

Everyday Challenges and Overall Social Impact of the Bede Community: In a Quest for Equality in The Society of Bangladesh

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Abstract

Though the origin of ‘River Gypsies or Bedes’ traces back to the ethnic group of Arakan but they have been an integral part of Bengali culture for more than 350 years. Even then, the community did not obtain the constitutional recognition from the People’s Republic of Bangladesh that contributed towards deprivation of all those basic rights that an ordinary national would have been entitled to. Years of marginalization and deprivation have caused Bede’s heritage on the horizon of extinction by transforming their traditional livelihood to modernism, resulting in the loss of cultural diversity in the country. Part III of the Bangladesh Constitution enumerates the inclusion of special provisions that will promote and improve the condition of the backward section community. Further, the provisions of international instruments enshrine similar perspectives along with other basic, necessity rights; however, these will only be ornamental if no suitable measures are adopted from the government’s side. Interestingly, the government has depicted some appreciable strategies recently to bestow protection, prevention, and enhancement of marginalized communities by drafting the Anti-Discrimination Act, where these communities would be settled in the mainland to mitigate those inequalities they face every day, but unfortunately, the outcome still has not been satisfactory. Thereby, this research study proposes and analyses the following factors which caused years of suffering along with the extent to which it persuaded the upcoming extinction of culture and further focusing on how the state and the mainstream society are willing to revive their cultural heritage with some recommended proposals.

Key Words: River Gypsies, Marginalization, Deprivation, Non-discrimination, Cultural Heritage.

I. Introduction

The evolution of human civilization commenced from the settlement of river areas which assisted in flourishing the development of human beings throughout history. Reflecting upon the culture of Bangladesh, civilization began in the same way and the country can be referred to as the riverine country because about 700 rivers (including tributaries) flow over the heart of Bangladesh. This became an earning source of livelihood for many people and from where the journey of ‘River Gypsies’ began, local people summoning them as ‘Bede or Bedey’. About a million of Bedes are living in various districts of the country currently.

The River gypsy, also known as ‘Water Gypsy’ or ‘Nomadic People’, have been contemplated as one of the most marginalized and ethnic groups or nomadic communities in Bangladesh. Yet, the Bedes have not been enlisted as an ethnic group in the census of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), Ministry of Planning, and the Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh.² As a consequence, this persuaded the dispossession of basic human rights ranging from right to food, shelter, education, medical care, water, and even proper sanitation. Even the rates of poverty, child marriage, lack of job opportunity, lack of consciousness about family planning and lack of education are relatively high among them. Many research studies have demonstrated that 90%

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² Carmen Brandt, *The 'Bedes' Of Bengal: Establishing An Ethnic Group Through Portrayals*, 330 (2015).

have no shelter, 90% are non-voters until 2008,³ 95% drink dirty water from rivers with extremely poor health and family condition,⁴ more than 90% of the male illiterate while 96% of *Bede* children have never received any schooling, and the overall poverty rate is a shocking 98%.⁵

Apparently, the Constitution of Bangladesh emphasizes the need for cultural identification with provisions for basic necessities, rural development and right to education under Part II. Moreover, Part III reflects that no person shall be subjected to any kind of discrimination and if necessary, special privilege will also be granted to the underprivileged people of the community (*Art. 27 & 28*). Despite being an essential part of Bengali heritage, no constitutional recognition has been granted to them and unusual lifestyle and traditional cultural practices of the Bedes have made their relationships with ordinary people difficult.

Though being domiciles of Bangladesh, the lack of official recognition from the government has pushed their community into an uncertain future, dismantling all such constitutional rights which every citizen of a nation deserves. The struggle of surviving with a high rate of illiteracy and poverty has forced them to relocate from traditional livelihood to conventional professions and if this continues, then it may extinct the cultural diversity the community adds to the country.

