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**RIVER EROSION AND THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGES OF VILLAGERS IN
PADMAPUKUR AREA**

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Abstract:

The families of Padmapukur village who have been settled after the riverbank erosion are being victim of dysentery. There has been a long change in their socio-economic situations. And these changes are happened within i.e. family, ancestral lands and households. But despite of social changes, the inhabitants of this village are living in the eroded areas. As a result, they have to lead a miserable life even, thus the socio-economic conditions of number of families are becoming worsen day-by-day. It has been found in the study that many people had in their different professions before the riverbank erosion and later became day laborer. Those families had two houses and a kitchen now they are living under a one room which is very close to the kitchen. Many of them have long been forced to change their professions and even relocate their positions. But these types of changes are still happening over there.

Key Words:

*River Erosion, Socio-Economic
Changes, Village Area.*

1. Change in the Case of Family Type, Homesteads and Arable Lands

After the riverbank erosion, the households those who came to the village of Padmapukur were the residents of the western part of the other village. These families had their own lands. They inherited the land of the estate from the fathers. The land included in their ownership up to 1-10 bighas. Thus, a significant change is noticed in the ownership of houses before and after of the riverbank erosion. Apart from riverbank erosion, many of these former ownerships have also been changed. Many families were used to live jointly and in these cases the ownership of the house was in the name of the head of the family.

Basically, the changes in the ownership pattern have not happened suddenly. A few years before the breakdown of rivers, the ownership of the houses have been changing. The arable lands are being destroyed by one after another by riverbank erosion. Crops production has been decreased. The financial condition of the family has become increasingly worst. Changes in the profession and labor transition continue to occur. As a result, joint family turns into nuclear families. Thus, when the impact of riverbank erosion began to fall, the joint family was forced to break into a single family.

Studies have shown that 80 families out of 100 families have been affected by river erosion more than once. Of these 80 families, there are no arable lands of 60 families. All of their arable lands have been swallowed by the riverbank erosion. As a result, there are no more lands for their crops production. In the research area, 15 families were found that they were live together in a joint family before the disaster, after the riverbank erosion, all of them got into a single family. Apart from this, 40 families have also been found with no houses that were also damaged by river's breakdown.

1.1 Changes in Profession

Most of the people in the research are are involved in agriculture and fishing's occupations. In the case of farmers, the main occupation of the head of the family was agricultural works. After the riverbank erosion, their profession is changed. The amount of cultivable lands of the farmers is decreased even sometimes land was destroyed by the river. In order to survive they have taken with various occupations. Someone who had a minor occupation before, it is now a major profession. However, Labor has also been shifted with the change of professions. At present, people have been involved in fishing profession though previously they used to cultivate their own lands. With the income of other family members, they used to meet other basic needs of the family.

However, studies have shown that the family heads are interested in keeping agriculture as their major occupation. There are also some reasons beyond this. Aged and family heads do not know any other work except agriculture. But the labor of other members of the family is changing. They do not want to take agriculture as a major occupation for them. They want to learn a good work and reside in Dhaka or any other cities that does not have to rely on agriculture or arable land.

The economic condition of two families was in such position that they had only a few plots of arable lands. However, foods and other expenses of families can not ever be met with these crops in a year. This family has long been involved with the vegetables business. Even after the riverbank erosion, the only source of income was the raw materials business. But their economic condition was not much worsened than before.

Before the danger, women used to work in the field. In addition to rice cultivation, crops of two seasons like Rabi and Kharip were also produced. At that time women used to work in the field with men. But after the natural calamities, there has also been a significant change in women's profession. During the disaster, women usually do the construction of new houses along with other household works while men are descended only to the supporting roles to women. After the riverbank erosion, women not only doing household chores but also playing a role as family income provider.

Among 100 respondents, the changes of profession for 50 respondents have been made significantly. And out of those 50 respondents, 4 respondents have become day labourer from businessmen. Thus, previously, whose professions were agriculture now they are involved in business. Now 18 of them are involved in agricultural works. Previously, they were involved in agriculture profession. On the other hand, the numbers of fishermen have currently been decreased. For example, 19 people who were involved in fishing occupation now they are working in the daily wages. And the main reason is that gradually the river is becoming fishless.

In the families, the profession of boys has also been changed like women. And the average ages of these boys are about 15-26 years. Before the riverbank erosion, they were associated with both academic and agricultural activities. Due to rapid changes of profession caused by riverbank erosion, the economic conditions of those families have been deteriorated. In order to meet the challenges they typically get involved in any profession.

