

Bede Women in Bangladesh: An Overview of Their Status

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Abstract

This paper focuses on understanding the way class and gender hierarchies combine to influence the women's position and experiences of a Bangladeshi woman born into the lowest level of class structure. Specifically, this research focuses on the Bede women, as a member of lower class status who has been severely oppressed throughout Bangladesh history. They have long been systematically, historically and institutionally facing challenges and being discriminated in their everyday lives. Bede women's problems encompass not only gender and economic deprivation, but also discrimination associated with ethnic minority position, which in turn results in the denial of their social, economic, cultural and political rights. They become vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation due to their gender and lower class structure. Thus, the problems of Bede women are distinct and unique in many ways and they suffer from the 'triple burden' of gender bias, class discrimination and economic deprivation. This paper tries to highlight the status of Bede women in Bangladesh society. To gain insights into the social and economic status of Bede women, this paper is exploring more closely into their lives and encapsulate the social, economic and human rights situations of Bede women in Bangladesh. This paper might also help the policy maker to take necessary steps to reduce the class and gender discrimination of these Bede women.

Keywords: Bede, Exclusion, Gender, Vulnerability, Violence, Empower

Introduction

Bede community in Bangladesh is racial ethnic minority and floating people, they move from place to place to conduct their business for

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earning. Bede women roaming in villages with knapsack of business products on their head and vociferating to attract people to whom they offer treatments (joint pain, toothache), sell products (home utensils, trinket and amulets, bangles, herbal medicines etc). Some *Bede* women roaming in villages with snake baskets and flutes (*bin*) for showing snake game, catching snake, treating snake biting, offering herbal plants that hinder snake entering in home and also protect people from snake biting, they also known as *Sapuris*² who also entertain people by showing magic. But now entrance of *Bede* people is rare in villages. In a study Maksud & Imtiaj (2006) indicate that *Bede* women usually walk around 10 miles a day for their professional earning. Women work harder and longer than the men and earn for their families, but in decision making their role is negligible. In *Bede* community no women inherit paternal property. In general, the status of women in Bangladesh is very low, like in other South Asian countries. Among them though, *Bede* women as member of ethnic minority group face the worst conditions and oppression. *Bede* women are living a history of pain, agony, sorrow, misconduct, maltreatment and suffering. They are not only the victim of gender discrimination, but also the victim of as a marginalized Muslim community. Moreover, the lives of *Bede* women are spiraling downward from bad to worse. There is no controversy among development planners and workers that there has been very little impact on raising the status of *Bede* women from the development initiatives implemented thus far in Bangladesh. So, in this paper researcher also attempt to develop such an understanding of the position of *Bede* women in Bangladesh and present an analysis of the complex intersectional ties of the challenges they face. This is accomplished through a review of the current theoretical discourse on gender and lower class position and of empirical findings regarding forms of gender- and ethnic minority group faced by *Bede* women in Bangladesh.

Objectives of the Study

- a. To explore the nature of exclusion and vulnerability of Bede women in the context of gender and class basis.
- b. To know about the social problems faced by women in Bede community.

- c. To explain the social rights and basic services of women in Bede community.
- d. To assess some strategies for the well-being of them.

Literature Review

Parven (2018) explored in her article named *Women empowerment of Manta village in darkness* that *Bede* women sometimes now go India (particularly Kalkata and Orissa) by book (passport) with families for earning through their traditional business. In few years ago many of them had no passport, and then they went to India by jumping over barbed wire or paying some money to border guards for crossing. They claimed themselves as *Kabiraj* (village doctor), they made medicine by trees, bones of different animals and offer treatment of pain, heart diseases, the bite of fox and snake, long time fever, and mental problems. They living beside road by setting up small tents covered with plastic materials or black oilcloth. After the end of the business during nine month, they returns home with earned money, and rests of the slothful months they involve in various festivals and wedding programs. *Bede* women go forward with having no education, early marriage, no dream of better life. Manifolds social problem including killing, women harassment, rape or women oppression are hardly seen in *Bede*.

Islam (2018) explained in his article entitled *Dissecting the Nomadic Lifestyle of Bede Community*; the Bengali movie entitled *Beder Meye Josna* had great popularity among the people of Bangladesh during the 90s. The story of movie on the basis of a romantic love between a *Bede* girl (snake-charmer) named *Josna* and the prince of a royal family, and also their struggle of being united. This movie also represents their ways of living by catching snake, showing snake dance with the tune of flutes. A short story titled *Bilasi* by Bengali novelist *Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay* portrays the life of a *Bede* girl (*Sapuria*) and her husband, and social discriminations faced by them. This study also revealed that the role of women in family contribution is regarded more than men in *Bede* community. They are valorous to enter into society without veil for the purpose of earning. They prefer to wearing colorful dress and excessive ornaments for roaming here and there. *Bede* women offer ancestral

mystic treatment (treating diseases by reciting mystic and esoteric mantras) and herbal medicines. Villagers believe that they can rid people from evil spirits due to having supernatural power. With the advancement of society, they are losing popularity of their professions. Consequently, In Dhaka *Bede* women often beg money from city people in busy street and other places. So, they need to be considered as under developmental process.

