



The Untouchable Muslim: A Preliminary Discussion of the Bede Community in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the present socio-economic and educational status of the Bede (“untouchable”) minority community in Bangladesh. Despite belonging to the Islamic faith, Bedes are not generally welcomed in mainstream Muslim society. They are primarily nomadic, and live by selling folk remedies and snake charming, deprived of health and educational resources, and living in great poverty. The level of literacy and health facilities for Bedes are negligible. This analysis addresses the dearth of academic studies of the Bede community, and the more serious lack of governmental and non-governmental initiatives to listen to the voice of the Bede community and meet their needs. This study recommends that the government and human rights organizations must come forward to support this community.

Key words: Bede-Community, Development, Life Patterns, Education, Health

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated countries in the world, with about 168.95 million people, including nearly 0.5 million of nomadic Bedes, who live scattered in different parts of the country (Beurden J. V., 2007). Bedes traditionally live, travel, and earn their living in the riverine systems of Bengal, for which reason they were historically called “water” or “river gypsies” (Maksud A. K., 2006) (Brandt, 2018). According to historians, Bedes originated from present day Myanmar, particularly Arakan state, and they belong to the Mangta ethnic group, who assisted the King of Arakan, Ballala Raja (Note 1. , 1160-1179), in 1638, and later migrated to the Bikrampur area near Dhaka (Beurden J. V., 2007). Some scholars argue that the word “Bede” is derived from the Arab “Bedu” (i.e., “Bedouin”), referring to nomadic peoples. However, the word “Bede” is also similar to the Bengali “Baidia,” referring to a healer or village doctor, and Bedes continue to be associated with folk medicine, along with various other professions like snake-charming, magic-shows, snake-selling, and astrology. Physically, Bedes are generally indistinguishable from native Bengalis (Yasmin, 2018).

Nearly half a million nomadic Bedes currently live in Bangladesh, and most of them are Muslims (Maksud A. K., 2006). Despite recent government development project and giving voting power

to Bedes, the community has weak socio-economic status, and a low level of literacy. Some researchers have demonstrated that the Bedes are essentially a lower or even untouchable caste in terms of their ostracism from mainstream Bangladeshi society. This article explores the community in three parts. The first section discusses the overall condition and profile of Bedes; the second deals with government roles and initiatives for them; and the final passage recommends policies for development agencies and government organizations to improve the situation of Bedes.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This study mainly sets two primary objectives. First, the article analyses the present socio-economic and educational condition of Bedes. Second, it seeks to illustrate the actual health and other basic facilities of Bedes in Bangladesh. Finally, the article examines the government contributions on Bedes in Bangladesh.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is mainly qualitative in nature, examining specific issues on the basis of literature study. The study primarily uses secondary data. Halder demonstrated a model to study the Bedes in his “socio-legal study,” covering a different timeframe from the current inquiry (Halder S., 2012). More importantly, the recent IT revolution of Bangladesh is causing many things to change, except Bedes.

Bedes in Bangladesh at a glance

Nomadic peoples are associated with sheep pastoralism, which the word “nomad” etymologically connotes in its Latin, Greek, and other equivalents (Oxford Dictionary VII: 182, 543). The first known usage of “nomad” in English, according to the OED (VII:182), is from 1587, referring to “a race or tribe which moves from place to place to find pasture, one who lives a roaming or wandering” (Salzman, 2002, p. 245). There are an estimated 30-40 million nomads in the world. The Bedes are a nomadic community traditionally referred to as “water” or “river gypsies” who are an archetypal feature of Bangladeshi society. Approximately 5 million Bedes live in Bangladesh.

According to Noya Miah, a prominent Bede leader, the term “Bede” is of Arab origin, on the basis of similarity with the Arab Bedouin, although Banglapedia considers them as descendants of Mon Tong tribe of Myanmar (Dalton, 1978). Bedes are engaged in the snake charming, catching snakes, curing snake bites, traditional and spiritual healing services, magic and monkey shows, and the selling of bangles and trinkets (Arefeen, 1992). They can be divided into eight main groups: Malbeda, Sapuria, Bajikar, Sandar, Tola, Mirshikari, Baryal, and Gain Bede, as discussed below:

- The Malbeda tribe primarily deals with medicine and treatment. Its women provide dental services and treat physical pains, while the menfolk search for lost gold ornaments in rivers, canals and ponds.
- The Sapuria tribe is renowned for catching snakes, and playing snake games in villages, ghats, and markets.
- The Bajikar group of Bede are popularly known as gamblers, and their womenfolk perform magic, produce handicrafts, and practice *Kabiraji* treatment through trees.