II. Objectives & Methodology

This research paper will reveal the gravity of social discrimination and racism experienced by the Bede community through critical evaluation of remedial measures existing in both national and international legislation with relevant case laws; further, exhibiting how it degrades the social image about them in the mainstream community. In addition, the research paper aims to highlight and identify the factors which foster discrimination and deprivation of rights towards the Bede community; to analyse the depth of deprivation, discrimination, and exclusion of the Bede community and to determine whether any legal remedy is available towards the protection of their human rights. Moreover, it attempts to recommend strategic policies for improving the security, condition, and ensuring the rights of the marginalized Bede community and to assist future researchers to understand the community for further research.

In order to achieve the above mentioned research objectives, the present background elaborates on how the journey of the Bede community began with the deprivation of the following entitled basic rights and highlights those factors of social stigma still prevalent today. Moreover, the comparison has been made with the existing laws and regulations of Bangladesh along with the international instruments and relevant case laws and principles that have been depicted. To improvise and analyse the research study, information from secondary data has been accumulated from different published and unpublished materials, books, journals, articles, case laws, newspapers, and websites.

³ A.K.M. Maksud Imtiaz Rasul, *Background And Justification, The Nomadic Bede Community And Their Mobile School Program*, 2 (2006), https://Keithlyons.Me/Wp-Content/Uploads/2010/12/Bede_School.Pdf.

⁴ Mohammad Sujoun Lasker, Liza Mithila Dio, Mohammad Hasan Chowdhury, Md. Sajjat Hossain, Md. Nurul Islam & Md. Jayed Chowdhury, *Lifestyle Of The Nomadic River Gypsies And Their Threat Narrative: A Tale Of Two Villages In Bangladesh*, 165 (2019).

⁵ Philip Gain, *The Story Of A Floating People, A Nomadic Existence*, THE DAILY STAR, Jan. 25, 2019, <https://www.thedailystar.net/Star-Weekend/Spotlight/News/Water-Land-1692571>.

III. Terminology

Derived from the Greek origin, the term, 'Gypsy or Bede' also referred to as 'Nomades', means a group within a race of people who are traveling to various places and have the least interest to settle down over any land permanently.⁶ During Mughal period, the Manta people were used to call 'Bedey or Bede' after the Bangla word 'Baidda' which meant the village doctor or healer of the village. But instead, they tried to defend their Arab background on the basis of resemblance between the words of 'Bede' and 'Bedouin' as the term was offensive to their community.⁷ Ethnically, they belong to Mong-tong (Mangta) ethnic group of Arakan, Myanmar, migrating to Bangladesh in the 1630s, accompanied by the fugitive king of Arakan, Ballal Raja, and settled in Bikrampur area near Dhaka; latter dispersed out to remote areas of Bengal and Assam.⁸

The Bedes are culturally distinct from the main Bengali group and they have their own language called Thet or Ther⁹. Apart from this, their culture has been mentioned numerous times by many famous Bengali novelists in Bengali Literature, exhibiting how their culture is parallel to Bengalis, such as Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's famous short story titled 'Bilashi' portraying the life of a snake-charmer's daughter and her husband. Famous national poet Jasimuddin also composed a beautiful poem titled "Babu Selam Bare Bar", had drawn up the character and lifestyle of a Bede woman.¹⁰ This evolved the notion of Bedein Bengali language, as a group of people or a caste that make their livelihood by capturing snakes and entertaining people by making the snakes dance with the tune of their flutes, providing traditional and spiritual healing services, performing magic and monkey shows and selling of bangles and trinkets.¹¹ Thus, it is evident to state that they have been a part of Bengali heritage for a long time.

IV. Background of Bedes:

a. Geographical Placement

Bedes are located mainly, more or less, in nearly all Dhaka division districts. But that they are also dispersed in other districts as well as in the division of Chittagong in Brahmanbaria, Comilla, Chandpur, Noakhali and Chittagong, in the division of Sylhet in Sunamganj, Moulavibazar and Habiganj; in the division of Rajshahi in Rangpur, Dinajpur, Bogra, Rajshahi and Pabna, as well as of Khulna in Jessore, Kushtia, Chuadanga, Narail, Khulna, Bagerhat and in the division of Barisal in Patuakhali and Barisal.¹²

b. Language

⁶ Cambridge Dictionary, <https://Dictionary.Cambridge.Org/Dictionary/English/Nomad>.