1.2 Residences

The main objective of the survivors is to find out a new habitant after the disaster. In this case, those who have money they can easily go away somewhere but those who have lost everythings-need to take shelter for someone's houses which is deplorable. After the loss of everything in the riverbank erosion, survivors attempt to settle in the neighborhood or of approximately 5-6 miles within the area (Akhter, 1999: 16)

Because they usually hope that once they would be able to return their houses. However, whether they will be able to return or not it totally depends on the family's economic solvency, social status, family standard, network etc.

Due to riverbank erosion, the families were not only deprived of their houses, property and other related materials, but also specially separated from their respective kinships, friends and neighbours, which they could not immediately meet up. Eventually they became victims of a psychological crisis and suffering (Elahi et al., 1991).

At present, some of the families have settled in Padmapukur villages that earlier belong to Western area of the same village. Out of 100 respondents, 40 people are facing the collapses of the houses. Of these, 15 people's houses have been swallowed by this calamity. Of these, 5 families are living in their neighbours homes. And 3 other families are staying at the middle of the village buying lands. And the remaining 7 families are staying on the embankments. These seven families do not have their own lands.

1.3 Food Habits

During the disaster, a difference on food habits is seen compare to normal time. Besides, the situation remains unfavourable. But food is essential for survival. A discussion has carried out in order to find out the foods habits changes of the victims. Out of 100 respondents, all of them opined that no attention was given to eating foods during the mishap. Since no one's mind was good at the time of extreme danger. Because everyone has to run quickly to get rid of the trees, to cut down the trees and to remove all other essential items from houses to find out a safest place. But some of the families could have survived those have some stocked rice and pulses. And for those who did not have anything in the houses, they had to go through a lot of difficulties during the era of riverbank erosion. It is known that some of the families have eaten twice in a day.

Apart from this, the study area is situated far away from upazila so relief could not be reached on time. Basically, the problem is very strong in coastal areas. It has also been found that

those who did not have money in their hands had to borrow money from others to provide foods. Some of them sell livestock and run the family, provide food and other necessities.

1.4 Diseases and Health Problems

The outbreak of several diseases has been noticed based on the occupation and environment of the people of the researched areas. For example- dizziness, cholera, diarrhea, fever, typhoid, bloodbill, cough, flux, itching etc.

However, the intensity of cholera, fever and itchy are more common. The outbreak of the three diseases is found severely during the last disaster of the Padmapukur village even a woman was died.

People affected by riverbank erosion usually believe that due to the illness, there has been an impact on family as well as the other things and even in the family are stopped if the woman becomes sick. Because the whole works of household like cooking, raising and rearing children is dependent on women's shoulder. But unfortunately women can not take care of their own health due to the increases in household chores during disaster. Besides, women usually take the responsibility for taking care of children and old people in the family.

After the disruption of the river, the condition of which is fairly good, they can easily take consultations from the doctor. But for those who have no money they would not able to go doctors and take medicines. Since the power of the body is the only source to survive, they compelled to sell different things in the houses and even sometimes borrow money from neighbours for the treatment of diseases.

There are no hospitals in Padmapukur village or even any hospitals or medical centers in between two kilometers of the research area. That is why there is no provision for the treatment of people affected by this region. So the villagers have to go to nearby village for treatment. In the absence of medical treatment only two women of this village died during the last erosion of the river.

1.5 Economic Activities

Most of the families of Padmapukur's river erosion, based on livelihood, depend on agriculture and day-to-day basis. Most of the 100 respondents are involved in agriculture and day labor by professionally. However, before the river erosion, most of the people of this area had occupation of agriculture. Then people used to live on the basis of agriculture. But after the breakdown, a variation can be seen in the profession. If someone is involved in business, he also works with daily wages. There are so many residents that they spend a specific time

outside of the village only in search of work. But considering the ages, a difference is seen on works. Thus, financial variations were seen of Padmapukur village.

In the research area, it was found that a person main occupation is shopkeeper; along with that he works on the daily basis in others land.

But after the riverbank erosion, young boys and girls were seen to be involved in various activities for the purpose of suppressing money skipping their education.

1.6 Other Variabilities of Households

Riverbank erosion brings different types of changes among different classes of people in the area. Almost all classes of people lose their homes, land and so on. Various changes of livelihood of the peasants took place mainly due to the changes in labor. The most change is noticed now for the farmers. These changes express the lower standard of living.