- Sandar women sell bangles, ribbons, and various toys by ferry. Many of their men are locksmiths, and others collect snails by dipping them in river-canal beel water to find pearls, which are sold by their womenfolk on ferries.
- The Tola perform monkey shows in markets and villages.
- The Mirshikari tribe provides health services to the villagers, sell reproductive health tonics, and perform exorcisms.
- The Baryal tribe are fishermen and fishmongers in local markets.
- The Gain Bede tribe lives by frying pots and pans. They are also seen roaming the rivers and canals in small boats like the Baryals (Anwar., 2018).

Family system

Bede, as a marginalized Muslim community in Bangladesh, mostly live a nomadic life, moving from place to place to earn a living. The cycle of Bede tradition transfers from one generation to the next (Yasmin, 2018). There are three types of Bede family system: large families, consisting of 10-12 members; medium families, of 5-9 members; and small families, of four members (Chowdhury, 2018) (Table 1).

Table 1: Family sizes

No. family members	Percentage	Size
1-4	38	Small
5-6	47	Extended
7+	15	Extended

Source: Uncovering Inequitable Access to Vaccination Programs by Nomadic Bedey Children of Bangladesh (Doctoral dissertation). *American Journal of Rural Development*. (Parvin, 2017)

The majority of Bedes live in Khupri boats (76%), followed by tents (14%) and Ekchala (10%). Aside from rivers, they also camp on unused wasteland (Hossain, 2009).

LANGUAGE

Bedes mainly communicate via Bengali language for earning and other official purposes, but they have their own language which is close to Tibetan-Burmese Sak-Luish language. Surprisingly, this language does not have any script. According to government census, nearly 40,000 Bedes are fluent in Bengali. (Hossain, 2009). Kabir wrote about the language of Bedes: "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. While they typically speak within the community in their local language, they can also speak fluently in Bangla." (Kabir, 2020)

There is no preservation of the language of the Vedic people or books written in this language. Rahman Veda explored Bede language by going into drug control work. The name of their mother tongue is "Thar," which seemed to be going extinct, so Rahman wrote a book about his eight-year study of it (Rahman H. , 2022) A Bede woman named Alima Khatun (aged 42 years) said:

"We have forgotten our own language due to lack of practice. We use Bengali language as our main language instead of using our own ["Thet" or "Ther"] language. We only use our own language to communicate with people in our own community. But through the passage of time

now we prefer to use Bengali language, and our children cannot speak our own language.” (Daize, 2021)

While most are conventionally identified as Muslims, there are also Hindu Bedes, and some of them perform many rites and rituals and worship Manasa (a snake goddess) (Kabir, 2020).

Dress code

Traditionally, Bede men typically wear a lungi, while women 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* (a loose, collarless blouse). Their dress code is changing nowadays as the Bede blend into homogenized globalist culture of Western dress (Kabir, 2020).

Social stigma

Throughout Bangladesh’s mainstream culture, the Bedes have always been seen as the lowest class of people, and have effectively been viewed as “untouchables” akin to the Dalits. As a result, they do not get chances to work, and are ostracized from most areas even of the informal economic sector (Kabir, 2020)/ The researchers Ayesha Siddequa Daize and Laboni Akter Lima wrote on their works that Bede would like respect from others.

