



The Effects of Human Rights of the Tea Plantation Workers: A Study on Hamidia Tea Estate

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Abstract

What are the indicators of human rights acts and regulations that affect tea garden workers? The aim of this article is to explain the state of human rights of tea plantation workers, as often described as pathetic, but no concerted effort has yet been undertaken to promote the human rights condition as a whole in the tea plantation areas of Sylhet. The first tea garden was established in 1854 at Malnichhara in Sylhet. Sylhet is a place of tea gardens. Two other tea gardens, Lalchand and Matiranga, were established in 1860. Tea production in Sylhet increased with notable rapid growth. There are about three hundred thousand people working there, and 75% of the workers are female. Human rights are the fundamental rights in a democratic country. Every nation of the world must be active for the human rights of all citizens. In this study, it is highlighted the concept of human rights initially. Human rights-related laws are constructed for all workers. In a third-world country like Bangladesh, bottom-level workers face numerous problems and find themselves in a slavery place, which creates a big gap between the owner and workers' relations. In the earlier stage, workers led their lives with a miserable level of slavery. Tea is the most preferred beverage by millions of people across the whole world. Sometimes it is difficult to find available secondary sources.

Keywords: *Human Rights; Tea Gardens; Bangladesh Labor Act 2015'; Economic Dependency*

Introduction

Human rights are universal, inalienable, interrelated, interdependent, and indivisible. Human rights have been one of the most developed agendas for the last two decades. Bangladesh is a country where a variety of workers are working in a different sector. Tea is the second largest export cash crop of Bangladesh. There are approximately 400,000 people (permanent workers) working at more than 172 different tea gardens in the country. But according to BTA, nearly one million people directly or indirectly depend on tea gardens. The tea industry is the largest sector in Bangladesh, especially in Sylhet. The tea industry is expanding in terms of cultivation and output. However, according to Baishya (2016), the most important people responsible for this growth of the tea industry, the tea garden workers, are the worst sufferers. This study helps people to be aware of their rights and responsibilities. Wage, livelihood,

education, health, sickness, closure, and neglect of tea garden issues. With respect to crop yield, issues of the laborers, numerous violence and strikes across tea gardens are burning issues which are increasingly rising. There is a fact that human rights of the tea plantation workers are mostly limited. So, this is a researchable problem. Tea plantation workers need to lead a simply good life with a fine wage and income. They continue to live like people without choice or right to a land they have tilled for four generations. Human rights suggested proper acts and guidelines for the laborers, especially in the improvement of the economic, financial, and social sectors. Along with the theoretical study, workers have limited capacity to incorporate with the people of the mainstream community. Their children do not get proper educational facilities and are unable to build up their own careers in their whole lives. They face enormous difficulties in exploring livelihood opportunities outside the tea garden. The massive dilemma is researchers are not strongly paying attention to and studying the concept of basic human rights of the workers, especially the tea plantation workers. So, there is no available information related to human rights of tea garden workers. On the way, only analyze socio-economic conditions; working conditions of tea plantation workers are not appropriate. This socio-economic condition is the one kind of indicator of human rights. Most of the researchers only focus on the workers' working situation. For this, it is the pivotal problem of research.

Literature

Hammed and Hossain (2016), published by ILO, described the working conditions of tea plantation workers in Bangladesh. They explained the fundamental rights at work and role and status of women tea plantation workers. They identified some articles and rules for the tea plantation workers. Despite being educated, children of tea plantation workers do not get official jobs in the tea garden. Both tea workers and leaders are the view that education is the fundamental for bringing change to the community. According to this analysis, the researcher strongly focusing on the working conditions and labor benefits, role and status of women tea plantation workers, and recognized numerous problems they found. Rahman (2016) argued that tea garden workers play vital role in tea production of the country. This study explores wage structure, literacy, and health and sanitation status. The tea garden workers of Bangladesh lead a poor life due to their low income (less than US\$ 1 for a day's work from sunrise to sunset), the tea garden workers of Bangladesh lead a poor life due to their low income (less than US\$1 for a day's work from sunrise to sunset), which is much lower than that of the Indian tea garden workers. Das and Hasan (2006) revealed that generally, it is assumed that the people working in different tea gardens all over our country have been leading a life of untold misery. But the life of these working people has not yet been investigated much in 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 these people. The research has found that the condition of the workers' houses is dilapidated with lack of sanitation, lack of sufficient sources of pure drinking water and very low wages of labor. Most of the houses are small, living with more people than their accommodation capacity and therefore lacking privacy of the family members. So, there is alarming situation of the living condition of the tea plantation worker.

