

Indigenous Disparities and Inclusive Development: A Case Study of the Bagdi Community in Jhenaidah District, Bangladesh

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Abstract: This article aims to explore the socio-economic and political discrimination experienced by the Bagdi community in the Jhenaidah district of Bangladesh. Based on qualitative data, we argue that the Bagdi community experiences several manifestations of prejudice as a result of their marginal position in relation to their limited access to education, healthcare, employment, and political participation. Being a minority exposes them to political exploitation and dominance within a larger society. They often experience egregious instances of systematic exploitation, such as forcible acquisition of land, intimidation, vandalism, and pillaging of residences. The situation highlights the need to endorse more inclusive development, allowing the Bagdi people to equally cohabit with their mainstream neighbors. Establishing a shared understanding and collaboration between the Bagdi community and the majority population is crucial to reducing socio-political disparities, and promoting an inclusive society with the community. This study emphasizes the need for increased awareness and advocacy initiatives to draw attention to the difficult situation faced by the Bagdi people and rally support for the improvement of their miserable conditions. Furthermore, this provides a thorough understanding of the different forms of prejudice and difficulties experienced by the community, as well as its ability to overcome these challenges. To enhance the socioeconomic and political conditions and ensure equal participation of the Bagdi community in Bangladesh's socioeconomic and political domains, it is crucial to identify causes and find solutions to systematic exploitation through inclusive development.

Keywords: Indigenous disparities, social inequality, inclusive development, Bagdi community

Introduction

Within Bangladesh, there are nearly 50 small ethnic groups that cohabit with the country's predominant population of Bangalee. According to Ahmmed (2010), these individuals exhibit cultural and social characteristics that set them apart from the bulk of the population. The estimated number of indigenous people is about 2.5 million, according to Sen et al. (2009). However, the latest population survey of Bangladesh in 2022 indicates that

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the total population of ethnic minorities is 1,650,159. Within this, the Bagdi community has a population of 12,092, representing just 0.73% of the country's overall population (Population and Housing Census, 2022). The community's nomenclature is dependent on the specific geographical area and region. In some regions, they are referred to as "munda" while in other areas, they are known as "buno" (forest dwellers), and in still other locations, they are termed "sardar" (hunters) (Ghosh et al., 2013). Bagdi's are descended from people with Dravidian links, and from a religious standpoint, this ethnic group has a strong connection with the Hindu community, which represents the majority.

The Bagdi community mostly resides in West Bengal, East India, and contemporary Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, they mainly live in different cities, including Jhenidah, Faridpur, Kushthia, Jessore, Rajshahi, Khulna, Pabna, and Dhaka (Roy, 2021). For instance, they are found in Chaklapara, Puraton Hatkhola, Gilabaria in Jhenidah district, Sharsha and Manirampur in Jashore district, as well as Daulatpur and Bheramara in Kustia district. Throughout history, the Bagdi community has faced significant challenges in maintaining economic stability. According to Risely (1881), their primary means of livelihood traditionally revolved around fishing, labor, and small-scale domestic husbandry, with fishing being the main activity. Despite changes in their primary occupation over time due to various factors, their economic condition remains unsteady. The community has often been overlooked by both governmental and non-governmental organizations, resulting in their marginalization and exclusion from mainstream society. This ongoing marginalization has led them to perceive their own existence as a burden to society (Ashif, 2020). Moreover, the Bagdi people of the plain land, face prejudice and abuse in multiple domains of society. Barkat et al. (2009) argue that indigenous populations in Bangladesh often face vulnerability and experience substantial social exclusion and discrimination. The roots of this discrimination can be traced back to historical events, particularly British policies such as the Permanent Settlement Act of 1793, which displaced indigenous people from their land and forced many into bonded labor in tea plantations, coal mines, and indigo plantations (Sharmeen, 2013).