“A woman named Akhikunnesa (56 years old), explained about racial stigmatization. She said: ‘We want to get respect as like a human being. People showed racial hatred and hate us just because we are Bede [racial minority group in Bangladesh]. This racial discrimination makes us excluded and alienated from the people of mainstream society. Before a few years ago this hatred was in severe form, but now people look at us a little differently due to some changes in our lifestyle.’” (Daize, 2021)

Marriage system

The practice of early marriage is common among the Bedes. It is essential to note that in the Bedes there is no system of post-divorce subsistence (i.e., men do not have to pay any money for their wives after divorce). In addition, fathers have the right to take away their sons and daughters, while sons are the sole inheritors of their parents. According to Sultana Parven:

“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 BDT 40,000 (US \$471) in marriage as mohrana (dower).” (Sultana Parven, 2018)

Table 2 shows that the average age of marriage for a Bede girl is 12-15 years, and that of boys is 15-17 years. Bedes follow their own culture whereby the husband goes to the wife’s house to live permanently. The wife has to take a vow that she will take care of her husband and the children until the death (Yasmin, 2018).

Table 2: Marriage age of Bede boys and girls

Age	Percentage
12-15	56%
16-20	42%
21-25	1-9%
Above 25	0.1%

Source: Tamara. Yasmin. (2018). Vedic community: A neglected nomadic people in Bangladesh

Economic condition

Rivers are life for Bedes. For hundreds of years, they have wandered along intricate waterways, charming snakes, training monkeys, selling trinkets, performing magic, and healing people. As far as their financial situation is concerned, Bedes are recognized as a marginalized group in Bangladesh. An estimated 98 percent of Bedes live below the extreme poverty line, and they are not involved in mainstream economic activities; rather they are mostly engaged in some informal, traditional and hereditary jobs or activities (Sultana Parven, 2018). Bede livelihoods vary, including small business enterprises and informal activities as mentioned previously. Few engage in mainstream jobs as rickshaw pullers, tea stall operators, and confectioners, and an estimated 92 percent are engaged in traditional activities, including selling talismans for preventing snake bites, snakebite treatment, snake charming and trading, and offering spiritual healing services and traditional medicines. (Beurden J. V., 2007) (Table 3, Table 4). A Bedes' monthly income is shown in Table 5.

Table 3: Occupations of Bedes in Bangladesh

Occupation name	Ratio
Snake charming	17%
Jharfuk	12%
Ethno-medicine	18%
Shinga	33%
Bagln, trinket	5%
Homework	7%
Confectionary	1%
Tea Stall	5%
Rickshaw puller	2%
Govt.	0%

Source: Parvin, L. (2020). *Uncovering Inequitable Access to Vaccination Programs by Nomadic Bedey Children of Bangladesh* (Doctoral dissertation). (Parvin, 2017)

Table 4: Current occupations of the respondents (n=60)

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Snake charming	5	8.33
Shinga lagano	7	11.67
Selling herbal medicine	11	18.33
Sell amulets and trinkets	8	13.33
Small business	9	15
Service	5	8.33
Animal husbandry	4	6.67
No work	5	8.33
Others	6	10
Total	60	100

Source: Traditional profession and livelihood strategies of Bede community in Bangladesh: a sociological study (Daize, 2021)

Table 5: Monthly family income of respondents (BDT)

Monthly family income	Frequency	Percentage
Up to 5000	5	8.3
5001-10000	30	50.0
10001-15000	17	28.3
15001-20000	1	1.7
20001-25000	4	6.7
25001-30000	1	1.7
30001-35000	1	1.7
35001+	1	1.7
Total	60	100.0

Source: Traditional profession and livelihood strategies of Bede community in Bangladesh: a sociological study. (Daize, 2021)

As Table 4 indicates, half of the respondent's monthly income is BDT (5,001 to 10,000), while 28.3 percent have BDT 10,001 to 15,000, and 8.3 percent have a monthly family income of below BDT 5,000).(Daize, 2021). Moreover, the findings of the Table 4 reflect that most of the respondents are under low income-generating socio-economic circumstances. This is related to numerous factors, including a level of literacy, lack of professional diversities and skills, the lack of popularity of their traditional professions nowadays, and their social ostracism preventing them from working in other fields.

Education

The majority of Bede children (95%) cannot attend schools, because they stay all the months of a year with their parents outside the home, and travel from one place to another. According to the UN Declaration, "everyone has the right to have free elementary education," yet almost all Bedes are illiterate. According to Drs. Chandan Kumar Sarkara, Mustafizur Rahmanb, and Swapan Kumar Saha, "A large majority of the children 100% cannot attend schools because they stay all the year with their parents outside home, and travel from one place to another" (Drs. Chandan Kumar Sarkara, 2013). Moreover, the children of the nomadic Bedes are far away from accessing social safety nets. Therefore, naturally these children are compelled to accept their hereditary occupations.

