

# Gipsy life: Citizenship Crux and Denial to State Services

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## ABSTRACT

The gypsy people of the state lead a nomadic life. They move forward frequently from hither and thither. About 10 months they love to spend their life on boats in a year. They seldom get state recognition through citizenship. As they do not live in a particular place, they usually do not get a national identity number. Except for the national identity number, nobody could get a nominal right to receive old aged monetary grant let alone other privileges. The national identity number works as a unique number for every individual. They are not entitled to schooling, getting jobs, access to justice, nuptial relations, social acceptance and recognition, bank loans, passport, health care services, state allocation to residence, opportunity of electrification, connection of gas supply and access to fresh drinking water. They are not the voters of any specific place, so they do not attract any special care by the politicians and privilege seekers. Most illegitimately, they are discriminated against. They are born in the land as others though just after birth the fate of those children have been curved with different ink in different manner. Without these essential rights they march on and lead their life as 'Bede' in the land without any grievance. A fascinating eye should be given to them so that they can be acknowledged as a citizen of the state without destroying their ethnic characteristics.

**Key words.** Gipsy, citizenship, state- services, passport, national identity number, adult franchise politicians etc.

## INTRODUCTION

*The Bedey* community has to struggle to be treated as a person in the eye of law though they are supposed to get such status (The Universal declaration of Human Rights 1948, Art. 6). *Bedey* community is an ethnic group in Bangladesh. They are also known as gypsies to the whole country. The '*bedeys*' or gypsies are a nomadic community in the state who usually travel from one place to another throughout the rivers of the state (Halder 2012; p. 75). There are more than one lac nomadic people in the state among whom 98% of *Bedey* people live the below poverty line (Alamy studies 2022). Their major life-leading occupations are selling baskets, selling and seeking jewelry, snake charming, capturing snakes from residential areas, selling medicines for snake-bitten patients, and extending spiritual support for treating various diseases (Halder 2012; p. 75). The nomadic people in Bangladesh are far from receiving state services and coverage. They are the people who got their birth in the state though they are not the citizens of the state in the eye of the law. They are deprived of the right to vote for electing the government of the state. They do not have any national identity number. Since they do not have national identity numbers and cards, cannot claim, or become entitled to state benefits. They cannot open a bank account and buy lands that correspond to the right to property (*The Constitution of Bangladesh 1972, Art. 40*).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Sazzad Hossain (2018) in his seminal work shows that the *Bedey* people are known as a nomadic community, and they traditionally live on water boats. A few NGOs have taken the initiative to develop their educational opportunities, social qualities, and standard of living (Hossain 2018; 60). *Bedey*

communities are not enrolled as citizens of the state. They do not get state-digitalized modern opportunities. They are not entitled to legal rights also (Hossain 2018; 60). Though they are Muslim by religion, they also follow the rituals of the Hindu religion. The female members or wife plays a vital role in earning and leading the families (Halder 2012; 80). Halder (2012) argues that after marriage husband goes to the wife's house to live on. The wife vows to take care of the husband and the children. Their professional orientation is divided into various segments such as *vaidyas*, *Shandars*, *Shapurias*, *Bajikars*, and *Tantriks* (Seraj et al 2022; p. 26). They want to change their lifestyle and profession because of they want to live socially in agriculture (Seraj et al 2022; p. 26). The *Bedeys* are subject to entitle the fundamental rights which have been guaranteed in the constitution of Bangladesh (*The Daily Star*, September 12, 2022). The nomads are human being and are subject to award human rights (*The Daily Star*, September 12, 2022). Gilbert (2014) emphasized that they are deprived of human rights, and face extreme forms of discrimination (Gilbert 2014). He also points out that their life is under threat and face various challenges. Day by day the lifestyle of the *Bedey* community is changing Because of the development of science, changing the river channel, water pollution, and natural disaster. They are being forced to land from their boat. He has found out that they do not get access to solid waste management facilities in municipal areas, in resulting the environment being polluted (Olga Tellis and others case 1985). Gilbert (2014) unfolded that the non-discriminatory principle is recognized by the UN all human rights instrument (Gilbert 2014). Akhter (2022) unfolded that the *Bedey* community departs along complex waterways, training monkeys, snake charming, performing magic and healing people, and selling trinkets. Pushed to the margin, they are struggling every day to preserve their heritage and profession (Akhter 2018). Dalton et al (1978) showed that *Bedeys* are an ancient nomadic caste, their history was different, and there have fiction and nonfictional literacy. This is the exception from the mass media like radio, television, and newspaper, but their nonfictional literature had within the colonial environment that's why their literature cannot reach a wide number of audiences. They have been influenced or taken important decisions or made policy by the superior person in the community (Hasibuzzaman and Nahar Case 2019). *Bedey* people lose their source of income because modern society marginalized their profession. A short history of *Bedey* is found in Taylor's Book "A Sketch of the Topography and Statistics of Dacca 1840" Bangladesh is based on agriculture; 60% of people depend on agriculture, but the *Bedey* people never want to be involved with agriculture. Gowashmi (2008) focused on the social right that's why they are shifted to other professions. They remain far from vital human rights. They are accepted as citizens in the eye of the law only (*Amader Somoy*, June 4, 2018). In the work of Supravat Halder (2012), it has been disclosed so many issues. The author has emphasized the gypsies struggling conditions for basic rights, professional orientation, family construction, family earnings, geographic location of the *Bedeys*, etc. Based on the above discussion, the author posits that there is a gap in the literature that the civil rights of the gypsies are untouched. It can effectively be argued that none should be kept out of the modern state structure.