Farhin (2017) explained in the article named *Bede community welcomes Bangla New Year with first ever dowry-free wedding* that Pohela Baishakh, 2017, the first dowry free marriage was held at *Kamarpara Baidda Patti* by the initiatives taken by *Bidyando* Foundation (working to improve the lives of unprivileged children). Some bride's family unable to pay money for daughter's marriage but they are obliged to pay due to maintain tradition. Then *Bidyando* Foundation took all responsibilities of marriage expenses of one couple with no exchanging of dowry which would inspire Bede men to get married without dowry.

Sharif (2019) explored under the article named *Winds of change transforming Savar's Bede Polli* that *Uttaran* Foundation (established by *Habibur Rahman* for the development of *Bede* people and *Hijra*) has launched a garments named *Uttaran* Fashion for creating employment opportunities of Bede women at Savar. Total seventy five women are now working there and around one hundred five women got training in sewing. The journey of *Uttaran* Fashion was started with the twenty five sewing machines. *Bede* women used to think themselves as only as *Bede* (in terms of their traditional occupations and way of life) and had idea about outside life, through their new employment they have started thinking themselves as part of mainstream society, they are now dreamed with new prospects, aspirations and way of changing .

Theoretical Framework

Concept of Intersectionality

The concept of intersectionality was firstly coined by Crenshaw in 1989, and then the idea was reintroduced by the sociologist Collins in 1990 (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality is a feminist theory, which can be used as an analytical tool to study and understand the

convergence of multiple identities with gender and to respond appropriately to alleviate the discrimination against oppressed classes. The theory is based on the premise that individuals simultaneously belong to multiple communities (that have emerged from social and power structures in the society) and would experience oppression and privilege both at the same time (Symington, 2004). Feminist scholars have used the concept of *intersectionality* to illuminate the interlocking hierarchies of identity that characterize individual experiences and the production of social life (Chow, Collins 1990; Crenshaw 1997). Multiple identities tend to push women to extreme fringes and make them more vulnerable to discrimination in terms of access to basic human rights, opportunities, resources, etc. Most developmental frameworks focus on gender relations and fail to recognize that women are a heterogeneous group and the extent of impact is different for women in different groups. Problems of women, who are at the margins facing the maximum oppression most of the times, tend to go unnoticed. Legal frameworks understand gender and caste discriminations as two distinct concepts and fail to realize that they intersect, as a result of which victims in many cases of discrimination as discussed in the previous sections do not get the justice they rightfully deserve (Symington, 2004).

In feminist studies women and men were analyzed at different and heterogeneous across and within the female and male categories. It is thus an idea often used in critical theories, the ways in which oppressive institutions (caste, class, religion, ethnicity and gender) are interconnected and cannot be examined separately from one another that power and oppression rest upon. In addition, the intersectionality concept is specifically used to address the experiences of people who are subjected to multiple forms of subordination within society, where it claims that gender as the primary factor determining a woman's fate. So Intersectionality theorists elucidate oppression and inequality of women under some precise variables including class, gender, race, ethnicity, and age. A significant insight came from their theories, not all women experience oppression in the same way, the same forces work behind the oppression of women and girl along with the oppression of racial and marginalized people (Crossman, 2020). It is therefore a

methodology of studying relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relationships and subject formation. So researcher has used the concept of intersectionality to present the issues related to marginalize class based discrimination. Some factors researcher address such as class, gender and religion are often critical to empower Bede women in Bangladesh.

Methodology

Study Area

Bedes are the racial minority group in Bangladesh. Around 17 lacs Bede people live in Bangladesh; they live 53 districts in Bangladesh. They have their tribal language named *Thar* (or *Akhomi*), but they usually speak in local language (Bangla). The study was conducted in three areas including *Savar*, *Rampura* and *Tarabo* at Dhaka and *Narayanganj* city in Bangladesh. The study area consists near about sixteen thousand populations. The study conducted at *Porabari*, *Amorpur* and *Kanconpur* villages at *Savar* (these three villages jointly called the *Bede Palli* at *Savar*), a slum behind the East West University at *Rampura* and another slum at *Tarabo* in *Narayanganj* city. Respondents were selected from those three area including *Savar* (*Porabari*, *Amorpur*, *Kanconpur*), *Rampura* and *Tarabo* in Dhaka and *Narayanganj* city. We have selected those places because a large number *Bede* peoples live there.

Methods of the study

Research method is unavoidable to conduct any research about social phenomenon. To conduct this study, we have followed very relevant methodology in where both qualitative and quantitative methods are used for analyzing the status of women in Bede community by collecting empirical data. In order to discuss this issue, we have used questionnaire survey though in-depth interview and non-participant observation and case study in order to collect data as supportive techniques.