Gain shows in his report that the main reason behind the low education rate of Bedes is the instability of their precarious lifestyles, moving from one place to another every 2-3 months. Maksud wrote that “Schools won’t accept them, because teachers know they will be ready to leave soon after they are admitted.” While some informal schools tried to educate Bede children, the ratio of drop-out was too high. Table 6 shows the scenario of Bede education.

Table 6: Educational condition of Bedes in Bangladesh

Educational level	Percentage
Illiterate	58
Primary	40
Secondary	2
College	0
University	0

Source: Parvin 2020

From above data, it can be summarized that the Bedes are completely illiterate. More efforts and sustainable solution is needed to enable their educational and (subsequently) socio-economic development (Parvin, 2017). According to Halder:

“Although poverty plays a vital role for deprivation of the Bede children from education, their nomadic lifestyle is the main cause for not getting enrolment in schools and if enrolled they dropped out from the process because the children leave the place, where the school is situated, with their families. Schools do not accept them at all. And because they are so poor, adults want their children to work as snake charmers, snake catchers and traditional healers to generate extra income.” (Halder S. , 2012).

Health condition

Due to illiteracy and frequent moving, Bedes are more or less deprived of medication and conventional healthcare access, as with education. In other words, they follow traditional ways of treatment instead of going to see physicians in hospitals. Poor health is considered instrumental in their poverty, which in term entrenches their poor health, in a vicious cycle. In the words of Drs. Chandan Kumar Sarkara, Mustafizur Rahmanb, and Swapan Kumar Sahac:

“Poor health retains the poor in poverty and poverty retains the poor in poor health. Bede children who roam around the country with their parents on boats and huts in the town side fail to avail the opportunity of getting vaccinated and health services. According to a recent assessment, it was found that only 2 percent of Bede children were immunized against diseases.” (Drs. Chandan Kumar Sarkara, 2013).

According to Hossain, Bede practitioners are very popular among the rural people of Bangladesh due to their specialty in the treatment of some specific diseases like pain, inflammation and arthritis, orchitis, snakebite, and nocturnal urination, etc. (Hossain, 2009). According to a recent report, there is no on-boat hospital in Bangladesh. Parvin shows that Bedes have almost no access to getting vaccinated and accessing health services. Only 2 percent of Bede children were found to be immunized against diseases, and less than 2% percent Bede women received TT during their last pregnancy (Drs. Chandan Kumar Sarkara, 2013).

Table 7: Percentage of mothers receiving TT during their last pregnancy

Indicator	Bede	National	Rural	Urban
TT Received	2	69.9	67.7	74.1
TT Not Received	98	30.1	32.3	25.9

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistic, Sample vital registration system (SVRS)

Bedes' lack of awareness and health education raises their danger of getting illnesses, especially infectious diseases. An approximation shows that death rates from communicable diseases among the age group 5-14 of the poorest 20 percent of the global population is 67 times higher than that of the richest 20 percent of the global population (Gwatkin, 2001). The situation of Bedes indicates that the health-seeking process and causes of death in this community must be more acute than for any other socially excluded and deprived ethnic groups in Bangladesh. Table 8 shows the percentage of treatment methods used by Bedes for their complex healthcare needs.

Table 8: Percentage of treatment methods received by Bedes for complex healthcare needs

Problem	Treatment method					
	Allopathic	Homeopathy	Kabiraji	Jharfuk	Bede methods	Others
Pain and arthritis	44.88	22.66	11.11	4.88	14.22	2.25
Orchitis (ekshira)	40.88	15.11	28.00	4.88	3.55	7.58
Snake bite	59.55	4.86	9.77	5.77	19.55	0.50
Nocturnal urination	10.22	6.22	24.88	16.88	29.77	12.03
Marriage affair	00.0	00.0	9.78	10.22	65.33	14.67
Infertility	15.11	9.77	14.32	20.88	35.11	4.81
Psychic patients	10.66	7.55	20.00	13.77	30.66	17.36
Tooth worm	50.00	30.00	10.00	3.00	5.00	2.00

Source: Social life, economic status, and health care delivery practices of the people of Bede community of Bangladesh: a case study. *Stamford Journal of Pharmaceutical Sciences*, 2(2), 48-52. (Hossain, 2009).

