

# Bede

## A Nomadic Existence



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Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) and  
Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD)

**2019**

# **Imprint**

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A Nomadic Existence

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Published by

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Green Valley, Flat No. 2A, House No. 147/1 (2nd Floor)

Green Road, Dhaka-1215, Bangladesh

T: 88-02-58153846, F: 88-02-48112109

E: sehd@sehd.org, www.sehd.org

Published: 2019

Printed by: Jahan Traders

ISBN: 978-984-94339-2-7

Price: Tk.100 US\$5

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Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD)

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# Preface

The Bedes are a Muslim nomadic community who travel around the country 10 months a year to earn a living and they gather in 75 locations of the country to meet their families, relatives and other community members for a month or two. A floating people, the majority of the Bedes are completely landless. According to different estimates the Bede population ranges between 0.5 and 0.8 million in Bangladesh. According to Grambangla Unnayan Committee, around 5,000 Bede groups roam around in the country.

Before modernization of Bangladesh, the Bedes were highly regarded in Bangladesh society as they served millions of people who could not access mainstream healthcare. However, their status gradually declined over the years as healthcare and medicines became more accessible and relatively cheaper. Now the traditional occupations of the Bedes are becoming obsolete.

The Bedes are now poverty-stricken with extremely low literacy rate. They have little access to resources including *khas* land, healthcare, basic government services and safety net programs. It is only in 2007 that some of the Bedes who lived on boats or floating became voters in locations of their choice. However, most of them do not have land or houses at the places where they are registered as voters.

Very few studies have been done on the Bede community in Bangladesh who remain invisible statistically. Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) took lead in conducting a study on the Bedes of Bangladesh with assistance from the Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD) under a European Union and ICCO Cooperation-funded project. The study was conducted in 14 locations in eight districts of the country. The Bede population was 55,408 in these locations.

The key objective of the study was to develop a comprehensive map, analysis and clarity on the Bede, which will become a strategic tool for the human rights defenders and organizations who work with this community. Detailed information about the Bede in their most populous and well-known locations as well as the state of their habitation, education, health, income, expenditure, access to different government facilities among others are valuable knowledge to make the community statistically visible.

The study findings are separated into two sections—quantitative research findings on the demographic and socioeconomic condition of the Bede and qualitative research findings on the social capital, changes and aspirations of the community.

The Bedes considerably lag behind in comparison to other community in Bangladesh in terms education. The majority of them have never been to school or received formal education. The Bede children and youth cannot continue going to schools since they are

always moving from one place to another with their parents. On top of that, awareness about education is limited among the community people.

The study found that housing condition of this nomadic community is another main constraint that holds them back. The majority of them live in tents, which is not even a housing category in the official census of Bangladesh. They used to live in boats but now most of them have shifted to tents on land. As many of them live a nomadic life, they face serious problems to access basic facilities that the majority population enjoy in Bangladesh.

It was shocking to find that the majority of the community still defecate and urinate in open space because they have no permanent residence. For the same reason, many Bede families do not have access to electricity. The study indicated that more than half of the Bede families have no access to electricity.

The study found that *shinga lagano* (fitting singe), selling *tabij* and *karimala*, snake charming, removing ‘tooth worm’ and showing monkey dances are the main traditional occupations of the Bede. Interestingly, the women of the Bede families perform most of these acts to earn a living, making them the main earning members of the family. Almost no one from the community have mainstream informal or formal jobs.

However, most of them want to shift to new occupations as their traditional occupations are becoming obsolete and the number of their customers have drastically decreased over the years. They need education and assistance from the government, NGOs and other influential entities to improve their present condition. Another major need of the Bede community is permanent residence, which can be met with reformation and implementation of land laws in support of the nomadic community.

The Bede community is generally looked down upon by majority of the people in Bangladesh. There are many misconceptions about the community, which further excludes them from the mainstream society.

This study was conducted by a team of PPRC staff supervised by Hossain Zillur Rahman, lead researcher of the project. The strategy and tools of the participatory research were developed by the research team of PPRC, SEHD and members from the Bede community.

A team of field researchers carried out the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) under the supervision of Saud Khan, a Bede leader and Uchan Aoung, research officer. The collected data was analysed by field research specialists of PPRC under the supervision of Subodh Chandra Sarker, data manager and Sabrina Miti Gain, research associate. The main report and graphical presentations were prepared by Sabrina Miti Gain under the guidance of Hossain Zillur Rahman.

Special thanks goes to Saud Khan, Bede leader and other members of the organization and the community who assisted the research team in every step of the study and participated in the consultation meetings.

Prosad Sarker of SEHD has set up pages and Md. Mozharul Haque has supervised the printing of the report. Babul Kumar Boiragi and Borsha Chiran from SEHD have assisted the production team in the SEHD office. Dr. S. G. Hussain, a cartographer prepared the maps of the monograph. Many thanks to them.

Philip Gain, program director of the project under which this study has been possible, guided the entire study team and did the final editing of the texts. He has also contributed photographs used in this report and has designed the cover.

We hope that the Bede community and those interested in them will find the findings presented in this monograph useful.

*Hossain Zillur Rahman*

*Sabrina Miti Gain*



Bede Boats Dakatia river,  
Chadpur, 8 June 2019

## Executive Summary

The Bede are a Muslim nomadic community or gypsies who travel around the country 10 months a year to earn a living and they gather in around 75 locations of the country to meet their families, relatives and other community members for two months. Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) conducted a study in 14 such locations in eight districts around the country where the clusters of Bede communities were residing. The Bede population was found to be 55,408 in these locations and the number of families was 10,054.

The biggest Bede cluster under the study was found in Ward No. 1 of Savar City Corporation Sadar of Dhaka with a population of 21,500 followed by well-known Bede localities in Louhajang upazila in Munshiganj district.

The percentage of men in the Bede community is 28.36% whereas 29.65% are female, which is also reflected in the sex ratio at 95.67. A huge portion of the community (41.99%) are children.

The average size of a Bede family is 5.51 whereas it is 4.06 at the national level (HIES 2016). The overall number of Bede families has increased in the last 10 years from 7,475 to 10,054 in the locations under study.

The Bedes are one of the most backward communities in the country in terms of education. The majority of them have never been to school or received formal education. It was found that 70.15% of the Bede adults are completely illiterate and 11% has letter knowledge only. The literacy rate of the Bede community is only 18.86% whereas the national literacy rate is 70.38% (HIES 2016). The enrollment rate in the primary or secondary education is less than 10% and higher education rate is almost zero. On average, 66.94% of the Bede children aged between 5 to 18 years old were not studying during the study.

The majority of the Bedes live in tents—a housing category that is not included in the census of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). It was found that on average, 62.54% of the Bede families live in makeshift tents or *dhura*. A significant number of Bedes have left behind the boats and now they camp on encroached land to live in makeshift tents. On the other hand, an average of 27.29% Bede families live in tin-shed houses and 7.95% live in semi-*pucka* houses.



The average size of a Bede tent or *dhura* is only 80.6 square feet whereas the average size of a tin-shed house of a Bede family is 138.54 square feet.

The majority of the Bede families (83.33%) drink water from tube wells. On average, 16.67% of the Bede families drink water from deep tube wells.

A shocking 62.27% of the Bede families still defecate and urinate in open space or drains since the Bedes live in temporary tents. At the national level, only 2.96% of the people still use the open space as toilet (HIES 2016). On average, 31.85% of the Bede families use ring-slab toilets and 4.94% use *pucka* toilets.

The majority of Bede families do not have access to electricity as they live in temporary tents. On average, 55.5% of the Bede families do not have access to electricity whereas at the national level, 75.92% of the families have access to electricity (HIES 2016).

On average, 95.23% of the Bede families use firewood to cook their food. On the other hand, 6.48% of the families use solar energy mainly for lighting purposes.

The major occupations of the Bedes are removing tooth worm, *shinga lagano* (fitting *singe*), selling *tabij*, snake charming and showing monkey dance. On average, 45.94% of the Bede families perform *shinga lagano*. Around 42% of the Bedes sell *tabij* and *karimala* and similar percentage of people perform snake charming. Around 36.38% of the Bede families 'remove tooth worm' to cure tooth ache. A large portion of the Bede families (41.94%) perform snake charming to earn a living.

It should be noted that a Bede family can be involved in multiple traditional occupations at the same time. Almost no one from the community was found to be involved in mainstream informal or formal occupations.

On average, 52.19% women of the Bede families are *shinga* healers. Bede women earn a living by removing tooth worm in 48.94% of the Bede families. The Bede women also sell *tabij* and *karimala*, show magic, work as street vendors and catch fish as their occupation. Some of them are housewives but the majority of the Bede women are the main earning members of their families.

The average monthly income from fitting *singe* is Taka 3,094. On average, Bedes who remove tooth worm earn Taka 2,608 and snake charmers earn Taka 3,625 per month. Earning from selling *tabij* and *karimala* is on average Taka 4,552, showing magic is Taka 1,167 and selling bangles and cosmetics is Taka 3,000 monthly. The average monthly expenditure of a Bede family is Taka 12,655.

The majority of the Bede families (59.44%) depend on their income to meet their monthly expenses. On average 24.89% of the Bede families have to take loans and 10.25%

of the families have to use their savings to bear monthly expenses. Their main yearly expenditures include costs of education of their children, medical services, repairing tents or boats or houses and other construction work, organizing religious events, etc.

The majority of the Bede families are completely landless. On average, 60.38% of the Bede families under the study was found to be completely landless since they live in temporary tents. However, over time many Bede families have begun to purchase land to settle down permanently. It was found that 36.21% of the Bede families owns homestead (3.44 decimals on average) but they do not own any arable land.

The study found that 96.65% of the Bede families own mobile phones. Around 35% of the Bede families own boats for their traditional way of life and occupation.

An average of 76.35% of the Bede families are in debt. On the other hand, only 15.38% of the Bede families have savings and 6.58% have bank accounts. On average, 7.50% of the Bede family do mobile banking (namely bKash).

Almost the entire Bede community is excluded from the social safety net programs (SSNPs) of Bangladesh.

Three community-based organizations of the Bedes were found under this study. The respondents stated that all of the community clusters under the study have participated in local and national elections and they are registered as voters.

For this study, several dimensions were considered in order to identify the recent changes that occurred in the Bede community including occupation, education, migration, social status, communication and title change. The respondents stated that the recent changes have been positive.

The main problems identified by the Bedes include prejudice against Bedes by others, decreasing income in traditional occupations, no land ownership, sanitation problems, education crisis, bad roads, garbage disposal, access to healthcare, river erosion and employment crisis among others. Possible solutions to their problems include shifting to new occupations, financial aid and quotas from the government, assistance from local governments, etc.

The main needs and aspirations of the Bede community are new or alternative work opportunities, permanent residence, access to solar power, better roads, sanitation facilities, access to *khas* land, employment opportunities, protection from river erosion and loans or financial support.



Bede adolescent and child, found in Natun Torki, a village in Kalkini Upazila of Madaripur District.

## Introduction to the Community

The Bede are a Muslim nomadic community or gypsies who travel around the country 10 months a year to earn a living and they gather in 75 locations of the country to meet their families, relatives and other community members for two months. A floating people, the majority of the Bedes are completely landless. According to different estimates the Bede population ranges between 0.5 and 0.8 million in Bangladesh. According to Grambangla Unnayan Committee, around 5,000 Bede groups roam around in the country.

The Bedes claim that the name of their community derived from the Arabic word 'Bedouin,' which refers to the nomadic Arabs in the deserts. However, according to other sources, the Bedes are descendants of 'Montong' tribe in Myanmar (Maksud & Rasul 2006). They are considered as one of the largest indigenous communities in the country (Seraj et.al 2013). However, the true origin of the Bede is unknown and it is not clearly identified when they came to Bangladesh (Samadder 2012).

Edward Dalton wrote of the Bedes in his book, Tribal History of Eastern India (1978): "The wandering gypsy-like tribes of Bedyas are found in Most Bengal Districts, and so indifferent is their character that they are usually placed under the special surveillance of the Police. They are a branch of the Bazigar or Nat family, a good account of whom is to be found in vol. VII of the Asiatic Society's Researchers page 458. They are jugglers, fortune-tellers, rope-dancers, beggars, wanderers, bird-killers, and their pursuits are further indicated by their having a slang, or rouge's language, only understood by themselves. They submit to circumcision and call themselves Mohammedan, but they have many Hindu customs and idolatrous practices, consult Brahmins on particular occasions. Though scattered and nomadic, they are organized as communities and have "head centres" in different localities. They sometimes call themselves Manjhi and Mahali."

There are different occupational sub-groups or *gotro* among the Bedes based on their different traditional occupations. The main ones are *Mal Bede* or *Mal Boiddo* who perform *singa lagano* (fitting singe) and heal toothache; *mirshikari* or traditional healers who do *jhar phook* and sell *tabij*; *sapure* who catch and sell snakes; *kurindar* or *jhai* who search for lost items or gold in rivers; *bajigar* or magicians; *sandar* or hawkers who sell cosmetics from door to door; *tela* or *toila* who show games using animals; *borial* or *manta* or fishermen; *dhawa* or lock pickers and *gyne* who fixes umbrellas, sells spices, etc.

Before modernization of Bangladesh, the Bedes were highly regarded in Bangladesh society as they served millions of people who could not access mainstream healthcare. However, their status gradually declined over the years as healthcare and medicines became more accessible and relatively cheaper. Now the traditional occupations of the Bedes are becoming obsolete. The Bedes are now poverty-stricken with extremely low literacy rate. They have little access to resources including *khas* land, healthcare, basic government services and safety net programs. It is only in 2007 that the Bedes who lived on boats or were floating became voters in locations of their choice. However, a great percentage of Bede households do not have land or houses at the places where they are registered as voters. They are truly floating people who carry their tents anywhere they go.

## **Background to the Study**

The study is a mapping exercise on the demographic and socioeconomic conditions of the Bedes in Bangladesh under a European Union-funded project “Defining the excluded groups, mapping their current status and strengthening their capacity and partnership.” Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) took lead in conducting the study with assistance from Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD). The study is conducted to prepare a comprehensive map on the current situation of the Bedes and the difficulties they face, which will be an important tool for dialogue and advocacy for the community. The research outcomes added to the existing literature will add value to the discussion on social exclusion of Bedes in Bangladesh. (For more on the Bedes and other excluded communities of Bangladesh, see “State of the Excluded and Marginalized Communities”.

## **Objectives of the Study**

The key objective of the study is to develop a comprehensive map, analysis, and clarity on the Bedes, which will become a strategic tool for the human rights defenders and organizations who work with this community. Detailed information about the Bedes in their most populous and well-known locations as well as the state of their habitation, education, health, income, expenditure, access to different government facilities among others are valuable knowledge asset to make the community statistically visible. The study also aimed to identify the most recent changes in their lives, their problems and possible solutions as well as their needs and aspirations. Another objective of the study was to engage the community members in the participatory research process for the broader goal of capacity building.

# Methodology

**Research team:** The lead researcher of the project, the project director and the in-house research team developed the strategies and methodologies for the participatory research. They had discussions with the community representatives to finalize the choice of research instruments and study locations. Training of field researchers and community key informants were also conducted by the team.

**Sample design:** The Bedes live in community clusters, which is the case for most of the excluded communities in Bangladesh. The research approach was to identify these community clusters and select a reasonable sample of such clusters to collect both cluster-level as well as household-level information. The community leaders and researchers of the project selected the number and locations of the Bede habitations that are to be mapped. Selective or purposive sampling method was applied to select the Bede clusters. After consultations with the community leaders, a sample of 14 most populous spots of Bedes were selected that would represent the community most accurately. The sample covered eight districts.

**Data collection and analysis:** Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with participation of 10-15 community members at the cluster sites were conducted to collect data for the study. The local leaders and key informants were consulted as well. The structured FGD questionnaire was utilized to generate quantitative information on household characteristics as well as qualitative information on cluster characteristics. The study was conducted from 9 March to 5 April 2017. A team of field researchers carried out the FGDs in 14 cluster sites, which was supervised by a research officer. The collected data was analysed by hand and Microsoft Excel.

## Limitations of the Study

All of the Bede settlements in Bangladesh could not be identified and surveyed under the study. A sample number of locations was selected that would be most representative of the entire community. Accessibility and availability of information during both primary and secondary data collection were other major constraints of the study. Moreover, the study was based on FGDs. A household survey could have generated a more concrete database, which was not possible due to resource constraints.