⁷ Brandt, *supra*.

⁸ Bedey, *Banglapedia* (Feb. 25, 2015) <http://En.Banglapedia.Org/Index.Php?Title=Bedey>.

⁹ Derek S. Johnson, Tim G. Acott, Natasha Stacey & Julie Urquhart, *Social Well Being and The Values Of Small-Scale Fisheries*, 202 (2018).

¹⁰ Sariful Islam, *Dissecting the Nomadic Lifestyle Of 'Bede' Community*, DAILY SUN, Mar. 30, 2018, <https://www.Daily-Sun.Com/Magazine/Details/298572/Dissecting-The-Nomadic-Lifestyle-Of-%E2%80%98Bede%E2%80%99-Community/2018-03-30>.

¹¹ *Hereinafter*.

¹² Md. Noman Amin, *Geographic Location, An Impact Assessment Of The Trend Of The Life Patterns Of Nomadic Bede Community In South-Western Part Of Bangladesh: A Sociological Analysis*, 13, https://Www.Academia.Edu/26927457/An_Impact_Assessment_Of_The_Trend_Of_The_Life_Patterns_Of_Nomad ic_Bede_Community_In_South-Western_Part_Of_Bangladesh_A_Sociological_Analysis.

Bedes have their own language similar to the Arakanese language called 'Thet or Ther,' derived from Prakrit, a Middle Indo-Aryan language formed from Sanskrit but distinct from it as the common people's spoken language.¹³ While they typically speak within the community in their local language, they can also speak fluently in Bangla.

c. Religion

The entire community population consists of both Muslims and Hindus, but some of them perform many rites and rituals and worship the Manasa (snakes' goddess).¹⁴

d. Dress Code

Culturally, *Bede* men typically wear lungi and for women, they cut a ten-cubit long fabric into two pieces and wear one piece at the bottom of the body wrapping it in two folds around the waist and hanging the other piece like a scarf around the back. They wear fatua or angi (without collar, loose shirt). Their dress code has changed now, while trying to integrate with the modern culture.¹⁵

e. Social Stigma

Throughout Bangladesh's mainstream culture, the *Bede* community has always been seen as the lowest class of people and viewed as untouchable citizens. As a result, they do not get the chance to work as workers in separate families and are instead expatriated from the economy's informal sector.

f. Profession

Bedes claim to master the art of curing and catching snake and snake-charming, as a means of earnings. They also possess hunting skills. The career of *Bedes*, once highly regarded in the Bengali community, was respected as traditional snake bite doctors and spiritual healers in rural areas. Nevertheless, the advancement of medical science and technology has forced them to move to a more sustainable future, away from their earlier followed unconventional professions.

g. Marriage and Family system

Bedes have the custom of traveling from one village to another village for trade during the harvesting season, which they call 'Gawal'. Upon finishing off Gawal, families engage, for their young sons and daughters around the age of 15 and 12-13, respectively, to participate in marriages, where they select their spouses, if they have any, without registration of marriage and the custom of giving TK. 40,000 (US \$471) in marriage as mohrana (dower).¹⁶ During the marriage season, they stay in any permanent place for a temporary period of two months to conduct their social functions. As part of the marriage ceremony, their tradition specifies that the husbands will live indefinitely in the wife's home, and the wife takes the vow to take care of her husband and children, and must also be the provider of income. One *Bede* family is usually composed of 4-8 members living in a single boat. If any outsider wishes to marry a female *Bede*, then such person is expected to pay a fine to the community before marriage and if he gets permission then only he can marry her. Research study has shown that about 20% of marriages occur between a *Bede* and an outsider.

¹³ Prakrit, *Banglapedia* (May 5, 2014) [Http://En.Banglapedia.Org/Index.Php?Title=Prakrit](http://En.Banglapedia.Org/Index.Php?Title=Prakrit).