## METHODOLOGY

The qualitative methodology has been followed for conducting the research. The research works of seminal authors, national and international legal instruments, newspaper articles, relevant other documents, and information from the field have been considered for conducting the research. Field works were conducted. As many as twenty respondents were interviewed. The length of the interview was 60 to 90 minutes. An open-ended questionnaire was followed for conducting the research. The respondents were identified on the basis of availability. The tribal leaders, aged women, and students though a small ratio, were interviewed. The interview was conducted at the landing places of the respondents.

### Citizenship Crux

*Bedey* community in Bangladesh is yet to receive the right to adult franchise in the state (Rahman 40; personal interview). The nomads are the citizen in the eye of the law only (Sarder 58; Personal Interview).

They are entitled to an adult franchise (*The Constitution of Bangladesh 1972, Art. 40*). All human beings are born free and retain equal dignity (*UDHR 1948; Art. 1*). From a human rights perspective, it has been sworn to extend equal rights to all without discrimination as to race, sex, color, birth, language, religion, and political identity (*UDHR 1948; Art. 2*). Equality and equal protection of the law should be extended to all (*UDHR 1948; Art. 6 & 7*). Both the constitution of Bangladesh and the international human rights charter has declared equal treatment to all citizens. Some of them have been blessed and got citizenship rights since they have changed their ethnic profession and movement. Apart from that, a remarkable number of people have failed to gain a national identity card (Sarder 58; personal interview). They cannot cast their vote (Sarder 58; personal interview). A human being is normally regarded as a free-will agent, owner of his own properties, and can spare according to his/her own choice (*UDHR 1948; Art. 7*). The Gypsy does not have a fixed place to live which deprives them of getting the nationality status. The people who are born in the state should become the subject of citizenship (*The Citizenship Act 1951, S. 4*). In the field, it was observed that they are born and brought up in the country. They are not intruders. The state facilities are closely connected with the national identification number. The national identification number is provided by the election commission (*The National Identity Registration Act 2010, S. 5*). The birth of every child should be counted, and a certificate is supposed to be provided (*The Birth Registration Act 2004; S. 5*). The Union Parishad or the City Corporation is supposed to perform this duty without considering race, sex, color, religion, or birth status (*The Birth Registration Act 2004; Ss. 2 & 5*). The gypsy people suffer from the state facilities and health care coverage. They seldom get a birth certificate (Sarder 57). They do not have any permanent place to live (Sarder 57). The following challenges they have to face in the state life.

### **Professional Dimension of the Nomadic Life**

They are known as *Bedey* in society and do not hesitate to introduce themselves as *Bedey*. They make a living playing snake games and playing pot music at certain times of the year and usually live by the fields or in the surrounding areas. Every person has a lifestyle and it depends on inherent and human nature and all kinds of natural forms. Nomadic people are members of a community who live in different locations and moving one place to another place (from time to time). Their culture was different. Anthropologist H.K.S Arefeen mentioned that “The people of the *Bedey* community are the marginalized Muslim community of Bangladesh”. In 1680 year they come to Bangladesh with King Arakan and King Ballal Sen, they were fugitives from Myanmar ethnic group, then they settled in Bikrampur of Bangladesh, then they were spared all over the country (Maksud 2002).

### **Education**

A bunch of *Bedey* children almost 95% cannot get educational opportunity, they cannot go to school because of they have no permanent land for living (Sarder 57). Almost all the months of the year they travel from one place to another place with their parents (Sarder 56). *Bedies* are not considered to the primary education which is determined by the state rules. With the initiation of Private NGOs and municipality intervention in primary education reached *Bedey*'s children (Shawan & Rabbi 2017; 107). They are discriminated against in the opportunity for education. The general community seldom accepts their participation in the school (Ahmed 15). The school authorities want a permanent address, national identification number of parents, and birth certificate of the student they cannot provide that. By born they are bound and compelled to the ancestral profession (Robiul 52). One of the respondents found that he has been admitted to a madrasah. The madrasah authority usually is seen liberal for extending religious education (Ahmed 14). Since the Kaumi Madsha does not provide any certificate so they think they might be liberal about the permanent addresses (Ullah 56). In Madrasa education orphans are welcomed to educate (Kutubul Alam 45).