Studies by Rahman (2011) and Barkat et al. (2009) have examined the discrimination and economic inequalities faced by indigenous people, indicating that the Bengali population holds dominant authority over indigenous minorities in politics, economy, and government. Indigenous minorities face numerous obstacles, including unfavorable economic conditions and political impediments, compared to the established Bengali population. They often encounter denial of their land rights, further exacerbating their economic hardships. The Bagdi community, an indigenous group in the Jhenidah district of Bangladesh, exemplifies these challenges. Despite national progress in various development indices, ethnic groups like

the Bagdi remain on society's fringes, struggling with persistent disparities that hinder their well-being and advancement. Moreover, social exclusion significantly deprives the Bagdi of essential resources and opportunities, including economic benefits, social influence, housing, and access to social services. While Barkat et al. (2009) indicate the economic aspects of discrimination, it is crucial to acknowledge the equally important social and political components. On the other hand, Rahman (2011) highlights social exclusion, which denies marginalized individuals access to economic benefits, social influence, housing, and social resources. In this case, implementing social programs is crucial for narrowing the socio-economic disparity between marginalized populations and the mainstream population.

Another study by Uddin (2008) highlights the political challenges faced by indigenous peoples, who navigate lives marked by oppression, marginalization, discrimination, and violence. Addressing these inequalities through inclusive development is essential. Inclusive development aims to ensure that all segments of society benefit from economic growth and social progress, thereby addressing the disparities faced by minority communities, including the Bagdi community.

These previous studies demonstrate the discrimination experienced by indigenous minorities in Bangladesh, including social, economic, political, and cultural aspects. The Bagdi community, like any other ethnic groups, often faces difficulties. Due to a lack of extensive investigation, the Bagdi group, despite its distinct identity, has been overlooked and marginalized by the mainstream society. This study aims to explore the socio-economic and political discriminations experienced by the Bagdi community in the Jhenidah district of Bangladesh. By examining the various manifestations of prejudice and marginalization that the Bagdi's encounter, this research seeks to highlight the urgent need for inclusive development strategies that can address and subdue these disparities.

Research Objectives

The Bagdi community is vulnerable and experiences high levels of social exclusion and discrimination. Members of this community not only experience discrimination as a result of their minority status, but they also affront challenges in social and economic life. The research's objective is to investigate instances of discrimination experienced by the Bagdi population in the Jhenidah District of Bangladesh. The specific objectives are as follows:

1. To explore the patterns of social, economic and political discrimination faced by the Bagdi community;
2. To understand the community's experiences with various forms of discrimination,

3. To suggest ways of reducing the level of discrimination through inclusive development.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Indigenous communities are those that have historical continuity on their territories; they consider themselves distinct in culture, economy, social, and political status but are similar in identity. They usually live within the geographically distinct ancestral territories. They tend to maintain distinct social, economic and political institutions within their territories. However, they are largely marginalized and discriminated resulting in socioeconomic and political disparities. Disparities, in the broadest sense, refer to significant differences or inequalities in conditions, opportunities, and outcomes among different groups within a population (Meghani & Gallagher, 2008). Various dimensions, including social, economic, and political spheres, can manifest these disparities, often highlighting systemic issues that require attention to achieve a more equitable society. In this research, the term disparity refers specifically to the social, economic, and political inequalities experienced by the Bagdi community. The Bagdi community experiences these disparities in their daily lives, which impact their access to essential needs, economic opportunities, and political representation. By focusing on these specific disparities, this research aims to identify and address the barriers that prevent the Bagdi community from achieving full participation and equal opportunities in society.

The paper theoretically frames the issue of indigenous disparities using "conflict theory" and the "inclusive development" approach. Conflict theory suggests that society is characterized by conflict and inequality, with power and resources unevenly distributed among various groups (Prayogi, 2023). This viewpoint, first introduced by Karl Marx in 1867 and later expanded upon by thinkers like Max Weber in 1922 and Ralf Dahrendorf in 1959, underscores the significance of social, economic, and political factors in shaping society (Prayogi, 2023). The concept of conflict theory centralizes the stratification of society into multiple social classes, each with distinct interests and goals, engaged in a perpetual struggle for dominance over limited resources like money, power, and social standing. Conflict theorists argue that the competition for power and resources manifests in various forms of societal conflict, including class conflict, race conflict, gender conflict, and wars between states or ethnic groups. Within the context of indigenous minorities, conflict theory provides a framework for understanding the systematic disparities and injustices they face due to colonization, marginalization, and exploitation by dominant groups. Indigenous populations have continually endured instances of marginalization within society; being denied access to land, resources, and political influence, while also encountering discrimination, bias, and aggression from the prevailing culture.