The research questions of the study are:

- What are the indicators of human rights acts and regulations that affect tea garden workers?
- Does the tea plantation workers aware of their basic and other rights?
- How can women workers of tea plantation improve themselves economically?

The main objective of the study is to know the level of awareness among the people about their basic rights. The other objectives of the study are:

To investigate the status of the human rights to food and shelter and related rights of the tea plantation workers.

To find out plans and procedures to ensuring tea plantation workers' rights status according to 'Bangladesh Labor Act 2015'.

To identify maternity benefit status of the tea plantation female workers.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the literature on human rights, labor exploitation, and structural inequality in developing economies. Existing research suggests that while formal labor laws exist, their implementation often remains weak due to institutional constraints, economic dependency, and power asymmetries between employers and workers. While most existing studies focus on economic conditions and wages, this study expands the discussion by examining a broader set of human rights indicators, including education, health, housing, gender inequality, and awareness of rights.

Tea plantation workers represent a historically marginalized labor group whose living and working conditions are shaped by structural dependency. Employers often control not only wages but also housing, healthcare, and access to basic services. This creates a system where workers remain economically and socially dependent on the plantation authority, limiting their ability to claim rights or resist exploitation. In addition, lack of awareness of rights and low levels of education further reduce workers' capacity to demand fair treatment. Gender inequality also plays a significant role, as female workers who constitute the majority of the workforce face many additional barriers in accessing economic opportunities and social mobility.

Therefore, this study argues that human rights conditions are shaped by three key mechanisms:

- a. Economic dependency
- b. Institutional weakness (poor enforcement of labor laws)
- c. Limited awareness and education

Based on the theoretical framework, the hypotheses of this study are:

H1: Tea plantation workers with lower levels of education are less aware of their basic human rights.

H2: Workers who are economically dependent on tea plantation, authorities experience poorer human rights conditions.

H3: Female tea plantation workers face greater inequality in access to economic opportunities and benefits compared to male workers.

H4: Weak enforcement of labor laws is associated with poorer living and working conditions of tea plantation workers.

Conceptualization

This study provides original empirical evidence using primary data collected from Hamidia Tea Estate. Also, the study has found several variables which are connected with fundamental rights, and it represents the impact of the living condition of the workers of Hamidia Tea Estate. These fundamental rights can be regarded as variables and these variables are educational status and facilities, issues of human rights, like food, housing facilities, electric facilities, medical care, wage, allowance, women participation, discrimination of gender, sanitation and toilet, maternity benefit, holidays (Festival, ethnic programs), income inequality. For analyzing overall circumstances, the study states that there is a relationship between them.

Analysis

In a research paper, the study allows me to evaluate the study’s overall validity and reliability. This area has been selected for some reasonable advantage for collecting information and data and has easier transportation system. This research depends on the interest of the research topic.

The research area of the study is Hamidia Tea Estate. This tea estate is in Matarkahon, Moulvibazar, Sylhet. Mixed approaches have been followed to examine the study. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches have been used to conduct the data.

Qualitative research: It is a process of natural investigations that seeks to understand social phenomena within their natural setting. It focuses on what social phenomena and relies on direct experiences of humans in their everyday livelihood.

Quantitative Research: It is used to analyze the problem by generating numerical data and these data that can be applicable to statistics.

The validity and reliability of any type of research depend on data that has been collected. This method is much more structured than Qualitative data collection method. The qualitative measures included surveys, interview schedule and observation. The quantitative methods also included the interview schedule as well as the official records.

A population is the entire group of items or individuals of interests in a study. All the tea garden workers of Hamidia tea estate are selected as the population of this study. The total number is 400. Hamidia Tea Estate is located in Matarkahon, Moulvibazar, Sylhet. The area of the tea estate is 4.51 acre. This institution is working for producing tea, food retailers and tea retailer’s business activities. According to the data, there are total 400 employees (permanent, temporary and factory workers), one tea factory, 2 banglow, one mosjid, one temple.

