these communities constitute approximately 1.5 million people. They are considered the most marginalized, deprived, broken, exploited, oppressed and excluded groups of people among the minorities of Bangladesh. They are the poorest of the poor and their “poverty is extreme, persistent and inter-generational”.

Kaiputra (Pig rearing community): Also known as Kawras, this community, most of them Hindus, are concentrated in Satkhira, Jessore and Khulna. Treated as Dalits, they are one of the most despised communities because they rear pigs, an animal filthy to majority people of the country.

Bede (gypsies): A community, mostly Muslims, the Bede or, as they are commonly referred to, ‘water gypsies’ are a group of extremely poor people.

Jaladas (water slaves): A Hindu fishing community concentrated in the coast of Chittagong are known as Jaladas, literally meaning ‘slaves of water’. The Jaladas are one of the most marginalized communities.

Sex workers: Sex work remains to be a disgraceful choice in Bangladeshi society and women engaged in this work are referred to by abusive terms, all meaning that a sex worker is a ‘fallen woman’.

Biharis: Biharis live in 71 camps in 51 districts with their largest concentration in Geneva camp in Dhaka. The Biharis are a distinct Muslim minority in present-day Bangladesh who immigrated to this land after the Partition of India in 1947.

Other excluded communities: Teli (oil presser), Napit (barber), Dhopas (washer-man), Tati (weavers from Pakistan who speak Urdu), Darji (tailor), Hajam (unqualified doctors for circumcision), Mazi/Khotta (boatmen), Bhera (carrier of bridal carriage), Kasai (butcher), etc. □

Workshop to Develop Methodology for Research, Survey and Investigation



Participants with resource persons. Photo. Prosad Sarker

Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC), took lead in organizing a two-day workshop in Dhaka from 28-29 May 2016 to develop methodology for research, survey, study and investigation on the marginalized and excluded communities.

Twenty-six participants representing different ethnic, marginalized and excluded groups, media, a select of civil society organizations, human rights groups and the project staff attended the workshop.

The key objectives of the workshop were sharing background and objectives of the project, discussing necessary resources and sources for research and investigation, developing methodology for research, survey, study and investigation for defining the excluded and marginalized groups and mapping their current status.

In his introductory remarks, Philip Gain, the program director informed that project addresses the issues and concerns of approximately 4.6 million people belonging to the marginalized and excluded groups.

Dr. Hossain Zillur Rahman, the lead researcher of the project and executive chairman of PPRC further explained the objectives of the research on the marginalized

communities and said, “These communities are statistically invisible. We want to locate them, develop clear maps on them and introduce them to the rest of the country and the world.”

“Eighty percent of people of our country were poor when we got independence. But now we have made progress. The challenge today is to bring the issues of the marginalized to the forefront and bring them out of extreme poverty they are trapped in,” he observed.

Dr. Harishankar Jaladas, a well-known writer and one from Jaladas community discussed the importance of shedding light on the marginalized people and discrimination they face in their everyday life. He urged the researchers to treat them with respect. “The roots of the marginalization and exclusion must be understood to solve the problems they face in their daily life,” he said.

Liakat Ali Chowdhury, senior fellow, PPRC and Gazi Mizanur Rahman, project coordinator, PPRC talked on resources and sources necessary for research.

Besides Hajera Begum, a representative of sex workers and Soud Khan, a Bede Sardar shared their experiences as representatives of marginal communities and raised different issues and concerns of their communities. □

Need Assessment and Consultation

Need assessment: Three workshops were organized in three locations to assess the specific problems, needs and demands of different excluded communities. Participants in these workshops highlighted their socio-economic and political problems and deprivation. They recommended solutions as well.

A need assessment workshop was organized on 23 June 2016 at Chittagong National Institute of Technology (NIT). Representatives of three excluded communities concentrated in the Chittagong—Jaladas, Bihari and Sweepers—attended the workshop. Dr. Hossain Zillur Rahman, executive chairman of Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) facilitated the workshop. These three communities face unique difficulties and are in need of solutions specific to problems they face. However, some common problems they face relate to poor housing, education, health, and social stigma.