Techniques of Data collection and Analysis

We have taken semi-structured Interview (face to face interview) schedule (containing both open and close ended questions) and check

list as tools for data collection following mixed method principles. In order to fulfill the gap of survey method we have taken case study through a check list with open-ended questions. We have taken ten case studies from *Savar Bede palli*, *Bede* slum at *Rampura* and *Tarabo*. A significant portion of information came from case studies that have taken from the respondents. The SPSS (Statistical Package of Social Sciences, version 22) is used for processing and analyzing the survey data. Data has been collected from February to March in 2020.

Sampling procedure

In this study, 31 respondents had been selected as target population from 16000 study population who aged from (15-90) years old. There were around twenty five thousand families including (*Savar*, *Rampura*, *Tarabo*). Random sampling in this study was selected due to shortage of time and long distance of study areas. Six case studies were also conducted from three research sides which were also based on purposive sampling.

Results and Discussion

Socio- demographic characteristics

The present study was conducted among the *Bede* peoples of the three areas, *Bede* villages at *Savar*, *Bede* slum at *Rampura* and *Tarabo* in Dhaka and Narayanganj city. In total 31 female respondents ranging from age 10 to 80+ years were interviewed. The table shows that the age groups of the respondents where it is clearly evident that a large number of respondents (38.7%) belong to the age group (31-40); while (32.3%) is under the age group (21-30); and rests are under the others age groups. The table signifies that a large number of respondents is illiterate (77.4%), from them some can hardly write their name only. Again about (22.2%) of the respondents have understood primary education (I-V). Most of the *Bede* women are still illiterate; it may due to their previous nomadic life, lack of consciousness, poor education facilities or economic hardship. The religious statuses of the female respondents reveal that all they are Muslims by religion and practice Muslim rituals. They become comfort to give their identity as Muslims not as *Bede* due to social prestige. Respondent's marital status shows that the largest numbers

of the female respondents (90.3%) are married and rests are widow and divorced. A great segment (54.8%) of total respondents said that the number of persons in their family is between (3-6 members) and (19.4%) respondent's family size is between (7-9) members. Moreover (12.9%) respondents revealed that their family size is between (1-3) members. On the other hands, (9.7%) of the total respondents have between (14-16) family members and rests (3.2%) respondent's family size is between (10-13) members.

Marriage system in Bede Community

The table shows that the marriage age of the girl, in where a large portion of the respondents (54.8%) said that the marriage age of girl is between 10-15 years, while (45.2%) respondents affirmed that between 16-20 years. In *Bede* community, girls are married at their young age (their age of schooling). Thus their education remains at risk. Around (90.3%) respondents statement was girls go after marriage to their in laws house. Meanwhile (9.7%) claim that they remain in their parent's house.

Table-1: Dowry system prevalent in Bede community

Dowry system	Frequency	Percentage
From bridegroom to bride	19	61.3
From bride to bridegroom	7	22.6
No dowry	5	16.1
Total	31	100.0

Source: Field survey 2020

A unique type of dowry system is prevalent in *Bede* community; in where bridegrooms give money or valuable things to bride in case of marriage because they believe giving money from bride side to groom side is totally *haram* in Islamic laws. Around (61.3%) respondents said about dowry system in where groom give money to bride. While (22.6%) said that bride side give dowry to groom side as like so called dowry system. And rests (16.1%) said about no dowry. In traditional *Bede* community, groom side used to give money to the bride side. At present that process is followed by most of the *Bede* people. The distribution of parental property also follows

the Islamic laws in *Bede* community. But *Bede* community at *Tarabo* follows a different process in where money or valuable gifts is given by bride side to groom side which prevalent in mainstream society and distribution of parental property follows a system where girls get one-fourth of a boy. *Bede* peoples living at *Tarabo* are *Sapuria* by profession. An elderly women (age 96 years) named *Hasna Banu* living at *Rampura Bede* slum said about dowry system. She told that,

Recent my son has get married and all of the marriage expenses including dowry was around Tk. fifty thousand. Without money they can't think of marriage. Some of them have to earn money and some get money from their parents as marriage expenses, such as dowry or Mohorana of marriage (Case study-1).

Nature of work and income

Women's occupation

Occupations of the women in *Bede* community are unique from mainstream occupations. *Shinga lagano*¹ is mostly prevalent occupation among women and carried by 35.48% respondents. They also involved in *pokfalano* (removing germs from teeth). Meanwhile each 6.45% of the respondents affirmed that their occupations are respectively *Jharfuk*² (ghost, disease), selling amulets and trinkets, and snake charming. Only (3.23 %) respondents involve in service.

1. The interesting method of curing sick peoples, the *Bede* woman used *Shinga*, made from buffalo or cattle horn, was a hollow sucker used to draw blood from a sick patient waist for withdrawn to cure the sickness where a cut was made and the *Bede* woman then sucks heavily from the sawed-off tip of the horn, thus sucking out blood (Shawon & Mahbub, 2017).