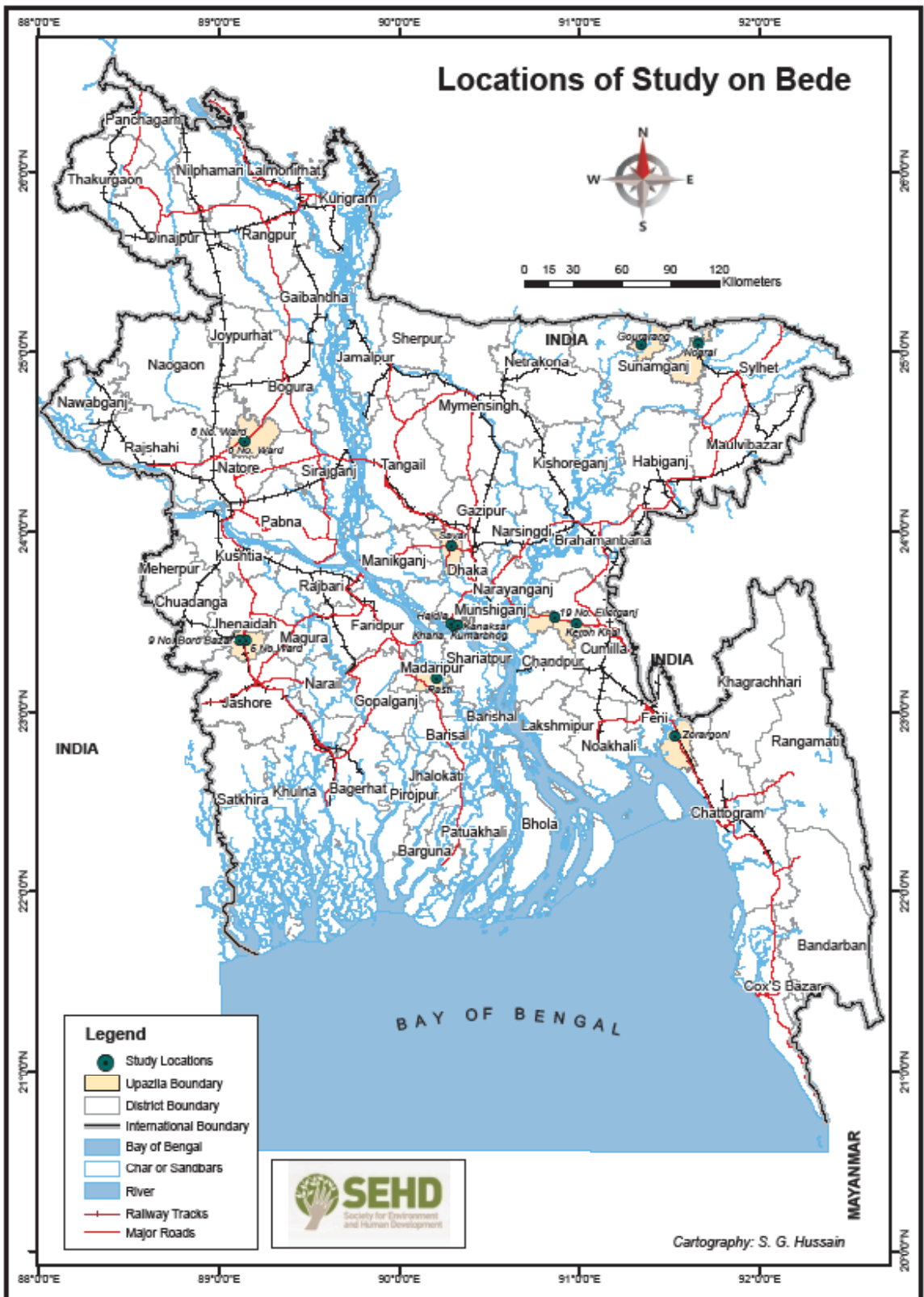
## Study Locations

Following are the locations of 14 sample clusters of the Bede community in eight districts:

Sl.	District	Upazila	Union council/ward	Post office	Village
1	Munshiganj	Louhajang	Kumarbhog	Korhati	Kharia
2			Haldia	Kazir Pagla	Goalimandra
3			Kanaksar	Kanaksar	Kanaksar
4	Madaripur	Madaripur Sadar	Rasti	Puran Bazar	Purbo Rasti
5	Dhaka	Savar	Savar	Savar Sadar	Porabari
6	Cumilla	Daudkandi	19 No. Eliotganj	Eliotganj	Birtola
7		Chandina	Keron Khal	Choghoria	Harikhola Notun Bari
8	Chattogram	Zorargonj	Zorargonj	Zorargonj	Moddhom Sona Pahar
9	Sunamganj	Chhatak	Noarai	Cement Factory	Fakir Tila Bej Para
10		Sunamganj Sadar	Gourarang	Sunamganj Sadar	Gourarang
11	Natore	Singra Sadar	8 No. Ward	Singra Sadar	Sarker Para
12			6 No. Ward		Par Shingra
13	Jhenaidah	Kaliganj	5 No. Ward (Kaliganj pourashava)	Naldanga	Kashipur Pashchim Para
14			Barobazar	Hatbar Bazar	Bade Dihi



Houses of well-to-do Bede families in Kanaksar village in Louhajang upazila, Munshiganj district.







# Findings

## Population

The exact population size of Bedes in Bangladesh is not available as the government has not included the Bede community who traditionally lived on boats in its official statistics. According to Grambangla Unnayan Committee—an organization working with the Bede community, Bede population ranges from 0.5 million to 0.8 million (Maksud & Rasul 2006; Maksud et al. 2009). According to the same organization, there are 75 locations around the country where Bedes meet for yearly gatherings.

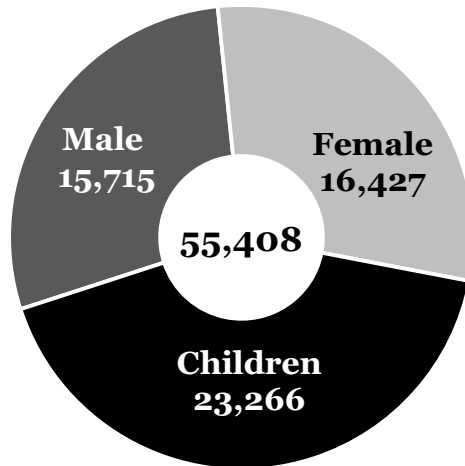
The PPRC study was conducted in 14 such locations in eight districts around the country where the clusters of Bede communities were residing. The Bede population was found to be 55,408 in these locations and the number of families was 10,054. The biggest Bede cluster under the study was found in Savar Sadar of Dhaka district with a population of 21,500 followed by well-known Bede localities in Louhajang upazila in Munshiganj district.

**Table 1: Number of sample Bede clusters, HHs and population**

Districts	No. of Bede clusters	No. of HHs	Population	Male	Female	Children
Munshiganj	3	2,254	12,523	3,065	2,922	6,536
Madaripur	1	250	960	300	280	380
Dhaka	1	4,000	21,500	7,000	7,500	7,000
Cumilla	2	750	2,825	1,000	925	900
Chattogram	1	350	1,850	500	550	800
Sunamganj	2	900	5,250	1,250	1,500	2,500
Natore	2	950	6,700	1,750	1,900	3,050
Jhenaidah	2	600	3,800	850	850	2,100
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>10,054</b>	<b>55,408</b>	<b>15,715</b>	<b>16,427</b>	<b>23,266</b>

According to the findings, 28.36% of the Bede community is men whereas 29.65% are female. Therefore, number of women is higher in the Bede community, which is also reflected in the sex ratio. The sex ratio is determined by calculating the number of male against every 100 female. The sex ratio is 95.67 in the Bede community, which is lower than the national sex ratio at 100.3 (BBS Census 2011). A huge portion of the community (41.99%) consists of children.

## Number of sample population



The average size of a Bede family is 5.51 whereas family size is 4.06 at the national level (HIES 2016). The average family size of the Bedes is the highest at 7.05 in Natore district but in some districts Bede family size is below 4 people on average.

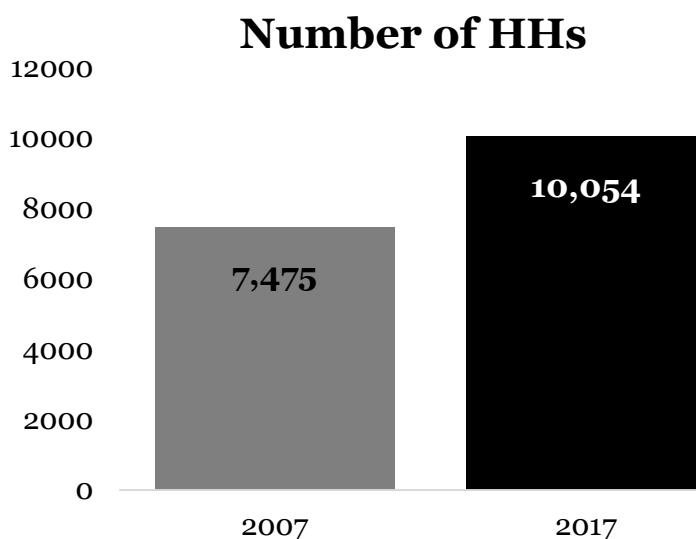
**Table 2: Sex composition**

Districts	Average HH size	Sex ratio
Munshiganj	5.56	104.89
Madaripur	3.84	107.14
Dhaka	3.38	93.33
Cumilla	3.77	108.11
Chattogram	5.29	90.91
Sunamganj	5.83	83.33
Natore	7.05	92.11
Jhenaidah	6.33	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>5.51</b>	<b>95.67</b>

The overall number of Bede families have increased in the last 10 years from 7,475 families to 10,054. The highest increase in the number of Bede families i.e. Bede population is seen in Munshiganj district. Bede population increased since 2007 in the other districts under the study as well except Madaripur.

**Table 3: No. of HHs now (2017) and 10 years ago**

Districts	No. of HHs (2007)	No. of HHs (2017)
Munshiganj	1,750	2,254
Madaripur	275	250
Dhaka	3,000	4,000
Cumilla	500	750
Chattogram	200	350
Sunamganj	600	900
Natore	750	950
Jhenaidah	400	600
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,475</b>	<b>10,054</b>



## Education

The Bedes are one of the most backward communities in the country in terms of education. The majority of them have never been to school or received formal education. It was found that 70.15% of the Bede adults are completely illiterate. The literacy rate of the Bede community is only 18.86% and 11% of them have letter knowledge (can only sign) whereas the national literacy rate is 70.38% (HIES 2016). Only 8.66% of the Bede community have received primary education and 7.66% have received secondary education. Only 1.88% of the community have passed SSC examination and an insignificant 0.61% has passed HSC examination. With a few exceptions, no one from the Bede community has graduated.

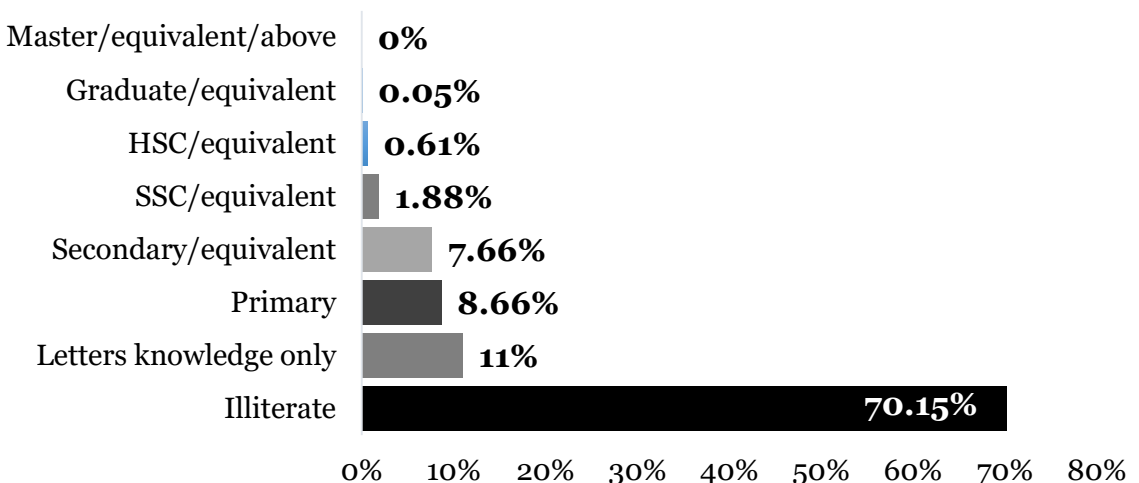
In Sunamganj, 34% of the Bedes studied up to class 5 or primary education and 29% completed secondary education in Chattogram. Except for 0.37% Bedes in Natore, no one from the Bede community was found to have graduated in 14 locations.

The children of the Bede families have to frequently travel from one place to another. Therefore, they are excluded from the universal primary education programmes of the government and non-government organizations. As they are overwhelmingly illiterate, they cannot shift to better occupations and end up continuing their hereditary and traditional occupations. There are some non-government initiatives to conduct mobile schools that roam around the country on boats (Maksud & Rasul 2006).

**Table 4: Education (% of 18 years and above)**

District	Status							
	Illiterate	Letter knowledge only	Primary	Secondary /equivalent	SSC/ equivalent	HSC/ equivalent	Graduate/ equivalent	Master/ equivalent / above
Munshiganj	85.67	10	0	4	0.33	0	0	0
Madaripur	85	5	0	10	0	0	0	0
Dhaka	85	10	3.8	0.75	0.25	0.2	0	0
Cumilla	67.5	20	4	6	0.5	2	0	0
Chattogram	50	12	0	29	9	0	0	0
Sunamganj	53.5	7.5	34	4	0.93	0.07	0	0
Natore	71	12.5	7.5	4.5	2.5	1.63	0.37	0
Jhenaidah	63.5	11	20	3	1.5	1	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>70.15</b>	<b>11.00</b>	<b>8.66</b>	<b>7.66</b>	<b>1.88</b>	<b>0.61</b>	<b>0.05</b>	<b>0</b>

### Education (18 years and above)

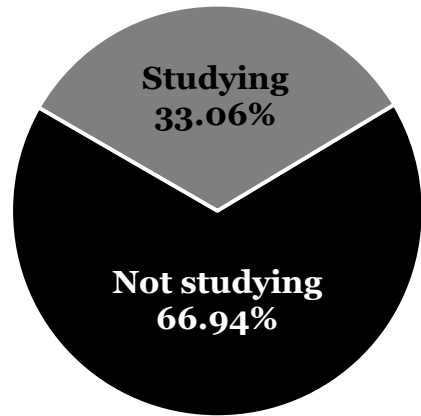


On average, 66.94% of the Bede children aged between 5 to 18 years were not studying during the study. Considering the fact that a huge portion of the Bede population (41.99%) are children, it is a huge setback. More than 80% of the Bede children were not going to school in Munshiganj, Sunamganj and Jhenaidah districts. On average, only 33.06% of the Bede children were studying. In Dhaka, 25% of the Bede children go to school. However, 80% of the children were studying in Madaripur district.

**Table 5: Education (% of 5-18 years)**

Districts	Status	
	Studying	Not studying
Munshiganj	17	83
Madaripur	80	20
Dhaka	25	75
Cumilla	22.5	77.5
Chattogram	50	50
Sunamganj	20	80
Natore	32.5	67.5
Jhenaidah	17.5	82.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>33.06</b>	<b>66.94</b>

### Education (5-18 years)



### Housing

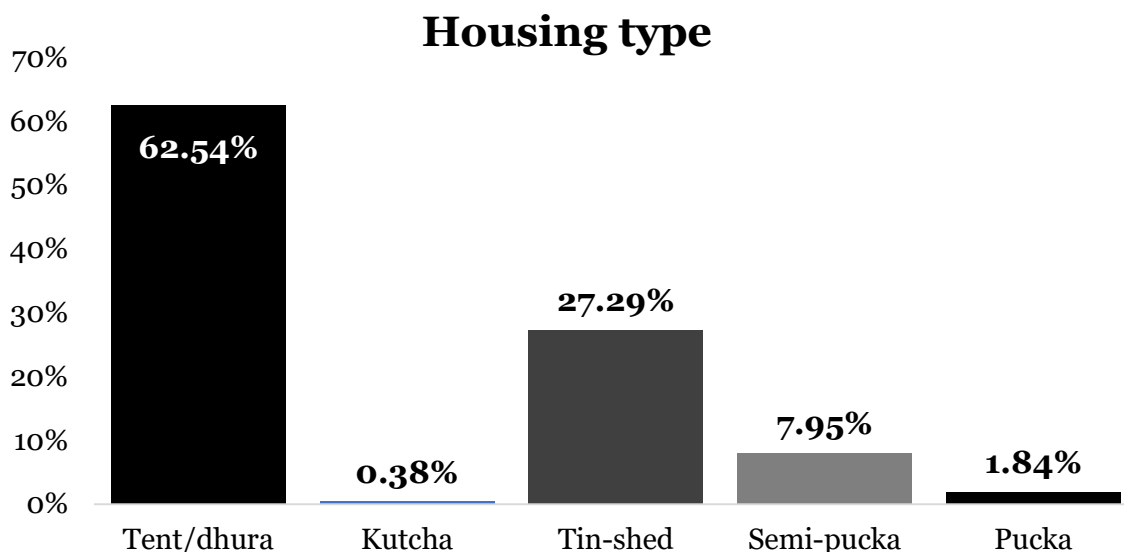
According to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), there are four categories of housing structures—*jhupri* (temporary structures made of plastic, polythene, board, scraps, etc.); *kutchra* (semi-durable structures with wall and roof made of bamboo, wood, leaves, etc. that require some annual upgrading); *semi-pucka* (semi-permanent structures with brick wall and corrugated sheet roof) and *pucka* (permanent structures with brick wall and concrete roof). An additional category of housing structure—tin-shed—has been added in the study, which has corrugated sheet roof and wall.