The organizational structure of the Hamidia Tea estate has been given as below:

Employees	Number of employees
Permanent employees	185
Temporary employees	200
Factory workers	15

In a Tea estate, there are one general manager and two assistant managers also who maintain the whole tea garden. Both male and female workers have working together for their livelihood. Hamidia Tea Estate provides facilities to their employees according to the Bangladesh labor Act -2015.

Number of employees based on gender

Gender of the employees					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	15	37.5	37.5	37.5
	Female	25	62.5	62.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

According to the analysis, around 37.5% male and 62.5% female employees is working in a tea estate for many purposes. So, we can see that most of the workers are female. Also, the size of the

employee’s family is not only small but also large as well. Most of their families have 5 or 7 at numbers. The family has 2 or 3 members of earnings. Systematic random sampling has been used as a sampling method in this study. Therefore, sampling is a representative portion of the population. The sample size is 40. So, a researcher must choose every 10th number from the total population as a sample randomly. The data has been analyzed by statistical Package for social science (SPSS) and MS Excel. SPSS is used in coding and collecting information with the help of various methods such as written questionnaires, and interviews.

Research design is the blueprint of the plan specifically created to answer the research question. In this study, descriptive research will be used. It is used to describe the selected characteristics of the subject accurately. This study discovers association or relationship among variables. This research helps to describe systematically and accurately the facts and characteristics of a given population or area of interest.

In this study, data has been analyzed by using multiple graphs and diagrams which is statistically elaborate here but identifying errors.

Overtime wages: There is no hard and fast rule about overtime rather laborers are also interested in overtime. Only those who are working at Manager Bungalow or Leaf Carrying Track are entitled to work overtime. Every day 15 kg leaf collection is compulsory for labor. In addition to 25kg a laborer gets BDT 4.12 per kg leaf collection. If a labor is working in extra time, he/she should get taka 201 (per head/per day) also Satisfaction with facilities about sick leave and maternity leave: Respondent are categorized into five groups (strongly satisfied, satisfied, somewhat satisfied, dissatisfied, strongly dissatisfied) to easily interpret the collected data. The satisfaction level is shown in a table:

Get maternity facilities from the tea garden authority					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Dissatisfied	8	20.0	20.0	20.0
	Strongly dissatisfied	4	10.0	10.0	30.0
	Somewhat satisfied	7	17.5	17.5	47.5
	Satisfied	9	22.5	22.5	70.0
	Strongly satisfied	12	30.0	30.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

So, this data revealed that 10% of total respondent are strongly dissatisfied with facilities for sick leave and maternity leave of respondent, 22.5% are satisfied, 20% are dissatisfied, and 17.5% are agreed to some extent. But 30% of the respondents are strongly satisfied with the facilities. There is a policy for maternity leave.

Once it is for three months. Now it is for four months with pay. In a tea estate, there is also a ‘Baby care room’ for the female workers. So, they easily work at a working time. In a ‘Baby care room’, there is 7 female assistants for taking care of the female worker’s children. The percentage of the data has been shown by the help of graphs:

Figure: Satisfaction with facilities about sick leave and maternity

Working hour (years): It is from 8am to 3pm but for female labor it is from 8am to 4pm. A laborer get one day earn leave after every working day and twenty days sick leave in a year. Most of the workers (around 35%) have been working in this tea estate for almost 4 years above. About 20% of total laborers

work in factory and 80% work in field. 60% of total laborers are involved in leaf plucking. There are some unproductive laborers like duty in bungalow, Chowkidar etc.

Working in this tea estate					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0-1 years	5	12.5	12.5	12.5
	1-2 years	7	17.5	17.5	30.0
	3-4 years	14	35.0	35.0	65.0
	4 years and above	14	35.0	35.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Medical facilities and cost of medicine: The cost treatment of the employees mostly bears the tea garden authority. They are satisfied with the sanitation facilities they have. On the way, the tea garden has a hospital where laborers get free check-ups and treatment from the authority.

