



AALBORG UNIVERSITET

MASTER'S THESIS

On

"From Marginality to Mainstream: The Integration Journey of Individuals from Tea Communities in Sylhet into the Broader Bangladeshi Society"

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Table of Contents

1)Introduction.....	6
1.1 Research Question.....	7
1.2 Motivation of the study.....	7
1.3 Rationale of the study.....	8
1.4 Structure of the thesis.....	8
2) Methodology.....	9
2.1 Research Philosophy.....	9
2.2 Positionality.....	10
2.3 Research Design and approach.....	10
2.4 Sampling.....	12
2.5 Participants.....	13
2.6 Data collection.....	13
2.7 Data Analysis.....	15
2.8 Validity, Credibility and Trustworthiness.....	16
2.9 Ethical Consideration.....	18
2.10 Limitations and Challenges.....	18
3) Theoretical Framework.....	20
3.1 Jenkins Social Identity.....	20
3.2 Integration Concept by Ager & Strang.....	23
3.3 Acculturation Theory by Berry.....	25
3.4 Capacity to aspire by Arjun Appadurai.....	29
3.5 Arjun Appadurai's framework on "Globalization".....	31
3.6 Recognition concept by Axel Honneth.....	33

3.7 Empowerment theory.....	34
3.8 Justification of using above theories.....	37
4) Historical Background.....	38
5) Literature Review.....	40
5.1 Socioeconomic status.....	40
5.2 Progress Towards Integration.....	44
6) Data Analysis.....	48
6.1 Negotiating Aspirations and Upward Mobility.....	50
6.2 The desire for belonging and social recognition.....	58
6.3 Collective agency and community advancement.....	64
7) Concluding Remarks.....	72
Bibliography	
Appendixes	

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Abstract

The tea-working community of Bangladesh has encountered marginalization and social exclusion over generations due to their socioeconomic status and historical circumstances. However, some of them are currently attempting to integrate into mainstream society, despite the existing barriers and marginalization. From social constructivist perspective, we employed narrative inquiry within qualitative research design to explore the key motivations that drive them to walk the pathways of integration and strategies that they are following to enhance their social inclusion in wider Bangladeshi society. To uncover this, we have conducted narrative interview with seven respondents from seven different tea gardens in the Sylhet division of Bangladesh. This study employed narrative thematic data analysis to explore their integration journey into the broader Bangladeshi society, drawing on seven interrelated theories and concepts including Jenkins' "social identity", the "integration" concept of Ager and Strang, Berry's "acculturation" theory, 'Capacity to Aspire' and "Globalization" framework by Arjun Appadurai, Honneth's "recognition" concept, and "empowerment" theory. In our study, we have explored the motivation for the integration of individuals from the tea community into the mainstream society of Sylhet, Bangladesh, which spans from personal aspiration for a secure life to a collective vision for community well-being. Strategies like education, dominant culture language proficiency, career transition, and participation in different skill-based workshops drive them towards leading a stable life. They engage in dominant cultural spaces, social interactions, and public events to ensure social recognition. Simultaneously, they maintain strong ties with their roots, and through collective efforts, they aim to uplift their community through social bonds, social bridges, and social links.

Keywords: Integration, Marginality, Mainstream, Identity, Community, Recognition, Empowerment, Aspiration, Globalization.

1.Introduction

Integration refers to the process of being a recognized and accepted member of a society; it involves multiple dimensions such as legal and political inclusion, socioeconomic engagement, and cultural adaptation (Penninx & Garcés, 2016). Factors such as isolation, discrimination, and a lack of resources hinder a community from getting integrated socially, politically, economically, and culturally in a wider society. Such communities are categorized by their caste, class, gender, ethnicity, or geographical or socioeconomic position (Have & Neves, 2021). They often struggle with systematic barriers that restrict their full involvement in mainstream society. Tea-working communities in Bangladesh are one of them (Al-Amin et al., 2017). There are 167 tea gardens, spanning seven districts in Bangladesh (BTB, 2021). Around 300,000 workers are employed in these tea gardens (Repon, 2015). The tea industry is significant for the country's national economy, and it produces around 2% of global tea production and exports 3% of global tea traded on the world market (Sabur et al., 2000). Tea workers are the main contributors making this industry strong and active as well as serving the economy of Bangladesh, but they have remained excluded from the expected recognition and opportunities to participate fully in mainstream society. The factors such as poverty, illiteracy, religion, language, and different ethnic subcultures kept them alienated from mainstream communities year after year (Al-Amin et al., 2017; Rakiba, 2014). But recently, it is noticeable that a group of people of the community have been trying to get integrated into the mainstream society in Bangladesh by breaking all the structural constraints and obstacles. Thus, our study aims to explore the overall integration journey of individuals from the tea working community into mainstream society.

Many studies have been conducted previously focusing on different aspects of tea garden workers in Bangladesh. For example, studies have been conducted focusing on living conditions of tea workers (Rahman, 2016); health, safe drinking water, sanitation, and housing conditions (Barkat et al., 2010); poverty and social vulnerability (Islam & Al-Amin, 2019); human rights (Das & Islam, 2006); debt bondage of the tea workers (Kara, 2012); rights of tea children (Hossain et al., 2017); the ethnicity, gender, caste, class, and culture of tea workers (Tabassum, 2019). We also found that research also had been conducted to find how some of the tea workers' children are trying to aspire to a better future through education (Al-Amin & Islam, 2024). After studying several relevant pieces of literature, surprisingly, we identified that, scholarly attention lacks on the comprehensive integration journey of the community into mainstream Bangladeshi society.

Therefore, the study aims to explore the key motivations drive them to walk the routes of integration and Strategies that they are following to enhance their social inclusion in broader society. To achieve the main objective of this study we set our research question as follows,

1.1 Research Question

What key motivations drive individuals in the tea-working community of the Sylhet division of Bangladesh to integrate into mainstream society, and how do they navigate the pathways towards the integration despite having significant social, cultural, economic, and political barriers?

1.2 Motivation of the study

People experience marginalization or exclusion in society for various reasons, such as ethnicity, cultural differences, language, and class, which hinder their full participation in the broader community. Tea communities of Sylhet Division are experiencing this kind of social exclusion (Al-min et al., 2017). But nowadays they are trying to adopt and integrate into the mainstream pathways of Bangladesh because of globalization and people's mobility. We were inspired to study this community's work toward inclusion with larger social fabric because their experiences reveal social imbalance, highlight their enduring strength, and offer essential insights toward establishing a society that is more equitable and empathetic. Besides that, some of the tea children were studying with us in our university back in Bangladesh where we observed their struggle, resilience and determinations to secure a stable life , inspires us to explore more deeply what things trigger them to think about coming out from their marginalized condition and overcoming the obstacles towards economic stability, dignity and social acceptance as it is essential to develop a balanced, equitable, peaceful, and more inclusive society. Additionally, we were inspired to study the integration of tea communities into the wider Bangladeshi community by understanding how people feel connected to a broader society without erasing their cultural backgrounds and how their efforts contribute to creating a more inclusive and multicultural society.

1.3 Rationale of the study

The necessity of study on community integration is increasing day to day due to understanding cultural diversity, societal inequality, and communities' efforts towards inclusion. When people from different backgrounds start living together, diverse experiences arise; studying this diversity helps researchers to understand both the exclusion and inclusion of a particular community in a broader society, which, in a broad sense, contributes to enriching the research on shared society, mutual adaptation, and building a common identity while maintaining cultural roots. Additionally, social segregation and separation can lead to conflict and violence; studying integration of marginalized communities assists in identifying the paths to foster solidarity and combat discrimination. It can also reduce marginalization in a community and contribute to establishing a more fair and inclusive society (Najmuddin, 2024). Besides, there is a huge literature gap in studying the integration of tea communities in the wider Bangladeshi community, which will be fulfilled by this study. Studying about the integration journey of this community will create a foundation for further enquiry in broader discussion. that in future help to uncover the actual realities, voices, and initiatives which will smooth the way of integration. The outcomes can contribute to promoting inclusion, strengthening social cohesion, and supporting the development of a more resilient community.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. Chapter one started by 'introduction' that outlines research topic and question. Chapter two encompasses the 'research methodology, explaining the research philosophy, design, sampling, positionality, data collection and analysis, and ethical considerations. . We presented the 'theoretical framework' in chapter three that guides the analysis and discussion. In chapter four, we present the 'historical background' that discusses the historical influence and different contexts of tea working community which lead them to get marginalized from over generations. Then, the 'literature review' in chapter five details the research topic, focusing on pertinent concepts and identifying the gaps in current studies. We presented the 'theoretical framework' in chapter five that guides the analysis and discussion. Chapter six provides an outline of 'analytical design and analyze collected data' within three themes. Finally, chapter seven includes the 'concluding remarks' that present the study findings and recommend future research in this field.

2.Methodology:

This chapter aims to comprehensively explain the methodological section, addressing the previously presented research objectives. It is organized to outline the details of research philosophy, research design and approach, sampling and participant details, data collection processes, methods of data analysis, validity, credibility and trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and limitations.

2.1 Research Philosophy

It is necessary for a researcher to outline a philosophical foundation to develop a research proposal, which helps to clarify the basis of the researcher's beliefs or ideas about the research (Creswell, 2014). These thoughts are considered worldviews or paradigms, which help formulate the design of a study (Creswell, 2007). In this study, we followed a philosophical worldview rooted in social constructivism. According to Creswell (2014), from the viewpoint of social constructivism, people actively try to understand their surroundings; their views are built through their daily experiences, thoughts, and interactions with others. Here, individuals attempt to interpret the world that they experience every day– from the places they live, from the jobs they carry out, and through the realities they navigate (Creswell, 2014). From these experiences, there can be multiple interpretations of a single phenomenon or the same thing (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 130). These interpretations are formed through individuals own backgrounds, surroundings, and conversations between the researcher and study respondents (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 130). Creswell explained that the prime aim of this kind of analytical process is to listen to participants voices, understand their opinions or views, and explore the in-depth essence of their personal experiences and unique challenges that they have encountered (Creswell, 2007, 2014). Creswell also identified that researchers own experiences can also influence their interpretation of participants stories (Creswell, 2014). However, the constructivist philosophy helps us to understand the stories and journeys of integration of the tea-working community in the Sylhet division. The participants have different opinions, views, and perspectives behind their motivation and strategies towards the pathway of integration, which are influenced by their background, beliefs, and certain situations or contexts. We depend on the participants stories to deeply understand their perspectives and experiences.

2.2 Researchers Positionality

To conduct a study, a researcher's viewpoints or perspectives are regarded as his/her positionality to the research. It also implies the researcher's relationship to their research topics or subjects (Goundar, 2025). In this study, as researchers, we hold our position as partial insiders and outsiders. Because we and our respondents are from the same geographical regions, we are familiar with the local social structure and power dynamics due to this proximity. This familiarity positions us as insiders and assists us in understanding certain contextual nuances. Conversely, despite being from the same geographical regions, there are significant differences between us and our participants in terms of lifestyle, social experiences, cultural practices, and economic background. We never share the tea-working communities' norms, traditions, and lived their daily realities, and challenges. We never encounter the forms of marginalization that are experienced by the tea-working community in the Sylhet division of Bangladesh. These differences position us as outsiders in terms of sociocultural experiences and insiders in terms of geographical closeness. However, we are conscious about imbalances in power dynamics in this research process and the advantages we carry, especially with respect to the individuals whose struggles we are documenting but not living ourselves. We remain critically reflective to examine their perspectives, which is essential for avoiding misinterpretation while upholding ethical standards and utilizing an analytical framework (Macqueen & Patterson, 2020). We are aware of our positionality during the interpretation of the narrative of their lives. We have undertaken this research with humility, visibility, and an intention to amplify the community's voices, insights, and agency. Finally, we strive to create a platform for the tea-working community that facilitates their ability to express their views and perspectives with integrity.

2.3 Research Design and approach

The study was conducted to explore the motivational aspects which increase the aspiration of tea-working communities and the strategies they are following to get integrated into mainstream Bangladeshi society. To conduct this kind of study, qualitative research is more suitable because it emphasizes how humans interpret and make sense of a particular situation or specific challenges (Creswell, 2007, 2014). It seeks to understand the perspectives of participants as well as analyze both their beliefs and the motivations behind what influences those beliefs (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). So, we have chosen a qualitative research design for this study because it allows individuals to express their experiences in detail. It will also help

us determine how individuals interpret and make sense of their experiences. Taylor et al. (2016) have noted that every single point of view of participants is significant for obtaining a range of diverse perspectives. Moreover, qualitative research also considers the surroundings or situations of individuals, which influence them to shape their thoughts, feelings, or behaviors on certain issues (Patton, 2015). It acknowledges that an individual's surroundings, including their family life, living place, and work environment, shape their understanding of certain events or situations (Creswell, 2007).

Qualitative research design has some unique characteristics. Here, researchers start investigations of their data, collected through interviews, observations, or stories (Patton, 2015). Through their investigation, they make interpretations of the data (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). Creswell (2007), explained that in inductive research design researchers make interpretations based on what they observed, heard, and understood. Thus, in qualitative research design we have followed an inductive approach to conducting this study because it has helped us to reach a conclusion about the integration experience of tea community individuals by organizing gathered data, identifying patterns and structures, and developing broader themes from the interpretations (Creswell, 2007).

Furthermore, qualitative research involves various typologies, which facilitate researchers gaining in-depth understanding of individuals experiences, meanings, and viewpoints (Butina, 2015). Narrative inquiry is one form of qualitative research that we have chosen for this research because it will assist us in exploring individuals ' stories to better understand their experiences (Butina, 2015). Here, people's stories are the main data. Narrative inquiry focuses on exploring individuals lives through storytelling while respecting their unique experiences (Clandinin, 2022). It highlights individuals' interpretations of their experiences from their personal viewpoints (Daiute, 2014). It can disclose the complex details surrounding meaningful events in individuals' lives (Webster & Mertova, 2007). According to Clandinin (2022), in narrative inquiry, an individual's experiences may be explored in various ways, such as listening to them, observing them, spending time with them, and analyzing their stories or narratives. It also focuses on describing an individual's full life story along with other key factors that shape it (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Besides, it admits that every individual's story is shaped by different experiences from their institutional, cultural, and social interactions (Clandinin, 2022). Narrative inquiry is an appropriate approach in qualitative research to examine a person's life experience as expressed through individual narratives and unique experiences (Webster & Mertova, 2007). By following narrative inquiry, we heard the personal

stories of participants in this study, which has helped us to explore the key motivations that inspire the tea-working communities to dream of a better future and the ways in which they are following to get integrated into wider Bangladeshi society. We will explore these insights from their personal stories, which they shared with us through interviews.

2.4 Sampling

In our study, we employed both purposive and snowball sampling together. The first respondent was selected by using purposive sampling. In a "Daily Star" news article, we got to know about his fascinating education journey from a tea garden primary school to getting the opportunity for admission to a German university. As his journey aligned closely with the research objectives of our study, we contacted him through social media, as Andrade (2021) argues, researchers choose respondents purposefully when the study features are defined for a specific group. We subsequently used snowball sampling to select additional respondents. Our study focused on the tea community in Sylhet Division; we had no established networks with the community. Additionally, locating participants by visiting fields personally was not feasible due to economic and logistical constraints; thus, we leveraged the networks of initial respondents and requested they refer us to other potential respondents within the community to reach the study's criteria.

Bryman (2012) noted on this account, in ethnographic research, probability sampling is also useful, particularly with hard-to-reach populations, where access to data sources is limited or challenging. It is an iterative process where researchers can use the previous respondents' networks to identify subsequent participants. We followed every requirement proposed by Bryman (2012) to address potential issues in data collection by using snowball sampling. The first respondent was selected cautiously by using purposive sampling. We initially engaged with other respondents based on diverse criteria. After learning about the respondent through a newspaper, we contacted him and found his experience aligned with our study aim. Initially, we considered the first interview as a pilot. After consulting our supervisor, we decided to count it as a final interview. Then we used the first respondent's network to find subsequent respondents, as suggested by Bryman (2012). To ensure the maximum data variation and reduce the bias, we had to set a limit on the number of suggestion waves on a single network, and we set a limit of two referrals from each person, which is called the chain limit suggested by Bryman (2012). After every recruiting wave, we combined it with purposive sampling to ensure the respondent represented the criteria we set and continuously monitored and adjusted

the sampling process (Bryman, 2012). We also used to write every important aspect, such as recruitment procedure, any selection-related bias, and respondent's behavior, in our reflexive diary to ensure credibility.

2.5 Participants

In this study, the participants consisted of 7 individuals from the tea community—people from seven different tea gardens and different localities in the Sylhet division in Bangladesh, aged between 25 and 45. Among them, five participants are male and two are female. Respondents were selected from diverse backgrounds in terms of religion, locality, and profession to ensure the maximum variation. The respondents' details are presented below. We kept their living area and tea garden names anonymous for security reasons.

Participants	Age	Gender	Religion	Profession
R1	26	Male	Hinduism	Graduated
R2	28	Female	Hinduism	Ngo worker
R3	30	Male	Christianity	Police Officer
R4	27	Male	Hinduism	Post graduated
R5	32	Female	Islam	Former Upazila Chairman
R6	45	Male	Hinduism	News Reporter
R7	35-40	Male	Hinduism	Upazila Land Officer

2.6 Data collection

We employed the narrative interview approach for data collection, as it enables researchers to gather the experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of the respondents in the form of a story. Besides, it helps to explore how personal experiences are intertwined with larger societal narratives (Clandinin, 2006). This method allowed us to explore the tea community individuals' journey to integration into mainstream society by getting insights into their journey. Moreover, we employed semi-structured interviews as a tool, as it provided us with the flexibility to delve deeper into the respondents' narrated experiences, focusing on specific events and perspectives, all while maintaining overall coherence. As Bold (2012) pointed out, employing this strategy

enables respondents to narrate their experiences in the form of a story, rather than simply providing factual answers.

Due to financial and logistical constraints, we conducted a video call interview instead of using an ethnographic approach for data collection in this study. According to Silverman (2017), video conferencing interviews are also a valuable method to conduct qualitative interviews when face-to-face interaction is not feasible. This method is gaining widespread acceptance due to technological advancements that make it easier to reach participants across the world. We have followed all the guidelines proposed by Silverman (2017) throughout the entire interview process.

In the first step, we initially set a questionnaire, formulating only a few questions that emphasized the importance of past, present, and future timeframes in alignment with the research question. These questions were designed to be flexible and open-ended, ensuring that the participants were free to share their lived experiences in a natural and uninterrupted manner, as Silverman (2017) suggested in preparation. Then, before conducting the formal interview, we had some informal conversations to establish a comfortable relationship, create a trustworthy environment, and select a final date for the actual interview based on the respondent's availability and preference. On the scheduled day of the interview, we first ensured that all technical aspects, including internet connections, audio-video connectivity, and two additional mobile phones for recording, were operational and the setting was free from any kind of disruption. In the whole interview procedure, ethical considerations were strictly maintained, such as obtaining informed consent, explaining potential risks with confidentiality measures, and ensuring participants' right to withdraw any information at any time. We used open-ended questions to encourage them to narrate their journey naturally. Throughout the session, we actively listened to every word and observed participants' verbal responses, facial expressions, and gestures (Silverman, 2017).

At first, we took one pilot interview to test and refine the interview questions, identifying potential problems throughout the process so that we could make necessary adjustments before the final interview began. In total, we conducted 7 interviews, including the pilot interview. The interviews were conducted in multiple settings. In the first setting, each interview lasted 45 to 60 minutes. At the time of taking the first session, we noticed that respondents were reluctant to discuss some specific aspects openly. To address these aspects, we conducted some follow-up conversations or built strong relationships and trust. As a result, in the second

session, respondents started to share information more openly, and finally we were able to gain broader and deeper insights and a chance to validate some information by cross-checking. We started every interview with greetings and concluded by thanking them and welcoming any further reflections they wished to add.

2.7 Data Analysis

Bold (2012) noted that there is no mandatory primary method for analyzing and revealing outcomes in narrative studies. Thus, in our study, we have chosen to use the narrative thematic data analysis method. Narrative method helped us to maintain coherence and flow, and thematic analysis proposed by Braun & Clarke (2006), offered guidance to identify patterns and synthesize them into a final thematic framework within the narratives. For ensuring methodological consistency, we have comprehensively followed the six-step process of thematic analysis proposed by Braun & Clarke (2006).

Braun & Clarke (2006), stated that the first step is "familiarization with the data." They highlight the importance of immersing deeply in the dataset, which involves actively reading and rereading the data while starting to take notes and observations. In our study, we listened to the audio recording many times to familiarize ourselves with the narratives and to correct any errors made during the transcription process. Then we read the transcripts to become familiar with the participant's narrative. We have divided this stage into two parts. Initially we listened to the audio recordings and read the transcripts separately to generate independent insights and identify subtle errors in the data. In the following steps, we have collaboratively engaged in multiple rounds of joint listening and reading sessions, which finally enable us to merge our perspectives, discuss interpretations, and comprehensively understand the data.

The second stage is about "generating initial codes," which involves segmenting data into smaller, manageable units to capture significant ideas and topics (Braun & Clarke, 2006). There are different ways of coding extracts. In our study, we have coded our data manually by taking notes, reading thoroughly and comprehensively to highlight important words and sections, and ensuring that every relevant detail has been captured for analysis. In the third stage, we started to search for themes by doing iterative refinement on our long list of initial codes that we had identified in our entire dataset and then combining them to form a unifying theme.