However, the majority of the Bedes live in tents and some in boats—a housing category that is not included in the BBS census. It was found that on average, 62.54% of the Bede families live in makeshift tents or *dhura*. On the other hand, an average of 27.29% of the Bede families live in tin-shed houses and 7.95% live in semi-pucka houses. A small 1.84% of the Bede families live in *pucka* houses and 0.38% live in *kutchra* houses. In Munshiganj, 83.34% of the Bede families live in tents or *dhura* and 57% of the families live in tin-shed houses in Chattogram.

A significant number of Bedes have abandoned boats, which was once their only shelter. Over time, the lifestyle of living in boats has become obsolete. The community now wants a permanent address and the benefits that come with it. They want to settle down because they want to send their children to school. However, till now most of them have to they camp on encroached land to set up their makeshift tents. They usually carry their tents wherever they go.

**Table 6: Housing condition (% of HHs)**

Districts	Housing type				
	Tent/dhura	Kutcha	Tin-shed	Semi-pucka	Pucka
Munshiganj	83.34	0	15.33	1.33	0
Madaripur	68	0	32	0	0
Dhaka	57	0	25	15	3
Cumilla	72	0	8.5	16.5	3
Chattogram	34	0	57	6	3
Sunamganj	74	0	22	3.25	0.75
Natore	55	3	27	12.5	2.5
Jhenaidah	57	0	31.5	9	2.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>62.54</b>	<b>0.38</b>	<b>27.29</b>	<b>7.95</b>	<b>1.84</b>

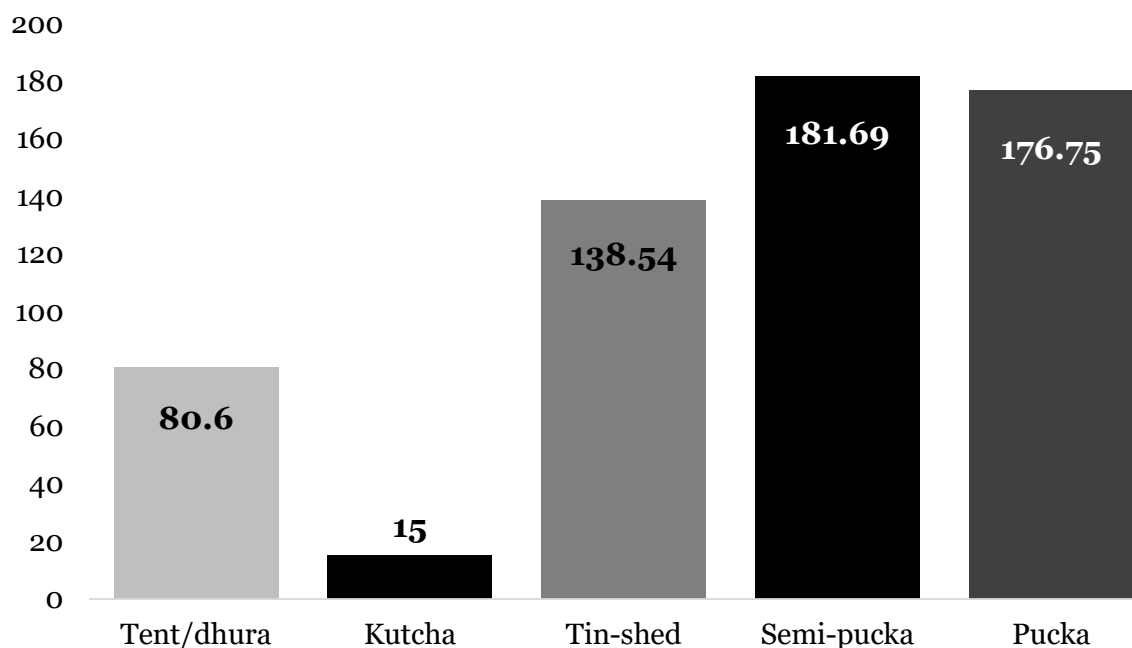


The average size of a Bede tent or *dhura* is only 80.6 square feet. The average size of a tin-shed house of a Bede is 138.54 square feet and semi-*pucka* house is 181.69 square feet. A *pucka* house is 176.75 square feet on average.

**Table 7: Average size of houses (sq ft)**

Districts	Housing type				
	Tent/dhura	Kutcha	Tin-shed	Semi-pucka	Pucka
Munshiganj	103.33	-	148.33	200	-
Madaripur	70	-	135	-	-
Dhaka	84	-	135	270	270
Cumilla	80.5	-	137.5	192.5	300
Chattogram	70	-	135	220	265
Sunamganj	84	-	180	225	228
Natore	84	120	135	216	216
Jhenaidah	69	-	102.5	130	135
<b>Total</b>	<b>80.6</b>	<b>15.00</b>	<b>138.54</b>	<b>181.69</b>	<b>176.75</b>

### Average size of house (sq ft)



## Health and Sanitation

*Sources of drinking water:* The majority of the Bede families (83.33%) drink water from tube wells. All of the Bede families drink tube-well water in Cumilla, Chattogram, Sunamganj, Natore and Jhenaidah districts. On average, 16.67% of the Bede families drink water from deep tube wells.





Bede adolescents.



A child in Goalimandra village in Munshiganj district is prepared for marriage.



A floating Bede group in Sirajganj.

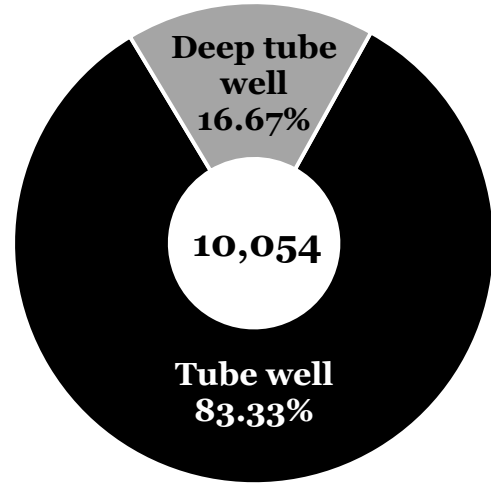


A Bede tent, stuffed with everything a family needs.

**Table 8: Sources of drinking water (% of HHs)**

Districts	Tube well	Deep tube well
Munshiganj	66.67	33.33
Madaripur	30	70
Dhaka	70	30
Cumilla	100	0
Chattogram	100	0
Sunamganj	100	0
Natore	100	0
Jhenaidah	100	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>83.33</b>	<b>16.67</b>

**Sources of drinking water**

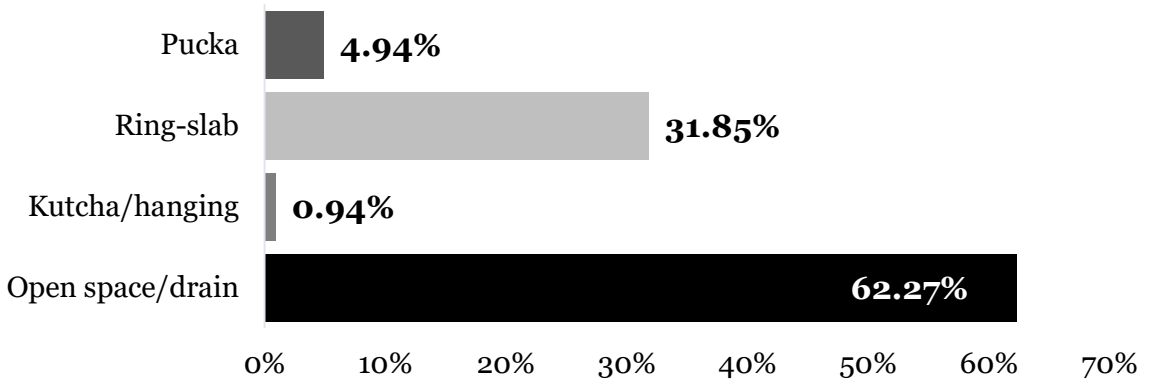


*Latrine facilities:* A shocking 62.27% of the Bede families still defecate and urinate in open space or drains since the Bedes live in temporary tents or boats. At the national level, only 2.96% of the people still use the open space as toilet (HIES 2016). On average, 31.85% of the Bede families use ring-slab toilets, which are usually not sanitary and 4.94% use *pucka* toilets. Whereas 61.37% families use sanitary or *pucka* toilets, which are either water-sealed and/or has flush at the national level (HIES 2016). In Chattogram, 51% of the Bede families use ring slab toilets. Around 7.5% of the Bede families use *kutchra* or hanging toilets in Jhenaidah.

**Table 9: Latrine facilities (% of HHs)**

Districts	Latrine type			
	Open space/ drain	Kutchra/ hanging	Ring-slab	Pucka
Munshiganj	76.67	0	22.33	1
Madaripur	68	0	32	0
Dhaka	49	0	43	8
Cumilla	62	0	35	3
Chattogram	43	0	51	6
Sunamganj	79.5	0	19.5	1
Natore	60	0	23	17
Jhenaidah	60	7.5	29	3.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>62.27</b>	<b>0.94</b>	<b>31.85</b>	<b>4.94</b>

## Latrine facilities

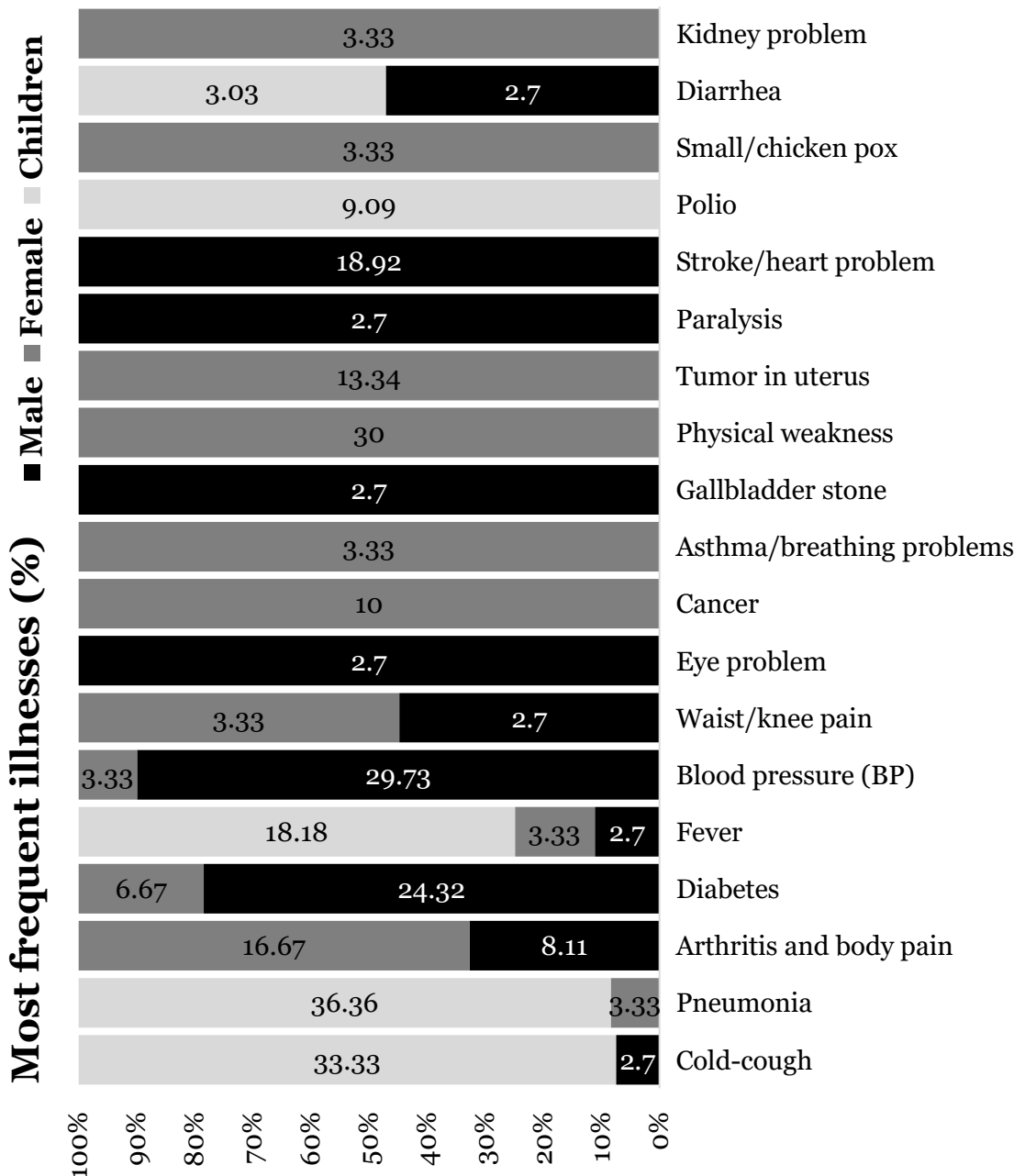


*Most frequent illness:* The most common diseases among the Bedes are pneumonia, cough or cold, high blood pressure and arthritis or body pain. Mostly children suffer from pneumonia and cough or cold as well as fever. The Bede men suffer mostly from high blood pressure (29.73%) and diabetes (24.32%). Other common diseases among the Bede men are strokes or heart diseases, body pain and arthritis. However, more Bede women suffer from arthritis and body pain than men. Another major health concern for Bede women is tumors in uterus. However, the majority of the women feel physically weak (30%). Some of the women also suffer from cancer and diabetes.

**Table 10: Most frequent illness of male, female and children (% of community)**

Types of disease	Male	Female	Children	% of total cluster/ community
Cold-Cough	2.7	-	33.33	12
Pneumonia	-	3.33	36.36	13
Arthritis and body pain	8.11	16.67	-	8
Diabetes	24.32	6.67	-	11
Fever	2.7	3.33	18.18	8
Blood pressure (BP)	29.73	3.33	-	12
Waist or knee pain	2.7	3.33	-	2
Eye problem	2.7	-	-	1
Cancer	-	10	-	3
Asthma or breathing problems	-	3.33	-	1
Gallbladder stone	2.7	-	-	1
Physical weakness	-	30	-	9
Tumor in uterus	-	13.34	-	4
Paralysis	2.7	-	-	1

Stroke or heart problem	18.92	-	-	7
Polio	-	-	9.09	3
Small or chicken pox	-	3.33	-	1
Diarrhoea	2.7	-	3.03	2
Kidney problem	-	3.33	-	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>



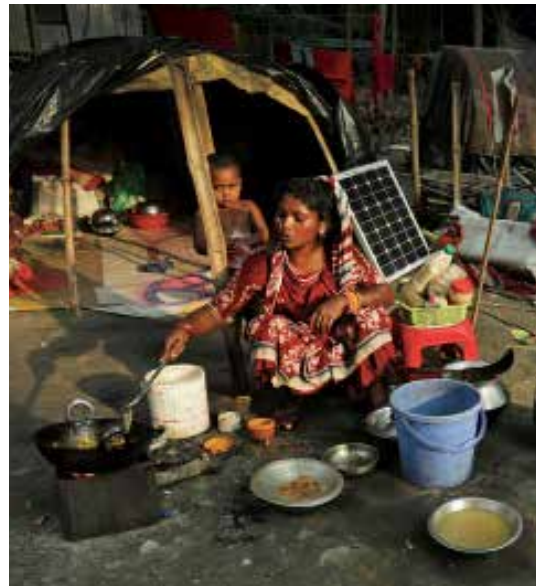
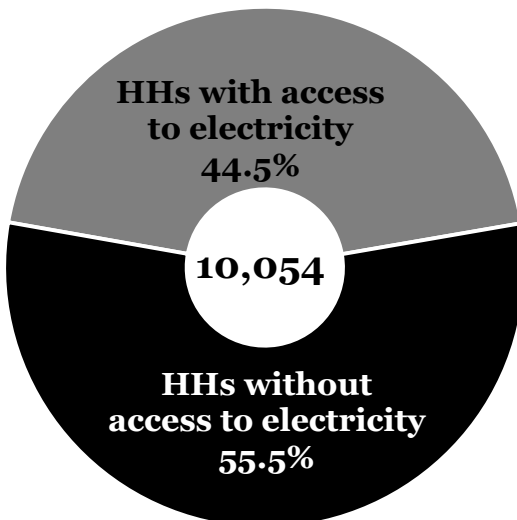
## Electricity and Other Energy Sources

The majority of Bede families do not have access to electricity as they live in temporary tents. On average, 55.5% of the Bede families do not have access to electricity whereas at the national level, 75.92% of the families have access to electricity (HIES 2016). More than 80% of the Bede households do not have electricity in Cumilla and Munshiganj districts. However, all the Bede families have access to electricity in Madaripur district. On average, 44.5% of the Bede families have access to electricity and the average duration of daily electricity supply is 11.4 hours.