Power asymmetries and conflicts over territory, resources, and cultural self-determination characterize the relationship between indigenous minorities and dominant groups from a conflict theory perspective. The dominant culture, which holds economic and political power, strives to maintain its control over indigenous territories and assets, often neglecting indigenous rights and self-governance. In this study, conflict theory is used to analyze the contemporary prejudices faced by indigenous minorities, specifically focusing on the Bagdi group. The analysis reveals wide-ranging disparities stem from a variety of causes, including inherent variations, sociocultural circumstances, and governmental policies. In this context, the necessity of inclusive development becomes undeniable.

Inclusive development refers to a systematic transformation of underlying structures, empowering marginalized people by amplifying their concerns and aspirations (Dörffel, & Schuhmann, 2022). This approach favors the inclusion of these groups in informal sectors, enabling them to influence societal trajectories alongside other stakeholders. According to the inclusive development approach, development should be comprehensive, ensuring that all segments of society, particularly the marginalized and disadvantaged groups, like the Bagdi community, benefit from economic growth. It emphasizes fairness, active participation, and equal access to opportunities and resources, striving to create a society where every individual can improve their well-being and contribute to community development. For the Bagdi community, inclusive development involves addressing the specific social, economic, and political inequalities they face, which significantly impact their daily lives by limiting their access to essential services, economic opportunities, and political representation.

Methodology

Methodology is a systematic, theoretical analysis of the methods applied to a field of study. We conduct our research using the qualitative method, collecting data through qualitative interviews and secondary sources. We selected this research approach because qualitative research is indispensable in social science research due to its ability to provide rich, detailed, and context-specific insights into social phenomena. It enhances our understanding of the complexities of human behavior and societal interactions, contributing to theoretical development, informing policy and practice, and ensuring that the diverse voices of individuals and communities are heard and respected.

Our research aims to investigate the socio-economic and political discrimination encountered by the Bagdi community in the Jhenidah District. The study population comprises the Bagdi community residing in this district, with a particular focus on the village of Chaklapara in Jhenidah Sadar. We selected this village because it houses a significant portion of the Bagdi

population in Bangladesh, making them particularly vulnerable to socio-economic and political discrimination. Understanding the patterns and experiences of discrimination within this community is essential to capturing their perspectives and viewpoints.

We employed purposive sampling for this study. We chose this strategy because it allows us to select participants who are most relevant to the research objectives, thereby facilitating an in-depth understanding and efficient use of resources. Purposive sampling is particularly effective in accessing hard-to-reach populations and offers flexibility and adaptability in the research process. Chaklapara village is located in Jhenidah Sadar, has a population of 252 members living in 52 households. The Bagdi people in Chaklapara engage in various occupations, including rickshaw pulling, small trading, fishing, and labor work. They all follow Hinduism.

The aim of this study is to uncover the socio-economic and political discrimination against the Bagdi community in Jhenidah. We deemed qualitative methods more appropriate than quantitative approaches, given the nature of our research objectives. We conducted in-depth interviews, case studies, and focus group discussions to collect data. In total, we conducted 28 in-depth interviews to explore the personal experiences and perceptions of discrimination among the Bagdi community. These interviews were casual and semi-structured, resembling personal conversations to make respondents feel comfortable and open to sharing their thoughts and experiences. This method allowed us to gather detailed and nuanced information about their daily lives and the discrimination they face. To gain a deeper understanding of the discrimination they experience,, we conducted five case studies. These case studies provided comprehensive insights into individual and family experiences, revealing the intricate details and broader context of their socio-economic and political challenges. Additionally, we conducted two focus group discussions to identify specific patterns and collective experiences of discrimination within the community. These discussions allowed participants to interact, share their diverse experiences, and build on each other's insights, providing a richer understanding of the common issues they face. We recorded and transcribed all of the interviews to ensure accuracy. We processed, organized, and categorized the collected data in alignment with the study goals. Extraneous raw data was minimized to focus on the essential aspects. We carefully examined, coded, and classified the data based on the research objectives. We presented the results in a detailed and explanatory commentary, which ensured the findings were coherent and well-structured. Our research adhered to ethical norms, including obtaining informed consent from participants, maintaining their anonymity, and securing ethical clearance from appropriate authorities if required. This ethical approach ensured the integrity of the research process and the protection of participants' rights.