2. *Jar-fuk* is mostly used as a treatment for diseases in Bangladesh. The *bede* uses this type of folk treatment from their spiritual leaders to overcome their illnesses. The wives drink water with wishes from spiritual leaders during their child birthing, believing that they will be able to give birth without difficulties.

Table-2: Occupations of the women in Bede community

Name of occupations	Frequency	Percentage
Snake Charming	4	12.90
<i>Shinga lagano</i>	11	35.48
Selling medicine	3	9.68
Small business	3	9.68
<i>Jar-fuk</i>	2	6.45
Service	1	3.23
Housewife	4	12.90
Others	3	9.68
Total	31	100

Source: Field survey 2020

On the other hands each (12.90%) of the respondents were respectively housewife and (9.68%) selling herbal medicine. And rest of the (9.68%) involve in other profession. The women of *Bede* community are mostly involved in the occupation of *Hijama* treatment (*Shinga lagano*). The costs of per *Shinga* treatment ranged from Tk. 500 to 5000. Some of them go to Chottogram, *Noakhali* and other districts for earning by performing their traditional economic activities; they live in small tents and remain in one place one to two months there. Most of the women remain in their traditional professions but they want to get alternative employment opportunities. Due to social change their professions are at risk to be attracted people and they think roaming from villages to villages is not their life.

Monthly family income & expenditure

The table illustrates that a significant number 58.1% of the female respondent's monthly family income is between Tk. 6000-10000. While monthly incomes of (29.0%) respondents are between Tk.11000-15000. On the other hands (8.3%) respondents mentioned their monthly family income as Tk. 1000-5000. Another (6.7%) respondent's monthly income is between Tk. 20000-24000. And rests each (1.7%) of the respondent's monthly income respectively Tk.16000-19000, Tk. 25000-29000, Tk. 30000-34000 and Tk.

35000-49000. The findings of the table reflect that most of the respondents are under low income generating socio-economic circumstances. It may due to low level of literacy rate, lack of professional diversities and skill, lack popularity of their usual professions. The findings of the study about monthly expenditure of the respondents showed that a significant number (51.6%) of the respondent's monthly expenditure is between Tk. 6000-10000. While (35.5%) of the total respondents monthly expenditure is between Tk.11000-15000 and a small number of the respondent's monthly expenditure is less than six thousand and also a little number of respondents expends more than fifteen thousand per month.

Table-3. Monthly family income of the respondents

Monthly family income	Frequency	Percentage
1000-5000	1	3.2
6000-10000	18	58.1
11000-15000	9	29.0
16000-20000	1	3.2
21000-25000	1	3.2
26000-30000	0	0.0
31000-35000	1	3.2
36000+	0	0.0
Total	31	100.0

Source: Field survey 2020

Social rights and basic services

Access to Education

The enrollment of children in school for getting education is increasing day by day. That was very unfamiliar in few years ago. Most of people think that without getting education their children won't be able to compete with changing pattern of society. Parent's consciousness and initiatives which have taken for increasing the literacy rate of Bede children work as force behind their school going. A significant number (87.1%) of the respondents elucidate

that their children (both boy and girl child) go to school. While from total school going children (87.1%), (37.5%) Bede girl go to school for getting education. They receive education from local government school, private school, street school, local Madrasa etc. Children in *Rampura Bede* slum don't receive education from any formal educational institutions, they learn from the informal street school organized by the student of East West University. *Uttaran* Foundation has started a project to improve the literacy rate among the children of *Bede* community at Savar. This project named *Uttaran Shikkhaloy* (a coaching center for *Bede* student); the main motto of this project is to improve the overall quality of education of the backward *Bede* children. Around 250 students are now studying there from class four to higher secondary and they can learn their lessons of all subjects from *Uttaran Shikkhaloy*. Among 250 students, most of the girl children prefer to receive education from *Uttaran Shikkhaloy* because it situated near their house. Sometimes the students of *Jahangirnagar University* take classes in *Uttaran shikkhaloy*. A primary school will be built at Savar for *Bede* children.

Access to Health

The table shows that most of the cases they take treatment when they are serious ill. About (22.5%) of the total respondents receive treatment from government hospital. About each (19.35%) % respondents respectively elucidate that they use *Kabiraji*³ formula in the time of their illness. While (16.13%) respondents go local community hospitals for treatment. So it is clear that a significant transformation has occurred in their treatment system. In previous time they only take *Kabiraji*, *Jharfuk*, herbal medicine and domestic treatment but in recent times they go hospitals for treatment due to social change, their permanent settlement and growing consciousness. Due to their financial incapability can't get better treatment facilities. Some of them usually go to private hospitals due to the reluctance to give treatment of the staffs of government hospitals.

3. *Kabiraji* was widely practiced based on informal use of local medicinal plants in rural areas. Healers in both *Kalami* and *Bhandari* practices resorted to religious rituals, and usually used verses of holy books in healing, which required a firm belief of patients for the treatment to be effective.