**Table 11: Electricity supply**

Districts	% of HHs with access to electricity	% of HHs without access to electricity	Average duration (hours) of daily supply
Munshiganj	20	80	11.67
Madaripur	100	0	16
Dhaka	60	40	10
Cumilla	15	85	10
Chattogram	26	74	18
Sunamganj	70	30	7.5
Natore	38.5	61.5	9
Jhenaidah	26.5	73.5	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>44.5</b>	<b>55.5</b>	<b>11.4</b>

### Access to electricity

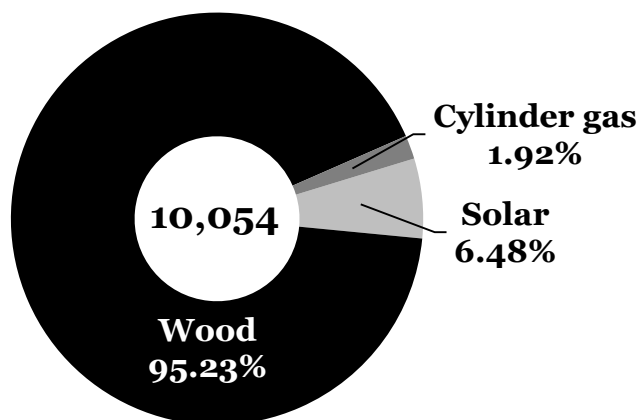


*Other energy sources:* The majority of the Bede families use wood as an energy source other than electricity. On average, 95.23% of the Bede families use wood to cook their food. On the other hand, 6.48% of the families use solar energy mainly for lighting purposes. A small percentage of the families use cylinder gas for cooking.

**Table 12: Other energy sources (% of HHs)**

Districts	Energy source		
	Solar	Wood	Cylinder gas
Munshiganj	8.33	91.33	0.33
Madaripur	-	100	-
Dhaka	8	92	-
Cumilla	3	96	1
Chattogram	-	94	-
Sunamganj	7.5	92.5	-
Natore	-	96	8
Jhenaidah	25	100	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>6.48</b>	<b>95.23</b>	<b>1.92</b>

## Other energy sources



## Income and Expenditure

*Major occupations and sources of income:* The major occupations of the Bedes are removing tooth worm, *shinga lagano*, selling *tabij*, snake charming and showing monkey dance. *Shinga* is a cow's horn or a metal pipe and *shinga lagano* (fitting *singe*) is the process of using it to suck out dead blood from the back or waist of the body to reduce

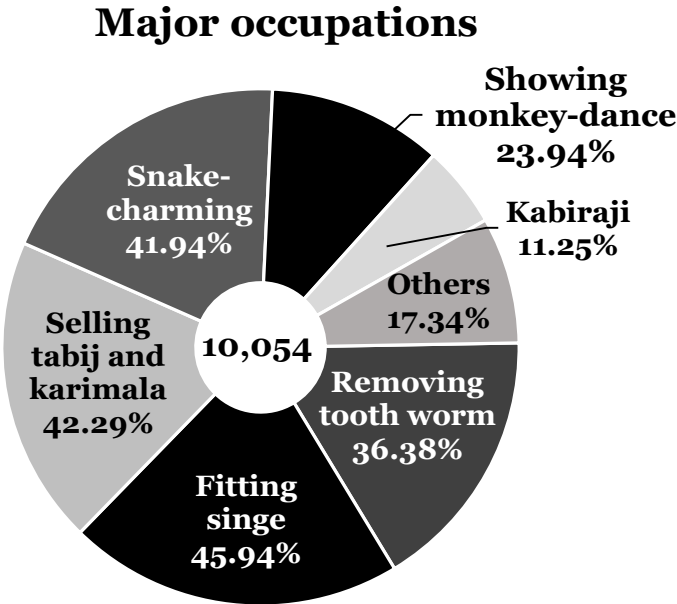
any sort of pain, which is mainly performed by Bede women. They also sell snake venom and cure victims of snake bite. On the other hand, the *kabiraj* Bedes use leaves and stem of medicinal plants, animal or fish parts, etc. to make different traditional medicines. They also sell amulets and talisman, locally known as *tabij*, *karimala*, etc., which are believed to give protection from black magic and evil forces.

It was found that on an average 45.94% of the Bede families perform *shinga lagano*. Around 42% of the Bedes sell *tabij* and *karimala* and similar percentage of people perform snake charming. Around 36.38% of the Bede families ‘remove tooth worm’ to cure tooth ache. A large portion of the Bede families (41.94%) perform snake charming to earn a living. It should be noted that a Bede family can be involved in multiple traditional occupations at the same time.

In Chattogram 95% of the Bede families show monkey dances and 96.5% of the families do the same in Jhenaidah district. On an average, 50% Bede families are *kabiraj* or traditional healers in Madaripur district and 40% in Natore district. On an average, 32.67% of the Bede families in Munshiganj district perform magic shows to earn a living. Around 47.5% of the Bede families earn a living as street vendors in Natore district and 50% families catch fish as their main occupation in Madaripur district. Almost no one from the community was found to be involved in mainstream informal or formal occupations.

**Table 13: Major occupations**

Status	% of HHs
Removing tooth worm	36.38
Shinga lagano	45.94
Selling tabij and karimala	42.29
Magic-showing	4.08
Snake- charming	41.94
Showing mon-key- dance	23.94
Kabiraji	11.25
Street vendor	5.94
Fish catching	6.25
Diver	0.94
Day labour	0.13





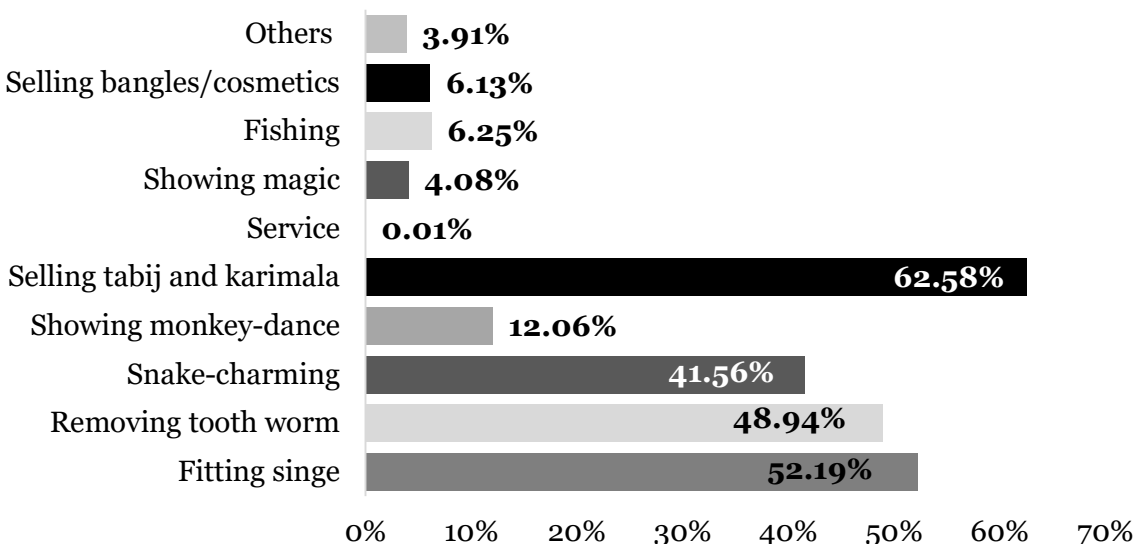
A Bede family can earn a living from multiple traditional occupations at the same time. The main sources of income of Bede families are *shinga lagano*, removing tooth worm, selling *tabij*, snake charming and showing monkey dance. On average, selling *tabij* and *karimala* is the main income source of 62.58% of the families. Around 6% families earn as street vendors selling bangles, cosmetics, etc. Only 0.1% Bede families earn a living as service providers.

**Table 14: Sources of income**

Status	% of HHs
Shinga lagano	52.19
Removing tooth worm	48.94
Snake-charming	41.56
Showing monkey-dance	12.06
Selling tabij and karimala	62.58
Day labour	1.75
Small business	0.61
Rickshaw/van driver	0.70
Barber	0.00
Service	0.01
Showing magic	4.08
Fishing	6.25
Diving	0.83
Selling bangles/cosmetics	6.13
Remittance	0.02



### Sources of income (% of HHs)



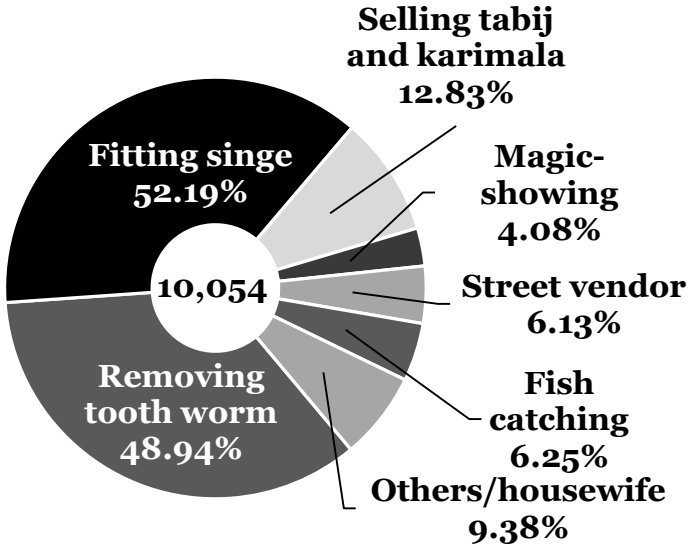
The majority of the Bede women are *shinga* healers who perform *shinga lagano* and traditional healers who remove tooth worm. On average, 52.19% women of the Bede families are *shinga* healers. Bede women earn a living by removing tooth worm in 48.94% of the Bede families. On average, women sell *tabij* and *karimala* from 12.83% of the Bede families. The Bede women also show magic, work as street vendors and catch fish as an occupation. Some of them are housewives but majority of the Bede women are the main earning members in their families.

**Table 15: Occupations of women (% of HHs)**

Districts	Remov- ing tooth worm	Shinga lagano	Selling tabij and karimala	Mag- ic-show- ing	Street Ven- dor	Fish catch- ing	Others/ house wife
Munshiganj	66	66	32.67	32.67	-	-	-
Madaripur	4	5	-	-	-	50	-
Dhaka	25	50	-	-	-	-	25
Cumilla	22.5	22.5	-	-	-	-	45
Chattogram	70	70	70	-	-	-	-
Sunamganj	96.5	96.5	-	-	-	-	-
Natore	12.5	12.5	-	-	49	-	-
Jhenaidah	95	95	-	-	-	-	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>48.94</b>	<b>52.19</b>	<b>12.83</b>	<b>4.08</b>	<b>6.13</b>	<b>6.25</b>	<b>9.38</b>



**Major occupations of women**



*Average, highest and lowest monthly income:* The level of income is different from different traditional sources of income in the Bede community. Average monthly income for from fitting *singe* is Taka 3,094. On an average, Bedes who remove tooth worm earn Taka 2,608 and snake charmers earn Taka 3,625 per month. Earning from selling *tabij* and *karimala* is Taka 4,552 on average. The Bedes who show magic to earn living earn only Taka 1,167 a month. Monthly income from selling bangles and cosmetics is Taka 3,000.

Monthly income for Bedes who are involved in conventional informal jobs is also low. Monthly income for Bedes who are day labourers (1.75% families) is Taka 4,167. Monthly income from small businesses is Taka 7,067 for Bedes (0.67% families). Bedes who are rickshaw or van drivers (0.7%) earn around Taka 5,069 per month. Average monthly income from fishing is Taka 6,500. The other income sources include remittance.

**Table 16: Average monthly income**

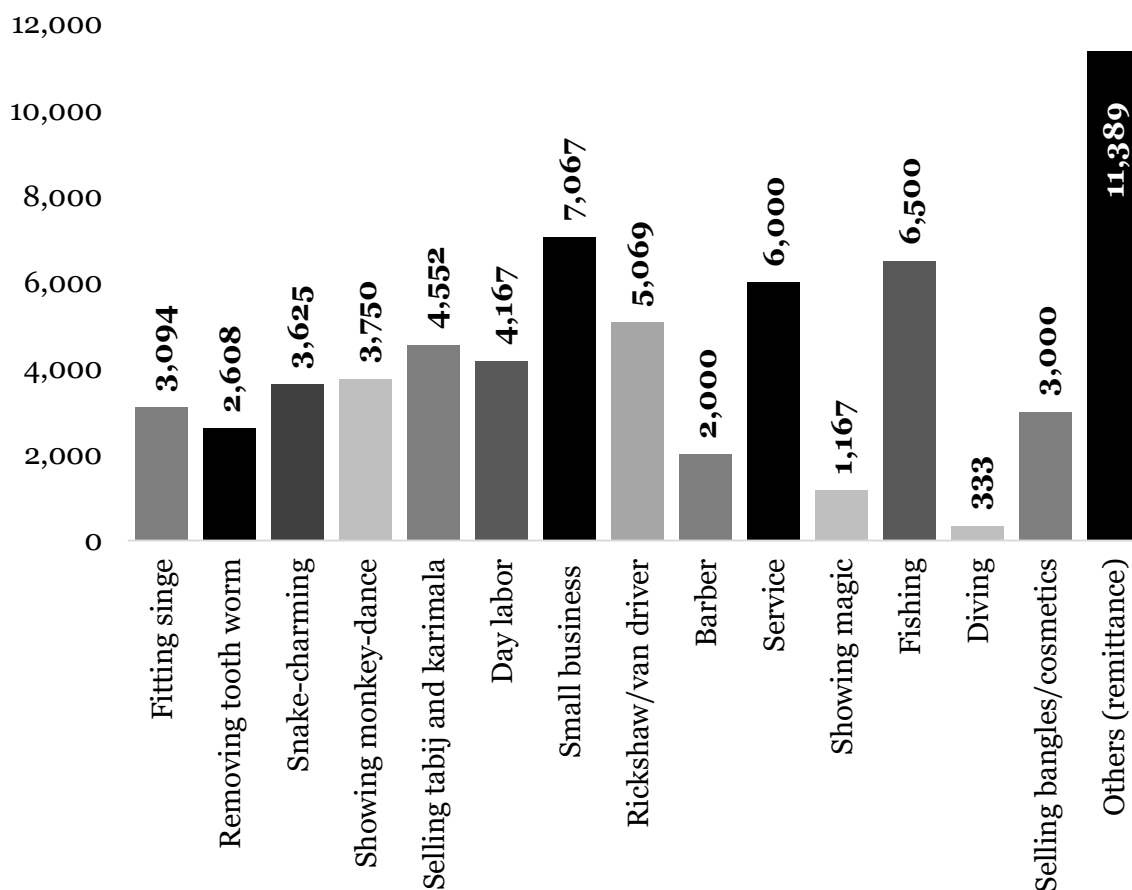
Status	Taka
Shinga lagano	3,094
Removing tooth worm	2,608
Snake-charming	3,625
Showing monkey-dance	3,750
Selling <i>tabij</i> and <i>karimala</i>	4,552
Day labor	4,167
Small business	7,067
Rickshaw/van driver	5,069
Barber	2,000
Service	6,000
Showing magic	1,167
Fishing	6,500
Diving	333
Selling bangles/cosmetics	3,000
Others (remittance)	11,389



Two Bede women out in locality in search of patients.

The highest income of a Bede is Taka 10,792 and the lowest monthly income is Taka 2,948. In Madaripur district, highest income for a Bede family is only Taka 6,500 on average. On the other hand, the average monthly income is as low as Taka 2,500 for a Bede family in some districts.