A workshop was organized at Gram Bikash Kendra (GBK) in Parbatipur, Dinajpur on 31 July 2016 with the participation of ethnic representatives of Northwestern districts. Participants representing Mahle, Santal, Oraon, Kora, Koda, Mushohor, Robidas, Kshatriya, Rishi and Kawras (pig herders) from Rajshahi, Chapainawabganj, Naogaon, Rangpur and Dinajpur districts attended the workshop. While the difficulties faced by the sweepers and Biharis are similar, the condition of the ethnic communities are unique in this region as the participants shared. A law, Khudra Nri-gosthi Sangskritik Pratisthan Ain, 2010, introduced a new identity for the Adivasi groups, which contains a list of 27 Khudra Nri-gosthi (smaller ethnic communities). But there are a big number of ethnic communities who are not Bengalis and are not recognized by the state. In addition to lack of constitutional recognition of the indigenous communities, the difficulties they face relate to land right, use of

mother languages in education, and quota problem in government jobs and universities.

SEHD and PPRC organized the third need assessment workshop in Kamalganj, Maulvibazar with the tea workers, their union and the ethnic communities of the Northeastern districts on 8 August 2016. A long list of issues and difficulties that the tea workers, their communities and the ethnic communities in this region face relate to their poor education, miserable wages [particularly of the tea workers], poor housing, sanitation, quotas in education and jobs, land rights and landlessness, labour laws, and labour courts. The participants

also demanded recognition and promotion of cultures, languages and identities of a large number of communities that are not Bangalis.

Consultation meeting: Three consultation meetings with CBOs, CSOs and other actors (universities, research organizations, government agencies, media, etc.) were organized in three locations—Srimongol, Dinajpur and Modhupur. The key objective of these meetings was to initiate discussion about how to effectively organize workshops, festivals, conventions, research and publications and share ideas and concerns specific to community, issues and locations of events. □

and their current status. Dr. Rahman's proposition to consider variables to understand poverty are: (a) access to safety nets in which the excluded groups have lesser access, (b) access to new opportunities that the excluded groups cannot take advantage and (c) social discrimination (many of the excluded groups are looked down upon). He discussed at length the variables of research on the excluded groups that are: statistics, self-identity, economy, living standard, human resource, access to services, change matrix, problem tree.

Explaining the significance of visibility of the excluded groups, Dr. Rahman said, "If we can make them visible statistically and portray their social status, problems and demands, changes for better in their life become easier."

With an objective to orient the journalists on the excluded groups a panel of Soud Khan, leader from Bede community from Munshiganj; Ramjan Ahmed, secretary, Porabari Somaj Kallyan Songho, Savar; and Hashi Begum, secretary, Nari Mukti Sangha, Tangail talked on their respective communities and responded to the questions of the journalists.

"The bedes (gypsies) travel throughout the country year-round to earn meager living means. They spend their nights in make-shift houses on public land and face social disgrace as strangers to the villagers. We do not want to live such a life. We want to change our nomadic life and live a dignified life." said Soud Khan. Ramjan Ahmed also said that the Bedes of Munshiganj have very limited access to education, treatment, sanitation and other public services. Soud Khan and Ramjan Ali urged the journalists to go to the Bedes and report in depth on their floating life.

Hashi Begum, leader of sex workers of Kandapara brothel in Tangail who were evicted in 2013 and returned to the brothel creating history narrated the amazing story of the Tangail brothel. She appealed to the journalists to report on the issue.

Philip Gain shared the stories of

Participants at need assessment workshop.



Training for Journalists in Investigative Reporting on Excluded Communities

A three-day residential workshop was organized on 'Investigative Reporting on Exclusion Challenges in Bangladesh' from 28 to 30 November 2016 in Dhaka. The Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD) took lead in organizing the workshop.

The key objectives of the workshop were to share and refresh the journalists with knowledge on the excluded communities, scale up their skills in investigative reporting on exclusion challenges in Bangladesh and increase media attention to the excluded groups, their issues and concerns.

Twenty-one journalists from TV channels, newspapers and online

portals and project staffs and community representatives who participate in reporting and research attended the workshop.

In setting the tone of the workshop, Philip Gain, facilitator of the workshop and director of SEHD gave an overview of the excluded communities in Bangladesh. Sharing the findings of SEHD's recent research and investigation he reported that there are around 110 ethnic and tea communities in Bangladesh.