FOOD AND NUTRITION

Given that Bedes belong to the lowest-earning group within the entire society, they are severely affected by the prices of daily consumer products. Bedes commonly fall into severe food shortage for period of months with their children and old people. Nutrition is the vital part of a standard livelihood, but most Bede children are victims of malnutrition. Though there are available steps taken by NGOs to remove malnutrition, they are not getting the resources to eradicate malnutrition. Moreover, by nature, the Bedes' economic situation has deteriorated drastically due to climate change and other obstacles. The situation entails malnutrition from the fetal stage onwards, with the stunting of the physical and intellectual growth of the future generation of the Bede community in Bangladesh (Drs. Chandan Kumar Sarkara, 2013).

Water and sanitation

Bedes lack access to potable water and hygienic sanitation, and they commonly rely on the canals where they live for all water needs:

“Those who live on a boat have to defecate and urinate in the river or canals water. This practice of 0.5 million Bedes pollutes enormously and unrestrictedly the environment of Bangladesh.” (Yasmin, 2018) (Gwatkin, 2001)

An empirical study shows that 47.5% of people where Bede groups live drink water from the nearest ponds or rivers, which is highly dangerous. However, 42.3% of people (who tend to be more educated or health conscious) drink water from tube-wells. Bedes have always been boat dwellers and have drunk river water, and they have always faced challenges in this regard. Tables 9 and 10 show their access to safe toilets and drinking water. In Kamarpara, there are 648 Bede residents who share just three toilets (Rahman M. A., 2000).

Table 9: Access to safe toilets (percentages)

Year	Bede	National	Rural	Urban
1990	-	21.0	16.0	40.0
2003	40	53.2	48.2	70.7

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistic, Sample vital registration system (SVRS) (Arif., 2017)

Table 10: Access to safe drinking water (percentages)

Year	Bede	National	Rural	Urban
1990	Unknown	89.0	88.0	96.0
2003	60	97.4	97.0	99.0

Source: Bangladesh Bureau Statistic, Sample vital registration system (SVRS). (Arif., 2017).

Governmental role for Bedes

The Bangladesh government has undertaken numerous policies and programs to improve Bede lives. In the first phase, the government began with seven districts as a pilot program. In this part of the study describes government initiatives on Bedes, particularly in terms of education, housing, and mainstream inclusion or citizenship.

Education

Bedes are excluded from the government's intervention to ensure universal primary education for all children, and state and NGO interventions have been unsuccessful in effectively enrolling Bede children in elementary education. Because of illiteracy of Bedes cannot enjoy the freedom to choose any other profession except their hereditary and traditional ones (Drs. Chandan Kumar Sarkara, 2013). The Constitution of Bangladesh and the UN Charter emphasize that the Bangladeshi government provides free elementary education for all citizens, and it spent more than BDT 150 million for Bedes in 2015-2016. In previous fiscal years, the government also disbursed a significant amount of budget for this community. Here, we demonstrate government expenses on Bedes's education. From Tables 11 and 12 it is quite noticeable that the Bangladeshi has spent and allocated significant sums of money to the development of Bedes, but with apparently negligible results.

Table 11: Government spending on Bede education (BDT)

Financial year	Number of beneficiaries			
	Educational stipend	Allowance	Training	Post-training support
2012-13	875	2,100	Not start	NA
2013-2014	2,877	10,500	1,050	NA
2014-2015	2,877	10,539	1,050	210
2015-2016	8,526	19,139	1,250	1,250
2016-2017	8,585	19,300	1,250	1,250
2017-2018	10,732	23,200	2,000	2,000
2018-2019	19,000	40,000	2,500	2,500

Source: The Department of Social Services of Bangladesh. (Note 2.)