The fourth step is "reviewing the theme" which needs further refined the identified themes in this step to improve their clarity, coherence, and distinctiveness (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In

this step, we further refined the categories and selected those that were best suited to address the research question. We also considered the themes' alignment with our selected theories and observed the number of codes associated with each participant. This process resulted in the elimination of several categories.

The fifth step is "defining and naming the themes" (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This step involves analyzing data within themes, examining their essence, connecting themes with the research question, and finally creating short, informative names for the themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 91). We selected three themes from several categories related to each theme.

The first theme: "Aspirations and pathways for socioeconomic advancement" emerged from the codes "Aspiration", "personal growth", "family prosperity", "family-driven aspirations", "economic stability", "impacts of NGO and government-led initiatives", "global media landscapes", "imagination", "education", "learning language", and "career".

The second theme, "The Desire for Belonging and Social Recognition," emerged from "lifestyle by dominant social group", "desire, inclusion", "social recognition", "efforts to socialize", "integrate into mainstream society", "dominant cultural space", "foster familiarity", and "participation in public events."

The third theme, "collective agency and community advancement," emerged from "strong emotional connection", "own community", "well-being of future generations", "bringing structural change", "social bond", "social bridge", and "social links".

The final stage involves producing or writing the report (Braun and Clarke, 2006). We followed every step to write a structured report by ensuring clarity, academic rigor, and alignment with established qualitative research and theoretical structure written in the study.

2.8 Validity, Credibility and Trustworthiness

To increase the legitimacy of the research outcomes, it is vital for researchers to acknowledge possible determinants that could affect the validity of their study. These determinants include any form of bias, limitations, or external influences that could potentially impact the validity of the study findings. Furthermore, to ensure the reliability and credibility of the conclusions, it is crucial to adopt appropriate methodological strategies (Creswell, 2009; Maxwell, 2005). One potential threat to ensuring validity in qualitative research is bias (Maxwell, 2005). Maxwell (2005) emphasized that researchers should critically examine and reflect on how their preconceptions influence the study findings, rather than attempting to eliminate them. Despite

our long-term residency in Sylhet and our observations of tea working community's lifestyle, it did not influence the accounts of the participants' experiences. Throughout the data collection, analysis, and identification of outcomes, we employed the "rich, thick description" suggested by Creswell (2009, p. 191). This strategy ensures that the findings retain the authenticity of the participants' experiences without bias (Creswell, 2009). In our study, we also paid detailed attention to every perspective of respondents. For instance, one of our respondents shared a Christian missionary's contribution to his integration journey, which others did not acknowledge. We elaborated on this in our analysis to ensure that every perspective was represented, as Creswell (2009) highlighted the importance of including different views to make the study "more realistic and richer." Maxwell (2005) noted that when researchers spend more time in the study setting, it helps them gain a deeper understanding of the context and avoid premature claims. Additionally, Creswell (2009) argued that understanding the context can enhance the validity of the findings. Although we did not employ an ethnographic data collection method, we engaged in close interactions and gained insights into their lived experiences because we are part of the mainstream population of the Sylhet Division in Bangladesh. These experiences provide us with the privilege of a deeper understanding of the participants' views, which Creswell (2009) identified as facilitating more credible findings. Furthermore, we maintained a reflexive journal, as suggested by Lincoln & Guba (1985), to enhance trustworthiness. We documented our personal feelings, reactions, assumptions, challenges, refinements, and ethical issues in a diary to critically examine our roles, perspectives, and decisions throughout the research journey. Maintaining a reflective journal enhances transparency and increases the credibility and trustworthiness of the study Lincoln & Guba, (1985)as it can justify the interpretative decisions made during data analysis and the perspectives that influenced the overall outcome. Moreover, to enhance the credibility and consistency of the findings, in several cases, the same respondents were interviewed multiple times, which helped to build trust, gain deeper insights, and clarify earlier responses. Additionally, the data were triangulated with multiple published relevant literature and theories outlined in the theoretical framework to strengthen the analytical argument and align with academic discourses.

2.9 Ethical Consideration:

To maintain ethics in research is necessary to ensure the security of participants, the reliability of outcomes, and the authenticity of the research process. It is crucial for revealing the concrete facts and dealing with real-world problems because it explains guidelines for carrying out scholarly research and mandates researchers to uphold a code of conduct throughout the research (Hasan et al., 2021). According to Ajemba & Arene (2022), consider codes of conduct or ethics in research, minimize potential risks of harm for the study participants, and enhance the study's credibility by maintaining confidentiality and anonymity.

However, to conduct this study, we followed the codes of ethics in qualitative research by Creswell (2007). First, we took the full consent of the study participants before conducting interviews. We clearly informed them about our study's purpose, nature, probable risks, and advantages before conducting interviews. In the analysis phase, we deleted all identifying details and used pseudonyms to maintain anonymity. We also assured the participants that they have the right to opt out of the study at any time without any negative consequences. Cultural sensitivity and integrity are also to be respected to impede the misrepresentation of participants. Additionally, to mitigate possible risks, we secured the data confidentiality by encrypting it with strong password-protected files, which are solely accessible to the research group. Moreover, since we did online interviews, we were very conscious when we conducted them. To write transcripts for data analysis, we recorded all interviews so that we could review them multiple times. We obtained the consent of all participants to retain the records of their interview conversations. In conclusion, by maintaining these ethical guidelines, we safeguarded the rights, dignity, and well-being of participants throughout the study. Furthermore, our dedication to upholding ethical guidelines throughout the study underscores our accountability to both the participants and the broader academic community.

2.10 Limitations and Challenges

Qualitative research has the potential for subjectivity and bias in different stages, which is difficult to manage, and it can create risk for the study's credibility due to its linkage to subjectivity (Roulston & Shelton, 2015). In our study, in addition to purposive sampling, we also have used snowball sampling, which may lead to a sample that does not fully represent the broader tea community population, as participants are likely to refer to others with similar views and experiences. Since we lacked the financial resources to physically visit the location, we conducted the interviews via video calls. Due to the visual cues of our devices, we were

unable to fully observe the participants' physical surroundings or the complete environment. If we were able to observe the complete environment of our interviewees, we might gather more information about their narratives. Study respondents were also small, which may hinder the generalization of the results to a broader population. But we have used secondary literature to supplement the information from our interlocutor as well as use theory that will enable to widen the perspectives of the research – not only to give us the individual perspectives and understanding of the navigation strategies used in our cases but also get a broader understanding of various navigation strategies within the broader field of inquiry.

Besides, we obtained a wide variety of data from interviews. Maintaining the consistency of this variety of data was difficult for us. Additionally, participants may share socially preferred responses and refrain from sharing various sensitive data. Moreover, the study primarily concentrates on exploring the key motivations of tea-working communities that drive their integration and the strategies that they undertake to become a part of the larger Bangladeshi society it may not sufficiently cover the wide variety of relevant contexts. Understanding integration or social inclusion is a long-term process that requires multiple attempts to obtain insightful meanings on this topic. Nonetheless, we expected that the findings would provide us with an enhanced comprehension of these narratives or phenomena.

Moreover, finding motivational stories or integration strategies for marginalized communities is a broad research topic that requires a long time to fully explore. This is difficult to explore fully within any limited timeframe, which is another limitation for us. Despite these issues, this study fully dedicated to exploring the inspirational actors who motivate the tea-working community of Sylhet Division to break out of their marginalization and the ways in which they are following to get integrated into mainstream Bangladeshi society. The outcomes are designed to facilitate the further progress of research in the area of integration, multiculturalism, and social cohesion.

3.Theoretical Framework

The theoretical chapter plays an important role in a research paper as it helps researchers to deliver a structured way from formation to detailing or documenting. Using multiple theories in research helps researchers to get comprehensive insights from empirical data, understand the complicated social phenomenon, and assist in guiding the writing of a report. Additionally, theory helps researchers by offering a structural framework, assisting them to understand and interpret data, identifying gaps, refining ideas, and checking their credibility and reliability by incorporating data from broad academic fields (Mueller & Urbach, 2017). This research focuses on the tea-working community in the Sylhet division of Bangladesh and specifically emphasizes their integration process into mainstream society, despite facing various obstacles. Since we got a wide range of data from the seven respondents to this study, it is difficult to explain these varieties of data fully by applying only one or two theories. So, we used three theories and four concepts to analyze the collected data. We utilized Jenkins'(2014) “social identity”, “integration” concept of Ager and Strang(2008), “Acculturation” theory Berry (1997,2005), 'Capacity to Aspire' concept by Appadurai, (2004), “Globalization” framework by Appadurai (1990), “ recognition” concept of Axel Honneth(1997), “Empowerment” theory by (Rappaport,1987;Keiffer,1984;Wallerstein,1992).

3.1 Jenkins Social Identity:

The identity is a universal concept that is applicable equally to humans as well as all entities in existence (Jenkins, 2014; as cited in Roy et al., 2024, p. 24)). Jenkins, (2014) stated that identity can be defined by two basic meanings; one is sameness or similarity of identity, and another one is continuity of identity across time. Jenkins highlights that identity is not a rigid or an static concept; rather, it is an active process. The process of identification allows people to associate themselves with groups or others, including friends, sports teams, or shared ideologies (Jenkins, 2014; as cited in Roy et al., 2024, p. 24).

According to Jenkins (2014), all human identities are fundamentally social, formed through interactions, innovations, agreements, disagreements, customs, norms, negotiations, and communication. He criticized the contemporary literatures of identity due to their static concept about it. Identity is a fluid and dynamic process of ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ shaped by continuous interactions and institutional frameworks. From a sociological viewpoint, Jenkins

explains identity to distinguish individuals and groups in relation to others (Jenkins, 2014, as cited in Roy et al., 2024, p. 24).

Identity is the human capacity to understand “who” is “who” and “what” is “what”, and it is fundamentally rooted in language. We should not take something as given or granted (Jenkins, 2014; as cited in Roy et al., 2024, p. 25).

The concept of identity is essential because it allows us to understand and differentiate ourselves and others, both personally and collectively. Identification doesn’t rigidly control behavior to understand social structures. Based on identity, the ability to predict actions is constrained due to its involvement in complex and changing patterns that are often vague and inconsistent. In addition, the relationship between personal identity and individual interests is very complicated to predict behavior reliably (Jenkins, 2014; as cited in Roy et al., 2024, p. 25).

Many scholars have criticized the identity concept for its unclear nature. From the perspective of essentialists, identity is fixed, static, and fundamental, while constructivists think identity is fluid, dynamic, and socially formed. This dual nature increases the concept’s utility in sociological analysis (Jenkins, 2014; as cited in Roy et al., 2024, p. 25). However, Jenkins criticizes the traditional differences between individual and collective identity and argues that it oversimplifies and neglects the intricate interactions and processes that contribute to forming identity (Jenkins, 2014; cited in as Roy et al., 2024, p. 25).

He stated that individual and collective identity are both closely interrelated and suggests that individual identity cannot be fully understood without considering its involvement with collective identity (Jenkins, 2014, as cited in Roy et al., 2024, p. 25) Both individual and collective identity develop through interactions and bring out both commonalities and contrasts. Therefore, acknowledging the interconnected nature of identity theories, we should treat individual and collective identity with equal emphasis. There are three interrelated orders, namely, individual order,’ ‘institutional order,’ and ‘interaction order,’ which together comprise the social world. Individual order highlights the personal reflections, thoughts, and experiences; in the interaction order, priority is given to the interactions and relationships among individuals, and institutional order focuses on patterns and structure of society. Instead of being separated, these three orders are interconnected and simultaneously interacting, influencing, and coexisting with one another (Jenkins, 2014, as cited in Roy et al., 2024, p. 25).

There is a constant tension between internal and external identity. Internal identity means how we perceive ourselves, while external identity refers to how other people view us (Jenkins, 2014; as cited in Roy et al., 2024, p. 26). Jenkins admits that the terms ‘internal’ and ‘external’ can be misleading due to their oversimplification of intricate realities. These terms act as useful metaphors to describe how individuals and groups both define themselves and others in a particular setting. Identity formation is a more dynamic, ongoing, and interconnected process. Internal and external processes of identification can happen together, known as “moments of identification”, and it challenges the typical, sequential view of how language and thought usually function. Identification happens in a common space where internal and external processes constantly interact and influence one another and exist as inseparable. However, internal and external influences may change due to dependence on various contexts and situations (Jenkins, 2014; as cited in Roy et al., 2024, p. 26).

Time and space play significant roles in shaping our identity based on our experiences. And the interrelation between time, space, and identity is essential to understanding the individual and collective identity. Both individual memory and shared history are vital in the process of identification, impacting both present identity and future expectations (Jenkins, 2014; as cited in Roy et al., 2024, p. 26).

Jenkins, (2014) critiques the perspectives of Emile Durkheim and Margaret Thatcher about society and highlights the collectivities like social networks, nations, or corporations are more intricate and abstract than just the total of their members. These groups are shaped by several layers of social, economic, political, and cultural dynamics that interact and influence one another in diverse ways (Jenkins, 2014; as cited in Roy et al., 2024, p. 26). Jenkins, (2014) contends that, despite the theoretical shifts and emergence of postmodernism, the concept of community remains vital and essential in daily life. It plays a role as a key source of collective identity and assists in addressing basic human needs. Being a part of a community does not necessarily imply the sameness in the thoughts and behavior of its members. Understanding and relationships attached to symbols can vary among members of a community. As an example, Jenkins says about a rugby club situated in South Wales that acts as a center of diverse meanings and significance for various people. A community and its symbols can encompass a variety of meanings that demonstrate the identity of a community is both collective and individually shaped (Jenkins, 2014; as cited in Roy et al., 2024, p. 26). As a key sociological concept, identity links individual experience to group interactions. These ideas are essential to realize how societies function and change because they explain human behavior across history

and identify the challenges of the current world. Moreover, by understanding identity and the process we can conduct our interaction with others, which is essential to capture the modern human relationship and the societal framework.

In conclusion, Jenkins's social identity is a continuous process that formed through the individual's own experiences, social interactions, and systematic influences. Identity theory will help us to understand not only individual identity but also perceptions from the community and mainstream society about tea workers influence their pathways to integration. This theory will provide us a framework to realize how tea workers reshape their identity according to social demands, how social interactions impact their sense of community or belonging, and how systemic factors such as media, NGOs, government, or education impact their capacity to integrate into the mainstream society of Bangladesh.

3.2 Integration Concept by Ager & Strang

It's difficult to define integration from a single perspective because of the broadness of the integration process (Castles et al., 2003, p. 113). Inspired by the work of Ager & Strang (2008), we have chosen the concept of successful integration in our research to gain insights from our collected data. Ager & Strang (2008, p. 167) have emphasized the successful integration that helps people be a part of a new society as well as an essential part of government policies and public discussions. Ten domains of integration, highlighted by Ager & Strang (2008), are crucial for an individual's integration into a new society. The aim of these domains is not to explain all factors that shape integration, such as politics or economic dynamics, but they contribute to providing a clear idea about the meaning of integration and what it should include. Ager & Strang (2008, p. 169) have discussed ten domains of successful integration under four key themes, which are explained as follows.

A. Markers and means focus on some opportunities that are essential for successful integration and vital indicators that support individuals to progress within their new surroundings. such as,

1) Employment, which is a basic indicator of a successful integration process. It provides people with financial independence and improves skills and social interaction. It contributes to improving language skills and building relationships with broader society. It assists people to gain a sense of purpose in life, which motivates them to broaden their goal, dream, or aspiration. Some challenges, such as unemployment, lack of official acknowledgment, and struggles to

get qualified jobs, hinder the successful integration of people into a broader society (Ager & Strang, 2008, p. 170).

2) Accommodation: Having stable accommodation is essential for successful integration. Safe and secure housing helps people to settle and feel part of the larger community. Lack of permanent accommodation and constant moves may break social ties, make it difficult to engage in community service, and reinforce a sense of disconnection (Ager & Strang, 2008, p. 171).

3) Healthcare facilities: sound health is another crucial indicator of successful integration. People can maintain well-being and participate actively in the societal function when they get proper access to healthcare facilities. Challenges like speech variations, unfamiliarity with available service, and cultural differences can impede access to health resources (Ager & Strang, 2008, p. 172).

4) Education: Getting access to quality education is fundamental for both children and adults. It fosters both individual growth and integration into the societal framework by developing a common ground and exchanging cultural norms and values with the wider society. It plays a role as a social agent through which people can connect themselves with broader society (Ager & Strang, 2008, p. 172).

B. Social networks: it refers to how people maintain connections both in their community and in a broader society. Social networks facilitate people's support and inclusion. It involves three domains, such as social bridges, social bonds, and social links. Social bonds imply the relationship between individuals and their family, their own community, and peers. Effective social bonds provide people with emotional support, form a sense of belonging, and receive practical assistance, which are vital to navigate in a new society. A social bridge focuses on interactions between individuals and the larger society within a country. Building a well-social bridge across diverse communities can reduce the gaps, foster understanding, and create a more inclusive society where people can thrive easily. And social links deal with connections to official institutions, such as educational institutions, medical services, and governmental bodies. Building these social links enables people to get access to necessary services and provide enough support that assists smooth integration (Ager & Strang, 2008, p. 177).

C. Facilitators play a crucial role in removing barriers in the integration process. It involves two domains of the integration process. These domains include linguistic and cultural knowledge, safety, and stability. Linguistic and cultural knowledge pertains to embracing the

language proficiency and speech patterns of the broader community. Language skills help people to enhance their ability to secure employment, access services, and involve themselves in mainstream society. People may face isolation, hurdles in negotiating bureaucratic processes, and difficulties in developing social bridges because of a lack of language proficiency. Understanding cultural customs, social norms, and community expectations enhances people's ability to foster acceptance, reduce social conflicts, and increase awareness, which plays an important role in integration. These things also contribute to fostering the safety and stability of people and getting them to integrate into a wider society by reducing bullying and verbal harassment (Ager & Strang, 2008, p. 173).

D. Foundation: imply what kind of legal entitlements they have and how they are recognized or treated as a part of a society, such as getting citizenship or having rights as the equal citizen of a country. Getting citizenship raises the identity, belonging, and responsibilities of both the individual and the state, which motivates the individual to invest in their new home as well as leading to the integration process. And having rights as the equal citizen of a state ensures access to education, healthcare, employment, and participation in politics, actively empowering individuals and fostering their recognition from the wider community, which aids them to integrate smoothly (Ager & Strang, 2008, p. 173).

In short, Ager & Strang (2008) highlight the importance of these indicators or domains, which can assist policymakers and service providers as well as marginalized groups to navigate the process of successful integration. This framework will contribute to our ability to capture the complexities and multifaceted aspects of the integration process of tea-working communities into the wider Bangladeshi community facilitating constructive discussion about how the ten indicators in four domains help to successful integration of tea-working communities into a broader society, enhancing both individual welfare and community solidarity.

3.3 Acculturation Theory by Berry

Acculturation is a process that occurs when cultural change and adaptation come into direct contact. It occurs at both the individual and group levels, where some may adjust smoothly while others face difficulties like stress, conflict and anxiety (Berry, 2005). Acculturation studies have been happening for many years. Initially, these studies were started in the period of European dominance over the indigenous people. In the meantime, concerns arose about immigrants who were crossing national borders and attempting to integrate into the host society. Later, globalization contributes to studies on the acculturation process from more

dimensions (Berry, 2005, p. 700). Today, along with colonization, migration, and temporary stays in another culture, acculturation studies involve its presence in multicultural societies where diverse ethnic and cultural groups uphold aspects of their traditional practices (Berry, 2005, p. 699).

The detailed explanation of the acculturation concept was done by John W. Berry, and he contributed to forming this concept as a theoretical framework in research. According to Berry, acculturation is the process that can happen when diverse cultural groups come into face-to-face interaction (Berry, 2005, p. 698). Acculturation is a complicated and ongoing process that influences both communities and individuals. It's a dual process that leads to change at both individual and group levels. At the individual level, psychological change occurs; a person's actions, behaviors, habits, practices, and, in some cases, identity are also influenced by the acculturation process (Berry, 2005, p. 699). Graves (1967) defined the phenomenon as psychological acculturation on a macro level, and he added that it happens when an individual comes near to a new culture. According to Berry (2005), this process may lead to the transformation of an individual's original cultures into broader societal ones. At the group level, cultural change occurs; societal frameworks, institutions, and cultural traditions also lead to change through the acculturation process.

Acculturation is a long-term, continuous process that includes mutual adaptation, where both sociocultural groups influence and adjust to each other. Berry (2005) used the term "behavioral shifts," which implies that when cultural interaction happens, people may adjust by learning languages, sharing food tastes, and adopting new social practices. He said the process of acculturation can be straightforward if individuals are open to learning and adopting. Individuals' personal perspectives, willingness, and determination also play a strong role in adopting a new culture. Berry (2005) also used two terminologies, namely "culture shedding (losing old behavior) and "culture learning" (adopting new behavior), to understand the process of learning and adopting in the acculturation process. However, he acknowledged it can lead to conflict, uncertainty, depression, and stress if people face difficulties adopting (Berry, 2005, p.700). He mentioned these as acculturative stress. Various acculturation strategies shape the level of behavioral change (Berry, 2005, p. 708).

According to Murphy (1965), acculturation of an individual happens quickly if the host society is supportive. A cultural pluralistic society where multiple cultural communities coexist is more supportive in this context. It allows them to keep their own cultural identity by providing both

institutional and community support, such as medical support and educational facilities (a bilingual program) and different perspectives in the curriculum (Murphy, 1965; as cited in Berry, 2005, p. 703). Nonetheless, not all societies treat multiculturalism equally. Due to historical background and ethnic ownership, racial or religious issues affect the acculturation process, which may lead to discrimination, exclusion, and difficulties in integrating into a new or even broader society (Berry & Kalin, 1995; Lebedva & Tatarko, 2004).