Table-4: From where they take treatment in case of illness

Getting treatment in case of illness	Frequency	Percentage
Government hospitals	7	22.58
Homeopathy	1	3.23
Local community hospital	5	16.13
Kabiraji and herbal medicine	6	19.35
Domestic treatment	5	16.13
Jharfuk,	4	12.90
Others	3	9.67
Total	31	100.0

Source: Field survey 2020

Maternal care

The findings of the study represents that the vaccination of women during pregnancy period. Around (87.1%) respondents agreed that women get vaccine during pregnancy period. Women of the *Bede* community receive maternal care from Upazila government hospitals. And also get treatment and medicine facilities from other government hospitals. Among them (87.1%), (51.4%) respondents affirmed that women took vaccine from local community hospitals; (37.1%) respondents supposed that women took vaccine from health worker who came to their community to vaccinate women and children and (11.4%) respondents exposed that women got vaccine from other governmental hospitals.

Reproductive health

Women got manifold pregnancy assistance like pregnancy advice, vaccine, vitamin and iron tablets etc. Around (48.1%) respondents illustrated that women get vaccine during their pregnancy period, (40.4%) respondents exposed that they get pregnancy advice, and (11.5%) respondents affirmed that women get vitamin and iron tablets from those hospitals as pregnancy assistance. The study represents that a small number (35.5%) of the total respondents said that they get nutritious food during their pregnancy time. And a great

segment (64.5%) of the respondents exposed that they don't get nutritious food in their pregnancy period. In spite of the necessity of taking nutritious food, they surrendered themselves to the system of poverty cycle. And malnutrition goes forward with them. Among them (64.5%), (63.3%) respondents claimed that poverty creates hindrance for them to take nutritious food, not only pregnancy period they can't get nutritious food in normal days. Their income is not sufficient to bear family expenses like buying extra nutritious food. While (20%) respondents affirmed that high price of nutritious food also another reason. Moreover (10%) of the respondents are explained about their unconsciousness. And rests (6.7%) respondents exposed that lack of pregnancy knowledge as reason behind not taking nutritious food during pregnancy time. They are not least concern about their reproductive health. Most of the women don't take extra care of themselves during pregnancy. In before, they worked for earning in spite of being pregnant, and took their baby child in one kind of cloth bags in the time of roaming villages for performing professional activities.

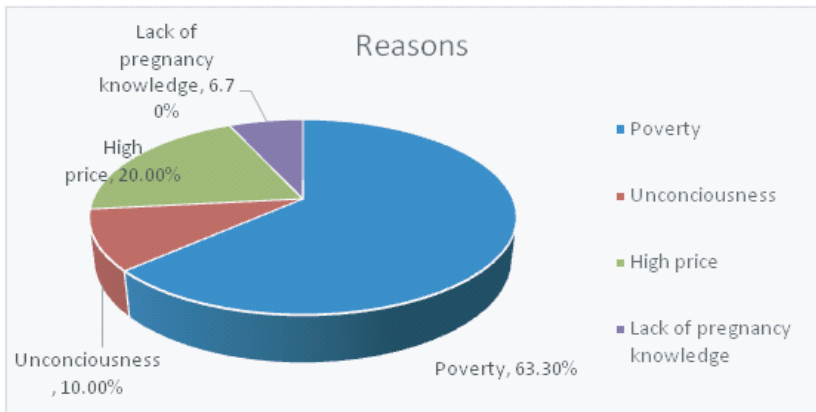


Figure-1: Reasons behind not getting nutritious food during pregnancy

Access to Occupation

Various initiatives have taken for the self-sufficiency of women. Around (25.8%) respondents explained that they get assistance for their self-sufficiency and (74.2%) of the total respondents said that

they didn't get any assistance for their self-sufficiency. The findings of the study also show that self-sufficiency of women contributed by governmental, non- governmental or voluntary organizations. From all of the total respondents (66.7%) illustrated that self sufficiency of women contributed by governmental organizations. Then (33.3%) respondents said women get assistance for their self- sufficiency from non-governmental organizations. Those organizations give employment opportunities, business and personal loan facilities, various training programs. Around each (38.9%) respondents explained respectively that organizations arrange various training programs (like tailoring, sewing) for self-sufficiency of the women in Bede community and also give employment opportunities. And rests (22.2%) respondents illustrated that women can take loan from those organizations for their business purposes after getting training in sewing and tailoring. A garment factory named Uttaran Fashion has launched by Uttaran Foundation for the development of Bede women, the main motto of this project is to create employment opportunities and training facilities for Bede women. In Uttaran Fashion, total 75 women are working there. Uttaran Fashion supervisor Sahanaj Parveen said that,

This gives us to honor, which our traditional profession couldn't give. Now we hope for a better life for ourselves and our next generations. We hope our children will employed themselves as government officer or other respectful professions after completing their education. We don't want to see them as Bede anymore. We spend a miserable life with many hardships but don't want this type of life for our generations (Case study-2).