It can be analyzed through SPSS and frequency table has shown as:

Cost of medicine					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Labor welfare authority	10	25.0	25.0	25.0
	Tea garden authority	30	75.0	75.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

About 75% of the respondents argue that they get their medical expenses from the Tea Garden Authority and 20% said about labor welfare authority. It is very helpful for which is also required the Bangladesh labor Act. Festival bonus and allowances: Every year, they get two festival bonuses. The amount per bonus is maximum tk.2250. It depends on past experience and nature of work. But casual or temporary labors get no bonus. Employees of the Hamidia Tea Estate have got every festival allowance such as Eid (Eid-ul-Fitor, Eid-ul-Azha), Durga puja, Lal puja etc. The frequency table is shown below.

Authority provides any festival allowances					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	40	40	100.0	100.0	100.0

Access to electricity facilities: The tea garden authority of Hamidia Tea Estate has provided their employees with electricity facilities which are very helpful. Respondents were delighted with the facilities of electricity. Analytical result from SPSS has showed as below:

Access to electricity facility at your home					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	40	100.0	100.0	100.0

Allotted housing facilities: One permanent laborer gets one house from the tea garden authority. Every house consists of two rooms (one is for sleeping and another for kitchen). Though, it is supposed to be constructed by the employer as per Bangladesh labor law, 2006. Twenty families claimed that they did not get houses yet by employer. So, laborer law is not being violated in all the tea gardens.

Allotted house sufficient for your family					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	10	25.0	25.0	25.0
	Yes	30	75.0	75.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Analyzed data revealed that 75% of total respondents are strongly said that they are getting sufficient outing facilities. About 25% have admitted that it is insufficient.

Pure drinking water: The tea garden authority has tried to supply pure drinking water to their employees. Respondents can be categorized as a source of water into three categories such as hand tube well and water from pond.

Responses have been analyzed through SPSS and results can be shown here:

Source of your drinking water					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Hand tube well	5	12.5	12.5	12.5
	Water from pond	10	25.0	25.0	37.5
	Deep tube well	25	62.5	62.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Around 62.5% of the respondents must use deep tube well water for the fulfillment of drinking and so on and 25% of the respondents use water from ponds which is not hygienic at all.

Respondent educational status and facilities: Educational level of the respondent categorized into five groups (illiterate, only literate, primary, secondary and higher education) to easily interpret educational information.

It is shown in the following:

Education level					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	(d)higher	2	5.0	5.0	5.0
	and above				
	(c) Primary	3	7.5	7.5	12.5
	(a)illiterate	15	37.5	37.5	50.0
	(b)only literate	20	50.0	50.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

After analyzing the primary data, we found that tea garden laborers are basically divided into four groups on the basis of their having education. It is also dramatically found that there is only 5% secondary and 0% higher secondary educational degree among the respondents. The data revealed that 37.5 % of the respondents are illiterate, 50% of the respondents are only literate and 7.5% of the respondents passed

primary school. The highest number of respondents is only literate, that is 50%. At the end of the week respondent has to take his/her wages by giving his/her signature. The percentage has shown as below. After analyzing the data, it is said that most of the laborers are not educated enough. Very few are reached their education to the secondary school.

Ration for respondents: In the following the respondent's ration opinion is presented:

Get ration from the company					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	40	100.0	100.0	100.0

It is remarkable that 100% of respondents are getting ration from the garden owner. Respondents are categorized into more than one group to easily interpret the collected data. But it is found that all of the respondents are enjoying land for gardening and getting 3kg of flour, rice (each dependent family member) as ration. Temporary workers are not getting any fringe benefit as ration.

Land for gardening: According to the data, every laborer gets land for this provision only for permanent laborers. Causal or temporary laborers get no paddy land or ration. The frequency table has shown as below:

Provide land for vegetable gardening					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	40	40	100.0	100.0	100.0

Respect and honor: A tea garden worker is a least respected person in our society. They work so hard for the livelihood of life. They earned little money which con not fulfills their demand properly. On the way, every person needs dignity and honor. But they do not get any honor, and they cannot get proper respect from society also. Most of the respondents have a feeling that they are not equally treated with the mainstream people by the outsiders, and almost 8% respondents feel that they are often looked down and treated as untouchables by the mainstream people. The rest of the respondents do not have the feeling of any discrimination and exploitation as they used to this habit.