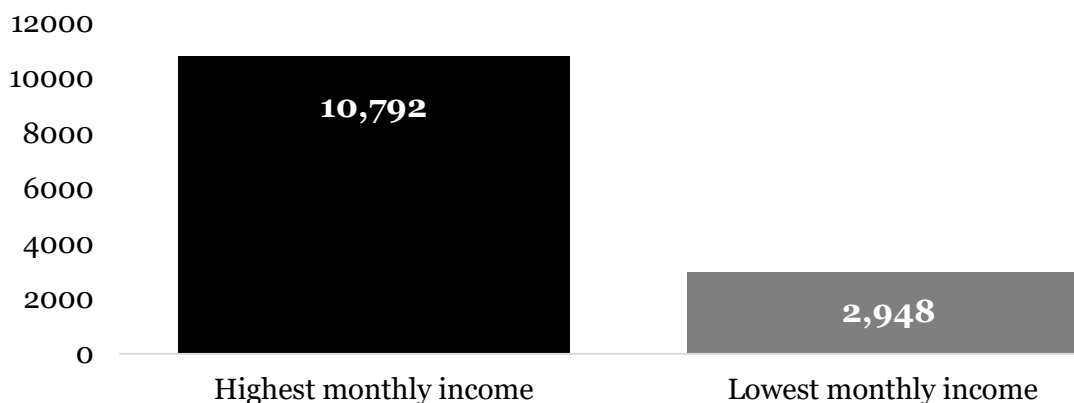
## Average monthly income (in Taka)



**Table 17: Average highest and lowest monthly income (in Taka)**

Districts	Status	
	Highest monthly income	Lowest monthly income
Munshiganj	10,833	3,333
Madaripur	6,500	3,000
Dhaka	12,000	3,000
Cumilla	7,000	3,000
Chattogram	20,000	2,500
Sunamganj	9,500	3,000
Natore	10,000	3,250
Jhenaidah	10,500	2,500
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,792</b>	<b>2,948</b>

## Average highest and lowest monthly income (in Taka)



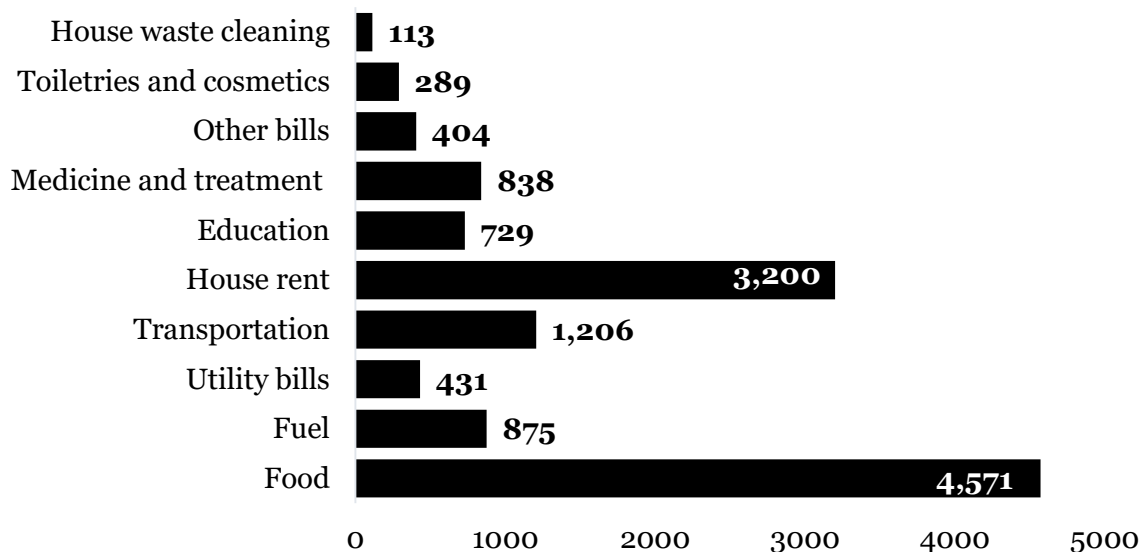
*Monthly expenditure:* The average monthly expenditure of a Bede family is Taka 12,655. On the other hand, the monthly expenditure of a household at the national level is Taka 15,715 on average (HIES 2016). A Bede family spends Taka 4,571 on average on foods, Taka 875 on fuel and Taka 431 on utility bills. On average, the Bede families spend Taka 1,206 to bear transportation costs. A Bede family spends Taka 729 on average for education of their children. Medical costs are on average Taka 838. Most of the Bede families live in tents so they do not have to pay rent. But those who rent houses have to pay an average of Taka 3200 per month.

**Table 18: Monthly expenditure (in Taka)**

Districts	Items										Total
	Food	Fuel	Utility bills	Transportation	House rent	Education	Medicine and treatment	Other bills	Toiletries and cosmetics	House waste cleaning	
Munshiganj	4,067	800	450	1,000	-	633	600	483	583	-	8,617
Madaripur	4,000	700	400	500	1,000	500	500	300	200	-	8,100
Dhaka	5,000	1,000	500	1,200	-	1,000	800	400	200	-	10,100
Cumilla	4,500	850	400	1,000	1,100	600	600	450	300	100	9,900
Chattogram	5,000	800	500	1,200	-	700	1,000	400	200	-	9,800
Sunamganj	5,000	1,000	400	1,750	-	900	1,100	400	200	-	10,750
Natore	4,750	750	350	1,500	7,500	800	850	350	250	125	17,225
Jhenaidah	4,250	1,100	450	1,500	-	700	1,250	450	375	-	10,075
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,571</b>	<b>875</b>	<b>431</b>	<b>1,206</b>	<b>3,200</b>	<b>729</b>	<b>838</b>	<b>404</b>	<b>289</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>12,655</b>

\*Food=Rice, pulse, oil, salt, fish, meat, milk, vegetables, etc; Fuel=Wood/coal/kerosene/oil/cylinder gas etc; Utility bill=Electricity/water/gas; Education=Tuition fee, study equipment, etc.; Other bills=Telephone, mobile, cable line, internet bill, newspaper bill, etc.

## Monthly expenditure (in Taka)

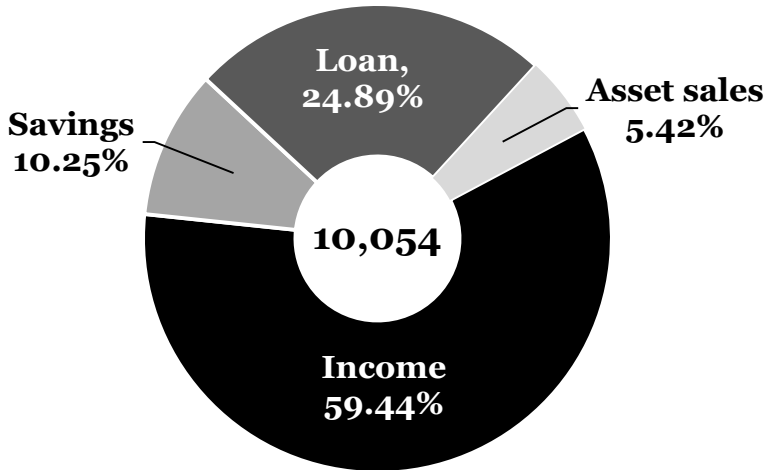


The majority of the Bedes have to depend on their income to meet their monthly expenses. It was found that 59.44% of the Bede families have to meet their monthly expenditure from their income. On the other hand, 24.89% of the Bede families have to take loans and 10.25% of the families have to use their savings to bear monthly expenses. Around 5.42% of the Bede families have to sell their assets to meet their monthly expenditure. No one from the Bede community was found who meets their monthly expenditure by receiving assistance from Social Safety Net Programs (SSNPs) or any financial aid.

**Table 19: Meeting average monthly expenditure (% of HHs)**

Districts	Income	Savings	Loan	Asset sales
Munshiganj	65.53	8.03	21.1	5.33
Madaripur	62	12	25	1
Dhaka	69	15	10	6
Cumilla	50.5	13	30.5	6
Chattogram	51	5	36	8
Sunamganj	51.5	14	31	3.5
Natore	61.5	8	22.5	8
Jhenaidah	64.5	7	23	5.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>59.44</b>	<b>10.25</b>	<b>24.89</b>	<b>5.42</b>

## Meeting average monthly expenditure



*Yearly expenditure:* There are some items for which families have to pay on a yearly basis on top of monthly expenditures. Therefore, inquiries were made about their expenditure of the last one year. The study found that Bede families who can manage to send their children to school spend the most behind education on a yearly basis. It should be noted that literacy rate in the Bede community is extremely low. On average, a Bede family sending its children to school pay around Taka 8,450 for their admission and session fees, school dress, private coaching and yearly education expenses. Bede families spent Taka 6,063 on average to buy electronics in the last one year.

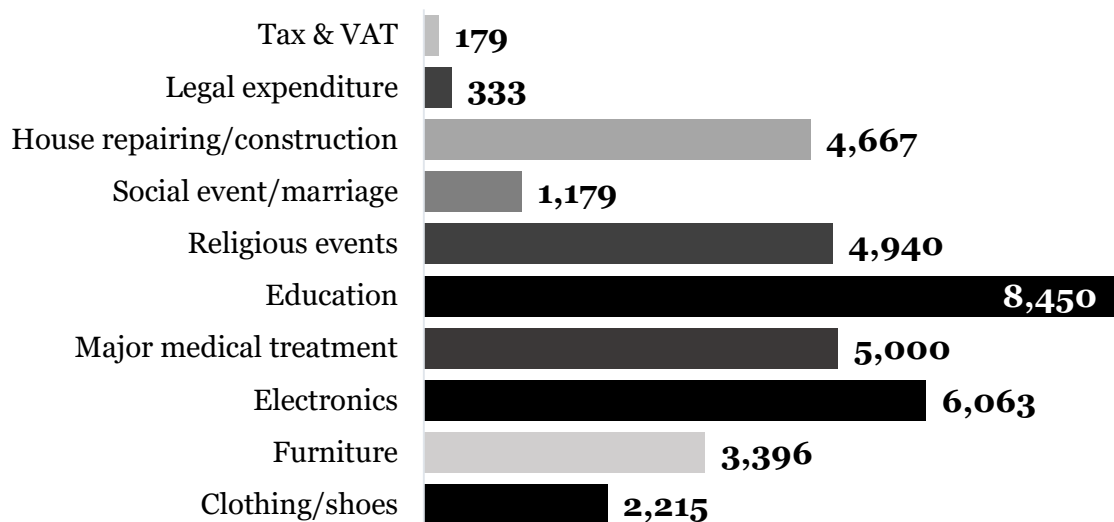
Yearly medical expenses are around Taka 5,000 and repairing of their tents/boats/houses and other construction work cost Taka 4,667 on average. They have spent Taka 4,940 to organize religious events and Taka 1,179 to organize social events and marriage ceremonies. The Bede families spend Taka 3,396 and Taka 2,215 to buy furniture and clothes respectively on a yearly basis.

Overall, average annual expenditure is Taka 3,642 for a Bede family. In Madaripur district, the average annual expenditure is Taka 1,000 and in Munshiganj district, it is only Taka 1,467. In Jhenaidah district, average annual expenditure of a Bede family was the highest at Take 5,000.

**Table 20: Expenditure of last one year (in Taka)**

Districts	Cloth- ing/ shoes	Furni- ture	Elec- tronics	Major medical treat- ment	Edu- cation	Reli- gious events	Social event/ mar- riage	House repairing/ construc- tion	Legal expen- diture	Tax & VAT
Munshiganj	1,467	3,667	6500	4,000	7,600	4,833	1,333	4,333	333	150
Madaripur	1,000	3,000	6,000	3,500	6,000	-	1,000	5,000	-	200
Dhaka	2,000	3,500	6,000	5,000	9,600	4,000	1000	3,000	-	100
Cumilla	1,750	3,500	6,000	5,000	7,200	4,500	1,100	6,000	-	250
Chattogram	2,000	3,000	7,000	6,000	8,400	4,000	1,500	6,000	-	250
Sunamganj	2,250	3,500	5,500	6,500	10,800	4,500	1,000	3,500	-	-
Natore	2,250	4,500	7,500	5,500	9,600	5,250	1,250	4,500	-	100
Jhenaidah	5,000	2,500	4,000	4,500	8,400	7,500	1,250	5,000	-	200
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,215</b>	<b>3,396</b>	<b>6,063</b>	<b>5,000</b>	<b>8,450</b>	<b>4,940</b>	<b>1,179</b>	<b>4,667</b>	<b>333</b>	<b>179</b>

## Expenditure of last one year (in Taka)



## Land and Non-land Assets

*Land ownership:* The majority of the Bede families are completely landless. On average, 60.38% of the Bede families under the study was found to be completely landless since they live in temporary tents. In Munshiganj district, 80% of the Bede families do not own land and around 75% Bede families in Madaripur and Cumilla districts are completely landless.

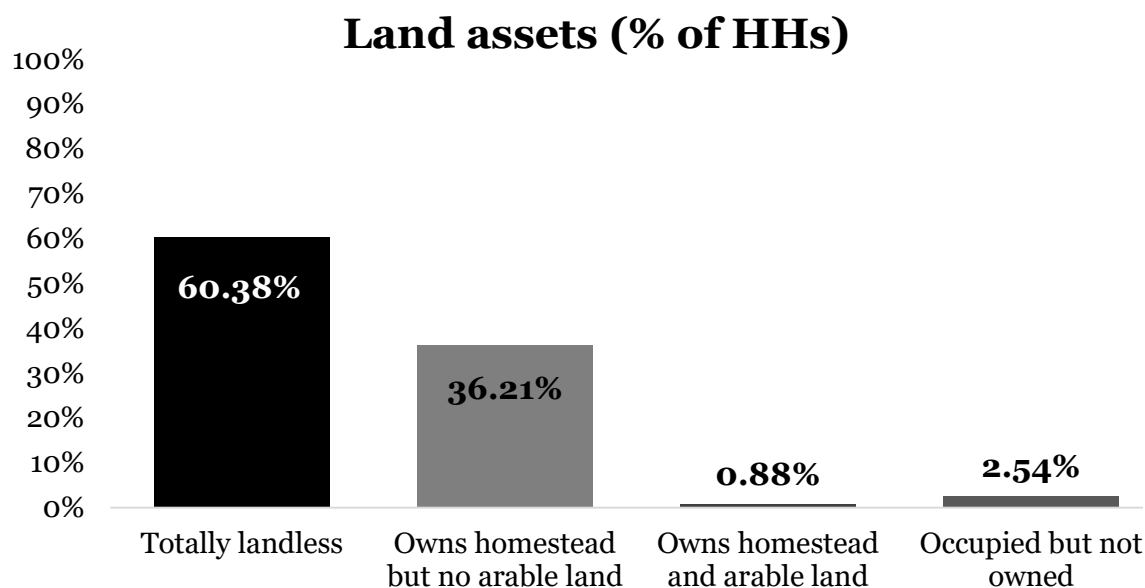
However, over time some Bede families have managed to purchase land and settled



down on land. It was found that 36.21% of the Bede families own homestead but they do not own any arable land. In Dhaka district, 63.5% of the Bede families have settled down and owns homestead but do not arable land. So did 57% Bede families in Chattogram and 49% in Natore district. On the other hand, only 0.88% Bede families own both homestead and arable land. Around 2.54% of the Bede families occupy land but they do not own it.

**Table 21: Land assets (% of HHs)**

Districts	Land status			
	Totally land-less	Owens homestead but no arable land	Owens homestead and arable land	Occupied but not owned
Munshiganj	80	16.67	-	3.33
Madaripur	75	15	-	10
Dhaka	36	63.5	-	0.5
Cumilla	75.5	20	-	4.5
Chattogram	43	57	0	-
Sunamganj	68.5	30.5	1	-
Natore	45.5	49	3.5	2
Jhenaidah	59.5	38	2.5	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>60.38</b>	<b>36.21</b>	<b>0.88</b>	<b>2.54</b>

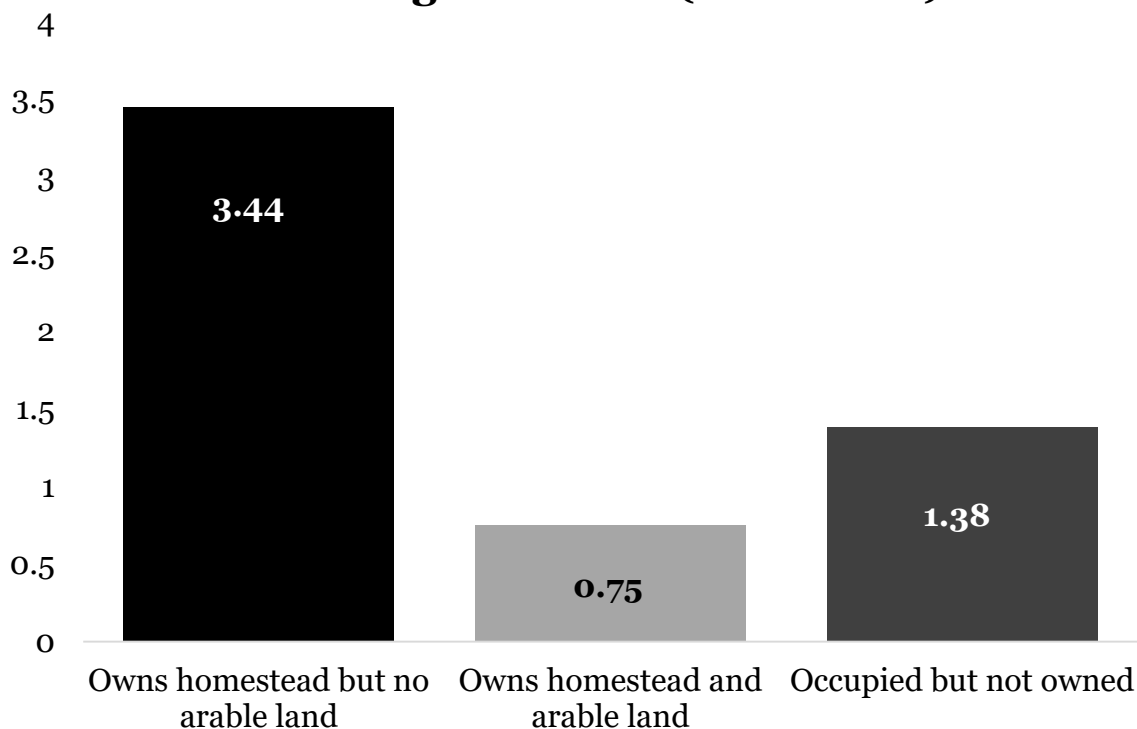


The Bede families that own land own around 3.44 decimals on average and those who own both homestead and arable land, own up to 0.75 decimals. For the Bede families that occupy land but do not own it, the land size is 1.38 decimals on average.