¹⁴ Supravat Halder, *Social Structure, Bedey Community Of Bangladesh: A Socio-Legal Study*, 78 (2012), https://Www.Researchgate.Net/Publication/269491264_Bedey_Community_In_Bangladesh_A_Socio-Legal_Study.

¹⁵ *Supra* at 8.

¹⁶ Sultana Parven, *Women Empowerment Of Manta Village In Darkness*, THE DAILY NEW NATION, May 25, 2018, [Http://M.TheDailyNewNation.Com/News/175807/Women-Empowerment-Of-Manta-Village-In-Darkness](http://M.TheDailyNewNation.Com/News/175807/Women-Empowerment-Of-Manta-Village-In-Darkness).

Interestingly, widow women are permitted to remarry and for divorcee, husband and wife will share their property and children between them, however, the husband might even get the larger portion of property, if it is necessary, showing the essence of male domination, as is in the prevailing society, but it is rare to have divorce practice in their group because they are not willing to practice such.¹⁷

h. Adapting to Natural Disaster

As there is no permanent shelter, it is incredibly difficult for the *Bedes* to deal with natural disasters and calamities because they live in boats with full occupation.

i. Water and Sanitation

The biggest challenge the Bede community has to face is not having clean drinking water and sanitation standards. Those who work on a boat will defecate and urinate in the water of the river and they use the same water for the purposes of drinking, cooking and washing. As a consequence, dangerous health problems can arise for people living in the Bede community. This activity of 0.5 million Bede people massively and unrestrictedly pollutes Bangladesh's climate and thus, affects the living conditions for local people residing on nearby lands. The excreta that this group is depositing in the open environment are approximately equal to 250 metric tons per day.¹⁸ Therefore, the Bangladeshi government should look immediately into this dire situation faced by both the Bede society and resident local citizens.

V. Critical Evaluation of National & International Legal Perspective

Democracy is not the law of the majority but the protection of the minority,¹⁹ for which every marginalized community or backward section of the society is entitled to certain legal remedial measures to be free from human rights infringement, ethnic inequality and racial abuse. This responsibility not only lies with the State concerned, but also, it is the responsibility of the global community to enforce an international legal framework for its recognition, rights and responsibilities and where Member States would have to ratify their domestic laws for proper enforcement.

Having regard to the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 1948, Art. 25 guarantees the right to an adequate standard of living for the health and well-being of individual families, including food, clothing, accommodation, medical care and other needed social services, parallel to Art. 15, Part II of the Constitution of Bangladesh. Yet *Bede* people have never received any government medical care, and the majority of children have never been vaccinated at all. Also, they are deprived of old age pension, disability allowance, flood relief or

¹⁷ Md. Noman Amin, *Marriage System And Family, An Impact Assessment Of The Trend Of The Life Patterns Of Nomadic Bede Community In South-Western Part Of Bangladesh: A Sociological Analysis*, 14, https://Www.Academia.Edu/26927457/An_Impact_Assessment_Of_The_Trend_Of_The_Life_Patterns_Of_Nomadic_Bede_Community_In_South-Western_Part_Of_Bangladesh_A_Sociological_Analysis.

¹⁸ Md. Noman Amin, *Water And Sanitation, An Impact Assessment Of The Trend Of The Life Patterns Of Nomadic Bede Community In South-Western Part Of Bangladesh: A Sociological Analysis*, 20, https://Www.Academia.Edu/26927457/An_Impact_Assessment_Of_The_Trend_Of_The_Life_Patterns_Of_Nomadic_Bede_Community_In_South-Western_Part_Of_Bangladesh_A_Sociological_Analysis.

¹⁹ Women's International League For Peace & Freedom, *Minorities' Rights In France: Many Challenges Yet To Be Addressed*, <https://Www.Wilpf.Org/Minorities-Rights-In-France-Many-Challenges-Yet-To-Be-Addressed/>.

some form of governmental family support schemes or health related facilities.