Dr. Hossain Zillur Rahman, lead researcher of the project and executive chairman of PPRC discussed the key research and reporting tools to define the excluded and marginalized groups

killing of the Santals in Bagda farm and burning of more than thousand houses in Gobindaganj in Gaibandha district. To give examples of good journalistic writing on the excluded communities he shared stories on the plight of the Harijans of Dhaka by SEHD.

Pinaki Roy, chief reporter of The Daily Star and a journalist who extensively reports human rights abuses against minorities and excluded groups said, "Media has a responsibility to protect the excluded people and journalists should be more humanist towards the people of society."

A senior journalist and stringer of

New York Times, Julfikar Ali Manik, also shared his experiences of writing on the excluded communities. "We need to have a clear map of the people who are weak and defenseless against infringement of their rights. We should take their side, understand their concerns and issues." said Manik.

Julfikar Ali Manik and Philip Gain also shared essential features of journalistic writing and the journalists shared their experiences and difficulties which they face in reporting. The workshop came to an end with certificates distributed to the participants. *Quazi Monzila Sultana* □

'untouchables' to the majority in the society. This community, basically Hindus, is concentrated in the South-western districts of Jessore, Satkhira and Khulna. A detailed survey of this community was done. SEHD took lead in the survey.

A team of 10 project staff, with assistance of the community members, gathered primary information on locations, demography, occupations, income status and its sources, education, history and culture, housing, health and sanitation, land status, assets other than land, access to services, financial status, access to potable water, electricity and other energy sources, access to safety nets, strengths or capacities of communities, participation in local government/citizens' organizations, changes that have taken place, problem-tree, and needs/demands/aspirations of the community.

According to fresh finds, the people of this community that are still actively involved in their traditional occupation live in 41 villages and all these villages have been surveyed. There are 29 villages where the Kaiputras have changed their occupation and have given up herding hogs in the open fields. Concentrated in Satkhira they all have turned into fishing villages. They hide their traditional identity to escape from dishonour that Kaiputra get from their neighbours.

Of the 46 villages surveyed, 19 are from 12 unions, five upazilas and one municipality in Jessore district; 21 are from 17 unions in five upazilas in Satkhira district; and six are from six unions in four upazilas in Khulna district. Of these villages, five have now given up herding hogs and have turned in fishing villages. Twenty-four Kaiputra villages have also been listed that have turned into fishing villages.

The Kaiputras are trapped in poverty and bereft of bank loans to run their business that requires large sum of money. Literacy rate among this community is low and there are many social ills that this community faces. A full report will be published as soon as possible.

Study of Kaiputra, Jaladas and Tea Communities



Jaladas fishermen of Chittagong fishing in the Bay of Bengal. Photo. Philip Gain

One common disadvantage of the excluded group is lack of baseline data (quantitative and qualitative) on their numbers, population size and socio-economic conditions. A comprehensive map and definitions of the ethnic communities in the plains, tea plantation workers and other excluded groups that are the final beneficiaries of the project is therefore in great need and demand to the human rights actors, policy and decision makers and the common people of Bangladesh.

Building on the works already done by SEHD and PPRC and with active participation and support of CCDB, GBK and five associates, fresh surveys and analysis of the excluded groups

were initiated. The groups to be clearly defined and studied include: Ethnic communities (50), tea communities (80), Dalits (sweeper and Rishi), Kawra (Kaiputra or pig rearing community), Jaladas (water slaves), Bede (gypsies), sex workers, Biharis and other smaller groups.

In the first year of the project three groups studied are: Kawra, Jaladas and tea communities.

Kaiputra (pig rearing community): Also known as Kawra, this is a community with guesstimated population of 12,000 who are despised in the society because they rear pigs, an animal 'filthy' to the Muslim majority. They are considered

Jaladas (water slaves):

Occupationally marginalized and suffering from a degree of social untouchability, Jaladas are a traditional fisherfolk community—mainly sea-faring but also engaged in riverine fishing—whose life and livelihoods are defined by the rhythm of ebb tide and rising tide in coastal Chittagong and Cox’s Bazar districts. PPRC took lead in organizing the survey on Jaladas.

According to Dr. Harishankar Jaladas, educationist and leading personality from a Jaladas heritage, these fisher-folk communities live along the coastline in around 60 spots from Teknaf in southern Cox’s Bazar district to Mirsarai in northern Chittagong district with an approximate population of 150,000. Jaladas communities also live on the islands of Moheshkhali, Kutubdia and Sandwip. There are also a number of riverine Jaladas communities centered around the three rivers of Karnaphuli, Sangu and Matamuhuri. Many of these families have lost their livelihoods and have migrated to Chittagong city. They belong to the Hindu religion and usually seen as one of the lowest castes.

