

Evaluate the Influence of Tea-laborer in Society and Culture of Greater Sylhet: Perspective Kamalganj Upazila, Bangladesh

Saifur Rahman Sajal

Freelance Bengali writer, Graduate from the Folklore Department of Rajshahi University

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Received: January 19, 2022
Accepted: February 25, 2022
Volume: 3
Issue: 2

After engaging various ethnic groups to produce tea, they start living together and through cultural and social interaction, they started introducing an almost identical social system. Although tea-laborers are a significant part of greater Sylhet, their traditional culture and social system have been neglected in this area due to education and economic backwardness. So, the effects of the tea-laborers social system are notorious.

KEYWORDS

Tea-Laborer, culture, influence,
Sylhet.

1. Introduction

Along with the amplification of society and civilization, different ethnicities are living in mutual contiguity for their own needs. This is why cultural transactions or exchanges have occurred. In this way, through cultural changes and evolution, people adapt themselves to the existing society. Sometimes society and culture are influenced by the political transition. However, no nation can easily leave its adopted lifestyle.

2. Society and Culture of Tea-laborers

To know any local community and its society and culture, it is necessary to focus on the essential aspects of life such as birth-marriage-death, family, social system, language, education, religion, etc. Moreover, it is needed to have a conception about the emergence and evolution of the population, cultural development section, etc. After discovering the tea plants in the greater Sylhet region, the English concentrated on the tea business. The tea-workers were brought different places of India to this region. British brokers help with this. After the division of the country, some of them went to the border region of modern India but most of them are still there.

3. Family System

Most of the families of tea-laborer groups of Kamalganj are patriarchal. Father can make final decisions about the family. Except for some of the Muslim families, girls do not get parental property. If there is no son in the family, the property of grandfather can get a grandson. If there is no grandson, then the uncle, otherwise male cousins will get the properties.

Women participate in every work of the family. They earn money by laboring in the tea garden. The majority of women workers are seen in the tea garden but they do not get enough respect from family and society. After the death of the father, the eldest son takes responsibility for the family and he takes the role of father. Some joint families are seen in the tea laborers colony. The position of wise persons like grandparents is very highly respected.

4. Social System

In the society of laborers, there are two types of social systems are observed. Living together with different tribes, a social system has grown up among them. Many races have their social administrative system. For example, 'Majhi' is the head of the village of the Mahali community. In addition to being the arbitrator, he has organized religious and social programs.

5. Language

Once upon a time, tea-laborers had their language. Even, now there are still some parts of it. The tea-laborers who work in different tea gardens of Kamalganj are forgetting their language, due to the isolation of their community. Many of the new generations do not know that they had something called language. The tea-laborers community uses Bhojpuri or mixes Bangla and Bhojpuri language among themselves. Because of poverty, they can not continue practices of their language and culture. The new generation of children does not feel the interest to learn their traditional language. They speak it a little bit in their family but use Bengali in all sectors. Ancestors of some tribes can not consign to successors of the uniqueness and originality of their languages. As a result, their native language was lost for the influence of various languages. Now they express their attitude in the language of different people and a mixed language of Hindi-Bengali_Asamese-Nagri. This language is known as 'Baghani Language' or 'Jangli Language'.

6. Education

The literacy rate of the tea-laborer community is not more than 10 persons. According to the official rules, there is primary education in each tea estate. After primary education here, most of them drop out. Because when children become little elder, parents send them to work.

7. Artwork

Some tribes are proficient in making nice baskets by bamboo-rattan. Women can knit lovely clothes. Girls are drawing beautiful Alpana on their living rooms wall.

8. Food-Habit

The food habits of most of the tea-laborers are different from their main community. They eat rice, chira, muri, bread. While working in tea gardens, they ate rice or bread with 'paati sena' or 'paati bharta'. They made it by cutting tea leaves and mixing chanachur, boiled potato, green onion, small chilis. They make it for lunch due to poverty. A kind of domestic alcohol called 'Haria' is very popular with them.

9. Birth

There is a great influence of religion in the rituals of birth. Although most of them are Hindu, their rituals of birth are more varied than Bengali Hindus. The tea-laborers celebrate various customs and rituals from pregnancy to naming children. The most popular customs and rituals of the tea tea-laborer community are kherangbil of Halam, panchbati of Bonaj, chatiar of Robidas, chathiar of Nunia, chutkabhuca of Bonaj, chuhika and barhaiya of Nunia, ekushia of Bonaj, panchagabddi of Robidas, shouchata, naming, khumpakhai, annoprashan, dhutimilai and rishamibam of Halam.

10. Marriage

In tea-laborer society, a marriage ceremony is celebrated in a festival environment. Married women wear sindhur on the forehead and shankha in the hand. Girl-betting and dowry system is still in their society. Highly enthusiastic, they are comfortable with cash transactions. There are divorce or separation customs of tea workers society, usually, infertility, fornication, etc. are the main causes of divorce. Polygamy, widows' weddings, etc. are also seen. In the tea workers society, the behavioral customs are used in the marriage ceremony are achi, arthangte, kahar vaat, kaisha, kuhja, gari gaoai, pujaiya, mangalacharar, manana, marahu, muh dehai, rottoi, logon, logon bandha, lota paani, sagai, horish, etc. At present, it is noticeable that there is a universality of marriage rituals in the living communities of tea-workers. Probably that small groups who have lived together for a long time have created a kind of cultural interaction. However, some community-based specific rituals are still celebrated.