According to Berry, there are four acculturation strategies: assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization (Berry, 2005, p. 704).

Assimilation happens when people don't want to maintain their rooted culture. Rather, they adopt the dominant society's culture. By following this strategy, people give up their original cultural practices, norms, and values and try to mix them completely with the dominant cultural practices and values. In this strategy, people focus on regularly interacting with individuals from mainstream culture. People learn the cultural practices, language, norms, and behaviors of the dominant culture. They often abandon their original cultural practices as part of an assimilation strategy. Assimilation may ease integration into the dominant culture, but it risks losing one's cultural identity. Additionally, if the transition is not smooth enough, then it creates feelings of exclusion (Berry, 1997, p. 9; Berry, 2005, p. 705).

Separation is totally the opposite of assimilation. It arises when people maintain their original culture and skip entirely the leading culture. In this strategy, people wish to uphold only their original cultural identity and maintain distance from the mainstream culture. People feel their tradition and culture are their original identity. And they never have any interest in adopting the culture of the main group of society. They may love to stay within their own ethnic community, celebrate their traditional occasions, and refrain from integrating with a broader society. This strategy helps people to maintain their original cultural identity, but it also leads to marginalization or social isolation, as they might lack access to resources or opportunities available to the individuals who have more connection to the leading society (Berry, 1997, p. 9; Berry, 2005, p. 705).

Integration is considered the most expected strategy of acculturation, as it allows individuals to maintain their traditional culture as well as participate actively in the mainstream society's culture. Individuals maintain their cultural identity while simultaneously integrating into the broader society. They make equal efforts to practice and engage both their rooted values and the broader society's various aspects, such as the social, cultural, and economic systems. It

fosters a society that is fair and inclusive, recognizing and appreciating cultural diversity. It lessens the differentiation between various ethnic or marginalized communities and the larger society (Berry, 1997, p. 10; Berry, 2005, p. 705).

Marginalization: When individuals do not maintain their traditional practices, values, or own cultural identity or even the dominant society's culture or values, then it's called marginalization. This can happen for different reasons, such as discriminatory policies, marginalization, and social exclusion. Marginalization occurs when an individual feels rejected by both their traditional culture and the host culture, or mainstream culture. It's associated with negative psychological, social, or cultural outcomes. Marginalized people often feel stressed, anxious, or depressed. They may have less access to resources and a smaller number of social networks (Berry, 1997, p. 9; Berry, 2005, p. 705).

As noted by Berry (1997), among the four strategies, integration is the best. Integration can maintain balance, make a connection with the origin, and lead society's culture. Thus, integration leads to the best positive outcomes in terms of sociocultural adjustment and psychological wellbeing. On the other hand, marginalization implies the disconnection of sociocultural ties in both the traditional and broader society's culture, which negatively impacts an individual's physical and mental health and leads to rising stress, which Berry described as acculturation stress (Berry, 1997, p. 10). The study by Berry et al. (2006) indicates that integration yields more positive outcomes than assimilation and separation. Although these strategies are more effective than marginalization, they can't fully support an individual in terms of his or her sociocultural and mental adaptation to mainstream society. By maintaining social and cultural connection with both traditional and mainstream culture, one can facilitate practical assistance and useful information, which help them integrate and adjust into a broader society more easily (Berry et al., 2006).

Acculturation involves adaptation that implies how individuals reshape themselves to adjust in a new cultural setting. There are two diverse kinds of adaptation: sociocultural and psychological adaptation. Socio-cultural adaptation deals with how individuals effectively navigate, handle, and function within the acculturation process in a new cultural environment. Factors such as the acquisition of new cultural knowledge, active engagement with locals and activities, and an openness to learning shape it. On the other hand, psychological adaptation implies the mental health, or psychological condition, of individuals. It encompasses an individual's personality traits such as sociability and optimism, as well as the level of social

support they receive from their family or community. By using both these psychological and social adaptation processes, people can navigate cultural interactions more easily (Ward, 1996, as cited in Berry, 1997, p. 14).

In summary, the focus of Berry's acculturation theory is how individuals, communities, or groups adapt to a new cultural setting by using four acculturation strategies: integration, separation, assimilation, or marginalization. It analyses the mental and sociocultural impacts of these strategies. According to Berry (1997), integration is the best strategy to adopt in a new sociocultural environment, while many systematic barriers like discrimination, financial constraints, and limited facilities often obstruct this process. Some people may assimilate under this pressure, while others may prefer separation or experience marginalization, which leads to social exclusion and uncertainty. Berry highlights the importance of mutual adaptation for both majority and minority communities and supportive policies such as fair educational opportunities, inclusive employment, and recognition of cultural variety, which help an individual get successfully integrated into a broader society (Berry, 2005).

To conclude, this theory will provide us a lens to get insights into the challenges experienced by tea individuals in Bangladesh and how they are navigating these challenges to get integrated into mainstream society. Additionally, acculturation theory also helps us to examine which kinds of acculturation strategies are adopted by the tea workers community for getting integrated and the factors that assist them in perceiving the process.

3.4 Capacity to aspire

In recent policy discussions, aspiration has been a prominent topic (Bok, 2010), and for this reason, it has gained significant attention in academic research (Bernard & Seyoum Taffesse, 2014). The notion of aspiration has multiple interpretations and can be approached from different aspects (Appadurai, 2004; Hart, 2013). Aspiration refers to a strong desire and ambition to achieve a goal in a particular pathway (Pasquier-Doumer & Risso Brandon, 2015). Aspirations are future-oriented motivations, and they also reflect the individual's or community's dedication and propensity toward a goal (Hart, 2016).

Aspiration refers to the ambition and desire tied to wants, preferences, choices, and calculations that are often overlooked in cultural studies. Culture generally focuses on collective norms, values, and shared experiences rather than individual experiences and is often viewed through the lens of the market. Appadurai (2004) argues that aspirations are not only bound by personal

desires and goals; cultural beliefs, societal norms, and the broader society also influence them. For example, the Islamic vision of a good life differs from the Buddhist perspective, and the aspirations of poor women living in Tamil Nadu differ from those of women in Delhi, Tanzania.

According to Appadurai (2004, p 59), people's capacity to aspire and strive for a better life is shaped by their cultural background. He argues that culture encompasses more than just traditions or history; it also influences the formation of people's future-oriented goals. He introduces a new perspective on culture and aspiration, examining how it shapes ideas about the future and can be recognized as the capacity for aspiration. Additionally, he argues that it is possible to integrate cultural factors into development by transforming our perception of poverty and identifying the future-oriented aspects of culture.

Appadurai (2004, p 67) states that the poor have a more brittle capacity for aspiration, as they have limited access to resources and the recognition they perceive from society compared to wealthier groups. Wealthy individuals have a wider range of options and resources, which provides them with the freedom to pursue various experiences and ultimately enables them to develop multifaceted and resource-intensive aspirations. However, when the poor raise their voices, they create new opportunities and possibilities for themselves, rather than remaining in a marginalized position. The way the poor express themselves refers to the cultural process that includes rhetoric, performance, and actions by which they recognize themselves as active agents of society and change how society perceives them. Mahatma Gandhi utilized local cultural symbols and practices as a navigational strategy through fasting, abstinence, and non-violent resistance to empower the masses and challenge British colonialism.

According to Appadurai (2004, p. 82), during difficult times for marginalized communities, they must endure emergency conditions with patience, which is paradoxical. The capacity to aspire serves as a psychological support tool and ethical anchor, offering them a long-term vision. By connecting Amartya Sen's concept of capability, Appadurai argues that the capacity to aspire is closely linked to the concept of capability. Without capability, it feels like having dreams without the means to pursue them. Appadurai also asserts that, to nurture the capacity to aspire, development practitioners must not only provide logistical support but also create an environment that fosters the capacity to aspire.

This concept provides a critical lens through which we can examine how the sociocultural positioning of individuals in the tea community, rooted in class, ethnicity, and occupation, often constrains their ability to aspire to a better life. Besides, it will help us to analyze the individuals

who begin to see themselves as active agents of change and, by creating a collective effort, try to change the systematic barrier and engage with the wider society. Importantly, the focus on the capability to increase the capacity to aspire offers us valuable perspective to understand how various government- and non-government-led micro-level initiatives contribute to nurturing the aspirations for a beautiful life.

3.5 Arjun Appadurai's framework on "Globalization"

According to Appadurai ,(1990, p 27-29) The modern world reflects interactive systems with global connections, as historians and sociologists have long recognized interconnectedness through war, religion, and trade. However, the contemporary world is experiencing interactions of different natures and intensities, driven by changing patterns of global interaction, print, capitalism, and technological advancements. Appadurai, (1990, p 27-29) challenges Marshall McLuhan's idea that transportation and media create a "global village." He argues that this perspective is overly optimistic, reflecting McLuhan and Power's assertion that "media often create communities with no sense of place" and being a paradox of globalization (McLuhan and Power, 1998, as cited in, Appadurai,1990).

Appadurai, (1990) said that the central concern of globalization involves a balance between homogenization and heterogenization, and traditional scholars debate whether the world is maintaining its distinctiveness by adapting to global influences while preserving local uniqueness or becoming more similar. Many scholars argue that homogenization occurs due to the influence of Americanization or commodification, which is explained through the center-periphery model. However, Appadurai ,(1990, p 34)) contends that this model is overly simplistic; he asserts that the contemporary global economy is too complex, fragmented, and disjunctive to be adequately represented by such a model. He introduces five scapes for understanding global cultural flows, which denote the fluid and subjective nature of these interactions. These five scapes are ethnos capes, mediascapes, technoscapes, finances capes, and Ideoscapes.

In ethnoscapes, Appadurai ,(1990, p 34) argues that in the recent era, people not only move within their own countries but also migrate internationally. Thus, the world is constantly shaped by immigrants, tourists, workers, and exiles, and these movements have a significant influence on culture, society, the economy, and national identity. The ethnic identity, which was once rooted in a specific geographical area, has now expanded on a global scale due to media, but

can still share common culture, language, and heritage by maintaining strong connections despite physical distance(Appadurai ,1990, p 47).

Mediascapes reflect the media's influence on people's perceptions and imagination of reality. The flow of information through digital platforms, newspapers, and television allows individuals to perceive one another and interact culturally. Technoscapes refer to the global flow of technology. According to Appadurai, technology moves rapidly across borders, creating significant connections through the exchange of information and products, influenced by politics, labour availability, and the flow of information((Appadurai, 1990)

In "Financescapes," Appadurai ,(1990, p 36) discusses cross-border financial flows and argues that it is not possible to fully explain interdependent financial networks such as currency speculation, the stock market, and multinational corporations using traditional economic indicators like GDP. This is due to the rapid and unpredictable movement of money and stock investments. For example, the 2008 financial crisis in the United States had a global impact, demonstrating that financial networks extend across countries worldwide.

Ideoscapes refer to the dissemination of political ideologies, including nationalism, democracy, capitalism, and socialism, as well as the collection of ideas from around the globe that influence movements such as human rights, environmentalism, and feminism. In this process, global communication technology shapes public opinion and drives ideological change in worldwide movements(Appadurai ,1990, p 36).

According to Appadurai ,(1990, p 30-31) In the modern world, imagination plays a crucial role in helping people understand and engage with their surroundings. It is also considered an action through which individuals comprehend global influences, construct their identities, and define their desires and goals. It has significant cultural and social influences, allowing people to navigate global changes while maintaining their identity. All-encompassing Appadurai ,(1990, p 46) emphasizes that we should consider cultural change not as a predictable structure but as fluid, uncertain, and influenced by multiple unpredictable factors.

We can analyze how global cultural flows in ethnoscapescapes, technoscapes, mediascapes, Ideoscapes and imagination influence individuals and communities in constructing their identities, defining their desires and goals, while maintaining their unique cultural identity. Additionally, the concept will also help us describe various aspects of social life, such as connections with mainstream individuals, culture, and education, enhance aspirations for better

opportunities, while obstacles like poverty, discrimination, and limited access to resources hinder their desire for integration.

3.6 Recognition concept by Axel Honneth

Inspired by Hegel's idea of recognition, Axel Honneth described the "Recognition" concept widely in modern philosophy (Honneth & Farrell, 1997). According to him, recognition is an essential element of social interaction that involves the unique identity of individuals as well as moral development. He said it is not possible to explain the recognition from only a single aspect; rather, it has many dimensions and kinds that should be considered in discussions. Honneth added that recognition is the acceptance of a person's worth and identity within a societal framework (Honneth & Farrell, 1997, p. 28). He contends that recognition is also related to justice and moral relationships. In his words, morality does not mean only the equal distribution of resources but also seeks how society is accepting, recognizing, or behaving with the people. Recognition allows individuals to improve their moral agency as well as social responsibility, where moral agency means the capacity to act according to ethical conduct or the ability to choose between right or wrong. And social responsibility means being involved in society as a moral person (Honneth & Farrell, 1997, p. 29). Recognition produces the moral obligations that imply the responsibilities individuals have toward others. Assisting others, being sincere and honest, or showing honour to people's rights are considered moral obligations. Moral obligations can establish justice in a society, and it occurs only when recognition happens mutually from both sides, such as a single individual or small group and a larger society or wider community. Honneth said when people receive recognition or are treated well by others, such as from the wider community, it boosts their self-confidence and makes them more worthy. Without recognition, people can't improve themselves as proper moral agents. Recognition motivates individuals to cultivate a positive personality (Honneth & Farrell, 1997, p. 31). Injustice and discrimination occur when people are deprived of recognition, which leads to humiliation, ethical injury (loss of self-worth), and social exclusion (Avishai Margalit, 1996; as cited in Honneth & Farrell, 1997, p. 17). Society should assure mutual recognition to assist human dignity and establish justice (Honneth & Farrell, 1997). According to Hegel (1979, 1983), there are three kinds of recognition, each with various moral obligations. These three recognitions, including love, rights, and solidarity, happen on three distinct levels.

1) Love: This kind of connection is an intimate or deeper level of recognition, and it happens in personal relationships. It supports people's emotional and moral character and recognizes each other's emotional requirements.

2) Rights: It's a basic level of recognition. Rights are universal. At this level, individuals receive recognition for their legal and political rights. Here, people receive validation for their rights, which enables them to participate in various societal affairs.

3) Solidarity: It is considered the highest level of recognition, where people are recognized for their offerings to maintain a balanced, fair, and effective society. It emphasizes the connection and duties of broader societies and focuses on shared identity and mutual support.

To get recognition, people struggle at each level, and this struggle helps them grow as moral individuals. Therefore, love, respect, and solidarity, or social recognition, are necessary for individuals to feel whole. When people reject these, they experience moral harm (Honneth & Farrell, 1997, p. 30). Morality balances various responsibilities in societal relationships.

In conclusion, the recognition concept focuses on the significance of recognition in forming individual and collective identity. This perspective will give us a lens to assess different aspects and experiences of the tea garden individual's life and how a lack of recognition affects the tea garden individual's identity and voices while positive behavior and encouragement increase their desire for recognition. Additionally, it will also assist us to interrelate recognition and justice as justice can be established in a society when recognition happens mutually from both sides. This perspective will further assist us in examining how the wider Bangladeshi community is behaving toward the tea community and whether it is suitable to establish solidarity in society or reduce the gap between tea community members and mainstream society to foster the integration process of the tea community.

3.7 Empowerment theory

Since the 1970s, the term "empowerment" has gained widespread acceptance across various disciplines, including psychology, adult literacy, public health, social services, and community development (Simon, 1994, as cited in Calvès, 2009). According to Calvès (2009), by the end of the 1990s, the concept had gained significant attention in the international development sector, encompassing various terms such as poverty, community, civil society, and agency. Different theorists have approached the concept from multiple perspectives, reflecting its

multifaceted nature. We will focus on individual psychological to collective community-based approaches within the concept of empowerment.

Empowerment can be understood by first examining the concepts of power and powerlessness (Moscovitch and Drover, 1981, as cited in, Lord & Hutchison, 1993)). According to Cornell, power is the ability of some persons, organizations, and groups to influence intended, foreseen, and unforeseen effects (Cornell Empowerment Group, 1989, p. 2, as cited in, Lord & Hutchison, 1993). Conversely, powerlessness reflects individuals' belief that their actions will be ineffective in influencing the outcomes of their life events (Kieffer, 1984). According to the Cornell (1989, as cited in, Lord & Hutchison, 1993), empowerment has been considered a significant process of change. Consequently, to become powerful, individuals must comprehend their potential and environment while being open to collaborating with others to effect change (McClelland, 1975, as cited in, Lord & Hutchison, 1993). Whitmore & Kerans (1988), defines empowerment as an interactive process through which individuals experience personal and social changes that enable them to take strategic action to influence the organizations and institutions that affect their personal lives and the social framework in which they live.

Keiffer's (1984) empirical study on personal empowerment is considered one of the significant works on empowerment, examining it as a process. According to Keiffer (1984), empowerment is a developmental process that includes four stages: entry, advancement, incorporation, and commitment. The entry stage is driven by personal experiences, where participants encounter events or conditions that feel threatening to themselves or their families, which is termed the "provocation". This provocation leads to action. To continue the empowerment process, three important aspects should be considered: a mentoring relationship, supportive peer relationships within a collective organization, and facilitating a more critical understanding of social and political relations, referred to as "advancement." " In the 'incorporation' stage, the central focus should be on developing political consciousness. The "commitment" stage represents the application of participatory competence to the ever-expanding areas of their lives.

According to Wallerstein (1992), Empowerment is a social action process that encourages the involvement of individuals, organizations, and communities to achieve goals such as expanding individual and community influence, enhancing civic engagement, improving the quality of community life, and ensuring social well-being justice. Whitmore (1988) clearly defined the concept and stated that there are common core presuppositions, which are:

- a. Individuals should define their own needs and have the autonomy to take the necessary action on their own rather than letting others decide for them, as individuals are assumed to understand their own needs well.
- b. All people possess strength and potential that they can utilize for their growth.
- c. Empowerment is an ongoing process in which people continually develop their skills and confidence.
- d. Self-trust, resilience, and confidence are essential in this process to cope effectively.

Altogether, these assumptions suggest that empowerment is a process through which individuals develop the ability to control various aspects of their lives and participate in community life with respect and integrity (Lord & Hutchison, 1993).

According to Rappaport (1987, p. 121), Empowerment encompasses two key aspects: the psychological perception of individual autonomy and personal authority, as well as the ability to exert influence in social, political, and legal spheres. This reflects that empowerment exists on three different levels. At the personal level, empowerment means gradually gaining control and influence over one's own life and actively engaging with the community (Keiffer, 1984); At the group level, empowerment involves the collective experiences, influence, and analysis of the groups based on their own initiatives and actions (Prestby et al., 1990); Finally, at the community level, empowerment refers to the entire community coming together to utilize resources and develop strategies that enhance their authority over their own lives, thereby improving their collective well-being (Labonté, 1989).

The perspectives on empowerment theory from Immanuel Wallerstein, David Keiffer, Julian Rappaport, and Diane Whitmore have practical implications. Their insights will provide advantageous guidelines for analyzing the vital role of individual and collective efforts within the tea community. These efforts influence the integration process by involving various types of contributions and movements. Furthermore, their work will help us understand that the journey of the tea working community towards integration is a societal process where individual-level action, such as education and skill development, and group-level action, such as rights-based activities by utilizing their own resources, can bring about the expected outcome through empowerment.

3.8 Justification of using the above theories:

We have selected “Social identity” by Richard Jenkins, “Integration” concept by Ager & Strang, “Acculturation” theory by John Berry, ‘Capacity to Aspire’ and “Globalization” framework by Arjun Appadurai, “Recognition” concept by Axel Honneth, and “Empowerment” theory together in our theoretical framework because, The integration process of individuals from the tea community is a multidimensional phenomenon that cannot be explained adequately through a single theoretical lens. Besides, each of the theories and concepts complements each other and will offer us distinct yet interconnected perspectives to look at their journey towards integration. For instance, “social identity” by Jenkins has offered us a lens to understand how the perception of individual identity, community, and mainstream society all together influence the tea workers ways of getting integrated into the larger society of Bangladesh. The “integration” theory by Agar and Strange will provide us lance to see how they navigate key domain of integration in their journey towards inclusion. “Acculturation” theory of John Berry will help us to examine the forms of acculturation strategies that tea workers are following to get integrated into the mainstream society in Bangladesh, and it also allows us to examine the determinants that are assisting them in grasping the process. “Capacity to Aspire” and “globalization” by Arjun Appadurai will support our exploration about how the five scapes of global cultural flows influence the tea workers of Bangladesh in forming their identities in mainstream society and defining their desires and aims: strengthening their capability to aspire while upholding their distinct cultural identity And finally, “empowerment” theory from different perspectives, such as Immanuel Wallerstein, David Kieffer, Julian Rappaport, and Diane Whitmore, to gain a profound understanding of how both individual and collective efforts from the community and organization influence the process of integration through various offerings and movements.

4. Historical Background

Bangladesh has a significant history of tea production, and the first tea garden was established in 1854 in the British colonial period (Al-Amin et al. 2017). During the British colonial period in the Indian subcontinent, to expand and develop the tea industry in East Bengal (Bangladesh), British rulers brought tea laborers from different regions of India, including Assam, Odisha, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and other areas, with promises of better wages and improved living conditions (Ullah et al., 2014).