Art. 26 of the Declaration and Art. 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), 1966, emphasize that everybody has the right to free education, at least at the basic and fundamental level, because education is oriented towards the full development of the human personality and towards greater respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Similar provision is also present under Art. 17 of the Constitution. While understanding the importance of education, 96 per cent of children have not received any primary schooling, mainly because of their nomadic and poor lifestyle or even if the community enrols children in school, they are removed from school by the concerned authority. But no policy has been formulated by the government to provide them with their fundamental right to education as well as protect their cultural rights.

The ICESCR further recognizes the freedom to freely participate in the cultural life of the community.²⁰ Correspondingly, the provisions of International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), 1966, consider the freedom to perform and enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language²¹ and thereby, signifies the importance of cultural rights and their relevance among minorities. Even the Constitution provides²² safeguards for fostering culture tribes, minor races, ethnic sects and communities by taking proper steps towards their development but no such constitutional recognition has been granted to the *Bede* community specifically, unlike other communities in similar positions as them. It already differentiates their rights from the rights of ordinary Bangladeshi nationals. Until 2008, *Bede* citizens were not even allowed to enrol as voters, however, they were granted the right soon after but the number of voters remains relatively small today, along with the deprivation of all those rights and facilities that any ordinary Bangladeshi citizen already enjoys. Regarding this matter, the Kerala High Court held in *A M Patroni v Kesavan*²³ case that in any community, religious or language, which has numerically less than 50 per cent of the population of the State is entitled to constitutional protection similar to ordinary citizens.

On the other hand, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), 1965, solemnly affirms the need to urgently eradicate all types and manifestations of racial discrimination in the world and to ensure awareness and respect for the dignity of the human being. In relation to this Convention, the UN Committee gave its decision in the cases of *L. R. et al. v Slovakia*²⁴ & *Hajrizi Dzemajl et al. v. Yugoslavia*,²⁵ where the state bears an obligation to not promote any racial discrimination even by any act of municipal body otherwise it would be attributed as the act of racial discrimination by the public authorities. Further, the state is obliged to guarantee everyone the right to fair treatment before the law and therefore, the

²⁰ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948 (UDHR), art. 27.

²¹ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966 (ICCPR), art. 27.

²² BANGLADESH CONST., art. 23A.

²³ Dr. Manmohan Singh, Vishwanath Pratap Singh, Inder Kumer Gujral, Ram Vilas Paswan, A.S. Nakadar & A.R. Antulay, *Dalit And Minority Empowerment*, 177 (1st Ed. 2008).

²⁴ UN Committee On The Elimination Of Discrimination Against Women, *Jurisdiction*, Communication No. 31/2003, U.N. Doc. CERD/C/66/D/31/2003 (March 7, 2005), <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/country/decisions/31-2003.html>.

²⁵ *Selected Decisions Of The Committee Against Torture*, Case No. 161/1999, UN Doc. CAT/C/29/D/161/2000; Convention Against Torture And Other Cruel, Inhuman Or Degrading Treatment Or Punishment, p. 78, (2008).

Committee had decided that there was a failure of the State party's courts to provide an effective remedy in the cases at hand. Correspondingly, the Supreme Law of Bangladesh does explicitly highlight, under Part III of Fundamental Rights, equality before the law, equal legal rights and non-discrimination against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, class, caste or place of birth.²⁶ Surprisingly, this section specifically states that this law applies only to 'citizens' while *Bede* people have not been officially recognized as citizens even though they have long been residents of Bangladesh.

Moreover, Art. 2(2) of ICESCR enumerates the right of non-discrimination as being set out in the Convention regardless of any kind as regards colour, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, land, birth or other status. Being mandated by the Constitution and ICESCR, the Government of Bangladesh has neither set any major livelihood-related policies for the Community such as health, nutrition, water, sanitation, land and education, nor mechanisms for improving their access to these basic entitlements unlike that of other Bangladeshi citizens. In case of delicate issue such as marriage, another major problem in the *Bede* community, female children and adolescents aged between 11 to 15 years are given to marriage early. Divorcee women usually do not get subsistence and maintenance allowances from their husbands, as the tradition illustrates that men are not income providers, and also loses the right to keep the child from the marriage with herself.²⁷ Despite the presence of legal boundary under the Child Marriage Restraint Act, 2017, *Bede* people have no knowledge about the consequences of child marriage as the rate of illiteracy is high within them, whereas as per law, it is strictly forbidden to conduct child marriage in Bangladesh and may result to 2 years of jail with fine for ordinary citizens.