**Table 22: Average land size (in decimal)**

Districts	Land status		
	Owens homestead but no arable land	Owens homestead and arable land	Occupied but not owned
Munshiganj	3.5	-	3
Madaripur	3.5	-	3
Dhaka	4	-	-
Cumilla	3.25	-	3.5
Chattogram	3	-	-
Sunamganj	3.5	1.5	-
Natore	4	3	1.5
Jhenaidah	2.75	1.5	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.44</b>	<b>0.75</b>	<b>1.38</b>

### Average land size (in decimal)



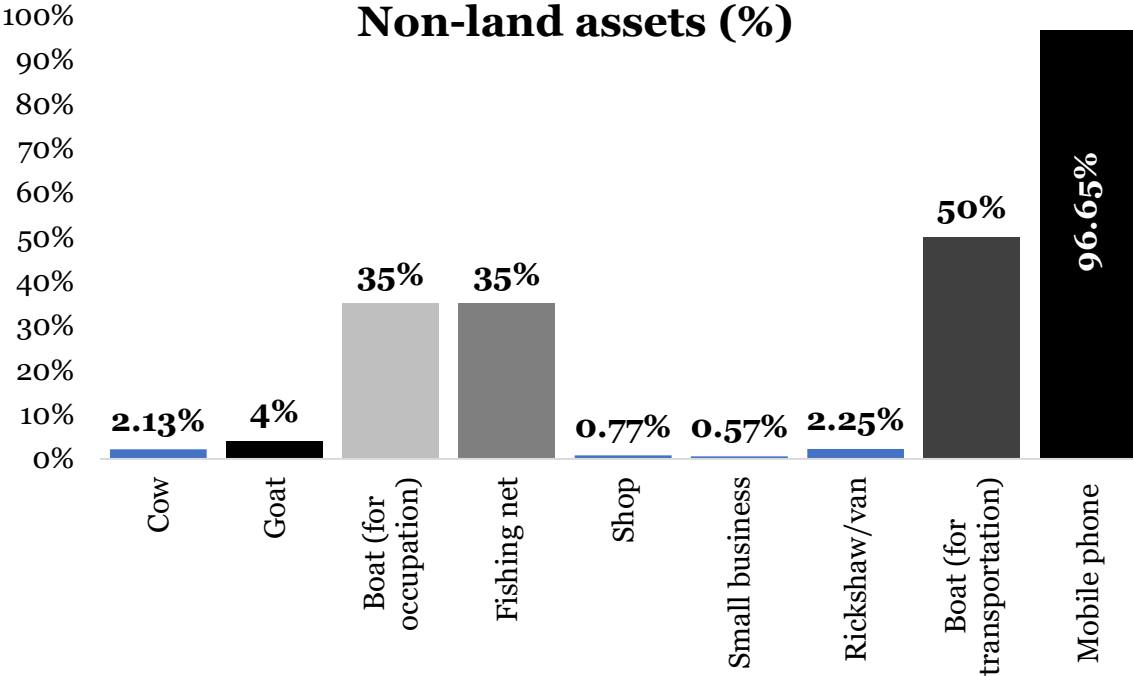
*Ownership of non-land assets:* The majority of the Bede families—96.65%— own mobile phones. However, no Bede family was found under the study who own other types of electronics including television, refrigerator and radio. Around 35% of the Bede families own boats for their traditional way of life and occupation. Also 35% of the Bede families own fishing net. It was found that half of the Bede families still own boats for transportation. Less than 1% of the families own shops or run small business. Small percentage of Bede own livestock or rickshaw or van.

**Table 23: Non-land assets**

Non-land assets	% of HHs
Cow	2.13
Goat	4
Boat (for occupation)	35
Fishing net	35
Shop	0.77
Small business	0.57
Rickshaw/van	2.25
Boat (for transportation)	50
Mobile phone	96.65



Bede tents on private land.



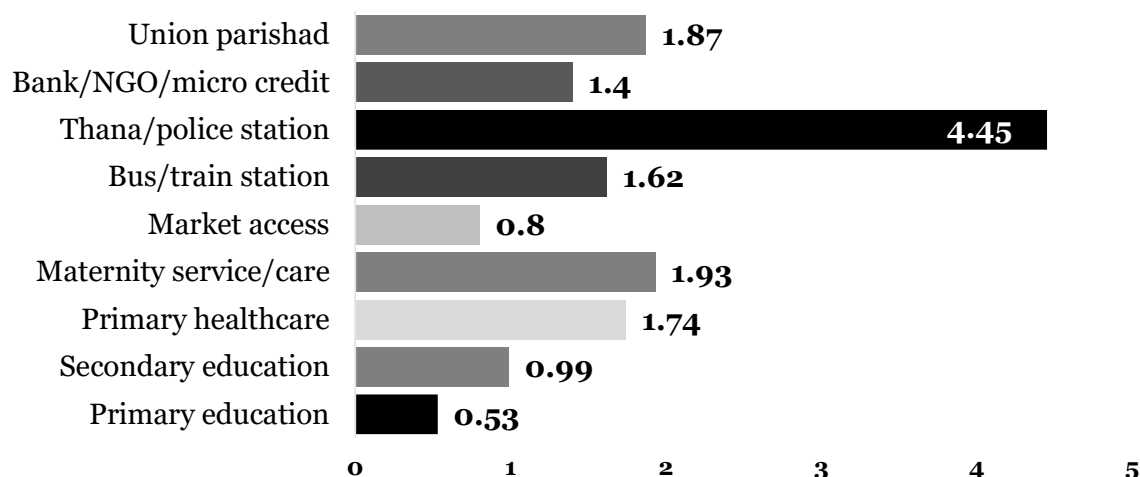
## Access to Services

*Distance to nearest facilities:* The distance to different educational, health, communication and other facilities from a locality is a crucial factor that indicates accessibility of those services. The facility nearest to the Bedes are primary schools. On average, primary schools are 0.53 km away from Bede settlements. On the other hand, police stations are situated far away from Bede households, which are on average 4.45 km away. Primary healthcare and maternity healthcare are respectively 1.74 km and 1.93 km away from the Bede settlements on average.

**Table 24: Distance of nearest facilities (km)**

District	Primary education	Secondary education	Primary healthcare	Maternity service/care	Market access	Bus/train station	Thana/police station	Bank/NGO/micro credit	Union parishad
Munshiganj	0.5	1.17	1.17	1.17	0.67	1.17	3.33	1.67	1.17
Madaripur	0.5	0.5	1	1	1	3	1.5	0.5	2
Dhaka	0.5	0.5	2	2	1	2	2	2	2
Cumilla	0.5	0.5	1.75	1.75	0.5	1.75	14	1.75	1.25
Chattogram	0.5	0.5	3	3	0.5	0.5	5	0.5	0.5
Sunamganj	0.5	1.5	2	2.5	0.75	2.5	2.5	2.5	4.5
Natore	0.75	2	1.5	1.5	0.75	0.75	1.25	0.75	1.5
Jhenaidah	0.5	1.25	1.5	2.5	1.25	1.25	6	1.5	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>0.53</b>	<b>0.99</b>	<b>1.74</b>	<b>1.93</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>1.62</b>	<b>4.45</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>1.87</b>

## Distance to nearest facilities (km)

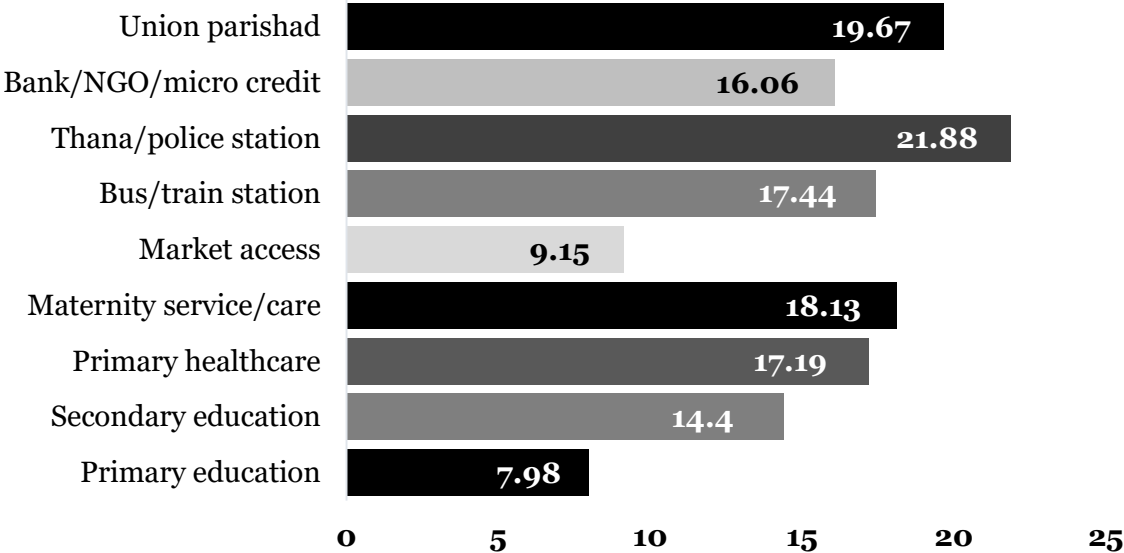


It was found that on an average, it takes around 8 minutes to reach primary school for a Bede student. Bedes can reach the nearest markets in 9.15 minutes on an average. Bus and train stations are usually 17.44 minutes away from the Bede settlements and banks and NGOs are 16 minutes away on an average. It takes around 19.67 minutes to reach union parishads and 21.88 minutes on an average to reach police stations from the Bede settlements.

**Table 25: Average time to reach (minute)**

District	Primary education	Secondary education	Primary healthcare	Maternity service/care	Market access	Bus/train station	Thana/police station	Bank/NGO/micro credit	Union parishad
Munshiganj	8.33	16.67	14	14	11.67	14	20	14	12.33
Madaripur	5	5	8	8	5	15	10	5	12
Dhaka	5	5	15	15	7	15	15	15	15
Cumilla	8	8	11.5	11.5	8	11.5	30	11.5	19
Chattogram	8	8	15	15	8	8	20	8	8
Sunamganj	11	40	45	45	12.5	55	55	55	70
Natore	11	20	17.5	17.5	11	11	7.5	8.5	8.5
Jhenaidah	7.5	12.5	11.5	19	10	10	17.5	11.5	12.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>7.98</b>	<b>14.40</b>	<b>17.19</b>	<b>18.13</b>	<b>9.15</b>	<b>17.44</b>	<b>21.88</b>	<b>16.06</b>	<b>19.67</b>

### Average time to reach nearest facilities (minute)



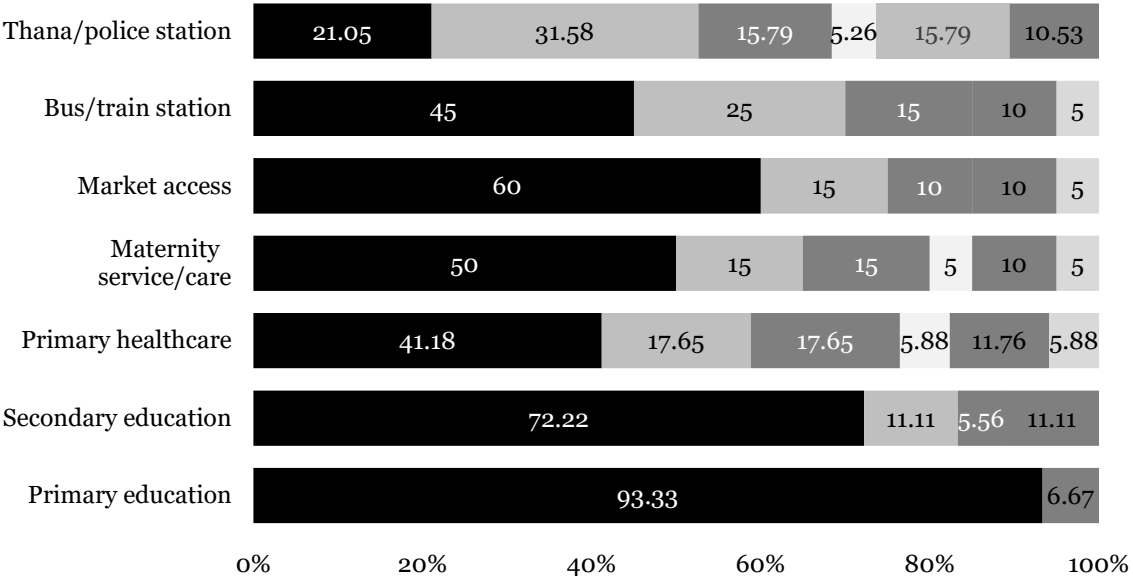
The majority of the Bedes commute on foot to access education, primary healthcare, markets, police station and other services. The study found that 54.68% of the community reach commute on foot to access the services. Majority of the Bedes students also reach primary and secondary schools on foot. On average, 16.48% of the community commute by rickshaw and 11.28% commute by auto rickshaws/easy bike/tomtom. Interestingly, 10% of the community travel by boat to access services. A very small percentage of the community travel by CNG, bus or car to access services.

**Table 26: Mode of communication for access service (% of community)**

Name of service	Mode of communication						
	On foot	Rickshaw	Auto/easy bike/tomtom	CNG	Bus/Car	Boat	Van
Primary education	93.33	-	-	-	-	6.67	-
Secondary education	72.22	11.11	5.56	-	-	11.11	-
Primary healthcare	41.18	17.65	17.65	5.88	-	11.76	5.88
Maternity service/care	50.00	15.00	15.00	5.00	-	10.00	5.00
Market access	60.00	15.00	10.00	-	-	10.00	5.00
Bus/train station	45.00	25.00	15.00	-	-	10.00	5.00
Thana/police station	21.05	31.58	15.79	5.26	15.79	10.53	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>54.68</b>	<b>16.48</b>	<b>11.28</b>	<b>2.31</b>	<b>2.26</b>	<b>10.01</b>	<b>2.98</b>

**Mode of communication to access services (%)**

■ On foot ■ Rickshaw ■ Auto/easy bike/tomtom ■ CNG ■ Bus/Car ■ Boat ■ Van



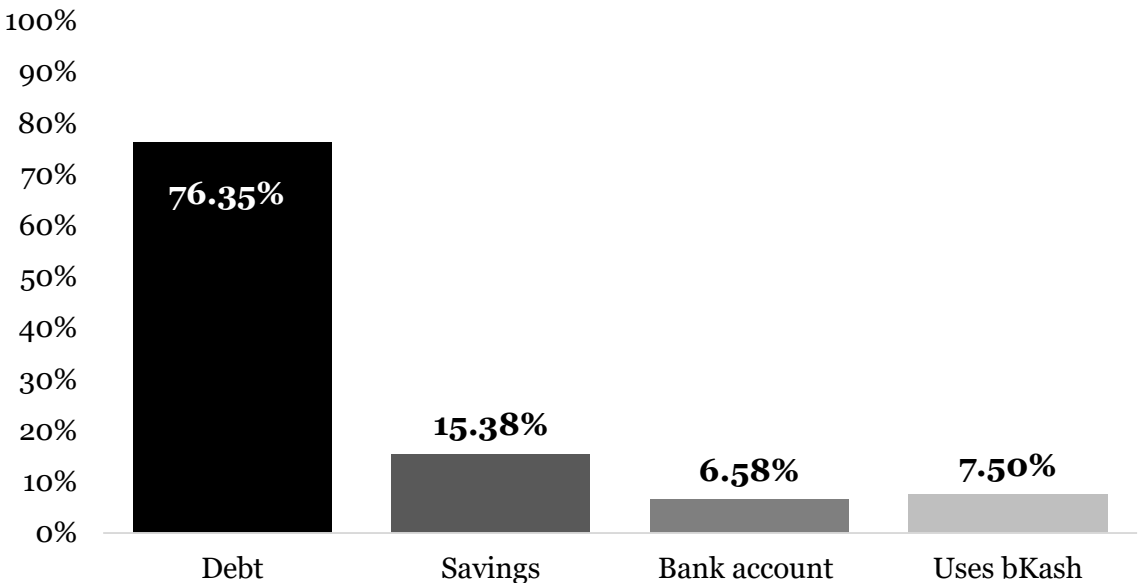
## Economic Condition

The majority of the Bedes have to borrow money from others in order to meet their daily or monthly needs. It was found that an average of 76.35% of the Bede families are in debt. On the other hand, only 15.38% of the Bede families have savings and 6.58% have bank accounts. On an average, 7.50% of the Bede families do mobile banking, namely bKash.

**Table 27: Financial status (% of HHs)**

Districts	Types			
	Debt	Savings	Bank account	Uses bKash (mobile banking)
Munshiganj	73.33	19	7.67	2
Madaripur	80	12	8	-
Dhaka	79	13	8	2
Cumilla	80	13.5	6.5	7.5
Chattogram	75	17	8	17
Sunamganj	77	17	6	2.5
Natore	71.5	22.5	6	11.5
Jhenaidah	75	9	2.5	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>76.35</b>	<b>15.38</b>	<b>6.58</b>	<b>7.50</b>

## Financial status (% of HHs)

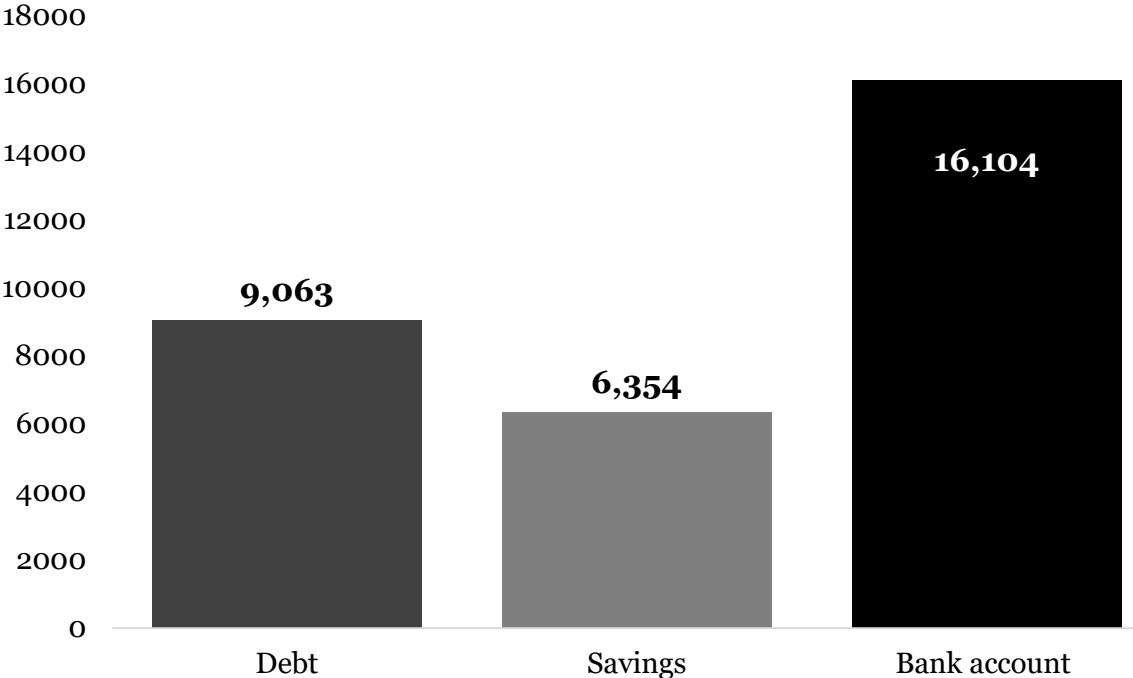


The average amount of debt for a Bede family is Taka 9,063. On the other hand, the average savings of a Bede family is Taka 6,354 and average balance in a bank account is Taka 16,104.

**Table 28: Average amount of debt, savings and bank account (in Taka)**

Districts	Types		
	Debt	Savings	Bank account
Munshiganj	4,500	3,333	13,833
Madaripur	10,000	2,000	20,000
Dhaka	5,000	1,000	20,000
Cumilla	5,500	6,000	15,000
Chattogram	15,000	10,000	25,000
Sunamganj	14,000	10,000	17,500
Natore	6,000	7,500	10,000
Jhenaidah	12,500	11,000	7,500
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,063</b>	<b>6,354</b>	<b>16,104</b>

### Average debt, savings and bank account (in Taka)





## Access to Social Safety Net Programmes

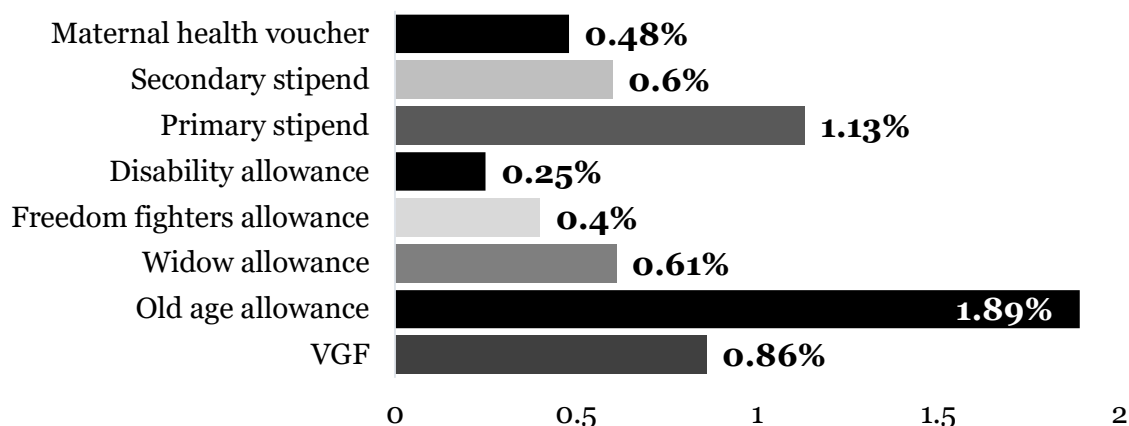
A tiny percentage of Bede families were found who are included in the social safety net programmes (SSNPs). On an average, only 1.89% of the Bede families receive old age allowance and students of 1.13% Bede families receive primary school stipend. Less than 1% of the Bede families receive vulnerable group feeding (VGF), widow allowance, freedom fighters' allowance, disability allowance, secondary stipend and maternal health voucher separately. No Bede family is included in the Open Market Sales (OMS), Vulnerable Group Development (VGD), Gratuitous Relief (GR), and Food for Work (FFW) or Cash for Work (CFW) and Employment Generation Programme for the Poorest (EGPP).

**Table 29: Access to social safety net programmes (% of HHs)**

Districts	Programmes							
	VGF	Old age allowance	Widow allowance	Freedom fighters allowance	Disability allowance	Primary stipend	Secondary stipend	Maternal health voucher
Munshiganj	0.68	1.84	0.94	-	-	0.72	0.6	0.45
Madaripur	2	2	-	-	-	-	-	-
Dhaka	-	0.5	0.5	-	0.25	-	-	-
Cumilla	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Chattogram	-	0.9	-	-	-	1.8	-	-
Sunamganj	0.25	2	0.2	-	-	2	-	-
Natore	-	5	1	0.4	-	1.14	-	0.5
Jhenaidah	0.5	1.01	0.39	-	0.25	0.01	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>0.86</b>	<b>1.89</b>	<b>0.61</b>	<b>0.40</b>	<b>0.25</b>	<b>1.13</b>	<b>0.60</b>	<b>0.48</b>

\*VGF= Vulnerable Group Feeding

## Access to social safety net programmes (% of HHs)



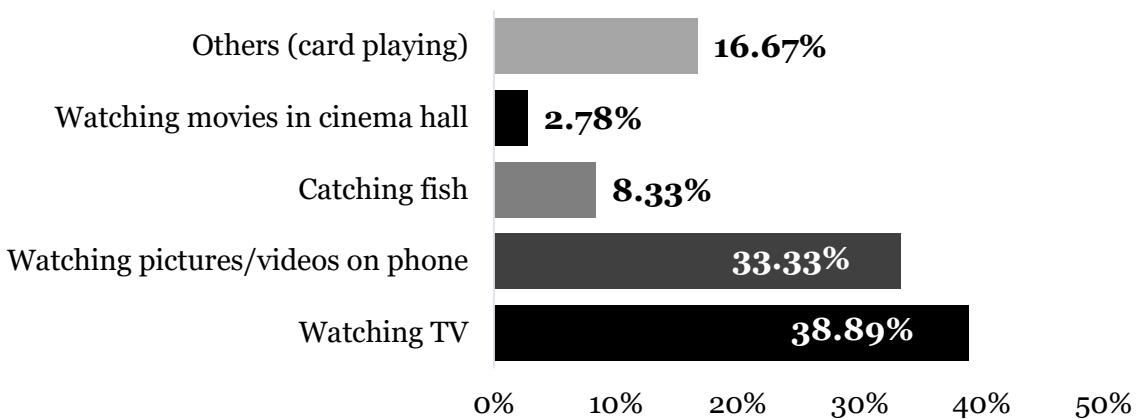
## Recreation

The most common form of recreation for the Bede families were found to be watching TV, videos on phone and playing cards. Some of them also catch fish as a leisure-time activity.

**Table 30: Recreation**

Type of recreation	% of HHs
Watching TV	38.89
Watching pictures or videos on phone	33.33
Catching fish	8.33
Watching movies in cinema hall	2.78
Others (card playing)	16.67
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

## Recreation





Titna Khatun from Goalimandra, Munshiganj. Disappointed, she wants to migrate out of traditional work.

# Social Capital, Changes and Aspirations

## Bede Culture

The Bedes are called in different names in addition to their most common names 'Bede' or 'Manta'. Local people refer to them as Baida, Bej, Sapure, Sarker, Saudagar, Beraijja, Garoli, Mirshikari, Bajikar and Sandar. The main celebrations of the Bedes are Eid-ul Fitr and Eid-ul Azha as they are Muslims. Weddings are also important celebrations for them. The Bedes, during their *mel* or yearly gathering, organize cultural shows and have lot of fun in dancing and singing. The Bedes speak mainly Bangla but they also speak a different language of their own, *Thar*. When they do not want the *gel* (Bangalee) or outsiders to understand what they are talking about they speak *Thar*.

## Community-based Organizations and Political Participation

Three community-based organizations of the Bedes were found under this study—Porabari Somaj Kallyan Shangha (Porabari Social Welfare Association) and youth associations named Ekota Nitiman Sawdagar Jubo Shangha and Jubo Shangha Club. These organizations are dedicated for social welfare, providing financial help to the poor and helping the people of the Bede community.

The respondents stated that all of the community clusters have participated in local and national elections and 13 out of 14 of the community clusters under the study have registered as voters. It should be noted that floating Bedes who own no land and live on boats or temporary tents became voters only in 2007. Bedes from all the clusters under the study have cast votes.

## Recent Changes in the Community

Some positive changes have started to occur recently in the Bede community. Several dimensions were considered in order to identify the recent changes that occurred in the community in relation to their occupation, education, migration, social status, communication and title. Major changes identified by the all of the community clusters include increased education rate or enrollment in primary education in the recent times; migrating to look for permanent residence; perception of people regarding the Bedes or an increased acceptability of the Bedes and development of roads and increase in use of mobile mobiles.

However, there has been no change in their occupation in 85.17% of the community

clusters. Only 7.14% of the community clusters believe awareness about education has increased. Around 14.29% of the community stated that their income has decreased or they are involved in small local businesses. In all clusters, no one changed their surnames or titles.

All of the Bede clusters identified the changes to be positive because of increased awareness, change in residence, better communication and increased opportunities in social interaction. Most of the changes started to occur after 2007.

**Table 31: Nature of changes (% of community)**

Dimensions	Nature of change	Type of change >20% Major change <20% Minor change
<b>Occupation</b>	No Change	85.17% (Major)
	Low income/Local small business	14.29% (Minor)
<b>Education</b>	Increased awareness of themselves or other people	7.14% (Minor)
	Increased education rate/Primary education improved	92.86% (Major)
<b>Migration</b>	Permanent residence	100% (Major)
<b>Social Status</b>	Change in perspective/More acceptability	100% (Major)
<b>Communication</b>	Development of roads/Increases mobile phone usage	100% (Major)
<b>Title Change</b>	No change	100% (Major)

## Problem Analysis

Following are the problems of the community and the reasons behind identified by the Bedes in 14 locations across the country:

**Prejudice:** Almost a quarter of the Bede clusters under the study stated that they are prejudiced by others and therefore socially excluded. All of them stated that their identity is the key factor behind the prejudice they faced from others. Many people in the mainstream society have different misconceptions about the Bedes and do not consider them as Muslims, which isolate the community more.

**Decreased income in traditional occupations:** The respondents identified decreased income in their traditional occupations as their biggest problem. The main factor behind this is decrease in the number of customers.

**No land ownership:** Another major problem identified by the Bede respondents was landlessness of the majority of the Bedes. The respondents stated many of them have to move around from one place to another because of their traditional occupations, which is why they do not own land.

**Sanitation problems:** Sanitation problem is acute in the Bede community. As mentioned before, a shocking 62.27% of the Bede families still defecate and urinate in open space or drains. The respondents stated that lack of access to land and poverty cause the sanitation problems in their community.

**Education crisis:** Illiteracy is another serious problem faced by the Bede community. As mentioned before, 70.15% of the Bede adults are completely illiterate and the literacy rate of the Bede community is only 18.86%. They identified poverty as the reason behind their high illiteracy rate.

**Bad roads:** The Bede respondents identified bad roads as a problem faced by their communities. They identified river erosion as the factor that causes this problem.

**Problems with garbage disposal:** The Bedes identified lack of access to land and no drainage system as the reasons behind the problems related to garbage disposal.

**Access to healthcare:** The Bede respondents identified poverty and no government opportunities or assistance as the reasons behind lack of access to healthcare services.

**River erosion:** The Bedes identified river erosion as one of their problems as they live near river banks or on boats.

**Employment crisis:** Lack of employment opportunities other than their traditional occupations is another major problem. They identified their Bede identity as the reason behind the employment crisis. They cannot enter mainstream informal or formal jobs because they come from the Bede community.

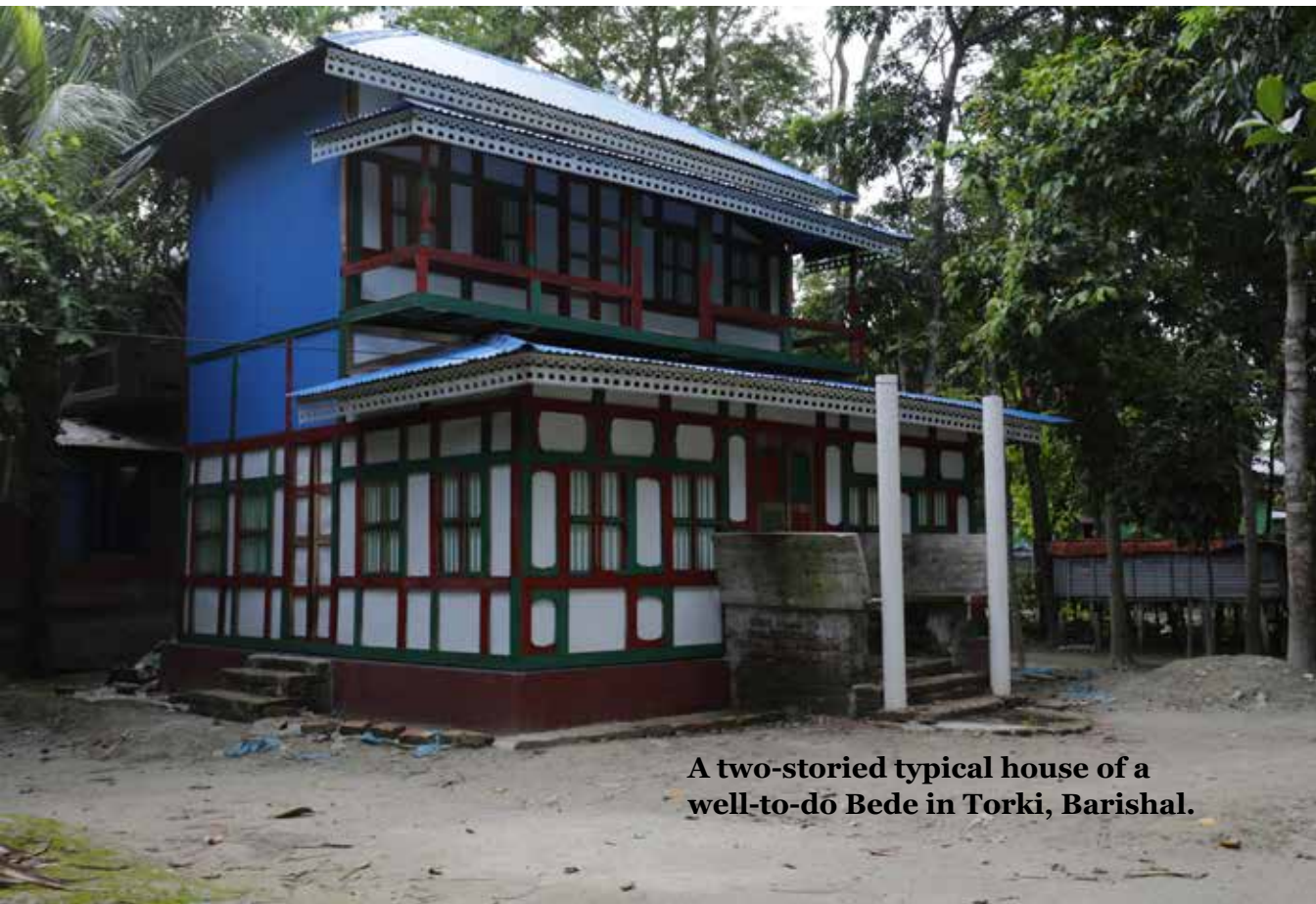
**Other problems:** Some other major problems of the Bede community are child marriage, polygamy and violence against women (VAW), which, however, were not mentioned by the Bede respondents as problems for the community but became evident during consultations and field visits.

## **Possible Solutions to the Problems**

Response from majority of the community clusters indicate that a change in their traditional occupations and shifting to new occupations is the main solution to their problems. Around 66.67% of the Bede community under the study suggested a shift to new occupations as the solution. They also stated that financial aid from the government



**A few of the bede families that have set up their flimsy houses on the bank of Dakatia River in Chandpur.**



**A two-storied typical house of a well-to-dō Bede in Torki, Barishal.**

and initiatives by government and private organizations can help them in solving their problems. Other suggested solutions include government quotas for the Bedes, assistance from the local government, special boats and ports for the Bedes, building drains and permanent toilets.

## **Needs and Aspirations**

**New or alternative employment:** Access to new or alternative employment opportunities other than their traditional occupations was found to be a major need and aspiration of the Bede community. As Bangladesh is becoming a middle-class country, more people are opting for modern means of healthcare and entertainment than the outdated services provided by the Bedes. Snake charming and monkey dancing involve cruelty against wild animals whereas people are now more skeptical about *shinga laganao* (fitting shinga) and ‘tooth worm’ removing methods of the Bedes. Therefore, they desperately need alternative sources of income to move out of poverty.

**Permanent residence:** Another major need of the Bede community is permanent residence, which can be met with reformation and implementation of land laws in support of the nomadic Bede community.

**Access to solar power:** As the Bedes are a nomadic community, they have limited access to electricity, which can be solved by providing solar panels to the community.

**Roads:** One of the needs of the Bedes is access to better roads, which can be solved mainly by government initiatives.

**Sanitation facilities:** Access to proper sanitary toilets is another major need of the Bedes as a shocking 62.27% of the Bede families still defecate and urinate in open space or drains. The Bedes are a nomadic community and therefore they have little access to sanitary toilets.

**Access to khas land:** The Bede respondents identified access to khas land as one of their main needs. Addressing their land issues will lead to solving many of their other problems. The majority of the respondents stated that reformation and implementation of the land-related laws are needed to meet their needs.

**Employment opportunities:** Some suggested the government and private sector to take initiatives to introduce quotas for the Bedes. Both government and NGO initiatives are needed to provide employment opportunities to the Bedes so that they can shift from their traditional occupations.

**Protection from river erosion:** As riverbanks are one of the main spots for temporary



Bede shelters, protection from river erosion is a major need of the Bede community.

**Loans or financial support:** Access to loans and financial support is another major need of the Bede community.

Around half of the community stated that employment in new occupations can help them achieve their needs. On the other hand, 38.71% of the community stated that reformation and proper implementation of the land-related laws will help them achieve their needs. The respondents also identified that filing collective complaints, quotas for Bede in different jobs, establishing embankments and public or private financial assistance as the means to meet their needs. More of than half of the community stated that government initiatives are essential to help them meet their needs.

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# The Story of A Floating People

## *A Nomadic Existence*

Philip Gain



Bede tents in Bhanga, Faridpur, 16 September 2016.

Fourteen Bede families have set up their oval-shaped makeshift tents on private land in Natun Torki, a village in Kalkini Upazila of Madaripur district. A branch of the Arial kha river flows on the west of Natun Torki. The area is well-known in Barishal for Torki Bandar, a narrow but flowing river on the west. The Bede huts are just on the outskirts of the crowded Natun Torki market.

Saud Khan, a Bede Sardar from Kharia in Munshiganj, and two other Bedes—Md. Zakir Hossain and Md. Nurun Nabi—guide me into their tents, many in the open space and some under the shade of a tree. It is a bright, sunny afternoon on June 29, 2018. Each tent seems to have everything a family needs, all crammed into a 100 to 150 square-foot space. Most tents are also fitted with solar panels. The tents facing west glow in the

golden sunshine.

It is Friday, an off-day here. I inspect the tents and take photos in the daylight before finally sitting down for a chat with the elderly Bedes, surrounded by everyone of the little Bede community.

Md. Zakir Hossain, in his late forties, informs me that all 14 families there had started their journey from Kharia in Munshiganj in October 2017. Since then they have set up their tents and set up businesses in 14 places!

Their journey through these months saw them moving through Shariatpur, Madaripur, Barguna, Jhalakathi and Barishal. Before coming to Natun Torki, they spent a month and ten days in the Doari Bridge area in Barishal.

“We stay in an area for as long as the business is good,” says Hossain, admitting that the business is actually not that good anywhere. “We survive on minimal income and the scope of business dries out pretty quickly. So, we keep moving.”

The 14 families are all Mal Manta (Bede call themselves Manta), one of a dozen groups among the Bede. One main business of the female Mal Bede is making use of singe, a metal pipe that sucks out bad blood from the human body to give relief from pain. Other businesses of Mal Bede include the search of lost gold, and sale of imitation ornaments, cosmetics, amulets, cups and other light utensils.

Hossain and his group plan to stay at Natun Torki for no longer than two weeks. They do not think business will be good here. I call Hossain some 20 days after I meet them to check if they have moved on.

“Yes, we are now at Haturia Launch Ghat in Goshairhat Thana under Shariatpur district,” he tells me. “We stayed at Natun Torki for 15 days.”

The life of the Bedes is tough indeed. “Because we are always on the run, our children cannot attend school,” laments Rubina Akhtar, 45, explaining that none of the 25 children of the 14 families receive education.

“Many years back, Father Renato, a Catholic priest, used to assist us and had a school that would travel with us,” recalls Rubina’s husband Nurun Nabi, 55, who had been a teacher of the floating school. Nurun Nabi studied up to class ten and is ready to teach the Bede children again.

“Give us a school and a teacher,” Rubina demands of me repeatedly. “We want education for our children.” When I mention that Bangladesh reportedly has a 100 percent enrollment for children, Rubina shouts in disagreement, “It is a lie.”

A large percentage of the Bede is on the move like these 14 families; and their children do not get any education. About 15 years ago, these groups used to glide through the

country in boats. Their economic condition was better back then. Now, none of them have a boat.

## The Bede Geography

Grambangla Unnayan Committee, a non-profit organisation that works closely with the Bedes, estimates that there are 5,000 Bede groups roaming around the country for 10 months around the year. Then they assemble at 75 locations in 39 districts. Normally, they get together during Eid-ul-Azha or national and local elections. Most of them were not allowed to vote until 2007. However, a great percentage of Bede households do not have land or houses where they are registered as voters. They simply carry their tents everywhere.

According to a survey by the NGO, more than 90 percent of Bedes are illiterate. An overwhelming percentage live below the poverty line. Very few children are vaccinated. As they change locations often, they do not enjoy any government family welfare schemes or health assistance. Although they belong to the poorest of the poor and are landless, they hardly get *khas* land for settlement. Their access to social safety net programmes such as old age allowance, VGF cards, disability allowance, flood relief etc. is minimal.

## From Water to Land

Before visiting Natun Torki, we also spend hours at Torki Char Bede Palli. The hamlet is located along a half kilometer stretch on a western branch of the Arial Kha river that snakes through Torki Bandar. The Bede hamlet, with its many two-storeyed concrete and wooden houses, is neat and clean. Some houses, of course, reveal the poverty of the 60 families staying there. The shabbier houses are built like boats and on plinths, perhaps in fond memory of their long-lost boats. The differences between the well-off and poorer Bede are clearly visible.

Md. Nannu Sarder tells me that in addition to the 60 families settled on tiny plots of land purchased as far back as 25 years ago, another 60 to 70 families assembled here on boats for two months in October. Torki Char Bazar is home for them. Some families have small plots of land but they are yet to build houses.

For a month or two in October and November they relax, organise parties with singing and dancing, repair their boats, and settle social matters such as disputes and marriages. “About half of the 70 families who don’t own houses and have their boats under repair set up tents,” explains the Sardar (leader of the Bede hamlet). The hamlet grows lively with the assembled crowds.

But during business season, most working men and women go out to sell their business

ware. Some women roam around with *singe* leaving the hamlet nearly empty. Beside the village, the river flows quietly—lifeblood of the wandering people, eager to settle down as agriculturists.

“But we have been able to purchase only tiny plots of land on which to build our houses,” says Nannu Sardar, 75. “None of us have agricultural land.”

This is a change they want now. “Once we settle down, our children can go to school,” asserts Nannu.

Two of Sardar’s friends—Md. Jahangir and Md. Abdur Rab—join us as we chat. They reminisce about their life 25 years back, when they all had boats. “We used to come here twice a year since 1972. The river had a magnetic power. We would repair our boats here,” recalls Md. Jahangir, 65, who was the first to buy five decimals of land for Tk 40,000 back in the day.

“The local Gale (non-Bede Bangalee) offered to sell land to us,” says Md. Jahangir. Others followed Jahangir too.

The Manta of Torki Char Bede Palli in Gournadi Pourashava are all from Amanatganj, Barishal, and all are Muslims. They believe that they are different from Bedes of Dhaka Division and other areas. Soud Khan of Kharia in Munshiganj who accompanied us agrees. “I can see the Bede of Barishal are the homely kind,” observes Khan.

The benefit of a permanent address is clear.



Bede boats in Turag river,  
Tongi, 12 October 2018.



**Traditional Bede boat in Gournadi, Barishal that is disappearing fast, 8 November 2018.**



**House of a poor Bede in the shape of a traditional Bede boat in Torki Char Bede Palli in Gournadi, Barishal.**

However, even after settling down, they face social difficulties with the Gale. “They look down upon us and do not want to socialise with us,” says Nannu Sarder. “We pray in separate mosques and we do not mix with the Gale who envy our economic well-being.” Relations between the Bede and Gale turned bitter after a fight two years ago.

Like the Bede who have settled in the Torki Bandar area, other Bede groups are also trying to settle on land. One such group is seen in Kakalia village in the Nagari union of Kaliganj upazila in Gazipur. Even a year and half ago, around 60 Bedes had boats beautifully lined up in the Turag river close to the Tongi-Ghorashal Highway. At one time, 200 boats would float in this part of the Turag, serving as a reminder of the river gypsy tradition in riverine Bengal.

But in July 2018, only eight boats were left. Quite a few of the awnings were set on the land close to the river. Others have disappeared from the river with signs of dilapidation around. Around 60 families have now built their houses on *khas* land on the Turag bank. The majority of the families have built tin shed houses, some with concrete floor. One family has constructed a two-storeyed house with a wooden deck—a typical house of a well-off Bede family. Others have set the awnings of their boats right on the banks of Turag.

Mosammat Rezia, 70, born and brought up on a boat, feels sad about the boat life that has recently ended for her and others. She has sold cosmetics and ornaments on foot all her life, a typical mode of work for Sandar Manta women. She has two sons who sell cosmetics and supplement their income by fishing in the Belai beel and river during monsoon.

“We are destitute,” sighs Rezia. “We have to buy everything except for water.” The families, however, have received two concrete toilets and one tubewell from the government.” Land and agriculture are mirages to the Bede of Kakalia or elsewhere. 60 Bede families have settled on 51 decimals of *khas* land; but not for free. Abu Miah, Tabu Miah and Ali have taken yearly leases of 20 decimals of land and divided it into 10 tiny plots. Fazlul Haque, Rezia’s son, took one of the plots for BDT 8,000 15 years ago. Others have taken plots for between BDT 40,000 and BDT 50,000.

It is here that we find Nuru Miah, aged 110. He stoops low, yet he walks fast and his eyesight is perfect. Born in Demra, he came here 10 years back. His wife Gedi Begum is 90 years old. Both husband and wife were born, and have spent all their life, on boats.

“Since then we have set the awnings of our boat on land and we live under it,” he says, pointing to the oval-shaped structure that he set up after his boat broke. Everybody in the little hamlet is sympathetic to the aged couple.

A few families in Kakalia that still live there will soon abandon their boats. “We do not want to go back,” says Sadhina Begum, 47, who with a son and two daughters left their boat about a year back.

Sadhina's son works at a garment factory at College Gate, 10 minutes away from Kakalia. Like Sadhina's son, 15 other young boys and girls go to work in the nearby garment factory.

A much bigger group of Sandar Bede, around 320 families, have been living on the Turag bank attached to the Tongi bridge. It is actually an age-old Bede slum comprising small huts crammed on a narrow strip of public land.

The men of this Bede squalid are in the fish trade. They buy fish from Abdullahpur, Jatrabari, Karwan Bazar, etc and sell it in the local market. "The Turag was wider and clearer in the past," says octogenarian Ismail, "but now it is too polluted with hardly any fish to catch." The women, as usual, sell cosmetics and utensils in villages far and near.

Bedana, aged 70, sits in front of her hut in great despair. She has heard that many of the Bede houses would have to be dismantled for the construction of another bridge in Tongi. "We have no land and no means. We do not know where to go if we are required to move out," says Bedana.

When I checked with Giashuddin Sarker, councillor of Ward No. 57, Gazipur City Corporation, in late September last year, he reported that, "94 Bede families have already been evicted for Tongi bridge construction. They have taken shelter in their relatives' houses and a few families have gone to Savar Bede villages."

Other Sandars at Tongi are equally concerned. In fact, the Bede around the country are all concerned. They want change in their lifestyles. They want to settle on land and become agriculturists. It is a century-old desire as reflected in W.W. Hunter's writing on Bediyas around a century and half ago: "They mostly wander about in boats, and subsist by jugglery and thieving, but some of them have now settled down as agriculturists."

However, Bede life on land is not easy. Unemployment and social ills such as drug addiction thrived in Bede villages. But years back, things began to improve with the help of a police officer, Habibur Rahman, then a superintendent police of Dhaka and now 2018 a deputy inspector general of police.

The police official appeared as a great friend to the Bede. "He motivated the drug addicts and dealers in the villages to engage in productive work," says Ramjan Ahmed, an educated Bede leader from Badda and managing director of Uttaran Fashion, a small garment factory that exclusively employs Bede girls and boys. "Many girls who previously charmed snakes and sold cosmetics now operate modern sewing machines and make clothes for export."

The factory is also a training ground. "So far 105 girls and boys have been trained and about 50 of them work at the factory," states Ramjan Ahmed. "The factory keeps training girls with a financial incentive. They seek work in other factories after learning the skills of the trade. This is how many are transitioning from traditional work to modern-day work."



## **Bede tents in empty agricultural field in Faridpur.**



“The profits are spent on the welfare of the Bedes,” says Habibur Rahman, who has a comprehensive plan for the Bedes of Savar in particular. A primary school dedicated for the Bede children is months away. A cluster village on about four acres of land for the landless Bede is becoming visible on the other side of the Bongshi river, which was the life blood of the Bede not long ago.

With Habibur Rahman’s initiative, 36 young people have learned to drive. Many others have passed the test to become police officers and got other jobs. He set up four schools in Kharia in Munshiganj, and also helps when Bedes face trouble anywhere in the country.

“I also want to set up a Bede museum in Savar where people will see the Bede artefacts and learn about their history,” says Habibur Rahman with confidence.

The Bedes are clear enough on one thing: they are falling behind in the race for progress. They realise if their nomadic existence continues, they cannot send their children to schools, access public health services and attain skills to move out of extreme poverty. So, their appeal to the state is that they are permanently allocated some *khas* land or that arrangements are made so that they can purchase small plots in areas they feel comfortable to live in.

First published, *The Star Weekend*, January 25, 2019

# Bede: A Nomadic Existence

The Bedes are a Muslim nomadic community who travel around the country to earn a living and they gather in 75 locations of the country to meet their families and other community members for one to two months. A floating people, the majority of the Bedes are completely landless. Before modernization, the Bedes were highly regarded in Bangladesh society because of the service they provided to millions of people. As healthcare and medicines became more accessible and relatively cheaper, the traditional occupations of the Bedes started to decline.

The Bedes are now poverty-stricken with extremely low literacy rate. Most of them have abandoned their boats. They roam around the country and live temporarily in tents they set on private or *khas* land. It is a big challenge for the roving Bedes to settle permanently on land, a common desire.

Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) carried out a study in 14 Bede settlements with a population of 55,408 in eight districts around the country. The monograph presents findings on demographic and socio-economic conditions of the community, which is a valuable addition to the academic and public discourse on social exclusion of the Bede in Bangladesh.



ISBN: 978-984-94339-2-7

Price: Tk.100 US\$5