But because of their distinct language, religion, culture, and way of life, they were not accepted into the local communities. As a result, they remained socially and culturally separated from the locals and often subjected to social exclusion and discrimination. They were identified to local people as "Coolie" and "Jungli." (Ullah et al., 2014). Gradually they realized that all promises were fake; instead, they faced harsh living conditions, poverty, and social marginalization. As a result, they attempted to return to their native origin. But legal and physical restrictions, lack of communication opportunities with locals, and remote locations of the gardens limited their ability to leave. Besides, those who attempted to escape were brutally killed, which established a fear of fleeing, and finally, they started to live in the gardens for generations (Ullah et al., 2014).

Although they were recognized as citizens of Bangladesh after the liberation war, practically the community has been overlooked by the state and remained strategically excluded from rights, opportunities, and public services in comparison to the general population (Al-Amin et al., 2017). The tea sector contributes significantly to the Bangladeshi national economy through export earnings. (Al-Amin et al., 2017). The wages they get cannot meet the basic need and lead their life below the national poverty line. Unfortunately, the government failed to take strong measures to create accountabilities of garden authorities for ensuring fair wages and improved living conditions. As a result, the community has to take self-advocacy as they demand their rights through protests and strikes for improvement of their living conditions. (Chandan & Deshwara, 2022).

Gardens are normally located in remote areas thus, the mainstream sociocultural influence is not very prevalent here, and they remain largely detached from dominant cultural norms and values (Al-Amin et al. 2017). Besides, tea gardens are considered informal hubs for the sale and consumption of alcohol. Local administrative authorities overlook these activities despite the national prohibitions on the open sale of alcohol. Consequently, within the group, the level

of alcohol consumption is significantly higher, which undermines their capacity to engage in long-term vision for improved socioeconomic conditions (Islam and Al-Amin 2025).

These structural vulnerabilities significantly impact children's access to education. They are often regarded as potential household income sources and encouraged to engage in labor from an early age. As the cycle of poverty and marginalization is reproduced across generations, they are not only deprived of their right to education but also of broader developmental opportunities (Al-Amin and Islam 2024). Although some developmental agencies organize various awareness-raising workshops, these efforts often fail to bring sustainable transformative effects. While there is an "Education for All" program implemented nationally in Bangladesh, tea gardens remain as pockets in this project. As schools are established but there is a lack of proper monitoring and oversight, some factors such as inconvenient locations, persistent financial constraints, and early marriages of female children contribute to high dropout rates (Barkat et al., 2010).

Children and women are notably worse off and disadvantaged in some areas compared to greater parts of Bangladesh. Compared to the national average, the infant mortality rate is twice as high in tea gardens. Children and women in tea gardens are experiencing extreme poverty and malnutrition. The ratio of the hardcore poverty line is almost 50 percent. Furthermore, 74 percent of these households live below the poverty line. The literacy rate of mature women (aged 15 to 24) is only 32 percent in the tea gardens, where the national literacy rate of women is almost 70 percent (Barkat et al., 2010).

Despite the prevalent structural barrier, there are some individuals, especially young people, strive to break the barrier of the cycle of marginalization through individual determination. Through commitment to education, they manage to construct a distinct and empowered identity. In this aspect, families who have awareness and relative financial stability try to nurture the aspirations to lead lives with dignity and stability like those of dominant society populations.

5.Literature Review

This chapter intends to offer a comprehensive overview of relevant literature, articles, and reports based on the research topic. It will help us to gather documented knowledge, examine the present improvement of a discipline, and understand the methodological rigor and bibliometric evaluations (Linnenluecke et al., 2019). It also determines whether the research topic is worth studying Creswell, (2014) because it identifies the gaps in this field.

We have designed our literature review chapter around two themes: socioeconomic status and progress toward integration. Under the ‘socioeconomic status’ theme, we review those relevant literatures that provide us a comprehensive idea about the social and economic conditions of tea communities in Bangladesh. In the second theme, titled ‘progress towards integration,’ we examine literature that presents various aspects of tea communities, which shape their identity and contribute to social inclusion. Besides, we will review four pieces of literature by the same scholars, namely ‘Islam & Al-Amin,’ due to the significance of their studies to our research. Overall, through this chapter, we attempt to find the underexplored area of study and understand the academic discussion around our topic.

5.1 Socioeconomic status:

A qualitative study based on empirical evidence has been conducted by Islam & Al-Amin, (2019) to explore the reasons behind the poverty and vulnerability of the tea workers in Bangladesh. It also shed light on the survival strategies of these groups. It discusses different aspects of their lives, including income opportunity, healthcare, sanitation, food security, ownership and assets, education, political engagement, and leisure. To collect data, the scholars employed a triangulation of methods to ensure the authenticity of data that includes in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews. The study revealed that the tea workers experience capability deprivation, such as facing barriers to getting access to education, struggling with getting food, challenges in getting proper healthcare for financial constraints, and limitations to being involved with political activities, which leads to poverty and vulnerability. The study also revealed that tea garden workers employ various survival strategies such as recycling debt, which involves borrowing money to repay previous loans, selling their work rights, and limiting their meal intake. However, these strategies are insufficient to help them overcome poverty and vulnerability. In this literature, the scholars recommended some policies to address their challenges and minimize poverty, such as raising wages, developing healthcare facilities, and improving educational prospects. In this article,

we found a thorough overview of the different aspects of the hardship and struggling life of tea garden workers, which they are carrying from year to year which will help us to understand their lifestyle that we do not live.

Islam & Al-Amin, (2025) described the impact of severe poverty on the education and professional outcomes of the offspring of tea workers. This study emphasized exploring the challenges encountered by the children of tea workers due to poverty, which limits their prospects for doing better in life. The prime challenges found by this study are lack of learning access, insufficient healthcare, early marriage, transportation costs, and sociocultural barriers. The study also shed light on the intricate interplay between poverty, girls schooling, and sociocultural variables. Findings indicate that remote locations of tea gardens make it challenging for children to go to educational institutions located in far distant areas. As a result, the offspring of tea garden workers experience a significant dropout rate. Furthermore, sociocultural factors, including early marriage, uniforms, and gender disparities, restrict the educational possibilities of female children of this population. Financial constraints force offspring to give priority to early placement on their familial job. This study also explored the limited concern of tea garden authorities with arranging the education facilities for tea workers children, which is another reason for the high dropout ratio after primary education. These deliberate controls have compelled children to remain unaware of their rights, perpetuating poverty and serving as a source of cheap labor for generations. Overall, this study inspired us to think critically about not only poverty but also how institutional deliberate restrictions keep the tea workers socially isolated from the wider Bangladeshi community.

The article provided by Al-Amin & Islam, (2024) focused on the reasons for aspiration failure among young children of tea plantation workers in Bangladesh, which means their difficulties in setting significant career aims. It also highlighted exploring how this failure confines them to economic hardship and deprivation. The researchers used Appadurai's 'capacity to aspire to understand how limitations on getting various opportunities make it difficult to dream of ambitious careers or goals of people from underprivileged communities. They also used Ray's 'aspiration window' and 'aspiration gap,' where 'aspiration window refers to the prospects that people believe are achievable based on their surroundings. And the aspiration gap refers to the difference between their desire and reality. Bourdieu's distinction and habitus concepts were

also used in this study to determine how the social system shapes people's conceptions, behaviors, and choices and reinforces social imbalance. Scholars used a mix of qualitative approaches, including case studies, interviews, and observation, to collect data for this study. The findings of this study emphasized poverty, educational obstacles, and social exclusion, which restrict their abilities to connect with broader networks and hinder their career development possibilities. Moreover, the younger mostly see the low-paid earners within their surroundings, which narrows their aspiration window. Cultural factors like family expectations are very low, which also contributes to aspiration failure among the young children of tea workers. This literature helped us discover Arjun Appadurai's aspiration theory and establish a basis for understanding that the lack of resources complicates the integration process. And the individuals from the community who consider themselves to be active agents of the broader Bangladeshi society can overcome these hurdles by following different strategies.

As a major economic sector of Bangladesh, the tea industry fulfills both the local requirement and international demand as a popular drinking item. Tea workers are the main contributors to making this industry strong and active as well as serving the economy of Bangladesh. So, studying about their livelihood is a significant issue for consideration. A mixed-method study was conducted by Rahman (2016) to explore the living conditions of tea workers in Bangladesh. The researcher has conducted a case study, field survey, interview, and observation to gather data. This study focuses on tea workers' salaries, literacy, health conditions, and sanitation to get insights about their living conditions. It is found that the daily income of a worker is very insufficient, less than one USD. In terms of income and allowance, the tea plantation laborers are living below the poverty line. The literacy rate of tea workers is low compared to national literacy. The study indicates a recent increase in the enrolment of new generations of tea workers in primary schools, a trend facilitated by the government and various NGOs such as BRAC. But most of them cannot continue their studies after primary or secondary education due to extreme poverty. Poor health and nutritional deficiencies are common among the tea workers. This study also found some of the family members of tea workers are now doing jobs outside the tea garden. This literature gives us an outline of the poor living conditions of tea workers. Moreover, a notable finding we get in this article is that some of the family members of tea laborers are doing jobs outside the tea garden. It inspired us to do research on, how doing job outside from tea garden influence the tea workers integration process into mainstream society of Bangladesh.

An assessment was prepared for UNICEF to explore the actual situation of women and children from 65 randomly selected tea gardens in Bangladesh. The study was conducted by Barkat et al., (2010) focusing on the basic human needs, such as health, education, safe drinking water, sanitation, and housing conditions. Research reveals the status of children and women is notably worse and disadvantaged in some areas compared to greater parts of Bangladesh. Compared to the national average, the infant mortality rate is twice as high in tea gardens. Children and women in tea gardens are experiencing extreme poverty and malnutrition. The ratio of the hardcore poverty line is almost 50 percent. Furthermore, 74 percent of these households live below the poverty line. The literacy rate of mature women (aged 15 to 24) is only 32 percent in the tea gardens, where the national literacy rate of women is almost 70 percent. Findings also reveal that child marriage is a common thing in tea gardens. This study gives us an overview of the rate of basic needs deprivation, particularly among women and children in tea gardens. We can know how far behind the tea garden women and children are to get their basic needs compared to the national average. These factors prompted us to select a sample of women for our study's interviews, enabling us to understand their real-life situations and provide a more diverse range of data.

The article provided by Alam & Sarker, (2009) is an in-depth analysis of the workers conditions in the tea sector in Bangladesh. Scholars have concentrated on the difficulties faced by tea plantation workers, highlighting their working conditions, lifestyle, and other pertinent issues. The study found most of the tea workers are unskilled in doing other jobs and deprived in numerous ways. Tea workers in Bangladesh were migrated from different places in India in the British period. Therefore, the historical context contributes to them being isolated from broader society. The study also revealed the minimum basic needs of tea workers remain unfulfilled. They lack adequate wage rates, active trade unions, literacy, hygiene, sanitation facilities, and proper food and housing. Findings also indicate that, despite doing hard work, some workers don't get their wage daily. Overall, these things provide us with insights into tea garden workers' living standards and working conditions. We also noticed how their historical migration context still impacts their lives and restricts them to being isolated. These observations are crucial for our research paper as they shed light on how tea workers overcome their isolation and gain acceptance within the broader community.

A qualitative ethnographic study conducted by Tabassum, (2019) focuses on the identity formation of tea plantation workers in Bangladesh. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews from an A-grade tea garden in Habiganj, Bangladesh. The researcher sheds light on

the tea workers' identity-shaping process and the marginalization they experience within the social and economic framework. The study discovered that tea workers identities are regularly shaped by various factors such as ethnicity, gender, caste, class, and culture. And they encounter multiple marginalizations due to different identities. Their ethnic and class identity impacts their social interactions, access to utilize assets, and class division within their community. Furthermore, female workers face marginalization due to their gender role. Various cultural practices, values, differences in languages, and religious norms also contribute to making differences in sense of belonging. Moreover, corruption within panchayats (their only political agency) hinders the shaping of the political identity of tea workers; as a result, they face marginalization to get their sociopolitical rights. Overall, from this study, we have been influenced to take semi-structured interviews as a data collection tool to get more profound insights about their experience of social interactions, as they have a unique cultural identity compared to the mainstream Bangladeshi people.

5.2 Progress Towards Integration

Ethnographic research has been conducted by Ahmed (2016) on a movement of tea workers that has been held by Chunarughat tea workers due to the announcement of establishing an economic zone in their farmland. Tea workers protested this announcement at Chunarughat, a district of Bangladesh, in December 2015. This study focused on how tea workers in Chunarughat are making a collective identity and acquiring recognition through their movement for land rights. The study also highlights that through this struggle they reveal their historical marginalization and aspirations for respect, recognition, and equality. The study reveals that the land rights movement of tea workers also increases their collective identity, solidarity, and political awareness, which enables them to advocate for their voices and get rights as equal citizens of Bangladesh. By assembling as a united community, they reinforce their solidarity and support system, which plays a significant role in their integration into broader social structures and efforts to address systematic disparities. This literature helped us to think about some open-ended questions regarding their rights-based activities, political awareness, and collective efforts, which foster their integration journey.

Although structural barriers limit the ability of tea laborers children to dream of higher education, the article by Al-Amin & Islam, (2024), highlighted how some of them rose above these limitations and set their future paths. To collect data, 54 qualitative interviews, eight case studies, and four FGDs have been carried out from two tea gardens in Sylhet. Researchers used

Appadurai's 'capacity to aspire' and Bourdieu's 'capital and habitus' concept as a theoretical framework for this research. The study investigates the challenges that children of tea garden workers encounter when attempting to pursue higher education. Among them, social, cultural, and economic barriers are significant. Findings also revealed that a small number of children of tea laborers, who are financially stable and socially and culturally progressive, break through these obstacles, dream of a better future, and enroll in higher education. We have noticed in this literature that the scholar's attention was only focused on exploring how some of the offspring of tea garden workers were trying to get access to higher education by breaking all obstacles. This literature contributes to broadening our perspectives, indicating that, in addition to education, how certain individuals from the tea community are integrated into the dominant society, including the economy, culture, social networks, politics, and other domains, despite facing numerous sociocultural and economic challenges.

Understanding the sociocultural transformation of tea workers has been a central concern in several qualitative research studies, including Magar & Kar (2016). Researchers conducted the study in various tea gardens in Assam, India. The study reveals that there is an interaction between tea tribes and the indigenous Assamese community, which fosters the cultural integration of tea-working communities into the broader Assamese society. Tea tribes are gradually adopting various cultural elements of Assamese society, such as learning language, dietary habits, and social practices that lead to blending their unique cultural identity into the broader society of Assam. Additionally, many young people in the tea community are now adopting the Assamese language and forming various organizations to promote awareness about the tea workers children's inclusion in schools and government institutions. The study also found, influenced by factors like language, culture, and consciousness, that some children of tea-working communities are adopting education as a strategy, which contributes to them getting closely integrated with the mainstream population. Additionally, their political consciousness is on the rise due to their significant contributions to India's independence. The study also identified that the social interaction between tea-working communities and mainstream people lessens their caste gap, and they are getting married to the mainstream people nowadays, which also leads to their integration into the greater Assamese society. Overall, this study offers valuable insights into the various factors that facilitate the integration of Assamese tea tribes into mainstream society. Besides, it helped us to validate our study findings with the factors that influenced the Assamese tea community individuals' pathways to integration.

Hazarika, (2019) conducted an extensive qualitative study on tea plantation workers in Assam. The study investigates the struggle for identity among tea workers and the role of the growing middle class within them. It highlights the tea workers' socioeconomic conditions and historical factors that impact them. Furthermore, it focuses on their incremental formation of collective identity as well as political awareness. The study reveals that, despite facing numerous socioeconomic challenges, the tea workers' efforts to search for dignity and honor have emerged as an aspiration among them to establish their identities. To establish their identity as 'Assamese,' they are adopting various efforts such as learning the Assamese language (oxomiya), getting educated, and participating in political issues. The research also reveals, influenced by education, a middle class is growing within tea worker communities, fostering a sense of identity, and contributing to social advancement. After reviewing this article, we understood it is important to study the topics of identity, political participation, and voice in governance of tea plantation workers, as all these things are relevant to the integration of tea workers into the broader community. In addition, we found these sectors are still lacking enough scholarly attention in Bangladesh, which is our tremendous inspiration to do research on this topic.

A case study conducted by Lin & Wen (2018) found that tourism has assisted the tea workers of Yunnan Province, China, in getting integrated into the mainstream society in several ways. First, they are getting a chance to connect with broader society by changing their traditional occupation and expanding diversity in their traditional tea-related job due to the arrival of tourists. Globalization through tourism has influenced the exchange of cultural heritage among tea workers with both locals and foreigners. Additionally, they are marrying both locals and foreigners, enabling them to establish connections with the broader society. The study also reveals that gender roles are changing, influenced by tourism. By the side of tea cultivation, women are involved with hospitality and tourism-related jobs, which make their role important in both family and community because they are contributing financially and increasing their leading skills. This study found that all these factors helped the tea workers of Yunnan Province foster interconnections with mainstream society, maintain their unique cultural identities, and contribute to a more inclusive Chinese society. This literature influenced us to include "Global Cultural Flow" by Arjun Appadurai in the theoretical framework of our study, as it examined the connection between tea tourism and the integration of tea workers in Yunnan Province,

China. This examination further guided us in analyzing how different aspects of globalization shape the integration journey of individuals from the tea community in Sylhet, Bangladesh.

Studies conducted on the tea community in Bangladesh offer in-depth descriptions of the various aspects of tea workers' lives, including their living conditions, housing, economic status, education, health, sanitation, dietary practices, culture, ethnicity, aspirations, trade unions, identity, marginalization, historical context, and associated impacts. However, scholarly attention on the integration aspects of the tea community is lacking, as only two studies have focused on their aspirations for education and land rights movements in Sylhet, Bangladesh, which do not encompass the broader dimensions of integration. Thus, this study aims to address the existing literature gap by examining the integration journey of tea-working communities into mainstream Bangladeshi society.

6.Data Analysis

The chapter first demonstrates an outline for the analytical design to interpret the collected data, then proceeds with the analyzing key findings organized in three themes, guided by seven selected theories and secondary literature that have already been discussed in the "theoretical framework" and "literature review " chapters.

Our research question is “What key motivations drive individuals in the tea-working community of the Sylhet division of Bangladesh to integrate into mainstream society, and how do they navigate the pathways towards the integration despite having significant social, cultural, economic, and political barriers?”. The research question has two important focus points: motivational factors and integration pathways. The theoretical framework will guide us in developing arguments from various perspectives that align with the data and answer the research question. “Identity” concept by Richard Jenkins (2014) will help us understand how not only individual identity but also perceptions from both their own community and mainstream society towards them influence their pathways to integration. The indicators described in the Agar and Strange (2008)’s concept on “Successful Integration” help us to understand how this support the integration process and which specific indicators the participants are involved with. “Acculturation” theory by John Berry (1997;2005) will provide a lens to examine the types of acculturation strategies tea workers are adopting for integration and the factors that assist them in perceiving the process. “Capacity to aspire” by Arjun Appadurai (2004) will give us a light to explain how aspects of social life, such as connectedness with mainstream people, culture, and education, enhance their aspirations to achieve better positions and how obstacles like poverty, discrimination, and limited access to resources conflict with their desire for integration. Arjun Appadurai (1990)’ framework on “Globalization” will allow us to understand how the five scapes of global cultural flows contribute to constructing the identity of tea-working communities in the mainstream society of Bangladesh. “Recognition” concept by Axel Honneth (1997) will help to analyze how a lack of recognition affects their identity and voice in advocating for their rights, while positive behavior and encouragement increase their desire for recognition. The empowerment theory, incorporating views from Wallerstein (1992), Kieffer (1984), Rappaport (1987), and Whitmore (1988) will explain how both individual and collective efforts from the community and organizations influence the integration process through various initiatives

We will use a narrative thematic analysis method to analyze our data. Since we conducted narrative interviews, our data reflects the respondents' life stories, and the thematic way will help to maintain flow and coherence. For that reason, we will analyze the data across three different themes, focusing on determinants and navigational pathways to integration instead of isolating these elements into separate categories. Because these factors are not totally discrete; instead, they emerge simultaneously in respondents' life stories in relation to the social structure and personal experiences.

The first theme, “Aspirations and pathways for socioeconomic advancement” will focus on individuals' aspirations and strategies to break the structure and attain a well-established position. We will look at what drives people, including personal wishes, family support, help from development organizations, the effects of globalization, and ways to navigate their paths, such as education, changing traditional cultural practices, improving language skills, getting involved in community activities, and adjusting living situations toward integration. We will analyze this theme in light of acculturation, integration, globalization, recognition, aspiration theories, concepts, and related previous research.

The second theme, “The desire for belonging and social recognition”, will focus on their desire for belonging and social recognition in the broader societal structure, where key motivational factors include being inspired by the lifestyle of dominant social groups, and a strong desire for Recognition. Inclusion approaches include socializing, engaging in dominant cultural spaces, participating in public events with a focus on identity, integration, global cultural flow, acculturation, and recognition concepts and theories. The theme also encompasses previous discussions related to these approaches.

The final theme, "Collective agency and community advancement," will highlight the strong desire for community advancement through both individual efforts and collective agency. These motivations grow from the desire to bring about structural change, foster strong emotional and social connections within their community, and contribute to the well-being of future generations. These pathways reflect strong social bonds within the community, social bridges with mainstream society, and social links. Theoretical framework—empowerment, identity, integration, recognition, capacity to aspire, and other established literature in this field will guide us to interpret the data.

Overall, the interpretation aims to follow temporal dynamics within the themes. The first and second themes are guided by the past and present experiences of the respondents; the third

theme is directed by past, present, and future timeframes. Additionally, throughout the themes, the analysis reflects the developmental trajectory which highlights individual level motivations and strategies for integration to evolving orientation towards collective wellbeing and community progression.