Table 12: Number of Bede beneficiaries of social welfare for financial year 2019-2020

Beneficiary category	Number
Elderly/ special beneficiary	5,000
Recipients of education stipend at 4 levels	4,000
Receiving socio-economic training	500
Recipient of post-training assistance	500
Total	10,000

Source: Ministry of Social Welfare of Bangladesh. (Bangladesh., 2021)

Housing facilities

As the Bede are traditionally nomadic, they do not have permanent houses and land. In order to improve the lives of Bedes and third-gender people, the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief built around 18,000 houses, at a cost of BDT 250,000 per house, which were given to Hijras and Bedes on the International Day for Disaster Reduction in 2020 (Tribune, 2020). It is still too early to evaluate the long-term difference this may make to these communities.

Citizenship and elections

The Bedes do not have formal citizenship, despite effectively living in Bangladesh (albeit usually on river boats). Recently the government announced that Bedes would be able to vote in all elections. Saud Khan, a Bede leader remarked that:

“For all these years, we were living as refugees in our own country, a Lauhajang resident. For the first time, we feel like we have become citizens of Bangladesh.” (dailystar, 2010)

The government of Sheikh Hasina Wazed and her Awami League party is expected to put Bede rights high on its political agenda, and the right to vote has generated much enthusiasm. About 1,300 Bedes (every eligible adult in Lauhajang) voted in December, and community leaders say they plan to run their own representatives for parliament in future elections.

Access to modern technology

Bangladesh government programs to digitalize the country and facilitate easy access to internet and technologies have touched the Bedes. Their lives have improved along with the improvement of the social system. Razzak finds that:

“The use of mobile phones, the use of sound boxes, televisions and solar lights with batteries in cottages has enlightened the Bede society. But once the light of the cup was their only hope. Now mobile phone use has increased in most Bede’s families.”

It is surprising to point out that Bede communities are increasingly using social media, including Facebook and YouTube, via smart phones. According to a recent study, almost all Bede children are using smart phones with internet access, and even in some cases read educational books, including in Bengali and English. Many fleet members were also seen reading magazines. According to Bimal Roy, Manikganj Regional Coordinator of Barsik, a non-governmental development and research organization on ecology and nature, "The change in the way of life of the Bedes is a reflection of the overall development of the country." The overall development of the country is not possible by excluding one population as a part of the society. They should be given the opportunity to live like ordinary people in the society. The Vedic community can be freed from this life if they can be given the opportunity to change their profession to improve their financial conditions (Razzak, 2018).

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Bedes need to rich their 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.
2. Bedes use the same river water for drinking, cooking, and other domestic purposes where they evacuate. The environmental conditions relating to sanitation and hygienic practices among the community are highly injurious to their own health, and disastrous to the adjacent environment. Safe water, sanitation, and environmental health should be executed in this community.
3. Government and different NGOs and their development partner organizations should acknowledge the special needs for education among Bede children who are roaming among different Bede groups, and the government must be more innovative in involving them in primary education (e.g., teaching elementary children about the history of the Bedes may make the education system more relatable and approachable for the children themselves).
4. The Primary Education Department should plan for a flexible primary education system for this community, because they are always jumping from one place to another; by providing flexible and consistent facilities in diverse areas, it may be possible for children to have continuation of elementary education in different regions.
5. Bedes should be considered as a minority groups like ethnic minorities in the Census by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), Ministry of Planning, and government agencies in general, so that public policy can establish a rationale for meeting their special needs.
6. The government should provide land for settlement, including housing and small business facilities.
7. Government agencies and NGOs should ensure Constitutional recognition and equality of Bede citizens.
8. A quota reservation system can be enforced at national level in terms of health care, education, jobs, and other required opportunities (as for Hindus and other minorities in various contexts).
9. The Bedes need the provision of some free medical facilities, such as for vaccination, family health planning, and other preliminary treatments for the community.

CONCLUSION

From the socio-economic point of view, the Bedes are still living under the poverty line, despite several government initiatives. They are deprived of the proper education, health, and water and sanitation conditions. The Bedes fall short in terms of all socio-economic indicators of progress in Bangladesh, and government agencies and NGOs need to coordinate a more cohesive and effective approach to help this community. Moreover, to uphold their ethnic culture, UN World Heritage should take an interest in documenting and preserving Bede culture, as cultural preservation is necessary for exogenous and endogenous socio-cultural growth and development. Most importantly, the Bedes should be protected and empowered with opportunities for economic advancement in order to preserve their ancient culture and identity, and attain a higher standard of living.

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