Findings of the Study

Patterns and experience of Bagdi people with dispersion

The Bagdi community faces significant socio-economic and political disparities that increase the level of their marginalization and dispersion. They experience profound social discrimination and exclusion from mainstream society. They are often stigmatized and excluded due to their minority status and traditional occupations. This social exclusion manifests in limited access to education, healthcare, and other essential needs. The community's low literacy rates and lack of educational facilities further exacerbate their marginalized status, creating a cycle of poverty and disenfranchisement. Economically, the Bagdi community suffers from pervasive inequalities that hinder their ability to achieve financial stability and upward mobility. Predominantly engaged in low-paying and unstable occupations such as rickshaw pulling, small-scale trading, fishing, and manual labor, the Bagdi people struggle to secure sustainable livelihoods. Their limited access to financial resources and credit facilities further restricts their economic opportunities. This economic marginalization is compounded by the lack of ownership of productive assets, such as land and property, which leaves them vulnerable to exploitation and displacement. The Bagdi community's economic instability significantly contributes to their dispersion, often compelling them to migrate in pursuit of economic opportunities. Politically, the Bagdi community is largely disenfranchised and lacks representation in local and national governance structures. The political arena rarely hears their voices, and their participation in decision-making processes is minimal. This lack of political power leaves the Bagdi people susceptible to systemic injustices, such as land grabbing, forced evictions, and denial of legal rights. The political marginalization of the Bagdi community is exacerbated by the dominance of majority groups, who wield significant influence over local governance and resource allocation. As a result, the Bagdi people frequently experience intimidation, threats, and violence, further reinforcing their marginalized status and increasing their dispersion.

Discrimination and Economic Deprivation

Economic disparity and destitution among the ethnic group have been pervasive for ages, affecting all strata (Chakma & Pallab, 2014). Bagdi's have much lower levels of per capita income, literacy rates, and dependence ratios compared to the broader community. They are experiencing growing discontent due to the escalating unemployment rate, deteriorating public health, increasing rates of neonatal and maternal death, widespread hunger, and the prevalence of infectious illnesses (Islam, Chowdhury & Islam, 1999). This research demonstrates that the members of the Bagdi community have housing discrepancies, living in cramped and sometimes improvised dwellings. They face systematic prejudice, since they live in economic hardship. The Bagdi people primarily use wood and straw to construct their

dwellings. Many individuals reside in tents, shielded by polythene or sturdy fabric. However, within the same area, the Hindu community and other groups reside in the most desirable dwelling locations. In the vicinity of Bagdi village, observations indicate the existence of a multitude of sizable structures and dwellings constructed with bricks. Most of them reside on property that belongs to others. One participant, Biasal Kumar, narrates this as a prime example.

Observe the neighbor's house; they have large structures, whereas we live on land that belongs to others. We have nothing. They hold well-paying jobs and earn substantial salaries, while we are laboring. There is so much discrimination.

Rita Rani (35) also expressed the same sentiment.

My mother-in-law is sick and an old woman. We requested that the local word member manage a card (for government allowance) for herself. Additionally, the government has provided housing for the landless, specifically through the Gucchagram project. But nobody listens to us! We have got nothing.

A case from the community can be mentioned in this context. Bala is almost 60 years of age. She is a senior woman from the Chaklapara Bagdi community. Her spouse died a decade ago. She lives in a leased residence with her two boys and other relatives. Like the other members of the Bagdi family, she relocated from Shailmari village to Chaklapara around three decades ago. During her formative years, she began to work by harvesting fish and mussels from canals with her parents, then selling them in the market. Her employment began when she was approximately 10 to 12 years old. Due to her age, she is currently unemployed. She said that she was aware of the government's provision of financial aid to widows. However, despite her application for an allowance card, she has not yet received any kind of help. She engaged in meetings with local word member, political leaders, and officials. All the individuals offered assurances, but they were unable to deliver any tangible results. She said: "We are in a situation of poverty, which hinders our visibility to others." Recently, she became aware that the government offers land and housing to those who need both. Regrettably, she received nothing. Without a bribe, she will receive nothing- she strongly believes.

The above case suggests that Bala and her community encounter multitude challenges, including poverty, limited access to government aid, corruption, and a sense of marginalisation. They often experience occupational and societal prejudice, which manifests as verbal abuse and threats. They endure this discrimination because of their financial fragility which is compounded by their inability to obtain any kind of economic assistance from the government or other organizations. According to Article 28(1) of the Constitution, the

State is prohibited from engaging in any kind of discrimination against citizens based on their religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth. However, the Bagdi community still experiences socio-economic inequality. As a result, these people suffer from both economic and social exploitation, which ultimately leads to deprivation. They face several challenges at a young age. If individuals cease their labor as a result of exploitation and other related problems, they face the peril of experiencing extreme hunger and malnutrition. A more unfortunate circumstance-the Bagdi community believes that if the government or volunteer groups provide assistance, they will encounter prejudice and bias from those outside of their own community.

Disparities in Education and Employment

Panda (1998) extensively examined the barriers to delivering high-quality education to the indigenous population. He identified several key factors contributing to the failure to provide education in tribal communities, such as poverty, socio-economic challenges, gender discrimination, the dominance of majority groups, parental motivation, resource availability, their misallocation due to corruption, and government policies and practices. Sarker and Davey (2007) highlighted the limited educational alternatives available to indigenous children, which lead to elevated rates of school abandonment. The study identified seasonal migration, economic difficulties, and social inequality as prevalent issues that hindered access to schooling. This study demonstrates that economic limitations, societal inequalities, and prejudice contribute to the restriction of educational opportunities for the Bagdi population. The community members who receive criticism and discouragement for enrolling their children in school serve as a prime example of the negative perception of education for Bagdi children. Discrimination continues to exist in educational institutions, impacting the availability of scholarships and involvement in school governance committees. One respondent, Santa Rani (35), said, *“When my son goes to school, neighbors despise him. And tell me that I am working hard, so why should I send him to school. Do I want to make my son minister?”* Another respondent, Ashit Kumar (45) stated,

We do not have sufficient money to spend on education. Even so, I took my son for admission. Seeing this, my neighbor said, “Why are you doing such a foolish thing? Poor people, manage a work for your son, which will benefit your family.

Because of their poverty, the Bagdi people have a poor level of awareness about education. A significant portion of them do not prioritise education, thus resulting in them choosing to send their children to work instead of attending school more often than not. Moreover, students are required to tolerate harassment in order to get a scholarship at the institution. They are not part of the local school management committee. Amol Kumar (15), one of the participants, explained that *“Managing stipends presents numerous*

challenges. I was refused again and again. My father and brothers have repeatedly requested the members of the managing committee in this matter. Finally, Kashem sir (a fictitious name) managed my scholarship.'

All respondents replied negatively when asked if the Bagdi people should continue to be part of the local school management committee. The school committee does not choose them as members due to their impoverished state and lack of education. Article 28(3) of the Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees that citizens cannot be subjected to any kind of disadvantage, obligation, limitation, or requirement merely on the basis of their religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth, with regard to attending public amusement venues, resorts, or educational institutions. However, the Bagdi people still encounter societal prejudice, particularly in terms of gaining entrance to educational institutions and receiving stipends. Consequently, the lack of education leads to unemployment in the Bagdi community, furthering their socioeconomic instability

Hossain (2013) asserts that indigenous people continue to lag behind economically. In addition, they may encounter employment discrimination. It is easy to assess the social standing of the Bagdi community. The government does not employ any of them, nor do they hold jobs at the upper or middle levels. In addition, conservatives are reluctant to retain them in employment. Moreover, their lower level of expertise results in a reduced salary for them. The respondent, Kapali Rani (42), expressed:

I previously performed domestic cleaning services for a family. Initially, they instructed me to prepare their meals. However, the housewife said that due to my Bagdi background, if I were to prepare a meal, it would be considered impure. Even our children frequently encounter derogatory remarks when they go to school.

Land Ownership and Grabbing

The issue of land and resource appropriation is a very distressing challenge for the indigenous population of Bangladesh. Influential Bengalis deceive the indigenous population by using counterfeit documents, resulting in their property being appropriated. Indigenous people worldwide, including Bangladesh, are encountering comparable challenges and advocating for the protection of their land and cultural heritage. The primary factors contributing to poverty among indigenous minorities include limited economic possibilities, geographical constraints, social marginalization, deprivation, and land confiscation (Barkat et al., 2009; Kamal et al., 2006). Prevalent occurrences of land-grabbing, threats, evictions, and murders endanger the lives of ethnic minority groups (Samad, 2006). Periodically, due to their limited political influence, the settler subjects these groups to unwarranted accusations. According to Kusiluka et al. (2011), the indigenous people's lack of education is a significant factor contributing to land-related conflicts. This

study revealed that the Bagdi community is facing a widespread problem of land grabbing, as influential political and social figures are using fraudulent papers to unlawfully steal their property. One participant, Haru Kumar's case, serves as a prime example of this.

Haru is fifty-two years old and works as a rickshaw puller. He relocated to Chaklapara with his family when he was 15 years old, where his father had a total of three acres of property inside the village. The grandfather had obtained funds by pledging the property as collateral to a local person. Upon his grandfather's demise, Haru's father endeavored to regain possession of their property, but he adamantly refused to surrender it. Even the land grabber initiated a diverse range of assaults directed against him. The father relayed this incident to Matubbar, who was in the village. After the arbitration, Matubbar asked the individuals to present the land documents, but they were unable to comply with this request. Consequently, the Matubbar ruled against them, resulting in the denial of their land restitution. Subsequently, he discovered that the land grabber had a financial arrangement with Matubbar, and he relinquished ownership of the property. Subsequently, he decided to depart from the village and relocate to Chaklapara.

This case evidently showcases that economic fragility and a lack of agency contribute to this discrimination. This case provides firsthand evidence of a property ownership dispute and highlights the challenges faced by Haru's family in their pursuit of justice. As a result of the persistent threats and harassment, they ultimately migrated from the village and relocated to Chaklapara. We divide the study population into two distinct settlement groups: the riverside group and the roadside group. Each group has its own set of distinct challenges. The population of Riverside Bagdi is deprived of land, rendering them susceptible to exploitation by political figures. The Bagdi people living by the roadside face political discrimination as their strong neighbours strive to unlawfully steal their land, despite the fact that they are rightful owners. The community's low literacy rates and lack of political clout enable land grabs and fraudulent activities. Political forces have a substantial impact on the process of land-grabbing. The leaders seize the land in order to assert their dominance over the Bagdi population. Furthermore, a large proportion of the Bagdi community from Chaklapara village once lived in Shalimari. They have moved here because of the imminent danger to their land, grabbing and cheating by the local people. One participant, Kallani Sarker (52) narrated,

After my daughter's marriage, my husband handed over the land's documents to a Muslim in our village as collateral for a loan. When my husband attempted to settle the debt, the Muslim informed him that we had sold the land. We appealed to the chairman for assistance in reclaiming our land, but he sided with the man. Justice is not for us.

Political Marginalization

Uddin (2008) said that the political existence of indigenous people starts with a sense of indifference and unease, in addition to their comprehension of politics. From the moment they are born, they must acquire the skills to endure and overcome oppression, marginalization, prejudice, and violence. Chakma (2014) also discussed the political situation of indigenous people, emphasizing the insufficient acknowledgement of their political involvement. He also emphasized other aspects: the vast majority of indigenous enclaves on flat terrain are mostly inhabited by Bengalis, and hence, the general population does not encourage their participation in local government elections. Most members of the Bagdi group stated that when living on other people's land, they strive to support the political party that their landlord supports. Prior to the election, the candidate implored the Bagdi community to vote in their favor, promising improvements. However, following the election, their circumstances received little attention. They experience perpetual apprehension because of their subordinate position. A significant finding about the Bagdi community is their reluctance to openly express their circumstances and voice any opposition against their oppressors due to fear. They have the belief that expressing their opinions might exacerbate their present conditions.

Members of the Bagdi community must align themselves with political parties that their landlords support, a decision that consequently impacts their political independence. Promises of improvement before elections frequently remain unfulfilled, placing individuals in a condition of susceptibility. Many individuals refrain from expressing their dissent against oppressors due to the fear of facing negative consequences. Despite their strong involvement in political parties, Bagdi people rarely receive nominations as election candidates or gain access to local governing bodies. Economic fragility and the enduring stigma associated with historical factors contribute to this prejudice. Some members of the Bagdi community have challenges when it comes to the voting process. Another participant, Romesh Kumar (48), commented on this matter:

Last year, before the election, I had a physical attack. When I reported the incident to the police, they offered no assistance and instead confronted me with a menacing warning, much to my disappointment. Throughout the election, they grew more dangerous. They passionately implore us to cast our vote in their favour. Irrespective of their accomplishments or deficiencies, they continuously evoke terror in us.

The Bagdi people face several instances of prejudice within the political domain. No one can nominate them as candidates in any election. They lack access to the local governing authority. Although they join the political party as active members, they do not attain any positions within the party. As a result, they face ongoing political exclusion on a daily basis.

Discussion

This study on the Bagdi community's socio-economic and political challenges in the Jhenidah district of Bangladesh reveals significant disparities, aligning with 'conflict theory' and the principles of inclusive development. In his research, Rahman (2011) demonstrates how indigenous groups encounter prejudice and economic marginalization, arguing that the Bengali majority holds dominant authority over the indigenous minority in politics, economy, and administration. The Bagdi community, much like other indigenous groups, faces unfavorable economic circumstances and political obstacles compared to the mainstream Bengali population. This social exclusion deprives them of economic advantage, social influence, housing, and access to social resources. Barkat et al. (2009) highlight the vulnerability of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) indigenous people due to their limited access to income and work opportunities, which parallels the experiences of the Bagdi. Numerous factors, including poverty, socio-economic challenges, gender discrimination, seasonal migration, the dominance of majority groups, a lack of curriculum relevance, cultural issues, low parental motivation, resource mismanagement due to corruption, and government policies and practices, contribute to the failure of education in ethnic communities (Kusiluka et al., 2011; Panda, 1998). This research confirms that the challenges confronting the Bagdi, people are pervasive. They experience social, political, and economic marginalization due to their status as an indigenous population. Historically, they have endured significant economic instability, with their economy primarily dependent on labour and small-scale household enterprises.

Their limited access to education and work prospects leads to economic prejudice. Due to poverty, many Bagdi do not prioritize education, opting to send their children to work instead of school. Additionally, the absence of schools in their villages, coupled with the high costs of education and the distant location of government schools, exacerbates this issue. In their occupation, Bagdi individuals encounter similar forms of prejudice, often struggling to obtain jobs due to limited education and skills. Samad (2006) identified land appropriation as a profoundly distressing issue for indigenous populations in Bangladesh. In our study, we observed that the Bagdi people of Chaklapara, originally from Shalimari, migrated due to intimidation, property encroachment, and fraudulent activities by the local populace. Limited literacy skills make them susceptible to manipulation by mainstream individuals, and government aid rarely reaches the Bagdi community. The conflict theory explains these dynamics, as it posits that social order is maintained by dominance and power, rather than consensus and conformity. The Bagdi community's marginalization reflects a broader pattern of systemic inequality and exploitation, where those in power use their position to maintain control over disadvantaged groups. The findings suggest a significant political component fueling land-grabbing actions, with the Bagdi