6.1 Aspirations and pathways for socioeconomic advancement

Motivations: Personal determination, family support, organizational efforts, and the impact of globalization.

According to Berry (1997), acculturation involves adaptation, and there are two diverse kinds of adaptation: sociocultural and psychological adaptation. Berry (1997) said people's psychological adaptation encompasses their personality traits, such as sociability and optimism, which reshape their goals, dreams, and desires and contribute to broadening their aspiration window. Berry (2005) added that individuals' personal perspectives, willingness, and determination play a strong role in holding their aspiration to have a better future as well as adapting to a new culture. We found a reflection of Berry's (1997, 2005) perspective in the experiences of some of our respondents. Our study has found that, despite having many challenges, they are holding a strong aspiration for their personal growth and better future. They hold their optimism, which helps them face diverse challenges and stay stable in their hope. In this process, imagination plays a vital role. They imagine themselves doing something better in life instead of continuing the tradition of tea plucking like their predecessors did. Their positive imagination and strong determination inspire them to prioritize walking through their dreams despite facing many discouragements, negativity, and social dismay, which reflects Appadurai's (1990) argument on imagination, where he highlighted that imagination plays a crucial role as an action through which individuals reconstruct their identities and define their desires and goals. One respondent has shared,

“I have faced numerous challenges. I was mentally and financially weak at that time, but I never lost my aspiration. I always hold onto my dreams and work to make them a reality”.

Respondent #1

Ager & Strang (2008) contend that family provides emotional support, a sense of belonging, and practical assistance, which are vital to strongly motivating a child to dream of a better future in their life. Additionally, love and bonds with family support people's emotional and

moral character, boosting their self-confidence, enhancing their sense of self-worth, and helping them believe in their potential (Honneth & Farrell, 1997). Our study also notices that families play a significant role in planting the seeds of inspiration for a better future in the lives of children in the tea community. Our study highlights parents' continuous efforts and support for children to dream better in life and link them to their passions. Families actively help the children connect to education and contribute to framing their future dreams. Even if the family can't support them fully financially, their love, bonds, and inspiration work as a strong motivational magic factor to encourage the children to continue their journey. Similarly, the study conducted by Lazurenko et al. (2021) demonstrates parental support and behaviors motivate children to do well in various spheres of their lives, such as academic spaces, developing values, and dreaming of a better future. Besides that, our study identified parents who have little academic knowledge; they play a significant role in increasing the child's motivation to dream of a more prosperous life. These families make strong efforts to inspire and assist their children academically, which ultimately broadens their aspirations for upward mobility. Al-Amin & Islam (2024) have explored a similar thing in their study that a small number of tea-working families in two tea gardens in Sylhet, who are financially stable and socially and culturally progressive, inspire and support their children more than the others to break through the obstacles, dream of a better future, and enroll in higher education to have an enriched life. Our respondents shared,

“My father believed that if I could work as a "babu" with only an SSC degree, then my child could achieve even more if I helped him get a better education than I received. With this in mind, my father enrolled me in a well-known primary school in the area.” Respondent #4

“My college was far from home, and every day I had to spend 20 takas on transportation. However, due to his low income, my father was unable to provide the daily support I needed. Despite this, my parents' aspirations steadily motivated me to continue my studies, leading me to walk 2 to 3 miles to college every day.”

Respondents #2

Furthermore, Murphy (1965; as cited in Berry, 2005) highlights various institutions' and NGOs' efforts to support marginalized communities in various ways, such as providing medical support, educational assistance, and adding different perspectives (life-relevant courses) to the curriculum. This approach enables the community to develop their skills and reshape their goals and aspirations. We underscore the reflection of Murphy's (1965, as cited in Berry, 2005)

viewpoints in our study, where many non-governmental organizations projects, arrange several trainings, workshops, and seminars to train the young and women of the tea garden. Although these projects are not maintained properly and invasion of external power dynamics exist, they support arranging various life-related courses to make the community skilled, increase awareness and promote inclusive development. They also provide educational support and teach various technical subjects such as electrical works and veterinary science which together inspire the tea communities to pursue a more advanced lifestyle. The study by Abiddin et al. (2022) also demonstrates similarly that efforts of different NGOs assist communities by arranging training for community members, providing advocacy to make them aware of their rights, and supporting education and health facilities to motivate them to improve their living conditions. We have also explored that Christian missionary-led boarding schools have an important effect on determining the identity of the tea garden children. These institutions give education access to children from the most vulnerable socio-economic situations. In addition to offering food and accommodation, these institutions foster an environment where children are introduced to essential norms and values and practice standard Bengali and English languages. These institutions provide students with a consistent academic path to the college level. As a result, this structured and disciplined lifestyle seeds the dream in the tea community children to lead a good life. According to respondents,

“At that time, 16 children attended a Christian missionary school in Sreemongol including me. In the missionary school, my life went well. I enjoyed good food at every meal. They helped me improve my language skills since our language differs from mainstream people's. I also learned English there. Overall, I led a well-structured and routine life. From that school, I completed my secondary education. Then, they assisted me in getting admitted to Notre Dame College for my higher secondary education under a project called “Studies in Exchange for Work.” While pursuing my studies at that college, I had to take on jobs like cleaning and being a watchman. Finally, I completed my higher secondary exams at that college. I learned many things there, as there were also students from mainstream society. Generally, only good students can study at that college, and what I learned there helped enhance my adaptability to blend in with mainstream society”

. Respondent #6

“The government runs various projects under the social safety net program, such as building houses and providing 5,000 tk annually to elderly individuals. However, these initiatives are

not well maintained. Local government bodies do not assist effectively to implement these projects and instead misuse the funds. NGOs like BRAC run a non-formal education project for free primary education. Although these initiatives are placed into a small extent, have a strong influence on enlightening their thinking”

Respondents #6

Appadurai (1990) argues that the flow of information through digital platforms such as newspapers, television, and even textbooks also allow individuals to perceive one another and interact culturally. Appadurai (1990) referred to technoscapes as the global flow of technology and contends that technology moves rapidly across borders, creating significant connections through the exchange of information and products and being influenced by politics, labour availability, and the flow of information (Appadurai, 1990). A study conducted by Alsaleh (2024) found technology and media act as significant actors to exchange cultures and ideas, adaptation, and opening the door to connect people with the world. The rapid spread of the internet and mobile phones has promoted cross-cultural interactions, which lead to blending different cultural values or practices and shaping people's ambitions and cultural identities (Alsaleh, 2024). Our study also reflects this phenomenon. We have noticed participants' imaginations, especially those of the youth, are growing and changing due to the influence of media and technological advancement. Digital platforms, including online content, social media, and textbooks, influence the community's sense of what it is possible to achieve and inspire them to expand their aspirations and pursue their dreams. Additionally, various technological devices such as mobile phones, laptops, smart TVs, and platforms like WhatsApp, YouTube, and Google contribute to delivering information about world politics and ideologies, which motivates the community to think differently about their aim in life, seeking the dream of exploring the world by coming out from their traditional surroundings and raising their inspiration to get integrated into mainstream society as well as connecting them to the world. Our participants shared,

“Technological advancement also plays a significant role in minimizing the gap between us and the locals by delivering information. For example, through mobile phones, tea garden workers today learn about events like those that won the US presidential election. I have also acquired a wealth of knowledge through social media. I would like to add that the young local people are very liberal, and the use of social media has a significant impact. I have

observed that some young locals are creating content on social media that highlights the hardships and poverty faced by tea garden workers.”

Respondents #4

“I wanted to pursue a bachelor’s degree because, in high school, I saw some teachers referred to as BSC sir, and I wanted to earn a BSC degree to be like them. Secondly, many chapters in my school and college books discussed the Nobel Prize, and I learned that a physicist could receive it. Those factors inspired me to choose physics as my major.”

Respondents #1

Strategies: Education, Occupation change, language proficiency, Participating in various organizational activities.

Ager & Strang (2008), has explained, education is fundamental for all individuals, strengthening their dreams and equipping them with the necessary skills to achieve better in life. It fosters both individual growth and integration into the societal framework by developing a common ground and exchanging cultural norms and values with the wider society. Ager & Strang (2008) also contend education plays a role as a social agent through which people can connect themselves with a broader society. Our study reflects Ager & Strang (2008)’s opinion. To turn aspiration into reality, education is significant, which facilitates our participants to strengthen their skills. In the process of integration, education acts as a crucial strategy because it facilitates individuals with literacy and rationality, which are necessary for employment, community engagement, and navigating daily life. The study by Magar & Kar (2016) has demonstrated a similar thing that some young children of tea-working communities in Assam are adopting education as a strategy, which contributes to their inclusion and integration in mainstream society. Because education fosters a shared understanding between marginalized and dominant societies, facilitating the exchange of collective values. Our study also noticed education acts as a transformative strategy among the participants who desire for leading a stable and smooth life. Our respondents shared,

“Since my educational background was commerce, I pursued both my graduation and post-graduation studies in management at that. During college, I worked as a home tutor to cover my study expenses. I often feel stressed about managing my studies and my part-time job teaching children. Still, one inspiration always drives me: completing my education and finding a fulfilling job so I can lead a better life than that of a tea garden worker. After finishing my undergraduate and graduate studies, I began applying for jobs. With the

blessings of God almighty, I secured a position at an NGO dedicated to empowering women from tea gardens to protect their rights. I am currently working as a field manager for this NGO.” Respondents #2

The study by Lin & Wen (2018) reveals that tea workers in the Chinese Yunnan province are changing their traditional occupation and expanding diversity in their traditional tea-related jobs due to the arrival of tourists, which increasing their financial solvency, removing their social marginalization, fostering their intimacy with mainstream through intra-cast marriage, ensuring inclusion into mainstream society. Similar thing we have identified in our study. Participants perceive the transition from their traditional careers as a strategy to integrate into the dominant society. The transition of careers indicates not only changing the traditional profession but also individuals branching out into various sectors and locations. The workplace is considered a center for several people from different places and backgrounds where cultural exchange occurs and people make adjustments with different cultural people to continue their jobs, which Berry (2005) considered an important aspect for adaptation, and he highlighted that cultural exchange reshapes individuals adjusting in a new cultural setting, and it helps individuals to get integrated into a new society easily. Besides, we have found that our respondents want to adapt to diverse professions or transition careers to come out from their traditional work, which will help them achieve economic solvency and create opportunities to get accustomed to the mainstream culture by interacting with diverse people from diverse backgrounds. It represents adaptability and strategic action, which implies people striving to navigate pathways to overcome marginalization. Moreover, jobs at any formal institution, such as NGOs or governmental organizations, imply progression from marginal status to mainstream involvement. It also indicates breaking down historical marginalization and ensuring social inclusion. Respondents shared that,

“I had wanted to be a police officer since childhood- I applied for a position in the Bangladesh police force and actively participated in the written exam for this role. Fortunately, I passed both the written and viva exams. The news of my primary selection for the position filled my family and me with immense joy, as I considered the possibility of living a life like that of mainstream people and breaking the chain of struggle that my parents had been enduring for many years.” Respondents #3

Furthermore, Ager & Strang (2008) have explained in integration theory that linguistic and cultural knowledge pertains to embracing the language proficiency and speech patterns of the

broader community. Language proficiency fosters the ability to understand local norms and values, strengthens cultural adaptability to socialize easily, and helps individuals navigate effectively in formal settings like job tests, which ultimately ensures people's integration into both the dominant society and the institutional procedure. Our study aligns with Ager & Strang's (2008) perspective, where participants develop language skills and speech patterns as a strategy to achieve social inclusion in wider society. Language proficiency helps them to improve communication skill which further expand their social networks, enhance their ability to secure employment, access services, and finally facilitates integration into the Bangladeshi mainstream society. The study by Magar & Kar (2016) also reveals the similar thing that many young people in the tea community of Assam are now adopting the Assamese language and social practices, which helps them to interact with the indigenous Assamese community and fosters the cultural integration of tea-working communities into the broader Assamese society. Our Participants have expressed that,

“One more thing I want to add is that I felt I should learn the local language if I want to have a better life like them. I started to follow their way of speaking and their language style in high school. By mixing with them and following their speaking style I could improve my language skill. Later, it helped me to make more friends and helped me to attend my job viva effectively”. Respondents #3

According to Ager & Strang (2008), people maintain connections both in their community and in broader society by using social networks and attending various organizational activities, which facilitate people's support system and inclusion in the broader community. Our study also underscores the active involvement of participants in different organizations, which considered as a strategic action to improve their capacity to expand networks, overcome isolation, and enhance inclusion in the wider community. Participation in organizational activities acts as a connector between the individual and the community, accelerating integration through capacity building, interactions and cultural understanding, which is essential for comprehensive social integration. In this process, we also noticed the positive attitude of individuals from broader society that smooths the way for marginalized people to get integrated, which reflects the argument of Berry (2005) about mutual adaptation, where he highlighted the importance of mutual adaptation for both majority and minority communities that support policies such as fair educational opportunities, inclusive employment, recognition of cultural variety, and providing access to participate in different programs (Berry, 2005).

These factors together help an individual to get successfully integrated into a broader society. Our participants have shared with us that,

“At my university, all my roommates and hallmates and classmates were very friendly, which allowed me to feel relaxed and comfortable. I actively participated in different organizational functions, including theater. I was the main organizer of the Saraswati Puja during my final year of graduation, as well as an iftar party in our department each year. I was involved in organizing various cultural programs such as these, which helped broaden my outlook and made me confident enough to maintain a big circle of friends. Respondents #4

According to Kraatz (2019), access to secure housing not only fulfils the basic rights of human beings, but it also plays a pivotal role in facilitating an individual’s integration into a wider community. Safe and secure housing and its surroundings have a significant impact on individuals, which helps people to settle and feel part of the larger community (Ager & Strang, 2008). Our study underscores the fact that participants are changing their housing location and moving closer to city centers with their families, which further supports themselves to get access in better education, a better quality of life and to be a part of mainstream society. Besides that, we have found an interesting thing that participants expressed their priority on having well-established neighbors and surroundings which impact individuals to reshape their actions, build their sense of identity, and foster their inclusion in the mainstream community as they share similar public spaces such as transportation, parks, hospitals, and schools, which are vital to developing mutual understanding and shared identity. The surroundings or neighborhood profoundly shape individuals’ ambitions, actions, and intercultural understanding by introducing them to various experiences and beliefs. This introduction supports bridging social and psychological gaps, promoting inclusion and a more cohesive community mindset, which reflects Berry (2005)’s point of ‘psychological acculturation’ that implies individuals psychological change occurs influenced by seeing other people’s actions, habits, and practices. Participants shared that,

“When it came time for high school, my father rented a small apartment in a nearby town and sent my mother, my two sisters, and me there. He visited us twice a week. Although it was challenging for my father to cover all the expenses due to his low salary, he was determined to give us the opportunity for a good education.” Respondents #4

“I believe that a person's neighborhood, housing location, and accommodation play a significant role in shaping their ambitions. I want to install those ambitions in my children, which I might not do.” Respondents #3

In conclusion, throughout the narratives, we can understand the tea-working community aspires not just to dream of a better future; they also negotiate with their harsh reality and employ all possible strategies to reach beyond present limits. Through silent strengths such as walking long distances to school, relocating to new urban places, and holding the belief their children have a better future, these people are shaping new paths forward and redefining their sense of belonging gradually.

6.2 The desire for belonging and social recognition

Motivation: Inspired by the lifestyle of dominant social group and Desire for inclusion and recognition.

Jenkins highlighted that identity is not a rigid or an unchanging concept; rather, it is an active process. The process of identification allows people to associate themselves with groups or others, including friends, sports teams, or shared ideologies (Jenkins, 2014; as cited in Roy et al., 2024, p. 24). Identification happens in a common space where internal and external processes constantly interact, influence one another, and exist as inseparable. However, internal and external influences may change due to dependence on various contexts and situations (Jenkins, 2014; Roy et al., 2024, p. 26). Jenkins's (2014) perspective is reflected in the experiences of some of our respondents. Our study has found that individuals who work outside the garden area and interact with local mainstream individuals are often influenced by local norms, values, and lifestyles. This influence is a significant factor in their social integration. We also observed that parents who are involved in various governmental or non-governmental projects tend to desire and encourage their children to integrate into a broader societal structure than others. For instance, our respondents 1 and 2, whose parents participated in a governmental project, illustrate the direct connection between parental social interactions and children's integration into mainstream society. According to participant

“At the same time, she worked on a government campaign that works for ensuring people's nutritional security. My mother's tasks were to visit people's homes to provide nutritious products and collect her salary; she often went to the local market. The garden was located

near the homes of some local residents, which allowed my mother to observe their better lifestyles and inspired her dream of living like them. She also realized that education was essential for achieving that dream lifestyle. As a result, she took me to school, spoke with the teachers, and secured my admission". Respondent #1

Our study underscores the importance of understanding and engaging with the environment, particularly in social interactions. Tea garden children who interact with other mainstream peers often aspire for an improved social position and a sense of belongingness as they share their ideas while playing, watch programs on television together, and overall observe the lifestyle of their mainstream friends. Similarly, the study conducted by Lin & Wen (2018) demonstrates how tea tourism enhances social interaction by creating shared spaces, economic links, and cultural exchanges within a broader social framework, which ultimately fosters the integration process. As Appadurai (1990) suggests, imagination is a crucial tool for people to comprehend and engage with their environment in the contemporary world. It is also considered an action through which individuals comprehend global influences, construct their identities, and define their desires and goals. It has significant cultural and social impacts, creating a sense of connection and belonging, allowing people to navigate global changes while maintaining their identity. Besides, in mediascape, Appadurai (1990) argues that the Media influences people's perceptions and imagination of reality. Our respondent has shared with us that:

"After completing primary school, I continued my education at a local school in our town. Aside from the tea garden school, I made many friends at local schools during my early years. I observed their lifestyle, speech patterns, and clothing, continually inspiring me to strive for a better life. I want to share one particular memory: one day, a high school friend was watching a cartoon on his mobile phone, and I watched with him. I saw a police cartoon character, and after that, I set my career goal to join the police force. And today, I am indeed a police officer".

Respondent #3

According to Barkat et al., (2010), Children and women in tea gardens are experiencing extreme poverty and malnutrition. The ratio of the hardcore poverty line is almost 50 percent. Furthermore, 74 percent of these households live below the poverty line. The literacy rate of mature women (aged 15 to 24) is only 32 percent in the tea gardens, where the national literacy rate of women is almost 70 percent and child marriage are common in tea gardens. But Tea

community individuals who migrate for education to other cities often adopt the host society's progressive cultural values, norms, and beliefs. As Appadurai (1990) argues, in ethnoscaping, the movement of individuals is not only physical. It also involves social and cultural exchanges while interacting with the local community and culture. Appadurai's (1990) arguments are reflected in our study, where we have found that these individuals internalize the practices and beliefs of the host society. Then they apply these in their family and community settings, eliminating practices against mainstream societal expectations, such as "early marriage," and promoting progressive elements such as "education." This process results from the influence of the host society's culture on the individuals, which helps maintain social harmony and create a positive perception, leading to recognition in mainstream society. Our participants noted:

"Hopefully, I will be in Germany next year. I don't know how I will manage everything, but I'm trying to support myself as well as my sisters; I want them to study too. Recently, my parents attempted to arrange an early marriage for my younger sister, but I refused to let it happen. I brought her with me, and she is studying now. I also convinced my parents." Respondent #1

He also added,

"You may be surprised to learn that many tea workers and children from our garden are now following my path and pursuing higher education. I feel fortunate when I think about them following me." Respondent #1

"In our community, specific malpractices are prevalent, including early marriage and intercommunity marriages. As a girl, I have faced numerous challenges in preventing early marriage and completing my studies. Therefore, I want to challenge these trends and remove the barriers to marrying outside the tea garden community. By choosing a local partner, I hope to bridge the gap between them and us." Respondent #2

Strategies: socializing efforts, engaging in leading cultural spaces and public events

According to Murphy (1965, as cited in Berry, 2005), an individual's acculturation happens quickly if the host society is supportive. A cultural pluralistic society where multiple cultural communities coexist is more supportive in this context. It allows them to keep their cultural identity by providing institutional and community support, such as medical support and educational facilities (a bilingual program) and different perspectives in the curriculum

(Murphy, 1965; as cited in Berry, 2005, p. 703). Nonetheless, not all societies treat multiculturalism equally. Due to historical background and ethnic ownership, racial or religious issues affect the acculturation process, leading to discrimination, exclusion, and difficulties in integrating into a new or even broader society (Berry & Kalin, 1995; Lebedva & Tatarko, 2004). Tea workers' identities are regularly shaped by various factors such as ethnicity, gender, caste, class, and culture. And they encounter multiple marginalizations due to their different identities. Their ethnic and class identity impacts their social interactions, access to utilize assets, and class division within their community (Tabassum, 2019). In our study, our respondents shared that these issues are visible to some extent when they try to socialize with the locals, expect acceptance and recognition, and are acknowledged as general members of society. Unfortunately, their efforts do not always bring positive outcomes. While some people show value, respect, and recognition and accept them, acknowledging their identity as human beings who deserve it in society, others refuse to acknowledge them as part of society and maintain a rigid boundary. Our respondent shared:

“I have already told you that people’s mentality is significant. Some individuals accept us with great friendliness, while others do not. Some locals judge us by various criteria such as clothing, physical appearance, work, and community. Their behavior also shifts when they discover that I come from a tea garden.” Respondent #2