### **Communal Heritage**

Since long ago the gypsy or *bedey* community in Bangladesh has been involved in the snake charmer

profession and catching snakes from houses and lands (Das 2023). In the rainy season, they used to move forward to places and seek lost jewelry from the local ponds (Nisharul 30). Sometimes, they play with the monkeys and pray for money in rural weekly huts (Nisharul 30). They used to treat snake-bitten patients with local organic medicines (Rahima 56). Their gradual declination began some 60 years ago and now they are seen as outcasts; partly because of their dietary habits and because their women do not wear the purdah and often touch the bodies of male patients (Khatun 53). They never live in one place for a long period of time.

### **Ownership of Land Property**

They hardly had their national counting number (Rusel 45). As they do not get a national identity number, they are not entitled to any legal rights and services (Rabiul 52). A permanent address is needed to get the national identity card (Rabiul 52). They do not have the right to cast a vote which has been given by the constitution of Bangladesh Since they do not have a fixed entity, they are neglected. They cannot own property (Rusel 45). They cannot open a bank account to deposit money though their earnings are too small to lead their life. In the eye of law, they are the citizens of Bangladesh and they should have the right to own property. No micro-credit sellers come to sell their product to them though it has been argued that micro-credit is a human right. There is nobody to move forward with their fate.

### **Social rights**

The nomads do not have access to state coverage especially extended by the local government. The benefits like food for work during summer, matrimonial coverage for the mother of firstborn babies, financial support to the aged people, widow allowance, and selling of rice at a reduced cost (Majhi 48). They are not entitled to these rights due to the lack of a national identity card. Socially they are not allowed to give their daughter into marriage with general people (Majhi 48). They cannot even mix up with the general people of the state (Bibi 50). They cannot even drink a cup of tea sitting at the restaurants (Bibi 50). They are given different plate and glass for taking food also (Majhi 48). They are not equally treated according to human rights standards (*The UDHR 1948, Art. 1*). They are also maltreated by socially influential people whenever they used to land in certain places (Akter 35).

### **Medical Facility**

The Medical facilities have tremendously spread all over the state. Almost, in all the union parishads, the lowest grade of the local government in the state, a community clinic has been established (Hasan 40). Medical facilities are one of the important state services. The citizens are entitled to such privileges. The Gypsy community is far from state medical services (Hasan 40). A residential address is necessary to receive medical facilities and medicine from the community clinics (Hasan 40). Their children do not get vaccines and immunization rights from the state (Banik 33). The status of reproductive health is also at dire risk. They remain far from the level of minimum nutrition standards (Shefali 45). The nomads have to remain under financial constraints where they cannot buy medicines and vitamins for growing-up girls and pregnant women (Shefali 45). The community men are not much powerful to protest against the deprivation (Mia 32). They need to provide fake addresses to the hospitals in case of severe diseases (Mia 32).

### **Fresh Drinking Water, Electrification, and Gas services**

Most of the nomads in Bangladesh used to live a floating life over boats (Majhi 55). There are some community men who have changed their ethnic character, live in the Savar region have been entitled to fresh drinking water, electricity facilities, and can use natural gas as fuel in the household practice (Majhi 55). Since they move frequently from one place to another, it is not possible to render these facilities to them. and maximum months of the year. So they used such kind of water for a drink that is not suitable, it is



polluted water (Kumar and Khan 2014). The nomads are also deprived of electrification benefits and modern living standards (Khatun 35).

### Lack of Shelter

The gypsy people are struggling with state shelter coverage (Sultana 2014). The government of the state has a project to provide one unit house to marginalized people (Sultana 2014). The *Ashrayan Prokolpo* of the state provides unitary houses for below-income people and landless people (Government of Bangladesh Website). The Government took the initiative through the social welfare policy for the underprivileged and distressed people. The Gypsy people are not entitled to the opportunity. The authority claims an application with a national identity number. The gypsy people do not have any permanent shelter. Hence, they are out of such state coverage (Majhi 55).

### CONCLUSION

The Bedey community of the state is a decade-old ethnic tribe. They should be entitled to the right to an adult franchise. They are usually struggling with their existence. Neither they can pray for their right, nor they are taken spontaneously to the right. Since they do not have voting right, they carry less importance to the political culture of the state. The state administration seldom thinks about their fate. There should be a policy to acknowledge them, their ethnicity, and their tribal nature. This research may contribute to the area of knowledge for the researchers. The policymakers of the state may share the learning and concentrate to overcome the situation. Further research work may be conducted in the future pointing out other things.

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