Marriage is forbidden in the same group of Mundas. Bride and groom like each other to see one another. Before the wedding night, the bride comes to the groom's house. All night is celebrated with jhumur dance and a local liquor called hariya.

In Kurmi's society, there is also not seen same-group marriage. Boys and girls in Nuniya's society generally can not express their views independently. But nowadays they can marry as per their own preferences. In Halam society, marriage is controlled by intermarriage customs. Marriage is banned in their own sub-group. The marriage is held in an inexpensive environment. When a child grows up in Kairi society, the talking of marriage is discussed among families. According to the Khariya's custom, the marriage proposal will be brought from the bride's party. The effect of the Child Marriage Prevention Act of Bangladeshis being influenced by tea-worker societies.

11. Religion

Most of the workers are from the Hindu religion. But their religion is not just like the Bengali Hindus, it can be said a mixture of traditional and mythological religions. Besides, there are Muslims, Christians and other religious people also living here, People from different communities and tribes of tea-workers live in harmony. They help each other in danger. Even they invite other religions' people to various religious festivals.

The Deshoalies believe in Ram Avatar. Their main religious festival is the Chot Puja. The festival is four days long. The women of the house are fasting. At this time, it is necessary to follow strict rules of all kinds of food and marriage life. All members of the family refrain from accepting meat.

Nunias are very conscious of their religious worship. No worshipping is considered a serious delict. Halams believe in traditional Hinduism. They have gods and goddesses of Hinduism and also have their own gods and goddesses. The traditional deities of Halam community are Bakla Burasa, Toikeltang, Matlikuchang, etc. They believe that these deities are capable of doing good in the family. In addition to these gods, Aimumang is worshiped as the family's savior.

12. Influence on Culture

Once the tea-laborer communities of Moulvibazar used different religions, languages, artworks, eating habits, birth-marriage-death centric rituals. But coming as tea-laborers to this area, they became minorities and now they lived together. Thus, due to cross-culturalism, they were introduced to common cultural activities. Their cultural customs come from traditional society. Due to lack of social interaction, very little of these ritualistic customs has been able to influence the Bengalis.

13. Influence on Society

From the above discussions, it easily seems that the effects of the tea-laborers social system are notorious. Because of the differentiation of local and national administration systems, their traditional social system has been eradicated and a new social system has developed in the social interaction of Bengali non-Bengali workers. These newly formed social systems are limited to themselves; they do not influence the greater social system of this region.

14. Conclusion

Birth-marriage-death, family, social system, language, education, religion, etc. are most related to the society and cultural system of tea-laborer in greater Sylhet. Most of the families of tea-laborer groups of Kamalganj are patriarchal but women participate in every work of the family. Living together with different tribes, a social system has grown up among them. Generally, tea laborers wear sari, pant, shirt, lungi. During working time man and women both workers wear a towel. While working in tea gardens, they ate rice or bread with 'paati sena' or 'paati bharta'.

They made it by cutting tea leaves and mixing chanachur, boiled potato, green onion, small chilis. They make it for lunch due to poverty. A kind of domestic alcohol called ‘Haria’ is very popular with them. There is a great influence of religion in the rituals of birth. Although most of them are Hindu, their rituals of birth are more varied than Bengali Hindus. Most of the workers are from the Hindu religion. But their religion is not just like the Bengali Hindus, it can be said a mixture of traditional and mythological religions. Due to lack of social interaction, very little of these ritualistic customs has been able to influence the Bengalis and the effects of the tea-laborers social system are notorious.

15. References and Notes

Sagor, K.A. (2006). Bangladesher adibasider katha. Patroput.

Murmu, M. (2009). Adibasi anweshon. Naoroj KItabistan.

Collected from Field: Aloka Saontal, Age: 20 years, Occupation: Housewife, Address: Notun Line, Phulbari Tea Estate.

Collected from Field: Khodeja Begum, Occupation: Tea-laborer, Age:35 years, Husband: Malek, Workplace: Dalui Tea Estate.

Collected from Field: Gangaram Sil, Age: 60 years, Occupation: Barber, Social Status: Freedom Fighter.

Collected from Field: Avimonyu Rajgor, Age: 57 years, Occupation: Farmer, Address: Road no. 07, Phulbari Tea Estate.

Collected from Field: Nomi Kurmi, Occupation: Tea-worker, Workplace: Dalui Tea Estate

Collected from Field: Rajkumar Mahali, Age: 45 years, Occupation: Thikadar (one kind of guard), Workplace: Madhabpur Lake.

Collected from Field: Sushel Kayastha, Occupation: Tea electric laborer, Workplace: Khurma Tea Estate.

Islam S., and A.B.M. Saiful. (2013). Gobeshona poddhati o Kaushol. 2nd ed. Dhaka, Dr. Sharifa Sultana Hasanat, 2014.

SPECIAL ISSUE: DR. MORVE ROSHAN K.^{1*} & Dr. Md. Habibur Rahman²

1. Assistant Professor (Adjunct), University of Lodz, Poland & Honorary Research Associate, Bangor University, United Kingdom. Email: morveroshan@rediffmail.com

2. Associate Professor, Department of Folklore, University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh

