*Migrant Labourer in Barrackpore Industrial Zone during the Early Twentieth Century: Health and Educational Care by Government and Non-Government Sectors*

Jhumpa Bose

Beginning in twentieth century, Bengal developed as a industrial zone in colonial India. Since many factories were located here, there was a lot of labourers needed for work. Barrackpore was one of the most prosperous industrial region of Bengal. Here the number of workers in the adjoining from state was high , in comparison the number of local or Bengali workers was less. Its main reason was the internal migration, which was from one state to another. For India the main source of internal migration is the “ place birth” data provided by the censuses since 1881. According to the Indian census definition, a migrant is a person enumerated at a place after than that of his birth. Internal migration in India also continues to support the observation that “ a discussion of urbanization in India fundamentally is a discussion of net- to- urban migration.”1 I tried to show in my paper why and how the immigration was done in Barrackpore industrial area. I mainly wanted to show that what steps were taken by the Governmentally and privately of health and education for migrant workers working in factories here. There was no discussion on whether those steps were adequate. I would like to focus these issues afterwards researching.

During the middle of the nineteenth century various industries developed on the both sides of the Hooghly river. Especially these areas were known as industrial zone. Since this region was under the direct control of the English East India Company, special economic and administrative progress was achieved. In the Company era the first barracks of the sepoy were established here. Barrackpore name originates from this barrack. After the establishment of the company’s main military cantonment here in 1772, Barrackpore was gradually named. Barrackpore situated on the bank of Hooghly north of the Calcutta. The main areas of Barrackpore subdivision are Khardaha, Titagarh, Shyamnagar, Jagatdal, Kankinara and Bhatpara. Various industries developed in this regions from the late 19th to the middle of the 20th century. Jute mills, paper mills, cotton mills, ship manufacturing factory, aluminum factory, rifle factory was formed in this region during this period. Naihati, Nawabgang, Barrackpore, Khardah, Baranagar those thanas on the whole are more healthy than those further inland, being higher, and enjoying a better supply of drinking water , which in some cases, is filtered by the management of the mills.2 Hoogly river was important role in this industrial development, because the main element of any industrial growth is water. The river was means of communication and the necessary equipment of the industry was transported through this river.

Due to various industries speciality the jute industry, a lot of people from various states of eastern and middle India, such as U.P (Uttar Pradesh), Bihar, Orissa, were migrated to different areas of Barrackpore Industrial zone. At that time, a lot of people had gathered in this region. At first they developed their habitat for economic reasons, but gradually they mixed with the regional environment or culture. For the first time due to which the Barrackpore area was forested, gradually the workers of various industries have established their permanent residence. At the end of 1920, these areas of Barrackpore started to flourish as on industrial zone and workers immigration an important role there. Due to the different industries, due to the migrations of labourers in this region from different parts of India, there was considerable increase of population. This urbanization has taken place in linear system from village to city migration. The construction sector accounting for a substantial chunk of migrant labour, featuring urban transformation along neo-liberal lines.3

Between the mid-nineteenth century, jute industry was one of India’s leading industries. In the colonial era, Bengal was most developed industrial province of India. In that case the importance of the jute industry was immense. Jute was cultivated East Bengal districts long ago. During the 1850s the product made by jute were exported from India to various places. Different type of sakes made by jute. In 1835, the bags was made by jute first with the help of machine in Dandi. In the year of 1855, India’s first jute mill was established in Rishra near of Hoogly river, the founder of this mill was Auckland.

Till the eighteenth century, this northern part of Calcutta was full of forest cover; rapid changes in the region were achieved for the industry. From the very beginning of the twentieth century, in these areas of Barrackpore , the amount of migrant labours of industries has increase greatly. Because of this, many slams were created for migrant workers in this region Barrackpore gradually turned into a jute mill town and migrant workers from various parts of India are gathering crowds in this area for the jute mill. Now the question is why they migrated to this part and participated as a worker, what was their background ? Besides, why did they take jute industry as a livelihood rather then other occupations and how the population due to this migration, surveys have found that most of the immigrants adopted this profession as the next generation economic issues play an important role in those who migrated to this area, in addition social and cultural issues existed. During 1891s to 1919s the many people coming from Bihar, U.P, Orissa, Madras, M.P (Madhya Pradesh) state were appointed as labours in the area near Calcutta. Now the question why they came to different provinces for work. Because The language and culture of the Bengalis were very different from them. In response to this question, an image of workers was created that migrant workers were backed by socially and financially, some parts were tribal There were part of rural society. Their was no industrial background. Arjan de Haan said most labours were migrated for land shortage, 59 percent of the workers working in the Titagarh jute mill did not own any land4. Those who came from U.P and Bihar occupied some land in the region, however those who came from madras did not get any land in the initial phase. For example a successful migrant worker named Singh said when he came from Arrah to live with his father in titagarh, there was less space for them to live5.

Afirst the immigrants worked as palanquin drivers, kuli, servant, but it was not enough to the family expenses. So they took the work in the jute mill, Paper mill, cotton mill. Lower caste people of U.P came to Calcutta for zamindari system and for financial earning and those who came from Bihar they did not like farming. Because the agricultural work was an uncertain livelihood, good farming could not be done during excess flood and drought as the result, most of the time they had to be unemployed. Their earning were guaranteed in the labour work. An example of a worker named Bishal, shown by historian Subho Basu that his father did not sent any money from Burma. After the death of his father, he brought his mother to Titagarh and work as a labours in various mill6. Whose were migrated from 1890 to 1910 did not established permanent residence here. Most workers sent their salaries to own village home and go home at certain times. Here they rented house but later they have permanent residence.

The migration process that began in India’s eastern states, especially in numerical terms, was different in factories of Bengal. Historian Ranajit Das Gupta says this during 1891 to 1901 and 1901 to 1911 period, large scale immigrant labours came to work for Barrackpore from Bihar, U.P, Orissa. So this time he considered “ immigration peak”. After the end of 1921, the number of workers came down, so this time it was considered to be “snap-snot” ?7Now the question is why factory owners in Bengal are employing immigrant workers? That’s because they were very laborious as workers, although there was lack of skills at first. But they could work a long time, for this they did not have to pay more. Local workers did not want to be employed for about two to three hours after the factories were far away from them. But immigrant labourers could work safely here. The lived here alone, their was no thought for their family. Unskilled migrant labourers worked to waste their time and money, but their wages would not have been paid. They had to work only as an apprentice. So the immigrant workers did not have any special privileges for other work, despite having so many problems, they used to work as a jute mills8At first they are unskilled in the work and they continue to the same way. Historian Haan describes who were shifted to factory in 24 parganas, why not employed local workers, why did the migrants not return to the village? In the 1870s, people from different parts of India came to work for the mill near Calcutta, they become dominant in 1900s. For example , Titagarh can be said where non-bengalis are much higher. Its main reason is immigration. In the year 1910, the the Bengali’s in Khardah jute mill region on the south of the Biswa Laxmi Ghat become a small group.9 The immigration process was originally executed from Calcutta to Delhi , Calcutta to Madras , Calcutta to Delhi by the railways. Most of these workers came from Orissa , Chotonagpur and southern part of Bihar.10

Migrant labourers in 24 Parganas jute mill removed local workers and took their place . more workers came from Bihar and U.P state. It was mentioned in the 24 parganas District Gazetter of 1914 “ that some mill towns are now practically foreign towns planted in the midst of Bengal”11. For this, a linguistic diversity was created in this region. Subho basu showed by researchthat there was 75% people spoke hindi in titagarh, but the number of people who spoke in Bengali was less then 11% (apart from this , 8 percent spoke in Oriya language)12. Haan showed in 1902, 1716 Bengali labours worked in Titagarh jute mill, in 1916 the number of Bengali workers decreased to 1026 13. From 1881 to 1891, the number of immigrants coming From Bihar,Orissa, Uttar Pradesh was 69588514. They were thought to be poor in rural India. The census report and royal commission on labour report show that they were shown ‘pushed, not pulled’. For example , Dasgupta has shown the ruined craftsman, the workers who do not get adequate job opportunities, for livelihood those who depend on the rural economy, those who do not want to be dependent on agricultural work even by peasantry, who are inefficient in business, and the poor labourers who became impoverished, they came in search of work in factories of Bengal 15. Three direction were observed in labor migration – (1) From the distric of West Bihar(Gaya,Patna,Sarran,Muzaffarpur). (2) From the northern district of U.P (Azamgarh,Ballia,Ghazipur,Banaras) .(3) Distric of Orissa ( Cuttack,Balasore)16.

Now let’s discuss what step taken in education and health sectors by Government or private sector for migrant labourers.In 1920s , the Government ‘s move towards social security of workers was very minimal and randomly. Unemployment was created due to sickness, accident, pregnancy and death in the daily life of the workers, that was due to their financial uncertainty and horror for them and this unemployment in the result of strike in labor. However , the Bengali ‘bhadrolok’ ( educated Bengalis ) played an important role in welfare of its workers. In this context, the first name of India to work in the welfare of the worker’s, he is Brahmo social reformer Sashipada Banerjee. In the 1860’s and 1870’s , he did many things for the welfare of the worker’s of Baranagar Jute Mill in the suburb area of Calcutta area and for the progress of women education17. From the 1869 to 1874 he was busy in the social development of worker’s located in Baranagar and adjacent areas. His contribution to the worker’s development was undeniable. Because of how many steps he took, these are he started a night school for the worker’s in 1869, the workmen club started for the laborers in 1870, “anna” bank (modeled on penny banks in England) started in 1871, the “Bharat Sromojibi” (Indian toilers) journal was started in 187418. Banerjee aim to developed workers poor habit of industry and frugality. The purpose of launching his ‘ Bharat Sromojibi’ journal was to improve moral condition among the laborers. But there were some limitations in all his efforts. Dipesh Chakraborty points out aspect this issue “ to Banerjee , or his mentor, Mary Carpenter of Bristol, the workers poverty , ill health or inadequate housing always pointed to the weakness of the workers moral fibre”19. But to get acquainted with some European officials, he got help in welfare of the workers. According to them Sasipada wants to make labor’s disciplined. But there was some lacking of his work in reaching the social base of the labors and the larger areas. For this reason, he stopped his activities in 1870s.

The Bengali Bhadrolok took the next three decades to take steps for welfare of workers. During the Swadeshi movement in Bengal (1905-1908). a special nature of labor opposition was noticed. At that time, the worker chose the way strike or movement against mill owners or Government for seeking their social demands. Many times they used the legal path. Aswinicoomar banerji, Praval Kusum Roychoudhury, Apurbakumar ghosh and Premtosh Bose helped them fight for this legal issue 20 . Trade unions always tried to get the demands of workers. The Indian Jute Manufactures Associations( IJMA)was formed on 26 th april, 1895, it was an organisation of the workers engaged in the jute industry in Bengal .One of their demands was the salary demand, time of work, holiday etc. As a result, their social security like health, transparent accommodation and education of children was neglected. Their primary demand was dependent on economic issues. Because there was not enough time for them to think about this matter, they have to keep their primary focus on earning for which their family will run. However , some union take necessary steps for the expansion of education and literacy. In the year 1923 the Workmen Compensation Act passed, the leaders of the union demanded compensation for the accident or death while at work. It was said at the Bengal Chamber of Commerce report this bill involved no important controversial features, and in fact it has since been passed by legislature. But it was explained the report that proposals for much wider changes in the Act were also under consideration. 21

In 1925 Bengal jute Workers Association was formed in Bhatpara, this union played a leading role in securing the security benefits of workers. Their main objective was to help in developing mental and physical strength among the workers. This union provided half or full salary for those sick workers who could not go to work. This organization is to protect worker’s retirement allowance or to get any benefits after retirements. Several day and night schools were started for their children who ware members of this association, They started the loan system from credit society for the workers and their families. A Government report of 1927 mention two to three day schools started for workers children in Bhatpara region. The number of boys and girls studying in those schools was approximately 12022. The three teachers were teach at this school and the children of association members could get education free. Bengal Jute workers association had a special role to got compensation for workers For example, the association helped to get compensation 6 out of 15 accident till 1927. A researcher has shown that up to 1925, 70% of The unions income were spent on education and health for working people23. For this reasons, the unions were slowly getting worse with the Government, because the popularity of the unions was gradually increasing. In 1932, the Government applied of Bengal Public Security Act (BPSA) to Calcutta, 24 Parganas and Howrah to prevent the rise of the unions. Because of their adoption of this policy, the unions regularly held meeting and discussions with communist leaders24. The implementation of BPSA , the power of the union is no longer the same. From this time on words, they had to face various problems in the active role of their workers.

But the Government had always created an attitude that they particularly interested in providing social security for the workers. The question of the education of the children employed in factories between the years 1915 and 1917. Children between the age of 9 and 19,generally known as half timers, are employed in mill six hours as day, Bombay Government proposed to mill owners to provide educational facilities for working children in the interval.25 But the workers did not much interest to social security. It was said in the Indian Factory Labour Commission “there was also contention that children of the workers would not attend to school and that workers would not use medical facilities, which often proved false after these were provided”26. Because the children of the workers accept this accept this education, they become clerks, the ambition will increase among them. But the Government of Bengal should always show that the facilities were provided to the workers.

However the Government shows no interest in providing education, because they become clerk, the ambition will increase among them. But the Government of Bengal should always show that the workers were provided with more housing , sanitary, medical than before, they are not accepting it. Haan shows from the IOL&R (India Office Library and Records) at that time the facilities provided to the workers in the mills and plantation workers were given medical attention. Of the 89 concerns that returned enquiry forms. 8 maintained school for children employed , 31 school for children of employed workers and 5 had schools for adults27. Since 1920, workers have become more. Aware of their children’s education than ever before As proof from that time, the number of child laborers in factory shoots decreased. The Titagarh municipality in 1939 distributed 23 stipends to teacher of primary school. Many children who worked in the factory as well as studied. ESI (Employee’s State Insurance) was introduced for worker’s illness at the central level. But in the 1950s it was planned to give jute mill worker but it was introduced in 1965.

Let’s come here what steps have been taken about health of the women workers. Maternity benefit legislation had been in the air since 1919. IJMA realized that the Government of Bengal would soon bow down to pressure. Red Cross Society, Women’s Friendly Society and Infant Welfare helped to women workers by given money for maternal benefiter personally. Bengal Service League was establish in 1915 those who provided maternity benefits to women28. Many association have been taught to women how to care of their new born baby, they provided free milk to the mothers. There were certain procedures for getting maternity benefits- first the doctor of the mill gave pregnant certificates to the women laborers, clerk checked the baby’s birth information, and sardars (headman) had ensure that women did not work elsewhere. There were many problems in women showing the doctor in the clinic. Before going, husband and mother-in-law had to get permission. Maternity benefits were not available for same time, because migrant women labor returned to the village home during their sickness.

The focus was on getting the benefits of working women during the postwar period by Washington Convention (29th October, 1919)29. India was a founder member of the ILO, the only non independent country to be so. In the initial years, employer delegates to the International Labour Conference (ICL) came from the Associated Chambers of commerce of India and Ceylon, formed in 1920. But this organisation of Chambers of commerce.30 In India maternity leave have already been mooted in 1910. But Washing Convention invented the question on this subject. In 1920 when the ILO (International Labor Organization) required, that Curjet investigate Conditions of child birth among Industrial workers in Bengal, Bombay, and North –Western provinces 31 . ILO main priorities for the workers including a living wage, protection against the economic consequences of old age , sickness and unemployment, protection of women labour.32 In 1926 a educated European lady has been sent as a head doctor for women worker’s .After a little hesitant at first, they took help from the lady doctor 33 . Bhatpara municipality started the Health Welfare Exhibition for workers in 1930s. IJMA was requested to the Magistrate of 24 Parganas gave some Land and eight thousand rupees for established a hospital in Bhatpara34. The annual report of IJMA was said to be in 1925 the past year is the fourth year of the five year period for which the jute mills arranged to contribute to the Calcutta school of Tropical Medicine the amount of the annual contribution rs. 27,200.35

Census report shows the number of migrant workers. It is known from the report of Royal Commission on Labour and IJMA measures taken by the Government for the immigrant workers. Haan discusses in his book ‘*Unsettled Setllers’*  how an industrial culture developed of immigrant workers in the Calcutta. He showed a special example of the Titagarh region, the people of Bihari, Oriya , Marwari, Madrasi who built their livelihood and residence there on the basis of industry. He mentioned “some extent the chronology of the workers lives: the process of of coming form of the village to the city, the city itself, and the work of the migrant”. Subho Basu showed how to the people migrated from village to city in the book of ‘*Does Class Matter? Colonial Capital and Workers Resistance in Bengal (1890-1937)*’. He wrote that Shaymnagar jute mill by the Thomas Duffcampany reveal the Madras line was often , occupied by both Oriyas and Hindustanis migrant from Bihar and east U.P side by side Bilaspuri lines. He collected population statistic from the Bhatpara post office and hospital. From there overall diversity of the population was founded. Ranajit Das Gupta used census statistic to provide information about migrant workers. He has shown that due to the participation of the large number of immigrant peoples, population increases in Barrackpore and many immigrant did not return to their birth place. Samita Sen worked on female workers in colonial India. She has noted that many women migrant from out sided states came to work here, they later settled here with their children. Dipesh Chakraborty says that, in the twentieth century workers of the industries wanted to build them as a professional class.

From the above discussion, it was understood that amount of private sectors initiatives than Government was much higher. Many labour organization or a person from various union came forward very much to help the workers. The amount of Government help was much negligible than the requirement. But I think there is need for much informative research in this regard, which i will try later. But at the it was necessary to say that a cultural hub was developed among the different classes workers of Barrackore region. As a result the immigrant labourer still live here thinking of their home land.

NOTES

1.Yang, Anand,‘ Peasants on the Move: A Study of Internal Migration in India’,The MIT Press, The Journal of Interdiciplinary History.Vol.10.No.1,1979, pp.39

2. O’ Malley, L.S.S, *Bengal District Gazetters,24 Parganas*, Calcutta, 1914,pp.86

3.Samaddar , Ranabir,‘ Migrant and Neo- liberal City’, EPW, 25 June,2016,pp.53

4.De Haan, Arjan, *Unsettled Settlers: Migrant Workers and Capitalism in*  *Calcutta*, Calcutta: KP Bagchi & Company, 1996,pp.111

5.Ibid,pp.112

6.Basu, Subho, *Does Class Matter? Colonial Capital and Workers Resistance in Bengal (1890-1937)*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004, pp.52

7.Dasgupta, Ranajit, ‘Factory Labour in Eastern India- Sources of Supply, 1885-1946’, Indian Economic and Social History Review,8,3,1976,pp.289

8.Chakraborty, Dipesh, *Rethinking Working Class History*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989, pp.90

9.De Haan, , *Unsettled Settlers,pp.57*

10.Dasgupta, ‘Factory Labour in Eastern India- Sources of Supply, 1885-1946’, pp.287

11.O’ Malley, *Bengal District Gazetters*,24 Parganas, pp.64

12.Basu, *Does Class Matter? ,* pp.43

13.De Haan, *Unsettled Settlers* ,pp.57

14.Dasgupta, ‘Factory Labour in Eastern India- Sources of Supply, 1885-1946’,pp.287

15.Ibid,pp.315

16.Ibid,pp.290

17. Dasgupta, Ranajit, ‘ A Labour History of Social Security and Mutual Assistance in India’, EPW, Vol.29,No.11,12 March, 1994, pp.613

18. Chakraborty, Dipesh, *Rethinking Working Class History*, , pp. 146

19.Ibid, pp. 147

20. Sarkar, Sumit , *The Swadwshi Movement in Bengal 1903-1908*, New Delhi: People Publishing House, 1973,pp.239

21..*Report of Bengal Chamber of Commerce,* Calcutta: The Criterion Printing Workers, Vol.I, 1929,pp.88

22.Dasgupta, ‘ A Labour History of Social Security and Mutual Assistance in India’, pp.615

23. Ibid,pp.615

24.Mitra, Ira, ‘Growth of the Trade Union Consciousness among Jute Mill Workers, 1920-1940’, EPW,Vol.16,No.44/46, Special Number, November,1981,pp.1845

25.*Report of Indian Industrial Commission 1916-18,* Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, India,1918,pp.37

26.. De Haan, *Unsettled Settlers*, pp.144

27. ibid, pp.160

28. Sen, Samita, *Women and Labour in Late Colonial India: The Bengal Jute Industry*, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999,pp.163

29. Rodgers, Gerry, ‘India, the ILO and the Quest for Social Justice since 1919’. EPW, No.10,5th March, 2011,pp.46

30.Ibid, pp.47

31.Sen, Samita, *Women and Labour in Late Colonial India: The Bengal Jute Industry*, pp.166

32.Rodgers, pp.48

33.Ibid,pp.168

34.Dasgupta, ‘ A Labour History of Social Security and Mutual Assistance in India’, pp.615

35.*Report of Indian Jute Mills Association*, Calcutta: The Star Printing Workers,1929,pp.17