Access to decision making

The study shows that the involvement of women in the decision making process of family. Most of the (93.5%) respondents said that their family involvement is high in family decisions than others women of Bangladesh. But rests only (6.5%) explained that women of their family were excluded from any family decisions. So, it is clear that the participation of women in decision making is not discriminatory, they have right to participate in any decision making,

except a little number of family, most of the family concern with the opinion of women. Women are weak, women are less experienced, and women are less capable, lack of knowledge as reasons behind the women exclusion from decision making process in family.

Table-5: Family members who are involved in family decisions

Decision	Male	Female	Both	Total
Family financial decision	22.6%	12.9%	64.5%	100%
Family planning decision	32.3%	12.9%	54.8%	100%
Decision of children's treatment	22.6%	16.1%	61.3%	100%
Decision of children's education	22.6%	16.1%	61.3%	100%
Decision about their own treatment	16.1%	16.1%	67.7%	100%
Others family decision	19.4%	16.1%	64.5%	100%
Total				100%

Source: Field survey 2020

The above mentioned table showed that the percentage of family members who take the decisions about their family matters. And in some male dominated family, only male members take any decisions of every matters, but also female dominated family are seen in Bede community. In the decision of family financial matters, (22.6%) respondents said that male members of their family take any financial decisions, (12.9%) respondents claimed that family financial decisions are taken by the female members of their family and a large portion (64.5%) of the total respondents explained that both male and female members of their family take financial decisions in their family. In case of family planning decisions, (32.3%) respondents said that male persons of their family, (12.9%) respondents narrated that female persons of their family, and (54.8%) of the total respondents explained that both male and female persons of their family take the decisions about family planning. In terms of the decisions about children's treatment, (22.6%) respondents said male, (16.1%) respondents explained female and (61.3%) respondents narrated both male and female members of their family are involved in this decision making process. In case of the decisions about their children's education, (22.6%) male, (16.1%) female respondents take

decisions, and (61.3%) both male and female mutually consult with each other about decisions of children's education. Another case of the decision about their (husband, wife or elderly person of family) own treatment, (16.1%) of the total respondents claimed that their own treatment related decisions are taken by male members of their family, (16.1%) said females have participation in the decision making process, and a major segment (67.7%) of the total respondents claim that both male and female can contribute in decision making procedure of their treatment. And finally in case of any other family decision, (19.4%) claimed that males are involved in decision making, (16.1%) said that females have access in decisions and a major section (64.5%) of the total respondents explained both male and female mutually consult with each other to take any other decisions related to family matters. So, it is clear that male and female mutually dependent to each other to take any kinds of decisions including financial, treatment, family planning, about children's education and treatment etc.

A female Bede Halima Khatun said

The only thing which is obvious that Bede women earn money, but most of the cases they have no control over their earnings. Women are used as earning machines only. Sometimes the husband stays outside the gate of their house to take the money from his wife so that he can spend the money according to his own choice, not the choice of his wife, which is not empowerment. If the women could spend money according to their own choice, it could be their empowerment at least to some extent both socially and economically (Case study-3).

Access to Justice

In total eight lineage of *Bede* community live in Savar including *Bajikor, Malbajikor, Sander, Mal Bede, Borshian, Sapuria, Kabiraj,* and *Tola*. Among from 8 lineage, the Eight representatives (*Sarder*) work for the betterment of the people of their own lineage. In spite of those eight representatives, two leaders (*Sarder*) are the head of *Bede* community. They all are works for their development. Panchayat Pratha is seen in *Bede* community for arbitration of any conflicts or

other affairs, in where a prominent old aged people regarded as *Sarder* who has the inherited supremacy over other people and gives resolution in any conflict within his community. No one can disobey the rules of *Panchayat Sarder*. They go to *Sarder* (*Panchayat* leader) for arbitration instead of going police station because *Sarder* is the supreme power holder in their community. Going police station for arbitration is rare in *Bede* community.

Panchayat leader resolves all types of affairs including conflict, marriage, separation between husband and wife, and other family matters. *Sarder* deals with every matter in his community because of his supreme leadership over the members. The findings of the study shows that the medium of resolution of conflict between husband and wife. Around (40.3%) of the total respondents explained that Local *Panchayat* plays a significant role to resolve the conflict or any problem between husband and wife. Moreover, (45.2%) said negotiation as a medium of conflict resolution, while (14.5%) respondents elucidated that women go their parent home in case of conflict with husband. First, women try to resolve through negotiation, then go to parent house and seek help from their guardians, but finally in case of severity they seek help to *Sarder* (local *Panchayat*).