Honneth and Farrel (1997), contends that recognition is also related to justice and moral relationships. In his words, morality does not mean only the equal distribution of resources but also how society accepts, recognizes, or behaves with the people. Recognition allows individuals to improve their moral agency and social responsibility, where moral agency means the capacity to act according to ethical conduct or the ability to choose between right or wrong. Social responsibility means being involved in society as a moral person (Honneth & Farrell, 1997, p. 29). Recognition produces the moral obligations that imply the responsibilities individuals have toward others. Moral obligations include assisting others, being sincere and honest, and honoring people's rights. In some aspects, even if the educated individuals in the tea community are not recognized and subjected to mistreatment by some people, they do not break the boundary of social responsibility as they have educational values. Our participants often strive for social acceptance and recognition, carefully assessing their intentions and how others treat them. They do not engage in a one-dimensional order, a term we use to describe a

simplistic, linear model of social interaction. When they realize people or groups are showing discomfort and indifference towards them, they choose to limit the interaction. Conversely, they are more open and responsive to those willing towards them. However, when individuals from their local community hurt their self-esteem by bullying and using bad language, they offer a thoughtful response, explaining why that behavior is unacceptable, maintaining mutual dignity and respect instead of reacting in anger as they uphold the social responsibility to create social harmony. Our respondent shared:

"I recall an incident from 2006 when, after collecting tea leaves, my mother, father, and sisters checked each basket's weight in front of a group of 'Bangalis,' they referred to us as 'kuli' or 'labor.' We could not do anything about it. One day, though, I responded to a friend by saying, 'You are calling my father 'Labor.' Do you understand what 'Labor' really means?' My father is a tea laborer, and I view that work with great respect. I am not criticizing your father; you are the one doing it. Does calling him benefit you in any way? My friends understood my point and apologized. I believe this issue stems from people's mindsets or perspectives." Respondent #1

Acculturation involves adaptation, implying how individuals reshape themselves to adjust to a new cultural setting. There are two distinct kinds of adaptation: sociocultural and psychological adaptation. Sociocultural adaptation addresses how individuals effectively navigate, manage, and function within the acculturation process in a new cultural environment. Factors such as acquiring new cultural knowledge, actively engaging with locals and activities, and being open to learning influence it. (Ward, 1996, as cited in Berry, 1997, p. 14). Usually, Tea community members wholeheartedly try to engage with the cultural norms of mainstream society. In particular, university students often utilize the opportunity to create connections. Because public universities in Bangladesh create a diverse setting as students from various regions converge, they bring their unique cultural and social backgrounds. This gathering creates an exchange environment that Appadurai (1996) called "ethnoscapes," which also helps to broaden the students' outlook and gives psychological strength to social engagement. Interestingly, this integration process combines adaptation and expression as they represent their culture and heritage in conversations, storytelling, and cultural events. It indicates they not only adapt to the dominant norms but also promote their traditions and way of life, which further creates a safe space for identity negotiations. Appadurai's (1996) argument in "Global

Cultural Flows " becomes relevant here, where the community adopts trans-local influence while maintaining a distinct identity and fostering recognition and a sense of belonging. Our respondent shared that:

"I easily mix with my friends, who welcome me to their festivals. I frequently visit their homes on various occasions. I always surround myself with positive people. I firmly believe that everyone is unique. Although some classmates and locals bullied me, I also made good friends who are still very close to me. My university life is quite enjoyable and open every day. All my friends, classmates, seniors, juniors, and teachers treat me very well here. Initially, I hesitated to share my tea garden community identity, but now I proudly embrace my distinct culture and traditions. My friends and those around me now respect my culture and appreciate the efforts I make. Some of my friends have even visited the tea garden where I was born and raised. My educational background and communication style may help bridge our gap." Respondent #4

Honneth (1997) said that, when people receive recognition or are treated well by others, such as from the wider community, it boosts their self-confidence and makes them more worthy. Without recognition, people cannot improve themselves as proper moral agents. Recognition motivates individuals to cultivate an upbeat personality (Honneth & Farrell, 1997, p. 31). Our respondents also highlighted the importance of being accepted and recognized by mainstream society, which strongly motivates intensified social engagement in the broader social fabric. They enthusiastically participate in community functions and social events to maintain and strengthen their sense of inclusion and solidify individual social identities. Respondents said:

"However, some are entirely different. For example, I am the only representative from the tea garden community at my workplace. But all my colleagues are very welcoming and never make me feel excluded. In fact, they sometimes encourage me by saying, "You come from a lovely place; you can do better than we do." Respondent #2

"My friends always invite me to their festivals. When I was living at home, I used to visit my friends' homes during their festivals. They serve a variety of delicious food. I also take gifts for them. We have a normal relationship in this regard. Due to my profession, I live far away from my home, so I cannot regularly visit them during their festivals. However, we have very normal relations." Respondent #3

Obtaining citizenship or having equal rights as a citizen in a country raises identity, belonging, and responsibility for both the individual and the state, which fosters their recognition within

the broader community and ultimately leads to smooth integration (Ager & Strang, 2008, p. 173). Our respondents expressed that the social recognition they get from the dominant society fosters a sense of belonging, which continuously encourages them to attend public events and social gatherings, though political parties do not show notable concern for them. Building on this sense of belonging, they express their desire to participate in public events, most notably voting, which they consider a reflection of their legitimacy and inclusion. Voting is an expression of civic identity and fulfilling their responsibility as citizens. Participants shared:

“As a citizen of Bangladesh, I have the right to vote. I used to practice casting my vote regularly. However, I cannot support any political party or candidate due to a professional issue. Except for that, I can easily exercise my voting rights.”Respondent #3

“I have deep feelings for my country; Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman granted us citizenship rights, and I voted because I know it is also my responsibility. Unfortunately, political parties show little concern for us”Respondent #6

6.3 Collective agency and community advancement

Motivations: To bring structural change and strong emotional connections with the own community.

Appadurai (2004, p 67) states that the poor have a more brittle capacity for aspiration, as they have limited access to resources and the recognition they perceive from society compared to wealthier groups. Islam & Al-Amin, (2025) explored, financial constraints force children to prioritize early placement on their familial job. This study also explored the limited concern of tea garden authorities with arranging the education facilities for the children of tea workers, which is another reason for the high dropout ratio after primary education. These deliberate controls have compelled children to remain unaware of their rights, perpetuating poverty and serving as a source of cheap labour for generations. Limited access to resources and minimal external collaboration restrict community individuals from envisioning aspirations for a better future. Constrained access to diverse perspectives and a broader socioeconomic context limits their ability to dream beyond their circumstances; as an invisible structural barrier within the garden area, it draws a heavy curtain across the path to dreaming.

Participant7 quoted:

“External support and collaboration are minimal. We earn 178 takas by working 8 hours a day, an increase from before; it went up due to our legal protests, but it still falls short of meeting basic needs. Garden owners are treated like kings. We lack direct contact with them.

The administrative body conceals the truth from them, leading them to believe we are satisfied with what we have. We need to support each other in addressing these issues, and we do. Political parties visit the gardens only to campaign before elections; afterward, they forget that we exist. Locals only engage with us for entertainment, such as during “Durga Puja and funding cultural events.” Respondent #7

Despite the many obstacles, the individuals within the community who dream of pursuing better opportunities are inspired by the potential for both personal growth and community upliftment. Their efforts to search for dignity and honor have emerged as an aspiration among them to establish their identities (Hazarika,2019). This inspiration motivates them to strive for higher societal positions, believing they can better serve their community by attaining influential roles, as they will have more access to resources and the capability to provide logistical support which will bring structural changes and smooth the way of integration. They see personal advancement as both individual success and a means to uplift the community. Moreover, they aspire to create an environment for future generations where socioeconomic, and other limitations do not constrain their aspirations, which aligns with Appadurai's (2004, p. 82) view, as he stated in the "capacity to Aspire," both logistical support and creating a favorable environment are needed to foster the capacity to aspire. Respondents said:

“For my community, I plan to reform the land rights law and property ownership criteria for employment opportunities for tea garden workers. As I mentioned earlier, securing a job was a significant challenge. After much struggle, I managed to overcome this barrier. However, this law still remains in effect. Therefore, I aim to update this law to ensure that no qualified candidate encounters difficulties in the recruitment process due to their lack of land ownership.” Respondent #3

“Additionally, I work at an NGO dedicated to empowering women. My goal is to highlight the problems faced by tea garden women, including early marriage, sanitation, illiteracy, and malnutrition. Furthermore, illiteracy has led to many prejudices among residents of tea gardens. I aim to promote literacy for all of them and encourage parents to send their children to school”. Respondent #2

These quotations reflect that the respondents have strong emotional ties with their community while trying to integrate into the dominant society, which also leads to motivation to prosper in the future, as it will enhance their ability to support their community. The study explored the integration journey reflects Berry's (1997) strategy, in which he argued in the acculturation theory that individuals can maintain their cultural identity while simultaneously integrating into broader society. Various studies on different minor groups in a host society reflect that they make equal efforts to practice and engage with their rooted values and the various aspects of the broader society, such as social, cultural, and economic systems. This fosters a fair and inclusive society that recognizes and appreciates cultural diversity. It lessens the differentiation between various ethnic or marginalized communities and the larger society (Berry, 1997, p. 10; Berry, 2005, p. 705). Their strong attachment with their own community also reflects on these expressions:

“In the future, no matter how far I go, I won’t forget my roots. It’s also my dream to support my community. I have been working for my community from a young age; whenever I have time, I help younger people with mathematics and science subjects. I always encourage them and their parents to keep studying. Last year, I organized a fundraising program to ensure that one of my younger brothers could gain university admission. I will do my best to ensure that my community can live a good, beautiful, and fulfilling life”. Respondent #1

“In the future, I want to continue my social work in my community. After retirement, I will keep my half-pension funds in a special account to support it. Sometimes, my family does not agree with this; they think I am spending all my savings on community service and not saving anything for my children. They are currently in school, and I believe they will succeed in the future. I will support them in every aspect of their lives”. Respondent #7

Strategies: Social bonds, social bridge, social links.

At the community level, empowerment refers to the entire community coming together to utilize resources and develop strategies that enhance their authority over their own lives, thereby improving their collective well-being (Labonté, 1989). Respondents shared that they form a collective agency within their community, which empowers them and drives them toward integration. By developing a strong social bond among themselves, they can utilize

their resources, fostering the integration process on a personal level and enhancing the entire community's position within broader societal aspects. The agency inspires tea garden students regarding higher education, organizes workshops to educate parents about the importance of supporting children in their studies, provides financial assistance for the academic journey, and implements many other initiatives. This reflects the views of Ager & Strang (2008, p. 177) about the significance of social bonds, as they nurture internal cohesion that enables communities to reach a better position despite facing systemic barriers for many years. Participant shared,

“There is a student organization formed by tea garden students called the University Tea Students Organization (UTSHO). Its primary activities involve inspiring tea garden students to pursue higher education by organizing workshops in the tea gardens, educating parents about the importance of supporting their children's studies and assisting tea garden students during admissions tests. I was an active member of this organization and can share that we established a stipend system for extremely needy students from the tea gardens of UTSHO. Through this organization, we have guided many students from tea gardens, and nearly 140 of them are now studying at various universities in Bangladesh, excelling in their respective fields. Besides, we undertook numerous initiatives to raise awareness and promote education, including organizing workshops and seminars, informing participants about various social movements and rights, and even hosting workshops on hygiene and sanitation for tea garden women.” Respondent #4

According to Keiffer (1984), three important aspects should be considered to continue the empowerment process: mentoring relationships, supportive peer relationships within a collective organization, and facilitating a more critical understanding of social and political relations. We have found that people from the community are progressively exercising different dimensions of collective agency. Collective agency enables them to challenge exploitative practices, negotiate better working conditions, and protest injustices more effectively than isolated efforts (Banerjee, 2017). Most notably, the community supports the mentorship group within their community, as it makes them aware of their social position and how they are perceived within the broader social structure. Understanding their rights enables them to create a collective voice that is representative and responsive to their lived realities. Such an outcome is only possible due to the strong internal bonding developed within the community, reflecting a shared sense of purpose, trust, and solidarity. This is crucial for navigating integration challenges and solidifying their position in society. Respondent 5 quoted:

“But I strive to keep raising our concerns. Through persistent effort, I became involved in local politics. My community strongly supported me on this issue. With their backing, I ran in the local government election. However, I lacked the funds necessary to submit my candidate nomination to the local government authority. At that time, the tea garden laborers generously contributed their salaries to help me submit my nomination. In this way, my fate led me into politics. I needed a small campaign to gain votes; the people liked me and supported me immensely.” Respondent #5

According to Jenkins (2014), all human identities are fundamentally social, formed through interactions, innovations, agreements, disagreements, customs, norms, negotiations, and communication. A social bridge focuses on interactions between individuals and the larger society within a country. Building a well-social bridge across diverse communities can reduce the gaps, foster understanding, and create a more inclusive society where people can thrive easily (Ager & Strang 2008, p. 177). A study conducted by Harris & Young, (2009) have found, fostering relationships across identity boundaries helps minority groups to integrate into broader society by promoting understanding and collaboration. Our study also reflects that the community individuals often create a social bridge with the dominant society when internal community efforts alone are not sufficient. Our study highlights the significant role of influential actors and organizations in the dominant society in supporting marginalized communities. This contribution includes financial and emotional support for structural changes, support for female students' education with free accommodation and food in Asian University for Women, allocation of university quotas, academic guidance from host society university students, and addressing various external issues. Importantly, this support system represents the highest level of recognition, which Honneth & Farrell (1997, p. 30) said “Solidarity” underscore the potential for positive change. Participants shared,

“In addition, we also work with individuals holding significant and influential positions and collaborate with various organizations in the community. For instance, in 2018, we engaged with several public university administrations. We requested a quota for members of the tea community in the admission test, as they are marginalized. Fortunately, some universities took this matter seriously and began implementing quotas. For example, Shahjalal University of Science and Technology accepts four students from the tea garden community under this quota, Sylhet Agriculture University accepts six students, and Sunamganj University of

Science and Technology accepts two students. It was solely our initiative; the government did not assist with that. After communicating with the Asian University of Women, the university responded positively—our 68 female students can study there for free, along with their living and dining needs.” Respondent #7

“One of the seniors in my office from your Roy community helped me with this. He takes every issue related to the tea garden. I share with him seriously and acts quickly. For example, a few months ago, the 3 Tea Garden was suddenly shut down, and the community suffered greatly because they had no savings. Then I wrote a report in the Daily Star. The next day, “Biddyanondo,” a social welfare volunteer organization, provided the people with plenty of food and beverages, which made me tear up. This report also helped to reopen these three tea gardens.” Respondent #6

Social links deal with connections to official institutions, such as educational institutions, medical services, and governmental bodies. Building these social links enables people to access necessary services and provides enough support to assist smooth integration (Ager & Strang, 2008, p. 177). In our study, we have explored that the community also creates a social link with government bodies, educational institutions, and the press to express their needs and raise voices against injustice and to legitimize their rights through creating a collective agency, which is vital for fostering a sense of belonging and creating an identity in the dominant society structure. For example, The study conducted by Ahmed (2016) reveals that the land rights movement of tea workers also increases their collective identity, solidarity, and political awareness, which enables them to advocate for their voices and get rights as equal citizens of Bangladesh. By assembling as a united community, they reinforce their solidarity and support system, which plays a significant role in their integration into broader social structures and efforts to address systematic disparities. Appadurai (2004) also highlights that, when the poor raise their voices, they create new opportunities and possibilities for themselves, rather than remaining marginalized. When the poor express themselves, it refers to the cultural process that includes rhetoric, performance, and actions by which they recognize themselves as active agents of society and change how society perceives them. Respondents shared:

“I earned a small salary for this work—178 BDT takas for 22 kg of tea leaves. After surpassing 22 kg, we earned 1 taka and 50 cents for every kilo. If I convert this amount to US dollars, it comes to just 0.00823 USD per kg. At that time, I first said we should receive at least 5 taka per kg of tea leaves because tea plucking is not an easy task. I discussed it with

other tea laborers and asked them if they would support me if I proposed this to the authorities. They all agreed. Together with other laborers, I presented our proposal to the authorities. We protested for many days, and eventually, the authorities accepted our demand, agreeing to pay us 3 takas per kilo of leaves". Respondent #5

"At that time, the government wanted to establish an economic zone on our land that the company had given us for cultivation. During the off-season, we cultivated crops there. If it were to be taken away, how would we support ourselves? Out of this concern we initiated a small movement around this issue. Ultimately, we succeeded in this movement, leading the government to reverse its decision to create an economic zone on our land. Over time, my political awareness grew through my active participation in various movements aimed at securing our rights. In 2020, I founded an organization called Bangladesh 'Cha Kollan Nari Shomiti', or 'Bangladesh Tea Garden Women's Welfare Association.' The main goal of this organization was to address the issues faced by women tea laborers and advocate for their rights. We have 13 demands. Some of these include maternity leave, health issues, early marriage, and wage increases, which are important topics. Each year, we celebrate International Women's Day through this organization. Our goal is to raise awareness among women tea laborers about their rights" Respondent #5

"I found myself asking: Where did I go wrong? I am physically fit and have met all the job requirements, yet I was disqualified solely because I do not own property. I didn't lose hope or spirit. It wasn't just me; a boy from another tea garden was dealing with a similar issue. I spoke with him, and we both went to the DC office in our district. There, we discussed the situation with the DIG, who understood our problem but couldn't intervene due to recruitment laws. Nevertheless, I continued to put forth my best effort. I shared my concerns with one of my journalist friends, who reported on the situation in the newspaper, garnering attention from the Human Rights Commission in Bangladesh. They provided me with excellent support and conducted a second verification. Ultimately, they successfully secured my recruitment." Respondent #3

These activities are vital, as Whitmore and Kerans (1988) said. Individuals should define their needs and have the autonomy to take the necessary action rather than letting others decide. Individuals are assumed to understand their needs well, which is crucial for their personal growth. All people possess strengths and potential that they can utilize for their growth. Self-trust, resilience, and confidence are essential in this process to cope effectively.

7. Concluding Remarks

In this section the research question of the project will be answered in relation to the data analysis based on three different themes. In our study, we have found that the integration of individuals from the tea-working community of the Sylhet Division into Bangladesh's mainstream is driven by a combination of personal aspirations, social desire, and individual and collective attachment to their own community. The members of the marginalized community navigate various pathways towards greater mobility, recognition, and inclusion into the broader dominant society.

In the initial stage, individuals strive for personal growth and family well-being, with the desire for economic stability serving as a driving force. Besides, family-driven encouragement, different workshops conducted by development actors like NGOs and government-led support mechanisms such as stipends for school-going children and global media influences further shape these aspirations. To achieve their goals, individuals pursue education, learn the dominant language, transition into diverse careers, and participate in various capacity-building workshops, which help build their capacity and boost self-confidence. Additionally, for some individuals, engaging in a wider social circle and relocating to towns are seen as turning points in their journey toward inclusion.

Another important dimension of this integration process we have found in our analysis of our data is the desire for social belonging and recognition. The lifestyles, status, and behavior of the dominant social group also inspire them to feel valued, recognized, and legitimized as equal members of society. To acquire acceptance, they try to socialize with the broader society, participate in dominant cultural spaces, and engage in public events to internalize the norms and behavior of the dominant class. Although the host society does not always show active interest, these individuals try with sincerity. In this context, educational institutions play important roles as social spaces by facilitating interactions. We have also observed that educated and young individuals from the mainstream tend to be more open to accepting them compared to others, which helps reduce social gaps and reshape their identity from marginality to mainstream.

We also have explored through the analysis of our data that participants feel a strong emotional and social connection with their own group and a sense of responsibility to bring structural change and create a safe social environment for future generations, and they believe integration is not merely an individual goal; with the collective agency they can bring own community

advancement, which facilitates the broader acceptance of the entire group into mainstream society. These motivations foster community-level actions that strengthen the relationship with the broader society and unify them. This social bond within the community was leveraged to build social bridges with the mainstream people and links with other institutions. These foundations within the mainstream society further create connections with mainstream organizations such as government bodies, NGOs, and universities. In the long run, these bridges make their voices heard, influence policy changes, and bring favorable outcomes towards their integration.

Altogether, the study illustrates the journey of participants from the tea-working community in Sylhet, Bangladesh, a complex but determined process of integration from three dimensions: aspirational mobility, desire for recognition, and collective advancement. The study shows that the members are not merely subject to marginalization but are active agents who shape their own identity, resilience, adaptability, and strategic engagement. It is shaped by both internal and external determinations to continuous negotiations, identity, and opportunity.

While the study has explored the integration journey of individuals from the tea-working community towards mainstream society in Sylhet, Bangladesh, it also opens up some focus areas to go deeper to examine the journey specifically of women from the same community towards integration into the broader Bangladeshi society. By using intersectionality as both a theoretical lens and methodological tool, it can be explored how, as a marginalized group, their experience of the journey to integration is shaped and intersected by gender, religion, and economic status. And that will further help to examine whether the pathways of integration of tea-working women differ from men within the same community.

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Appendixes

#Respondent 1

Date: 20/02/2025

Time: 10 am to 11.15 am

1. Could you please tell us about yourself.?

I am *. My father's name is Amrita Vumij, and he is a permanent tea worker. My mother's name is Ratan Moni Vumij, and she is a non-permanent tea worker. I am the eldest child of my parents. We live in the * Tea Garden Bangladesh. My academic journey began at *Govt Primary School,' and I attended *Govt College' for my higher education. Later, I earned my bachelor's and master's degrees in physics from Mawlana Vasani Science and Technology University in Tangail, Bangladesh.

2. Can you describe more about your education journey?

My father never studies. He doesn't like studying. His intention was for us to work in a tea garden and start earning money soon. However, my mother was different; she inspired me to pursue my studies. She worked in another tea garden in our area. At the same time, she also worked on a government campaign aimed at ensuring people's nutritional security. My mother's tasks were to visit people's homes to provide nutritious products and collect her salary; she would often visit the local market. The garden was located near the homes of some local residents, which allowed my mother to observe the better lifestyles of the locals and inspired her dream to live like them. She also realized that education was essential to achieve that dream lifestyle. As a result, she took me to school, spoke with the teachers, and secured my admission into first grade. My academic journey officially began at Paschim Botuli Govt Primary School. I was a very rambunctious boy during my childhood, and there was no one around me who studied at school. So, I spent the whole day playing with my friends in the tea garden, with no interest in going to school. One day, my mother scolded me severely and made me promise to attend school regularly. At that time, a government stipend of 150 Bangladeshi Taka was awarded to any student who attended school regularly for at least 25 days. My mother convinced me that I could receive this stipend if I attended school regularly. After that, with God's blessing, I accepted my mother's suggestion and started attending school regularly. I still remember that when I received my first stipend, my mother crafted a silver necklace specifically for me. Following this, my days passed by, and in 2008, I passed my primary school certificate exam with a satisfactory CGPA. After that, I enrolled in a nearby local high school called 'Fultola High School'. Before admission, I secured my position by participating in the high school entrance exam. When I was in ninth grade, we had to choose one of three categories to study in-depth: humanities, science, and commerce. I decided to major in science, driven by

my interest in conducting experiments. Practical research on the behavior of various animals in the school lab. At that time, many of my friends, relatives, and acquaintances discouraged me from pursuing science as my major. Even some people showed logic to my father to stop me from taking science. They told my father that if I chose science as my major course, I would need to take many paid private courses to understand it, and it would be nearly impossible for my father to cover these expenses. Although my father created some problems with my decision, I was fortunately able to convince him.

I want to share that one of my teachers mocked me in front of 200 students in class simply because I chose science as my major. That incident serves as a powerful reminder for me to stand by my decision. I successfully passed my secondary school certificate exam with a satisfactory CGPA of 4.13 out of 5, pursuing science as my major. Additionally, I would like to mention that I am the only student from the 2014 batch who has completed both my BSc and MSc degrees at a reputable university in Bangladesh.

I want to add one more fact: there was a hidden internal policy that hindered the progress of the tea worker community. This keeps us in that cycle, preventing us from living like mainstream people, because if we did, there would be a shortage of workers in that industry.

Furthermore, I am a very dreamy boy. My high school was located near a college. When our lunch break began, I would often see many students and teachers from the college there, which sparked in me the dream of attending college. After completing my secondary education, I enrolled in that college. In the meantime, I tried to get into a prestigious college in our district, but it was too expensive for me to afford. So, I enrolled in Toiobunnessa Khanom Government College. Here, I also faced many challenges, such as my identity as a son of a tea worker; some classmates and teachers often underestimated me, and my grades even dropped on an exam solely because I had not attended a paid private course run by a teacher. However, I managed to take my intermediate exam, and I passed it as well.

In front of my college gate, there were many posters for university admission coaching centers. Seeing this inspired me to dream of gaining admission to a public university. After discussing it with my parents, my father initially disapproved. The main reason was that they didn't have enough money to support me, as these processes are expensive. However, my mother encouraged me, and she borrowed money from local acquaintances under the condition of providing a certain amount of paddy within a specific timeframe since we have some land to cultivate given to us by the tea garden authority. With this money, I moved to our district town,

Sylhet, and enrolled in a coaching center. There, I gained knowledge about various topics, their admission criteria, and the procedures involved. I began participating in admission tests at several universities but did not secure a place at any of them during my first attempt. At that time, I was struggling mentally and would cry almost every day, knowing that my parents were working extremely hard to manage the money for my education. Despite my efforts, I didn't succeed. For the first time, my father provided me with close support. I still remember him telling me, "Try again; if necessary, I will support you financially." That was another turning point in my life. I took the university admission test for the second time and secured the top position on the merit list at Mawlana Vasani Science. and Technology University. In between, I have faced numerous challenges. I was mentally and financially weak at that time, but I never lost my aspiration. I always hold onto my dreams and work to make them a reality. I would like to inform you of one thing: I received the call for the viva under the ethnic minority quota section of the university, as I belong to a minority community, which is why I applied. I secured the top spot in the ethnic minority quota section and achieved the 16th overall merit position in the sciences section during the admission test. The financial crisis made that moment both precious and heartbreaking for me. I shared this problem with one of my older brothers, who lives abroad, and he helped me financially with my admission process. Later, our proctorial body also assisted me financially with my admission. When it was time to choose my major, I decided to pursue a degree in physics. Some primary motivations drove my decisions. I wanted to pursue a bachelor's degree because, in high school, I saw some teachers referred to as BSC sir, and I wanted to earn a BSC degree to be like them. Secondly, many chapters in my school and college books discussed the Nobel Prize, and I learned that a physicist could receive it. Those factors inspired me to choose physics as my major.

After completing my bachelor's and master's degrees in physics, I no longer wish to pursue a career as a physician. I've previously mentioned that I'm a very dreamy person, so I'm now interested in pursuing a career in data science. I hope to work for Google or NASA. My bachelor's and master's journeys were not easy; I faced very few hurdles, especially since I struggled financially. I'm working part-time, teaching students in their homes. Initially, I also tried to prepare myself to join the management team as a general staff member in our tea garden. However, one of my senior sisters, who is a student at Dhaka University and conducted a study on children of tea workers, suggested that I should give myself at least two years for my studies and a more progressive career. After hearing this, I began to think more about my career and higher education. I started applying to universities in Germany, and I was fortunate

enough to receive an admission offer from a German university for physics and materials science. After hearing this good news, one of my brothers-in-law, who lives in a Middle Eastern country, assured me that he would provide financial support during this process.

3) Can you describe your relationship with your friends?

I am a very sociable person. I can easily mix with my friends and anyone else. I never hide my identity as the son of a tea worker. However, I have noticed that some of my friends from my community try to hide their identity as tea garden workers when they're at university. I don't understand why they do this. Sometimes, I feel that some of my classmates, although not all, underestimate me by using dismissive terms like "jungli" and "Bagani," among others. In our area, we generally refer to the local community as the Bengali community. However, others address us as 'Bagani' or 'kuli.' I recall an incident from 2006 when, after collecting tea leaves, my mother, father, and sisters went to check the weight of each basket in front of a group of 'Bangalis,' and they referred to us as 'kuli' or 'labor.' We couldn't do anything about it. One day, though, I responded to a friend by saying, 'You are calling my father 'Labor.' Do you understand what 'Labor' really means?' My father is a tea laborer, and I view that work with great respect. I am not criticizing your father; you are the one doing it. Does calling him benefit you in any way? My friends understood my point and apologized. I believe this issue stems from people's mindset or perspective. However, not everyone feels the same way. I know some people may not like me, but many do appreciate me, and I embrace their positivity. My father once told me that to be a good person, you should interact with everyone and treat them with kindness. I follow my father's advice.

4. Please share your future aspirations with us.

Hopefully, I will be in Germany next year. I don't know how I will manage everything, but I'm trying to support myself as well as my sisters; I want them to study too. Recently, my parents attempted to arrange an early marriage for my younger sister, but I refused to let it happen. I brought her with me, and she is studying now. I also convinced my parents. I faced many difficulties but never lost hope. You may be surprised to learn that many tea workers and children from our garden are now following my path and pursuing higher education. I feel fortunate when I think about them following me. In the future, no matter how far I go, I won't forget my roots. It's also my dream to support my community. I have been working for my community from a young age; whenever I have time, I help younger people with mathematics and science subjects. I always encourage them and their parents to keep studying. Last year, I

organized a fundraising program to ensure that one of my younger brothers could gain university admission. I will do my best to ensure that my community can live a good, beautiful, and fulfilling life.

#Respondent 02

Date: 28 February 2025

Time- 12 pm to 12.50 pm

1. Could you please tell us about yourself.?

My name is *. I live in the * tea estate in Kamalganj, Moulvibazar. I have completed both my bachelor's and master's degrees in management, and I am currently working at a non-government organization (NGO). My family consists of six members. My father is a permanent tea worker in the *garden, but he does not regularly engage in tea plucking. During the off-season, he works as a night guard in the tea garden area. My father is the sole breadwinner for our family, while my mother is a homemaker. My father's low-wage employment as a tea worker often leads to significant deprivation during my childhood.

2. Can you describe more about your education journey?

First, I want to let you know that our area's local people are educated. My parents always strived to ensure that my life and my brothers' lives were free from illiteracy. They want us to get an education and lead a life like the educated locals. With that in mind, they enrolled me in the local school, where I studied from first to tenth grade. After completing my primary education, I was admitted to college. My college was far from home, and every day I had to spend 20 takas on transportation. However, due to his low income, my father was unable to provide the daily support I needed. Despite this, my parents' aspirations steadily motivated me to continue my studies, leading me to walk 2 to 3 miles to college every day. Additionally, I applied for a waiver of my monthly college tuition, which the college authorities approved on the condition that I excel in my studies. I am also working hard to achieve good results. In 2016, I passed my Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) exam with excellent grades. After that, I wanted to take the admission test for several reputable universities in Bangladesh. When I brought this up with my parents, they became worried about how they would manage my fees, and they didn't want me to go far away, as most public universities are located far from our home, even outside our

district. Meanwhile, some people began pressuring my parents to consider my marriage, as there is a trend for early marriage in the tea garden community. This situation was very challenging for me to handle, but I remained determined to continue my education. I managed to convince my parents, but they set a condition: "You can pursue higher education, but you must stay with us." I accepted their condition and was admitted to a nearby college under the National University of Bangladesh. Since my educational background was commerce, I pursued both my graduation and post-graduation studies in management at that. During college, I worked as a home tutor to cover my study expenses. I often feel stressed about managing my studies and my part-time job teaching children. Still, one inspiration always drives me: completing my education and finding a fulfilling job so I can lead a better life than that of a tea garden worker. After finishing my undergraduate and graduate studies, I began applying for jobs. With the blessings of God almighty, I secured a position at an NGO dedicated to empowering women from tea gardens to protect their rights. I am currently working as a field manager for this NGO.

3.Can you describe your relationship with mainstream people?

There are two types of people in my friend circle. Some of them understand us and get very close by supporting us mentally. Others, however, fail to comprehend or acknowledge our struggles. I have encountered both kinds of experiences. Some of my friends from the area are very helpful and deeply understand our struggle, but some of my local classmates have never accepted me as their friend. You know our language accent doesn't resemble that of the locals. This may contribute to their reluctance to socialize. Sometimes, they refer to us as 'Bagani' or 'Kuli,' but I always protest these words. I can share an incident: during my job search, I had a spot for a job exam in the DC office of our district. There was a question about tea garden labor. The question paper labeled tea garden labor as 'Kuli.' Upon seeing the question paper, I immediately protested using this term and opted out of the exam. Some of my local friends and exam mates supported me at that time and joined the protest. Afterward, we complained to the DC, and the authority apologized for this.

I've already told you that people's mentality is significant. Some individuals accept us with great friendliness, while others do not. Even some locals judge us by various criteria such as our clothing, physical appearance, work, and community. Their behavior also shifts when they discover that I come from a tea garden. However, some are completely different. For example, at my workplace, I am the only representative from the tea garden community. But all my

colleagues are very welcoming and never make me feel excluded. In fact, they sometimes encourage me by saying, "You come from a lovely place; you can do better than we do".

Additionally, on various occasions, my friends often invite us to join them. I used to go to their home on Eid and Puja. They cordially receive me, and we enjoy delicious food together.

4.Please share your future, aspiration with us.

In our community, specific malpractices are prevalent, including early marriage and intercommunity marriages. As a girl, I have faced numerous challenges in preventing early marriage and completing my studies. Therefore, I want to challenge these trends and remove the barriers to marrying outside the tea garden community. By choosing a local partner, I hope to bridge the gap between them and us.

Additionally, I work at an NGO dedicated to empowering women. My goal is to highlight the problems faced by tea garden women, including early marriage, sanitation, illiteracy, and malnutrition. Furthermore, illiteracy has led to many prejudices among residents of tea gardens. I aim to promote literacy for all of them and encourage parents to send their children to school.

One additional issue I would like to address is the lack of property rights for tea garden workers. I dream of reforming this law to grant property rights to the workers. I have already initiated a field survey myself, which I will submit to my NGO. I hope to present it effectively and raise awareness about this issue.

#Respondent 03

Date: 01/03/2025

Time: 11 am to 12.27 pm

1.Could you please tell us about yourself?

I am *. I completed my primary and secondary education in my hometown, *. After that, I pursued my bachelor's and master's degrees at a college under the National University of Bangladesh, Sylhet. Currently, I serve as a constable in the Bangladesh Police Force. Additionally, I am studying for a Bachelor of Law (LLB) at a private institution to gain a deeper understanding of various laws. My father is a temporary tea garden worker and a carpenter. My mother is a tailor and works in a private life insurance company. I am my parents' only child. I was born in the * tea garden, where I spent my entire childhood.

2.Can you describe more about your education journey?

First, I want to share some experiences from my childhood. My grandfather and all my uncles worked in the tea garden. However, my father did not work in the tea garden; he took up carpentry as his profession because the wages from the tea garden were too minimal to manage our living expenses. My mother worked at a private life insurance company, and in addition to that, she sewed clothes for others to help support our family financially. I grew up in a tea garden, and my parents always encouraged me to study and strive for better opportunities in life. They never wanted to live my life in such extreme deprivation and poverty. This realization led them to enroll me in a local primary school instead of the tea garden's school, which provided low-quality education. However, this primary school is quite far from our home, nearly 7 kilometers away. I still remember that when I was in first grade, I would walk about 14 kilometers each way to get to school. That was very challenging for me as a child. Unfortunately, my family couldn't provide enough financial support for public transportation to the school. After completing primary school, I continued my education at a local school in our town. Aside from the tea garden school, I made many friends at local schools during my early years. I observed their lifestyle, speech patterns, and clothing, which continually inspired me to strive for a better life. I want to share one memory: one day, a high school friend was watching a cartoon on his mobile phone, and I watched with him. I saw a police cartoon character, and after that, I set my career goal to join the police force. And today, I am indeed a police officer. One more thing I want to add is that I felt I should learn the local language if I want to have a better life like them. I started to follow their way of speaking and their language style in high school. By mixing with them and following their speaking style I could improve my language skill. Later, it helped me to make more friends and helped me to attend my job viva effectively.

My parents always supported me. However, everyone in the tea garden never thinks like my parents or me. The maximum has dropped out after primary school. I have many struggles to continue this journey, but now at least I can think of doing better in my life. After completing my primary studies, one day, while I was talking with a friend at a train station in our local town during my secondary school studies, my friend's father told me that the Bangladesh police were recruiting, as he owned a newspaper shop. After hearing this, I bought a newspaper, and as soon as I found the circular- because I had wanted to be a police officer since childhood- I applied for a position in the Bangladesh police force and actively participated in the written exam for this role. Fortunately, I passed both the written and viva exams. The news of my primary selection for the position filled my family and me with immense joy, as I considered the possibility of living a life like that of mainstream people and breaking the chain of struggle that my parents had been enduring for many years. However, the most unexpected challenge arose during the police verification process. In Bangladesh, when you get a job, the police verify your information as part of the hiring system. My police verification revealed that I didn't own any property, which is a requirement for securing a government job in Bangladesh. Yet, we were living in a company house provided by the tea garden, as my family had worked there year after year. This revelation was shocking for me and my family at the time. I found myself asking: Where did I go wrong? I am physically fit and have met all the job requirements, yet I was disqualified solely because I do not own property. I didn't lose hope or spirit. It wasn't just me; a boy from another tea garden was dealing with a similar issue. I spoke with him, and we both went to the DC office in our district. There, we discussed the situation with the DIG, who understood our problem but couldn't intervene due to recruitment laws. Nevertheless, I continued to put forth my best effort. I shared my concerns with one of my journalist friends, who reported on the situation in the newspaper, garnering attention from the Human Rights Commission in Bangladesh. They provided me with excellent support and conducted a second verification. Ultimately, they successfully secured my recruitment. I was recruited into the police force after passing my Higher Secondary School Certificate exam. Alongside my job, I pursued my bachelor's and master's degrees from a national university. Additionally, I aspire to obtain a law degree to enhance my understanding of various policies and rights, primarily since I work in a related field. Currently, I am studying for my LLB at a private institution in Bangladesh. I want to add one more thing: Throughout my academic journey, I faced a frustrating issue: I was required to take exams on religions different from my own. At times, I had to take an exam based on a Muslim religious text and, at other times, on a Hindu religious text. I am a Christian, and I believe it is my basic right to take exams based on my religious

beliefs. However, I didn't have that opportunity, especially during my primary and secondary education. My school administration did not see it as essential to provide Christian religious texts or to create chances for me to take my religion class and exams based on my religion.

3.Can you describe your relationship with mainstream people?

Cultural participation: My friends always invite me to their festivals. When I was living at home, I used to visit my friends' homes during their festivals. They serve a variety of delicious food. I also get gifts for them. We have a normal relationship in this regard. Currently, due to my profession, I am living far away from my home, so I can't regularly visit them during their festivals. But we have very normal relations.

Political Participation: As a citizen of Bangladesh, I have the right to vote. I used to regularly practice casting my vote. However, due to a professional issue, I am currently unable to support any political party or candidate. Except for that, I can easily exercise my voting rights.

Marriage: If I find someone qualified from all aspects for me, then I will prioritize her for marriage. Either she is from the tea community or from outside; it doesn't matter.

4.Please share your future, aspiration with us.

I aspire to obtain a respected position in the police force. Given my current employment in law enforcement, I am aware of the many hierarchical roles available. These positions have always drawn my interest. I plan to take part in various levels of exams for higher roles within the Bangladesh police. If God will, my goal is to achieve a high, respectable post in the police force and serve the nation.

If I have proper money, someday, I will try to buy land in my local town. I will try to bring my parents from the company's land to my own. I have faced many difficulties, like pure drinking water, medical support, and a proper education system in my childhood. So, I never thought my child would face similar difficulties. I could do a lot, but my environment, lack of facilities, and poverty prevented me. I believe that a person's neighborhood, housing location, and accommodation play a significant role in shaping their ambitions. I want to install those ambitions in my children, which I might not do.

For my community, I plan to reform the land rights law and property ownership criteria for employment opportunities for tea garden workers. As I mentioned earlier, securing a job was a significant challenge. After much struggle, I managed to overcome this barrier. However, this

law remains in effect. Therefore, I aim to update this law to ensure that no qualified candidate encounters difficulties in the recruitment process due to their lack of landownership.

#Respondent 04

Date: 10/03/2025

Time: 7 pm to 8:10 pm

1. Could you please tell us about yourself?

My name is *. I live in the * tea garden in Sylhet. I have completed my bachelor's and master's degrees from Dhaka University, with a focus on social welfare. Currently, I am preparing for a job exam. My father works in a tea garden, where he serves as the Tilla Clarke, and my mother is a housewife.

2. Can you describe your education journey in more detail?

In a tea garden, there are various social classes work. My father holds the position of Tilla Clarke, which is a second-class job in the tea garden. He passed his secondary school certificate exam with the help of his uncle, which enabled him to be recruited as Tilla Clarke in the tea garden rather than becoming a tea laborer. My father's duties included visiting various tea gardens in our area and overseeing the work of the tea garden workers. I've mentioned before that a tea garden has different social levels, including laborers, Clarke (also known as a babu), and managers (also known as a shaheb). The manager holds the highest position in the tea garden. At the managerial level, the tea garden authority does not allow anyone to hire from the tea workers families. However, my father believed that if I could work as a "babu" with only an SSC degree, then my child could achieve even more if I helped him get a better education than I received. With this in mind, my father enrolled me in a well-known primary school in the area. However, when it came time for high school, my father rented a small apartment in a nearby town and sent my mother, my two sisters, and me there. He visited us twice a week. Although it was challenging for my father to cover all the expenses due to his low salary, he was determined to give us the opportunity for a good education. Despite some difficulties, I passed my SSC and HSC with excellent results from the local college in this town.

After that, my dream expanded with my father's support, and I aimed to gain admission to a reputable public university in Bangladesh. To achieve this, I relocated to Dhaka, the capital

city, and enrolled in a coaching center specializing in university admissions test preparation. Fortunately, I secured a place at Dhaka University in the Department of Social Welfare. Upon my admission, I moved into the university hall. At my university, all my roommates, hallmates, and classmates were very friendly, which allowed me to feel relaxed and comfortable, and I started harmonizing with them very well. I never feel excluded there. At my university, I actively participated in different organizational functions, including theater. I was the main organizer of the Saraswati Puja during my final year of graduation, as well as an iftar party in our department each year. I was involved in organizing various cultural programs such as these, which helped broaden my outlook and made me confident enough to maintain a big circle of friends.

Additionally, there was a student organization formed by tea garden students called the University Tea Students Organization (UTSHO). Its primary activities involve inspiring tea garden students to pursue higher education by organizing workshops in the tea gardens, educating parents about the importance of supporting their children's studies and assisting tea garden students during admissions tests. I was an active member of this organization and can share that we established a stipend system for extremely needy students from the tea gardens of UTSHO. Through this organization, we have guided many students from tea gardens, and nearly 140 of them are now studying at various universities in Bangladesh, excelling in their respective fields. Besides, we undertook numerous initiatives to raise awareness and promote education, including organizing workshops and seminars, informing participants about various social movements and rights, and even hosting workshops on hygiene and sanitation for tea garden women.

3.Can you describe your relationship with mainstream people?

When we first moved to town, we embarked on a journey to a new place and a new school. We encountered various challenges there. For instance, the accents of my schoolmates, locals, and neighbors differ significantly from ours. I faced bullying mainly when I spoke using my accent. I was often called 'Bagani.' After spending a considerable amount of time in this community, I can now talk like the locals. I easily mix with my friends, who welcome me to their different festivals. I frequently visit their homes on various occasions. I always surround myself with positive people. I firmly believe that everyone is unique. Although some classmates and locals bullied me, I also made good friends who are still very close to me. My university life is quite enjoyable and open. everyday. Here, all my friends, classmates, seniors, juniors, and teachers

treat me very well. Initially, I was hesitant about sharing my tea garden community identity, but now I proudly embrace my distinct culture and traditions. My friends and those around me now respect my culture and appreciate the efforts I make. Some of my friends have even visited the tea garden where I was born and raised. My educational background and communication style may help bridge the gap between us. Technological advancement also plays a significant role in minimizing the gap between us and the locals by delivering information. For example, through mobile phones, tea garden workers today learn about events like those that won the US presidential election. I have also acquired a wealth of knowledge through social media. I would like to add that the young local people are very liberal, and the use of social media has a significant impact. I have observed that some young locals are creating content on social media that highlights the hardships and poverty faced by tea garden workers. They are expressing their concerns about the disconnect between the tea community and mainstream society.

Political Participation: As a citizen of Bangladesh, I have the right to cast my vote. I used to vote, but I am not directly involved with any political parties or individuals.

Marriage: Up until now, I hadn't given much thought to getting married. My priority is to secure a job first. After that, I will consider it. Typically, there is a trend to marry within one's community. If I find someone more suitable, I will consider looking beyond my community. Whether we marry within or outside our community doesn't matter to me.

Accommodation: I won't have any chance to live in a tea garden in the future. To live in a tea garden, one must be employed as a tea worker. But I don't want to be a tea worker. If I have enough money someday, I will try to buy a house in town so that my future generation and I can have a good environment in which to lead a better life.

4. Please share your future, aspiration with us.

Personally, my goal is to do a job in the Bangladesh Civil Service. I believe I can make a significant impact if I join the Bangladesh civil service, particularly in the public service

department. One more thing comes to mind: if I enter the public service, I can also help my community from different aspects.

#Respondent 05

Date: 13/03/2025

Time: 2 pm to 3.05 pm

1. Could you please tell us about yourself?

My name is *, and I'm from D* Tea Garden. I have three sisters and one brother in my family. Initially, I worked as a tea laborer until the 10th grade. My father has passed away, and my mother is a housewife. For a short period, I served as the vice chairman of the Upazila Parishad for the local government in Bangladesh, but I lost my position when the government changed. Currently, I am back to working as a tea Plucker.

2. Can you describe your education journey (Initial journey of life)?

My father was also a tea laborer. He passed away from cancer in 2013. I am the second child of my parents, and at that time, I was in tenth grade. After my father's death, my family faced a difficult situation. My mother was also ill during that time, making it impossible for her to work in the tea garden. Consequently, the responsibility for earning shifted to me. I started working as a laborer in a tea garden. Prior to that, I had never worked in tea gardens, so it was initially challenging for me. Gradually, however, I learned everything. My days went by in this manner, but I noticed that the tea garden authorities deprived us in numerous ways. They denied us our basic rights as well. What's surprising is that not a single tea laborer has ever protested against this injustice. They were always afraid of the authorities. During that period, I became accustomed to harvesting tea leaves. I earned a small salary for this work—178 BDT takas for 22 kg of tea leaves. After surpassing 22 kg, we earned 1 taka and 50 cents for every kilo. If I convert this amount to US dollars, it comes to just 0.00823 USD per kg. At that time, I first said we should receive at least 5 taka per kg of tea leaves because tea plucking is not an easy task. I discussed it with other tea laborers and asked them if they would support me if I proposed this to the authorities. They all agreed. Together with other laborers, I presented our proposal to the authorities. We protested for many days, and eventually, the authorities accepted our demand, agreeing to pay us 3 takas per kilo of leaves. At that time, the government wanted to

establish an economic zone on our land that the company had given us for cultivation. During the off-season, we cultivated crops there. If it were to be taken away, how would we support ourselves? Out of this concern we initiated a small movement around this issue. Ultimately, we succeeded in this movement, leading the government to reverse its decision to create an economic zone on our land. Over time, my political awareness grew through my active participation in various movements aimed at securing our rights. In 2020, I founded an organization called Bangladesh Cha Kollan Nari Shomiti, or 'Bangladesh Tea Garden Women's Welfare Association.' The main goal of this organization was to address the issues faced by women tea laborers and advocate for their rights. We have 13 demands. Some of these include maternity leave, health issues, early marriage, and wage increases, which are important topics. Each year, we celebrate International Women's Day through this organization. Our goal is to raise awareness among women tea laborers about their rights. The protest focused on increasing wages, and the Prime Minister was on a video call to hear from us. At that time, the media wouldn't let me go in and speak. In many ways, the local administration tried to silence my voice. I believe our story doesn't reach the central level—we are unheard.

But I strive to continue raising our concerns. Through persistent effort, I became involved in local politics. My community strongly supported me on this issue. With their backing, I ran in the local government election. However, I did not have the funds necessary to submit my candidate nomination to the local government authority. At that time, the tea garden laborers generously contributed their salaries to help me submit my nomination. In this way, my fate led me into politics. I needed a small campaign to gain votes; the people liked me and supported me immensely. I didn't want to accept any help from the tea garden authority. I believed that if I received any money or support from them, I wouldn't be able to advocate freely for tea laborers. I would somehow feel obligated to them, which I never wanted. Ultimately, I won the local government election, and now I am the vice-chairman of the upazila Parishad. I received votes from all political parties; there were no specific parties that voted and supported me. All parties have shown their love and support for me. Regrettably, the collapse of the Bangladeshi government led to the cancellation of our local government's elected body. My time as vice-chairman lasted only one month and 19 days. During this short period, I didn't have the opportunity to do many things for the tea garden community. I was able to do a few things, such as assist some tea garden students financially to get admission to various universities, help a seriously injured tea laborer after an accident, and support some tea laborers in building their houses etc.

3. Can you describe your relationship with mainstream people?

My relationship with the locals is very good. For example, during the election, I had no money for publicity. However, my community members and locals greatly assisted me. Some people published my poster at their own expense. Some individuals arranged publicity for me, which included renting a car at their own cost. Some locals living abroad even supported me by sending money and posting about me on social media. They are not supporters or members of any political party. They appreciated my bravery in emerging from a rootless and deprived position. My movement to secure tea laborer rights also impressed them, and I received votes from supporters of all political parties. It's also true that not everyone's mindset is the same. Some people disliked me because of a member of the tea garden community. However, most people were genuinely supportive and cared for me. I can share an incident from my election period: my mobile phone was damaged. At that time, a local uncle noticed the damage, gave me a new phone, and encouraged me to use it to promote the election on Facebook. That was very helpful for me. I didn't have enough money for election publicity, but I promoted my campaign primarily on social media. And I got a favorable response too. The assistance from some local journalists was also greatly appreciated. They knew me from my previous activities and reported news about me. Sometimes, they recorded my speeches and published them in the local newspaper. Thus, I received help from some of them as well. Some of my high school friends, those who were locals, also provided me with invaluable assistance that I will never forget. One of my local friends generously donated his wedding savings to help fund my election. I feel truly blessed to have such people around me.

Marriage: I love my community the most. If I marry anyone, my priority would be to choose someone from the community. Besides this, I still haven't thought deeply about this topic, so I can't share much more about it.

Cultural participation: I have maintained good relationships with many locals throughout my life journey. They always invite me to their cultural and religious programs. I always used to join them. They welcomed me to their house. I am Muslim, but I got invitations from both Hindu and Muslim local community people. I also used to mix with them. They always cordially welcome me to their various programs. We both enjoy this.

Organizational Activities: Different organizations such as Bureau, Karitas, and Brac are working to improve the living conditions of tea garden laborers. They arrange seminars and workshops to train the young tea workers, women, and others on various life-relevant issues.

4. Please share your future aspirations with us.

I want to make the tea laborers aware of their rights. They are also human beings and have the right to live in decent housing. I want to create a space for them to speak.

If I get a chance any day, I will reserve seats in parliament for tea garden laborers. These seats will be reserved only for people from the community. They will speak for themselves about their problems, rights, and needs.

I desire mental peace more than anything. I love being with my community in the tea garden. I will dedicate my whole life to working for these people. One more thing: I want to secure our land rights, and I will work on it.

#Respondent 06

Date: 16/03/2025

Time: 3.00 pm to 4.00 pm

1. Could you please tell us about yourself?

My name is *. I belong to the tea community. My Birthplace is *. My parents worked in a tea garden. I cannot say my birth date precisely because there is no written record. Looking at me carefully, you can see that my age does not match my studies. I look slightly older because of a four-year gap in my primary education. When I was in the third grade, my mother became pregnant, and I had to work in a tea garden as a substitute for my mother. Then, I also went to my uncle's house in India to get good food and an education. But my aunt did not accept me happily, so I went back to my family again and started my education. Overall, I have faced many struggles in my childhood. I started cooking when my mother returned to work in the tea garden. Over the years, I have had wounds on my hands and feet due to the poor hygiene and sanitation system. Most people in my community have sunken eyes because every child is born with malnutrition. Our skin is often dehydrated. My beard and hair have turned white prematurely due to a lack of nutrition

2. Can you describe more about your education journey?

Yes sure! Alongside my education, I look after our cows. One day, Christian missionaries saw me while I was tending to the cows in the field. They spoke with my parents about the

importance of education and expressed their desire to take me to ensure I received an education. My parents agreed, believing I would have access to better food and education. At that time, 16 children attended a Christian missionary school in Sreemangal including me.

In the missionary school, my life went well. I enjoyed good food at every meal. They helped me improve my language skills since our language differs from mainstream people's. I also learned English there. Overall, I led a well-structured and routine life. From that school, I completed my secondary education. Then, they assisted me in getting admitted to Notre Dame College for my higher secondary education under a project called "Studies in Exchange for Work." While pursuing my studies at that college, I had to take on jobs like cleaning and being a watchman. Finally, I completed my higher secondary exams at that college. I learned many things there, as there were also students from mainstream society. Generally, only good students can study at that college, and what I learned there helped enhance my adaptability to blend in with mainstream society.

After completing my HSC, I sat for the university admission test. Unfortunately, I did not know I had a chance at Jagannath University because I had no mobile phone and missed the admission date. Then, I got admitted to Modan Mohan College Sylhet in Accounting. My family then got tensed about how I could bear the living expenses in Sylhet as my language was different from the local people, and it was hard to do tuition. Fortunately, with the help of one local person, I had the opportunity to stay with a family that provided me with food and shelter in exchange for help with various tasks, such as teaching their children, shopping, and managing doctor's appointments. While some family members were kind, others were unhappy because I am Hindu, and they were Muslim. In that household, I mostly faced challenges with food, as they often consumed beef. As a follower of Hinduism, I have restrictions on eating beef. Sometimes, they would mix beef with my meals, and I unknowingly ate it. During Ramadan, I also had to fast with them. The son-in-law of the family did not allow me to attend his son's burial, which saddened me, as I had been present in the hospital the entire night when the child was born and had developed an affection for him. He said that if I attended the burial, the child would not go to Jannat. However, not all family members were unkind. Nevertheless, I did my best to gain acceptance to continue my education. I keep in touch with them and am grateful for their support, as they provided me with food and shelter, which allowed me to continue my education.

Some people from other ethnic communities are also admitted to college. There, I attended various meetings and seminars and socialized with people from the mainstream and other communities. This opened my eyes, and I started thinking about the rights of my community's people, for example. One day, we collectively protested for our rights and blocked the central area of Sylhet City. When I became more active about ensuring the rights of tea workers, I learned that MRDI was giving journalism training to 23 students from the tea community, and I used this chance. After seven days of training, four people got the opportunity to get a six-month fellowship in journalism. Then, finally, I started my journalism career at the Shyamol Sylhet newspaper. Gradually my report and experience helped me to work now in "Daily Star" one of the influential and famous newspapers in Bangladesh. After joining Daily Star, I faced another difficulty: writing reports because it is an English newspaper. First, I used to write short reports. I used to read other reports carefully to understand the pattern. After participating in different workshops and training, I finally overcame this difficulty and won the Best News Reporter award three times.

I do not earn significant income from this profession. Still, I cannot leave it only thinking of my community members because some favorable outcomes come when I report on the community's issues. My report assists many students in obtaining scholarships and free admission, too. Universities. For example, one girl got a chance at Harvard. I was with her from the start of her graduation in Bangladesh. Anjon got the opportunity to study in Germany, and I first made a report about his journey so that others could be encouraged. One of the seniors in my office from your Roy community helped me with this. He takes every issue related to the tea garden I share with him seriously and takes instant action. For example, a few months ago, the 3 Tea Garden was stopped suddenly, and the community suffered a lot because they had no savings. Then I wrote a report in the Daily Star. The next day, "Biddyanondo," a social welfare volunteer organization, helped the people with so much food and beverages, making me tear up. This report also helped to open these three tea gardens. Sometimes, I also face difficulties in preparing reports on sensitive issues. The owner of the organization I work for also owns several tea gardens. Consequently, the head office sometimes imposes restrictions on me, leading to some of my writings not being published. Last year, I published a report titled "Miscarriage," where I highlighted how women who are two to three months pregnant miscarried their babies while working with smaller tea trees since the tea trees must be under 26 inches. This task is physically demanding, contributing to miscarriages. I also wrote a report on hygiene and sanitation. There are no toilets at the workstations, and women face various

hygiene-related diseases, feeling unable to discuss these issues due to the stigma. As a result, many women die without receiving treatment. After seeing that, the Asian University of Women created a scholarship system for brilliant students selected through a test. These female students can study at this university for free, including food and living expenses. Some other people from my community also work with me, especially young stars, without any expectations, and they sometimes contribute financially to some issues. Some universities also take our problems seriously. For instance, to ensure a quota for our community, the Vice Chancellor of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology took our issue seriously. Professor Zakariya Ahmed from Anthropology has also shown effort.

The government runs various projects under the social safety net program, such as building houses and providing 5,000 tk annually to elderly individuals. However, these initiatives are not well maintained. Local government bodies do not assist effectively to implement these projects and instead misuse the funds. NGOs like BRAC run a non-formal education project for free primary education. Although these initiatives are placed to a small extent, they have a strong influence on enlightening their thinking.

3.Can you describe your relationship with mainstream people?

I have a good relationship with mainstream individuals. Some attempt to undermine my confidence by neglecting me indirectly, but I do not show weakness, and I proudly assert that I belong to the tea community. One person asked me, “Do you know English?” even though he knew I worked for an English newspaper. I did not respond.

I have deep feelings for my country; Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman granted us citizenship rights, and I voted because I know it is also my responsibility. Unfortunately, political parties show little concern for us. One party believes we are their permanent voters since their founder granted us citizenship rights, so they think we will not vote for other parties. Conversely, other political parties assume we won't vote for them, resulting in their lack of concern for us. We support each other for our well-being; there are some external aids, but they don't function effectively. We understand that this is solely our issue, and we must overcome it through our efforts. For example, we organize protests to increase our salaries; sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't.

#Respondent 07

Date: 21/03/2025

Time: 6.00 pm to 7.10 pm

1. Could you please tell us about yourself?

My name is *. I have completed my master's degree and work at the Upazila Land Office, where I also engage in some social work. My father is a bicycle mechanic. I have never stayed outside the garden area for an extended period. Although I graduated from MC College Sylhet, I never truly lived there; I only went during exam periods.

My home is in *. In Juri, I live in *, 8 No Bosti my father started working as a bicycle mechanic in 1988, and his shop was 2.5 km from the garden area. He also worked in rice cultivation since childhood. As far as I know, my father left his job as a tea Plucker because it did not cover our daily expenses. He started doing mechanical work and learned from a local mechanic to find an alternative.

2. Can you describe more about your education journey?

We are five siblings. My father managed the primary education of each sibling, but he couldn't afford the expense of secondary education for all of us. In total, our family had eight members. My mother earned a small amount from tea leaves, making covering our daily living expenses tough. I couldn't sit my matriculation exam on time because I hadn't paid the registration fee, but after a year, I could take the exam. I earned that money by working in the paddy fields, making 30 tk from 6 am to 2:30 p.m. I never thought I could finish my studies; it was hard for my father to manage our daily meals. Many days, we couldn't even have three meals. We often skipped lunch; for instance, out of 100 days, we barely got lunch on five occasions. There were also many nights we went without dinner. When I reflect on my current situation, I think back to my childhood and can't help but cry.

After completing my HSC, my education paused for six years due to my financial situation. During that time, I worked as a daily laborer in Hakaluki Haor. My father suddenly fell ill, and I had to take care of my family. After six years, my father mostly recovered, and when I saw my friends studying, I decided to continue my studies again so that I can do anything better in future.

I learned about job advertisements at the Upazila Vumi office through newspapers. I applied for the position and, fortunately, got the job after completing my higher secondary education.

During that time, I tutored school students to cover my daily expenses, which also helped me gain valuable experience. I have conducted five different groups daily, and some underprivileged students attended for free. I believe that this tutoring experience and the good wishes from those I helped contributed to getting the job.

When my financial situation gradually stabilized, I dreamed of helping children who faced similar challenges in continuing their education. As a result, I launched a scholarship program in my mother's name, the “Shila Medha Britti Project.” There are 92 tea gardens in Moulvibazar district, and I provide educational materials and a scholarship of 3,000 tk to students from these tea gardens who achieve an A+ in any of the following exams: JSC (Junior School Certificate), SSC (Secondary School Certificate), and HSC (Higher Secondary School Certificate). Additionally, I established a kindergarten school with a fee of up to 200 tk, where underprivileged students can attend for free. This initiative is not only for the children of tea garden workers but also for those from mainstream backgrounds who lack the financial means to pursue their studies without incurring costs.

I also started a free coaching center for Zuri Upazila tea garden students preparing to be admitted to universities. Students from Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Sylhet Agricultural University, and Sylhet Engineering College would come enthusiastically to help those preparing for university admission tests. I couldn't pay the instructors from various universities who taught the lessons; I only covered their transportation costs.

In addition, we also work with those who hold important and influential positions and collaborate with other organizations in the community. For instance, in 2018, we engaged with various public university administrations. We requested a quota for members of the tea community in the admission test, as they are marginalized. Fortunately, some universities took this matter seriously and began implementing quotas. For example, Shahjalal University of Science and Technology accepts four students from the tea garden community under the quota, Sylhet Agriculture University accepts six students, and Sunamganj University of Science and Technology accepts two students. It was solely our initiative; the government did not assist with that.

After communicating with the Asian University of Women, the university responded positively—our 68 female students can study there for free, along with their living and dining needs. Two girls from the university have secured good jobs in the garment industry. The most

joyful news is that one of our students from that university has received an opportunity to attend Harvard for higher education. I felt my wishes and efforts were coming true when I heard this.

Many talented students drop out due to poverty. Some parents, like my father, who couldn't complete primary education, know little about academics. Additionally, many parents struggle with alcoholism; the area is known for local alcohol shops strategically placed so that when workers receive their pay, they often buy alcohol instead of thinking about anything else. We do our best to create opportunities. However, not everyone can take advantage of them; some remain stagnant due to fears of not fitting in with mainstream society and socio-cultural and economic barriers, among other challenges.

Some people are in a good position because they are starting small businesses, farming, or cultivating, along with tea plucking. Many have become aware of their situation, and local alcohol consumption has decreased. External support and collaboration are minimal. We earn 178 tk by working 8 hours a day, an increase from before; it went up due to our legal protests, but it still falls short of meeting basic needs. Garden owners are treated like kings. We lack direct contact with them. The administrative body conceals the truth from them, leading them to believe we are satisfied with what we have. We need to support each other in addressing these issues, and we do. Political parties visit the gardens only to campaign before elections; afterward, they forget that we exist. Locals only engage with us for entertainment, such as during "Durga Puja," funding cultural events. However, they are unwilling to invest in education; they think just allowing us to remain where we are is enough.

It is also difficult to organize any programs because tea garden authorities do not grant permission; they believe that if the tea children become educated, who will pluck the tea? About 500 families live in a garden, but no doctor is available. In one hospital, which only exists in name, patients cannot get the other necessary medicines without Napa. Pregnant women sometimes die without treatment. Moreover, there is no maternity leave for mothers. They have to work while keeping their newborns at home because they cannot afford food without earning money.

3.Can you describe your relationship with mainstream people?

I always strived to maintain a good relationship with the local people during my student life. Some warmly accepted us students, while others treated us differently. I recall one incident from my college years: when friends visited our home, we welcomed them wholeheartedly. However, when I visited the home of one of my local friends, I wasn't even offered a seat. This experience was quite painful for me. In my workplace, I have also encountered similar mixed reactions. Nevertheless, I have realized I do not want to socialize with those who ignore me.

4. Please share your future, aspiration with us.

In the future, I want to continue my social work in my community. After retirement, I will keep my half-pension funds in a special account to support it. Sometimes, my family does not agree with this; they think I am spending all my savings on community service and not saving anything for my children. They are currently in school, and I believe they will succeed in the future. I will support them in every aspect of their lives.