Cooking fuel: Most of the houses are small in size, living with more people than their accommodation capacity and therefore lacking privacy from the family members. Most of the respondents use coal, sticks and wood or rest of the crops etc. it is unhealthy for people.

Girls' education: Most of the respondents send their male children to school and on the other hand, very few respondents send their female children to school. It indicates that most of the children including male and female are deprived of their basic right- 'education'. They think girls do not need any education like boys. The situation is getting worse for girls than that of boys in this regard.

Awareness about human rights: Majority people do not have any idea about their basic rights, tolerating everything that may be termed as human rights violation. It is more surprising that many of the respondents do not have any knowledge about their basic needs. They only think about how to eat at night or tomorrow.

Reason behind dropout of school:

According to the observation, there is a reason behind dropout of school. A large number of male and female children aged (6-12) years do not go to school. The poor socio-economic condition of the guardians is mainly responsible because of which the children aged (6-12) years usually remain away from education. This is also the reason for creating child labor. Child labor is very commonly found in tea gardens. Tea garden workers are socio-economically poor and therefore children are forced to work in order to support the family financially. On availability of schools in the premises of gardens is another reason why children are dropout of education. Apart from that, most of the respondents are disinterested in education as they think education is not for their children but for those children belonging to mainstream society.

Economic situation of the employees:

Most of the people do not have time to participate in recreational activities. Women, children and adolescent boys and girls are mostly deprived of all recreational facilities. According to the observation, most of the respondents are unable to fulfill their basic needs since their socio-economic condition is very poor. It is more surprising that many of the respondents do not have any knowledge about their basic. In Bangladesh, tea estates are facing various problems which must be solved to save the tea industry. Earlier, several research was conducted and a researcher found out various problems. These problems can be categorized in the following way:

Problem arises in office and factory: Problem related to management (managerial problem)

Field level/Tea Estate: Main activities are done in the field and most of the laborers are engaged in field. Problems related to the field level activities and their surroundings. There are multidimensional problems in tea production and plantation.

The major problems prevailing in tea garden are seasonal natural calamity: green leaf plucking season starts from March to August, basically in a rainy season, it is common floods, cyclones, storm etc.

On the other hand, researchers found these findings. In most of the gardens, there are no MBBS certified doctors. Only a medical officer and trained nurse are providing hospital service. In a labor section, one cannot think of pure drinking water. Unhealthy atmosphere is common feature in the laborer line; they believe that it is their fate decided by the God. Most of the laborers are addicted to wine made by them.

Antiquated infrastructure like communication (roads), labor house, water supply (kua /dug well/ indira. It is always open.

Road communication is always made of mud. Rainwater always enters into the living room. Workers are afraid of losing their jobs. There is lack of educational institutions and literacy rate is poor. Most of the garden there is no educational institute, not even government primary school. Around 59% of laborers are illiterate.

Conclusions

As we know, human rights are the fundamental right of every human being. People have a dream to live happily full of dignity. The tea garden workers still have dreams and want to change their lives. Tea garden workers and union leaders have the time to understand that education is the fundamental factor for

bringing change to the community and their life. Not only the Hamidia Tea Estate but also all of them should take measures to develop their worker living standard and financial situations. All of them should show deep interest in education and want to see their children educated and engaging in employment other than as tea garden labors. People have the responsibility to give proper respect to them. Government of Bangladesh has a responsibility to organize awareness program about female education and women health and sanitation. Self-awareness makes them confident. After the study, it states that they have less idea about their basic rights. The tea garden should take steps to give proper knowledge about human rights and Government of Bangladesh required laws and international rules and regulations. Their living conditions are not much better. The wage of the tea garden workers of a country is lower than the Indian tea garden workers. They also lost their languages and culture. Tea is a common drink in most countries. It makes us pleasure and relaxed. Tea garden workers, especially tea leaf plackers contribute a lot to provide best tea for us. So, we need to centralize on providing good respect and give them priority in mainstream society.

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