A total of 20 Jaladas clusters were mapped in the study. Of these, 16 are in Chittagong district and four in Cox’s Bazar district. Information have been gathered and analysis is being done on demography, education, occupations, income sources and levels, housing, sanitation, drinking water, electricity and other energy sources, land assets, non-land assets, access to services, financial status, access to safety nets, history and culture, community capacities, participation in local government bodies or civic organizations, change matrix, problem tree and needs and aspirations.

Tea Workers and trade unions:

Building on the work already done by SEHD in a previous project, some strategic works are being undertaken in the current project, one being assessment and analysis of the challenges, needs and constraints of the tea workers and their lone union, Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union (BCSU).

Assisted by SEHD and Bangladesh Cha Janagosthi Adivasi Front and Bagania, and BCSU, PPRC did a sample survey and in-depth focus group discussions (FGD) with the tea plantation workers, BCSU leaders (comprised of central committee members and panchayat members). Settlement clusters for tea workers were chosen in which qualitative and quantitative information were collected through an FGD methodology. Recognizing that tea gardens are classified into categories of A, B and C, eight sites were chosen of which six were from

A category gardens and one in each from B and C categories. The eight sites were geographically located in the four districts of Maulvibazar, Sylhet, Hobiganj and Chittagong.

An important distinction to bear in mind regarding the tea workers was that not all members of tea worker families are provided with jobs in the tea gardens. So in the surveyed communities, there were both tea worker families and non-tea worker families but all of whom identified themselves as belonging to the same community. □



(Left) Tea workers in Srimongol. (Right) Kaiputra feeding hogs (Gopalganj).

Photo. Philip Gair

Nikhil Mondol No More Wants to Herd Pigs

Nikhil Mondol (35) is a rakhhal, a traditional pig herder. He comes from Altapol village in Keshabpur upazila in Jessore, a Southwestern district of Bangladesh. He belongs to Kawra or Kaiputra community that herds pigs in the open agricultural fields and swamps.

Nikhil Mondol has been keeping herds for the last three years. Keeping herds is a tough choice to make. “It is tedious. It requires at least 16 hours of work every day with no holiday. The pigs are fed at least for 14 hours a day in the open field,” says Nikhil Mondol. Managing a herd of pigs of two to five hundred is a big deal. Nikhil is a member of a team of rakhals. “The owners of the pigs’ herds are not good to us. Sometimes a pig may get lost. We have to find it and bring it back. If a pig is finally lost, we have to compensate for our ‘mistakes,’” says Nikhil.

A rakhhal like Nikhil Mondol is recruited on a monthly or yearly basis. Monthly pay ranges from Taka 5,000 to Taka 7,000 plus food allowance, basic clothes and some toiletries. A rakhhal may be recruited for a year and is paid Taka 24,000 plus 10 pigs in the end of the year. Such arrangement gives a rakhhal incentive for taking good care of the pigs. Nikhil complains that the owners of herds deceive them in many instances. “One herd has many pigs; but the number of rakhals may not be sufficient. Then it is difficult to manage the herd,” says Nikhil. “One of us



Nikhil Mondol. Photo. Prosad Sarker

has to guard the pigs all night. Sometimes some pigs escape and damage nearby crops. We, the outsiders, then digest verbal abuses and sometimes come under physical assault. Occasionally, it is not the owner but us who compensate for the damage done.”

Nikhil is annoyed at this traditional business with pigs. “It is not an honourable occupation. Many children are also employed as rakhals. We should bring an end to rearing pigs in the open fields,” says Nikhil who studied up to class eight in Keshabpur school.

Some twenty-four Kaiputra villages in Satkhira and Khulna districts, have indeed, given up this traditional occupation and have turned into fishing villages. They do not want to go back to their traditional occupation, which they consider disgraceful.

Nikhil, father of two children, is determined to give up his traditional occupation. Instead, he wants to work in a rickshaw repairing garage. He wants to educate his children. He wants to see his children become skilled and get into respectable work so that they do not have to face negligence, deprivation and hatred of others because of the traditional occupation.