According to Dr. Jennings, "Equality before the law means that equality among equals the law should be equal for all. And should be equally administered, that like should be treated alike. The right to sue and be sued, to prosecute and be prosecuted for the same kind of action should be the same for all citizens of full age and understanding without distinctions of race, religion, wealth, social status or political influence."

Therefore, to re-model the nation as a modern developed state, empowering marginalized communities like the *Bede* should be considered as one of the top priorities for the government. Apparently, Part III of the Constitution offers a special privilege to the backward section community by the inclusion of special provision in favour of women or children or for the advancement of any backward section of citizens. This unique provision will allow these people to move forward from their status of being a marginalized community, either by reserving quotas or dispensing with special facilities in terms of basic necessities, education, employment, etc. In the case of *Chapman v. The United Kingdom*,²⁸ the Council of Europe states that recognizing the special needs of minorities and an obligation to protect their security, identity and lifestyle, not only for the purpose of safeguarding the interests of the minorities themselves but to preserve a cultural diversity of value to the whole community.

²⁶ CONST. BANGLADESH, art. 27 & 28.

²⁷ Drs. Chandan Kumar Sarkara, Mustafizur Rahman & Swapan Kumar Saha, *Marriage, The Vanishing People and Vanishing Community- A Case Study In Bangladesh*, 185, <https://Gssrr.Org/Index.Php/Journalofbasicandapplied/Article/View/1214/1206>.

²⁸ Application No. 27238/95 (2001), <https://Minorityrights.Org/Law-And-Legal-Cases/Chapman-V-Uk-2/>.

This particular provision of the Constitution can thus be used as a shield to protect the country's cultural diversity by giving the *Bedes* special opportunities and respecting their heritage. The Bangladesh Law Commission, which recommended that the government should enact a law to prevent discrimination against marginalized groups irrespective of religion, faith, class, ethnicity, caste, tradition, culture, occupation, ethnic originality, gender (including transgender) sexual orientation, disability, pregnancy, marital status, birth place, etc., initiated a wave of significant concern after many years in 2014. As an outcome, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) drafted the Elimination of Discrimination Act and requested the Government to enforce this new legislation after three years.²⁹ Currently, the legislation has not been enacted, however, it has the potentiality to become a milestone movement towards the legal protection of marginalized communities.

While numerous organizations of the United Nations and other non-governmental organizations are actively working in the prevention of racism, they have never furthered the issue of the protection of Nomads until recently in 2000, where the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination adopted a recommendation urging States Parties (all CERD members) to take action with firm political will and moral leadership to protect Nomads from racial violence and enhance their living standards by formulating and enforcing realistic as well as theoretical national strategies.³⁰ The non-binding effect of international instruments does not make it enforceable on the member states, but they definitely have a moral duty to shape and accept suitable legislative structure for their citizens, particularly those belonging to minority groups and disadvantaged groups.

VI. Recommendations

After extensively studying the everyday challenges faced by the *Bede* community, their rich culture and historical background and their current social and political condition in the country of Bangladesh, barely closer to achieving their fundamental, human rights of equality and liberty on an equal footing as other Bangladeshi citizens as they were at the beginning, the author has arrived at certain recommendations to further their quest for equality and facilitate their socio-political acceptance in society with legal backing, so that they finally get the respect and dignity they deserve by the virtue of being an inalienable part of Bangladeshi culture and society. The first step towards achieving this is ensuring their constitutional recognition so that the *Bedes* would have the right to all the constitutional provisions just as any regular citizen does. Further, there is a need for a new anti-discrimination legislation and regulations should be adopted to prevent violations of human rights, discrimination and ethnic harassment and to ensure their successful implementation. Similarly, the quota system reservation can be enforced at national level in terms of health care, education, jobs and any other required opportunities. One of the most important changes that needs to be brought about is ensuring their access to clean drinking water, sanitation, and hygienic conditions because they use the same river water for defecate purposes. This is a

²⁹ Muhammad Yeasin, *NHRC Sends Draft To Govt, The Draft, Prepared As Per Law Commission Recommendations, Proposes 'Elimination Of Discrimination Courts' In Every District*, THE INDEPENDENT, April 21, 2018, <http://www.theindependentbd.com/post/146679>.