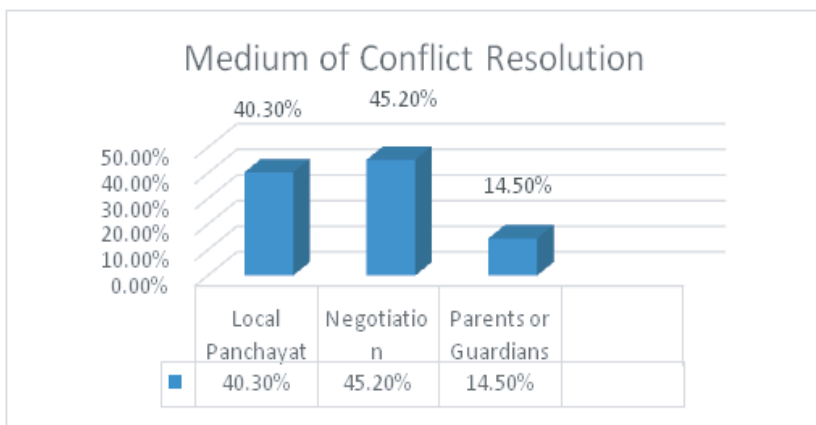


Figure-2: Medium of conflict resolution in family affairs

The main reason behind not going for seeking legal help is *Panchayat Pratha*, in where every arbitration are solved by *Sarder*.

Around (60.9%) respondents explained that they don't seek legal help because their resolution is possible through negotiation or through local *Panchayat*. While (21.7%) of the total respondents said that it is rare in their community to seek legal arbitration, so they feel fear to be alone from whole society for breaking the rule. And (17.4%) respondent elucidated women face criticism if they seek legal help in police station. The findings of the study also shows that the gender discrimination in judicial arbitration in local *Panchayat* conducted by leader (*Sarder*), in where only (9.7%) respondents said women face discrimination and a large number (90.3%) explained that women face no discrimination because women of *Bede* community get respect from all people within their group. Tendency to blame women and gender biasness turned decision to the favor of men. Sometime arbitrator don't listen women words properly that make discriminatory decision.

Access to Politics

Political involvement of *Bede* female is very low. From total 31 respondents, only one respondent is politically involved in national politics of Bangladesh. But a greater segments of female respondents explained that they have no involvement in politics. So, it is clear that their involvement in national politics is below than average. They have no representatives in national politics that can represent the whole *Bede* community in Bangladesh. As they are the citizen of Bangladesh, patriotism is seen in their activities. They participate the festivals of national days like Independence Day (26th march), victory day (16th December), International mother language day (21st February), and mourning day (15th August) of Bangladesh. They said that, Bangladesh is their birthplace, so it is their responsibility to take part in these programs and act like an active citizen.

Vote giving rights

The below mentioned table showed that a major portion (87.1%) of the total respondents agreed that they have national identification number as an evidence of Bangladeshi citizen. But (12.9%) respondents said that they don't have national identification number due to some reasons, such as having no right of franchise, unconsciousness, lack of political knowledge, have no permanent

address. When they lived in boat they have no NID card. Some has also dual citizenship both in India and Bangladesh. *Bede* people can give vote due to having national identification number. Around (67.7%) respondents agreed that they give vote in elections. But (32.3%) respondents said that they don't give vote, some don't give vote in spite of having NID card, and some don't give vote due to under-age. They give vote in national elections, *Pouroshava* election, and Union *Parishad* election. They said that as a citizen of Bangladesh they have the right to vote and involvement in politics. Though, few years ago they had no right to give vote or right to political involvement. But also they have least right to stand for election.

As a Bede woman our status in the society is lowest to lowest. We are excluded and discriminated though generation to generation and it was very difficult to be involved in political activities. Lack of female education, rigid class system, negative attitudes to women, and the rights of the woman is the main responsible for not attending in politics. We think that we cannot ensure a good woman leader in our community for our development. Now we have to realize that change will happen if we get involved in politics. If we can realize the benefits from this involvement, we will surely make time to participate in politics alongside our everyday work. If we ensure a significant level of participation in politic then we can quite capable of demanding and protecting our rights and obligation. The empowerment of Bede women and girls is the only way out of their poverty and oppression (Case study-4).

6.5. Social problems of women

Women in every society face more or less some problems. The women of *Bede* community are not exception. They also face some social problems like early marriage, torture, malnutrition, discrimination and others. In where around (31.3%) respondents supposed that they face malnutrition. Then (21.9%) respondents narrated that women suffer from torture as social problem. Then around (18.8%) respondent narrated that women face early marriage. And (12.5%) explained workload as problem faced by women in their community. While

(10.9%) respondents said that dowry is their social problem. And again discrimination is faced by women in their community explained by (4.7%) respondents. Early marriage of the *Bede* girl in Savar *Bede* community is decreasing through the declaration of a police officer, he said who will give marriage to their children after 18 years old, and the marriage expenses will be taken by him. In 2014 or 2015 he stopped three marriage (in where the girls were under 18), and then later when the girls reached 18 years old, he took the responsibility of all expenses of those three marriage.