The occupation of herding pigs is gradually shrinking. The key factor, says Nikhil, is the empty land to feed the pigs in is shrinking. In the past there was plenty of food in rivers, swamps and other water bodies. Now, these have dried up. In Bangladesh, the demand for pork is very low and there is little scope for its export. Moreover, there are risks associated with this business. If an epidemic such as anthrax hits, an entire herd perishes in a few days. There is also no government support for this business.

No matter wherever in the country a bathan (herd of pigs) is seen, the rakhals are Kaiputras. The Kaiputras have special skills to manage herds of pigs in the open fields. However, nowadays most of the owners of bathan are Sudra (the fourth category in Hindu casteism) and some Christians. The Kawras are thrown into the fifth category of Hindu casteism, viz. Dalit.

The number of Kaiputra families are on the decline in many of their villages. In Nikhil’s village there are only 12 Kaiputra families nowadays. Thirty years ago the number of Kaiputra families was around 100 in this village. Families that have some land to cultivate and other property stay in the village. Those who were landless and did not have any other income opportunities other than keeping herds have left the village and settled elsewhere. Some have migrated to nearby town Jessore.

There has been little research on the Kaiputra community. People in general know very little about them. The pigs they herd in the agricultural fields and swamps do no harm to agriculture and environment. Instead, pigs’ herds are welcome to fields because a herd of few hundred pigs can clean an acre of land of unwanted weeds and roots in two to three hours. Even the Muslim farmers welcome the Kaiputras with their herds of pigs to their land. A herd of pigs can plough a piece of land quicker than a tractor! The manure it leaves behind also fertilizes the land.

It is under the project funded by the European Union and ICCO Cooperation that the Kaiputra villages have been thoroughly studied. So far, 41 active Kaiputra villages have been detected. All these village plus five villages that have abandoned their traditional occupation have been studied. What is unique of the study is that a few educated Kaiputra young persons found among the community, many rakhals and owners of herds have participated in the study. Their socio-economic condition and difficulties they face in their villages and in the fields while herding the pigs have been studied with their active participation. Extensive study and interaction with the Kaiputras have generated insights about solutions to the insurmountable difficulties they face.

By Goutam Basak with Philip Gain □

NOTICE BOARD

Important activities done in the second year of the project

Research, study and analysis:

Communities to be surveyed in the second year are: Sweeper, Rishi, Bede, sex workers and Bihari. Besides, household survey of the forest villagers in the Modhupur Sal forest in Tangail district will be conducted.

Monographs on communities

published: Sweepers, Rishi, Kawra, Jaladas, Bede, sex workers and Biharis.

Production of documentary film:

A documentary film made on the forest villagers in the Modhupur, their life and struggle and state of the forest.

Investigation: Selected cases of human rights abuses and contemporary concerns of marginal groups are investigated and reports are published.

Trainings and workshops: Capacity building trainings and workshops are organized for the final beneficiaries. Representatives from all the final beneficiaries and stakeholders attend the trainings and workshops.

Convention and festival: A convention and festival is organized in second half of the year in the North Bengal. The final beneficiaries and representatives from all the stakeholders attend the convention and festival. Identity, life, culture, struggle and concerns of the excluded communities are addressed in the convention. □

I do not agree with the criticism that the preservation of tribal art and tribal dress indicates a desire to keep the tribal people as museum specimens. The danger is that these people will lose their culture and have nothing to replace it.

—Jawaharlal Nehru

REVIEW OF BOOKS

Lower Depths

Little-Known Ethnic Communities of Bangladesh

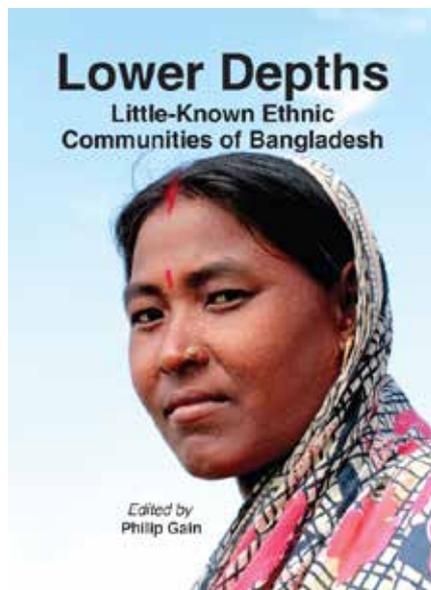
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In the latest government record (2010), the number of the ethnic communities in Bangladesh was 27 (duplications considered, their actual number is 24). The ethnic communities themselves estimate the number of their communities to be more than 45. Of these communities 11 live in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). In its recent (2014-2015) inventory, the Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD) has estimated the number of the ethnic communities outside the tea gardens and the CHT to be 37 in addition to those on the official record. These communities are concentrated basically in 25 districts of the Northwest, North-centre and Northeast.