³⁰ Professor K. Shamsuddin Mahmood, *WRITING FOR EQUALITY, Bede Community: The Victims Of Urbanization*, THE DAILY STAR, Jan. 29, 2019, <https://www.thedailystar.net/law-our-rights/news/bede-community-the-victims-urbanisation-1694062>.

basic humanitarian right every human is entitled to avail, irrespective of political status, or a lack of the same. Furthermore, there needs to be provision of some free medical facilities such as vaccination, family health planning and other preliminary treatments for the community.

Moreover, dynamic steps need to be taken to suit their particular needs. Because of their regular movement, a versatile education policy requirement should be established where they are required to complete at least 10th grade schooling, receiving SSC certificate. All *Bedes* should be included in the lists of electors so that they may contribute political participation from their side. Other important changes which need to be brought up include the prevention of child marriages and promoting female education, or even improving entrepreneurial skills as women are traditionally regarded as the *Bede* group bread-earners. Issuing and registering birth certificates, marriage certificates and all other certificates that a person needs to reside in a country is also an important political step which needs to be taken to ensure their social integration and recognition in society.

Other steps which can be taken to further their interests include the provision of special finance and micro-credit schemes by public and private commercial banks and financial institutions to marginalized communities for their small start-up businesses. Extra budget may be included in the annual budget to ensure sufficient health, food, education, etc., for disadvantaged communities with appropriate allocation.

Lastly, there's a need to review the existing policy frameworks of marginalized communities again for further development, as well as addressing more openly the notion of prejudice and bigotry so that social recognition and appreciation for the *Bede* community will develop in society at large.

VII. Conclusion

Being a disempowered community, it is distinct that *Bedes* are not uncommon to discrimination and racism in almost every sphere of life as if it has become their everyday challenges. It has tipped the community to the brink of extinction and disoriented the country's national identity and cultural diversity even in this 21st century where democracy enumerates, "of the people, by the people, for the people". Desperate survival attempts, minimal facilities, unable to afford medical treatment, lack of employment and high poverty levels have forced them to seek other genres of occupation for sustainable income and future. There is non-participation of the *Bedes* in policy-making bodies of local and state government as 90 percent of them are not identified as voters and this demonstrates socio-cultural and political discrimination. While the *Bede* women are considered economic providers, they are mostly dominated by men and have no part in the family's decision-making process, or lose their right to education due to early marriages and, moreover, they are viewed as women of immoral character by the mainstream society. In addition, the vulnerable community currently faces tremendous risk of being infected with the Corona-virus (COVID 19) crisis, and the government must undertake urgent actions in this regard. As a result, all of these factors give rise to the possibility that hundred years of Bengali heritage and its interplay with the *Bede* heritage may come to an end and there will be a period when the next generation would have no knowledge of their life. Yet on the other side, in recent years, the Government of Bangladesh has taken major steps to rebuild their community by settling them in the mainland and integrating them with the main society to reduce the challenges they face every day.

Nevertheless, in a country like Bangladesh where resources are scarce, it is difficult to serve and provide all of those rights and facilities to the entire population, especially bearing in mind the COVID-19 pandemic, as the political and administrative sectors are already in a vulnerable stage. Yet, at the same time, the lawmakers and policy makers should provide legal and institutional structures for the community's financial, economic, cultural, and political security. Further work is therefore needed to expose and assess the real nature of discrimination, ethnic violence and human rights abuses faced by disadvantaged communities such as *Bede*, so that they can enjoy basic human rights and live with dignity in Bangladesh's mainstream society.