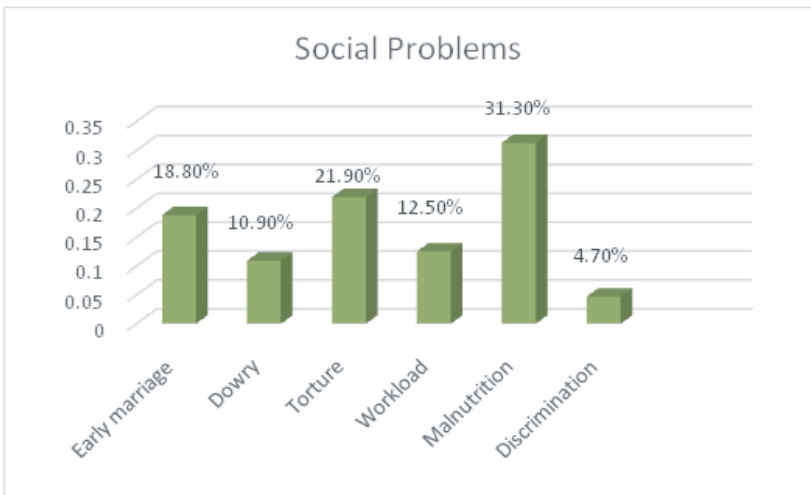


Figure-3: Social problems faced by women in Bede Community

Such a way feeling share a Bede woman, she said

As an ethnic minority women and illiterate women, I am very poor here to hold social position. I feel discrimination in home, society and in the nation. How I can go ahead? Due to limited access to education, information and productive resources, we have limited access to income and paid employment. It will not possible to empower our women without giving proper education and employment. Our life is a slave of man and upper class people. Sometime I think too much about our future. When I think about our future, then I feel worried, but I have to come in normal form because it is very difficult to find any alternative way (Case study-5).

Women harassment

Harassments are prevalent mostly in our society like a curse. Women of *Bede* community also face harassment. Around (64.5%) respondents said that women face harassment when they go for work in outside. And rests (35.5%) explained that women don't face harassment when they go out to work. A great segment of *Bede* women are involved in economic activities, but sometimes they feel unease to go outside for work because of harassment. Harassment makes them to feel they have no status and roaming around villages for conducting economic performances is not respectful deeds. Women in *Bede* community face several types of harassment like molestation, teasing, slang, insult and others. Among them (28.3%) respondents said that women mostly face slang used by male when they go out for work. While (24.5%) are exposed that women face molestation by outsider when they go for work. Then (18.9%) respondents exposed that women get bad proposal by outsider. Meanwhile (13.2%) respondents claimed teasing as harassment types that faced by women. And again, insult or humiliation is faced by (7.5 %) respondents, and women didn't get enough price of goods which interpreted by 5.7% respondents. A little number 6.5% of the total respondents have statements about harassment of women by the people of their own community and a major segment 93.5% disagreed with the previous statements.

Violence against Women

The study revealed that violence against women in *Bede* community. In where (71.6%) of the responds stated that women in *Bede* community are abused by their husband. And (28.4%) respondents affirmed that women in *Bede* community don't be abused by their husband.

Table-6: Forms of violence against women

Forms of torture	Frequency	Percentage
Physical torture	14	45.2
Slang	14	45.2
Fear of divorce	3	9.7
Total	31	100.0

Source: Field survey 2020

Among them (51.6%), physical torture as a form of abuse that explained by (45.2%) respondents. While also (45.2%) respondents said that women suffered from slang language by their husband. And rests (9.7%) respondents narrated that men show fear of divorce to their wives as a form of abuse. Violence against women is nothing new in society, women in every society suffer from violence but the severities of violence vary from society to society. But according the women in Savar *Bede Palli*, severe women abuse is less prevalent in *Bede* community. Slapping or minor physical torture, using slang are the major form of women abuse in *Bede Palli*.

One of the respondents said,

I could not attend to my work last week because that time my husband was beaten me so much. My whole body is aching still now. Most of the day, he takes ganja and local mod and come back home at midnight. This is not unusual, rather, it's quite a regular event...how can I stop him? How would I? My parents are poor; they will not be able to take shelter even for a few days. Whole day I busy with my occupational activities and domestic work, but it has no value to him. He gives me not a single penny for my family and also insists me to get him money for goua (gambling) and mods. More or less every month has to borrow money to relatives or friends to maintain my family? But it became too difficult to me maintain this large family (Case study-6).

Conclusions

In this study we have tried to analyze the nature of exclusion and vulnerability in the context of gender and class basis, their social problems, social rights and basic services, and strategies for the well-being of women in *Bede* community. *Bede* women are losing the demand of their traditional economic activities due to rapid social change. Some of them continue their traditional profession for survival due to lack of alternative means of income. Government and non-government organization has taken many initiatives to create alternative employment opportunities instead of traditional professions of *Bede* women. *Bede* women are traditionally good entrepreneurs and involved with economic activities. But in this emerging crisis they need leadership and entrepreneurship development training.

And also can be imparted them in paramedic and nursing training because they have knowledge about healing services, it would be helpful for them to develop themselves as community health service provider. In Bede community issues of birth and marriage registration should be promoted and child marriage should be eliminated to promote female education. Due to modernization their profession is at risk, so alternative employment opportunities should be arranged for them.

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