The book, *Lower Depths: Little-known Ethnic Communities of Bangladesh* is a recent publication of SEHD that focuses on the little-known ethnic communities found in 16 districts in Rajshahi and Rangpur Divisions, seven districts in the North-centre and two districts in Northeast of Bangladesh.

It contains brief profiles of 40 communities of the plains land giving succinct description of their history of origin, life, livelihood, education, culture, tradition and customs. Each profile is accompanied by a portrait, a table showing spatial distribution of the community and a geographical map showing its locations (upazilas and districts).

In addition to the profiles of the ethnic communities, it includes a chapter with a good number of investigative reports on brutal attacks, killings, arson and other atrocities associated with adivasis in North

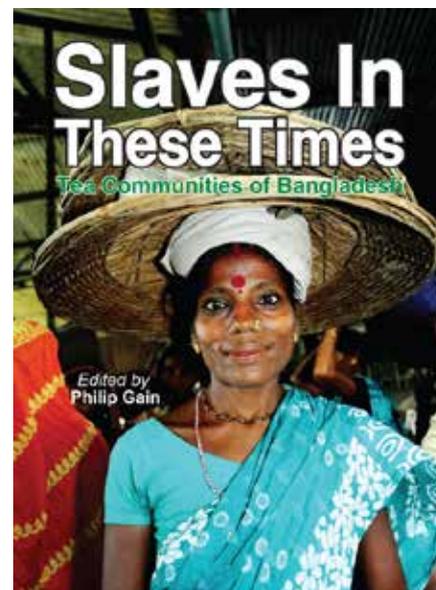


Bengal. These investigative reports, first published in national and local newspapers and magazines, show the pattern of abuses that the adivasis face.

A special addition to this volume is the agenda of the tea plantation workers and ethnic communities developed with their active participation.

Tallied with other communities in the volume on the tea communities (*Slaves In These Times*) and the photo album (*On the Margins: Images of Tea and Ethnic Communities*), one will find that there are at least 110 ethnic communities in Bangladesh excluding Bangalees, which means the government is yet to recognize a large number of ethnic communities. This book and other SEHD publications on adivasis stand unique to assist the government and other non-state actors in coming to a consensus about the number and identities of these ethnic communities.

The key message this book communicates is that the ethnic communities are one of the most vulnerable people in Bangladesh. They continue to remain socially excluded, overwhelmingly illiterate, deprived and disconnected. They have also lost their original languages in most part as well as their culture, history, education, knowledge and unity. It is in this context that they deserve recognition of their identities and special attention from the state, not just equal treatment. □



Slaves In These Times

Tea Communities of Bangladesh

Edited by Philip Gain
388 pages, 2016
Published by Society for Environment and Human Development

'Slaves In These Times: Tea Communities of Bangladesh' focuses particularly on the communities found in the tea gardens of the Northeast and Southeast of Bangladesh. SEHD has found as many as 80 communities in 156 tea gardens in Sylhet, Hobiganj, Moulvibazar, Chittagong and Rangamati districts. Of these communities, nine are mentioned in the government census of 1991 and in Khudra Nri-Gosthi Sangskritik Pratisthan Ain, 2010, which are Tripura, Santal, Oraon, Rajbongshi, Marma, Monipuri, Munda, Mahale and Garo.

This book includes profiles on all these 80 communities showing the diversity of ethnic identities that make each tea garden a territory largely unknown to the people of the majority community. Each of these profiles accompanies a portrait, a geographic map and table that indicates the number of tea gardens, the upazila and district they live in. Originally, these communities lived in Bihar, Madras, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh

and other places in India. The British companies brought them to work in the tea gardens in Sylhet region more than 150 years ago. The tea workers are indeed people of Bangladesh, but largely tied to the tea gardens and the labour lines and fall behind as equal citizens.