enduring prolonged human rights infringements such as land-grabbing, threats, evictions, and assassinations. Their political involvement is not adequately acknowledged, further entrenching their marginalized status (Chakma, 2014; Roy, 2009). Our study endorses these arguments, revealing that the Bagdi people feel isolated from the dominant culture due to their indigenous identity. Their historical marginalization leads to exploitation by mainstream individuals, reinforcing the belief that those in positions of authority should control those with less power. Consequently, the Bagdi often accept adversity, yet they actively seek administrative support to improve their situation. Despite their socio-economic stagnation, they view increased opportunities in education and other fields as beneficial. We believe that inclusive development is critical to helping them overcome their situation. Inclusive development, which aims to ensure that all marginalized groups benefit from economic growth and social progress, is crucial for addressing these disparities. For the Bagdi, inclusive development involves enhancing access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities while ensuring their political representation and participation. By fostering a more equitable distribution of resources and opportunities, inclusive development can help mitigate the socio-economic and political disparities faced by the Bagdi community. Our study highlights the urgent need for inclusive development strategies to address the socio-economic and political challenges faced by the Bagdi community. By applying conflict theory, it underscores the systemic nature of their marginalization and the necessity for comprehensive policy interventions to promote equity and inclusion.

Limitations and Contributions of the Study

In our study, there are several limitations. The findings' scope and generalizability are two major limitations. The geographical scope may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions or Bagdi communities in different contexts. Second, data collection constraints, such as reliance on qualitative data, may also affect the findings' comprehensiveness and accuracy. Purposive sampling as a data collection technique has its own limitations as well, as this might compromise hearing voices from more marginalised and disadvantaged within the Bagdi community. Additionally, the study's limited time frame may prevent it from capturing long-term trends or changes in the socio-economic and political conditions of the Bagdi community. Accessing a representative sample of the Bagdi community could be challenging due to their marginalized status, and discussing political disparities and exploitation is inherently sensitive, which may limit the scope of the research.

Despite these limitations, the study makes several important contributions, such as highlighting marginalized voices and providing a comprehensive analysis of the prejudice and discrimination faced by the Bagdi community. The study's policy recommendations can inform policymakers and

development practitioners about the Bagdi community's specific needs and conditions, advocating for targeted interventions and inclusive development policies. The study also emphasises the need for more awareness and advocacy initiatives, rallying support for efforts to improve their socio-economic and political conditions, and promoting inclusivity.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Several studies showed indigenous people often face a multitude of obstacles, such as human rights, socio-economic, political, etc. (Kusiluka et al., 2011; Mohsin et al., 2002; Roy, 2009). This study endorses these arguments: the Bagdi community in the Jhenidah district of Bangladesh faces significant socio-economic and political discrimination, entrenched in both historical marginalization and current socio-political dynamics. This has further highlighted how economic instability, limited access to education and employment, and political underrepresentation contribute to the persistent disparities faced by the Bagdi people. Documenting their lived experiences has revealed the resilience of the Bagdi amidst pervasive discrimination in various aspects of life. In this research, conflict theory provides a useful framework for understanding these dynamics, emphasizing the role of power imbalances and systemic inequality in maintaining social order. The Bagdi's marginalization reflects broader patterns of domination and exploitation by the majority population. Addressing these entrenched disparities requires a commitment to inclusive development, which aims to ensure that marginalized communities benefit from economic growth and social progress, thereby promoting equity and social justice. Actually, to break these disparities, it is crucial to provide quality education to Bagdi children, establish free or affordable educational initiatives, ensure access to healthcare, and offer vocational training programs. Access to microfinance and credit facilities can help the Bagdi people start and sustain small businesses, and financial literacy training can help manage incomes effectively. Legal reforms and capacity-building programs can empower Bagdi leaders and community members to engage in political advocacy. Establishing dialogue platforms between the community and local authorities can foster understanding and cooperation. Awareness campaigns aimed at reducing caste-based discrimination and promoting social cohesion are essential. Participatory approaches may involve the Bagdi in planning, implementing, and monitoring development projects. Building strong community organizations and networks can enhance the Bagdi's capacity to advocate for their rights and interests. A database tracking socio-economic and political conditions can provide valuable insights for policymakers and development practitioners.

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