To put the profiles of the tea communities that live in the tea gardens into perspective, a large section of the book is devoted to general overview of the tea industry, brief profiles of all tea gardens; investigative reports that explain the contexts of their deprivation and alienation; useful tips on web resources and institution on tea communities and tea industry; glossary, concepts and theories related to tea communities and tea industry and geographic maps of tea gardens (district-wise and the whole country).

The key message this book communicates is that the tea workers and their communities are one of the most vulnerable peoples in Bangladesh. They continue to remain socially excluded, low-paid, deprived of standard education and disconnected. They have also lost their original languages in most part as well as their culture, history, education, knowledge and unity. It is in this context that they deserve recognition of their identities and special attention from the state, not just equal treatment.

One consulting this volume, together with the volume on the marginalized ethnic communities of Bangladesh concentrated in Northwest and North-centre and the photography volume on all ethnic communities, will get a comprehensive map of the ethnic and tea communities in Bangladesh. □



Santal women of Bagda Farm tragedy in despair. Photo. Philip Gain

Bagda Farm Killings—State vs Adivasi

The Pakistan government acquired 1842.30 acres of cropland in Gaibandha for Rangpur Sugar Mill in 1955-56. All villages—reportedly 15 ethnic and five Bengali—were cleared of houses for preparation of farming sugarcane. Rangpur Sugar Mill was closed in 2004 and the sugar mill authority ‘illegally’ leased the land to the local influential people. Given the land was hardly used for sugarcane cultivation since the mill remained functionally closed, the original owners—most of them Santals and a percentage of other ethnic communities and Bengalis—believed if the land is no more used for sugarcane cultivation, it should be returned to them. So they began a movement in 2014 under the banner of ‘Shahebganj Bagda Farm Bhumi Uddhar Shongram Committee’ (Shahebganj Bagda Farm Land Recovery Movement Committee) to recover the land.

The land recovery committee negotiated with the administration with no outcome. So the committee resolved to go inside the Bagda Farm and start living and cultivating crops themselves from 1 July 2016. The Santals and others built around 2,000 makeshift houses inside Bagda Farm. The Rangpur Sugar Mill authority in its attempt to drive them out of the land took help of the administration and police. In the morning of November 6, 2016 a fierce clash took place between the Santals and workers-employers of Rangpur Sugar Mill who came with hundreds of police. Two Santals were killed by bullets that the police fired and hundreds were wounded. Some policemen were hit by arrows that the Santals fired in defence.

In the evening of the same day, a full battalion of police, RAB, BGB and Bengalis attacked the Santals and others. “The armed force started firing at us,” said Barnabas Tudu, a Santal woman. “We realised we had no defense in front of such a huge armed forces and crowd. We began to flee.”

The carnage went on throughout the night. All houses built in five locations within the Bagda Farm were burned to ashes. While the houses were set ablaze, the attackers looted whatever valuables they could find.

While the burning was complete by the morning of 7 November 2016, the sugar mill authority brought in heavy tractors and began to plough the land. The signs of homesteads and vegetable gardens were erased in just two days.

Traumatized, many of the victims of the clash left the Bagda Farm area. Those who opted to stay in Madarpur and Joypur villages remained confined. In the meantime, the sugar mill authority started fencing the Bagda Farm area with barbed wire and concrete pillars to stop the villagers getting in the Bagda Farm.

The officials of the district and local administrations and the judiciary assembled in Madarpur village on the morning of November 12 to console the victims. The DC pronounced that the prime minister’s office has given him strict instructions to do everything possible for the victims of the November 6 violence.

However, none of the civil administration and police took responsibility for the firing on the Santals and others. On the Santals’ claim to the land, the Deputy Commissioner reminded the Santals, “Rangpur Sugar Mill is the legitimate owner of the Bagda Farm land. And it is only the court that can settle any dispute that may arise.”

Seven criminal cases and three writ petitions were filed in connection with the clashes, arsons and other atrocities. The Santals, Rangpur Sugar Mill authority, police and some human rights organizations filed these cases and writs. A year after the incident, the progress of these cases and protests against the killings and arsons examined, the result is: colossal damage for those who wanted the land acquired during the Pakistan period returned to the original owners and the Rangpur Sugar Mill and the state agencies taking full control of the land! *By Philip Gain* □