Once agriculture was the main area of income for farmers. Families those who have not involved with agricultural sector were much more comfortable. They do not have to change their profession. But this new labour can not play a special role in improving the quality of their life. The changes that occurred due to river erosion and labor changes in the peasant family have been found in my studies.

After breaking the bank of river, it is not possible for them to recover the changes overnight. All the families had more than one house for accommodations. At present the number of house has been reduced. Previously the families who used to feed the cows in a room, now they keep thses animals under open sky. And the place is very smaller than it was before.

Previously, most of the family used to produce rice and winter crops. But now their association with agriculture has decreased. Labor has also changed. As a result, the material has changed in the making of their houses. So that many families have been used bamboo sticks in making the fences of home. Again, they do not have the ability to repair some of the houses. Many people have no capacity in building their house more than once. The fence of the house was broken. They said "we would not have had such a situation if the riverbank did not break".

Since most families used to rearing cows in convenience of their household activities, they had an impact on their families all the time. In addition to the cultivation of land, this animala were considered as a source of income. Sometimes they earn more by selling cow's milk even, some people used to keep cows to sell at a high price during Eid-ul Adha-the second highest Muslim festival. But now their land has disappeared in the river. They are not all involved in agricultural activities. As a result, they are deprived of this extra income opportunity.

1.7 Support from the Relatives

In spite of some real conditions due to social, cultural and situational reasons, homeless families expect a safe shelter as well as all kinds of support from very close relatives at the time of their disaster. When the riverbank breaks down, everyone is busy with themselves. There is no time to look after others. However, the tendency of being stayed nearby is noticed.

According to the Muslim Family Law, a married woman is inherited to her father's wealth. For various reasons, women maintain good relations with their dynasty's members so that they come forward with the possibility of moral, financial and other assistances in the time of danger (Rahman: 2009).

During the time of riverbank erosion, each family helped to their relatives by any means. Especially in supplying foods and accessories and consulted them mentally to recover the losses. Moreover, they always look after their condition. Generally, some families became shelterless in riverbank erosion and then take shelter at relative's houses. Some people have to pay some money for the cost due to stay in the house.

2. Changes in Administrative Structure and Judicial System

Another aspect of the river erosion is the administrative structure and the dynamics of the judicial system. Generally, judicial system in rural areas is carried out by the Imam of the mosque or by the prominent people of the village.

Controversy in the village of Padmapukur depends on various issues. For example, on the field of cultivation, the animals' livestock (poultry, chicken, goat, sheep, and cow) wasted crops. There are more conflicts between land and family is observed. However, after the breakdown, there is a lot of conflict and disputes are seen determining the direction of lands.

It is found in Padmapukur village that if there is a dispute over any minor issue is occurred in the village, then the issue may up to reach the chairman of the union. And if there is an earlier antagonism with someone, and if he is involved in politics, then the conflict increases and becomes fatal. Thus, changes in the administrative structure are being seen in the rural areas.

2.1 Occupying Chars

As per the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) report of 1997, the soil of chars formed in the river basin region is more fertile. Information from Bangla Peadia can be seen that the chars of Bangladesh are divided into five sub-areas (Alam, 2004: 101-121). Such as:

- ✓ Ganges River

- ✓ Jamuna River
- ✓ Padma River
- ✓ Upper Meghna
- ✓ Chars of lower Meghna (Akhter: 57-76).

Apart from these chars, there are other chars such as the old Brahmaputra and the Teesta River Chars. But these chars are made up of very little land compared to the main river chars. According to the 1993 statistics, the total amount of land in Bangladesh was 1722 sq km (Ahmed: 10-42).

Many chars in most of the rivers of Bangladesh are made. But their natural environment is very sensitive. If it exists this year it may not in the next year. Besides, there is a scope of inundated as well. Due to monsoon floods, these chars become fertile. This fertility usually lends itself to unsuspecting refugee populations to stay there.

Who belong to the wake up zones (chars)? This is a complex question. In fact, this land do not belong to anybody, anyone can use these areas, those who can not be owner, works for others. Under the law, the owner of this land will be government, but who will go to the explanation? According to the Ordinance of the State, 1972, 'Khas land' usually rising in the river, belongs to the government. And the rules of the settlement of this land go to the landless. But the policy never works, and is not allowed to do. Because the land awakened in the river is not registered, there is no record in the papers, so why would the question of partition be raised? And if the government survey team goes out, the 'attention' is given in the first part. The survey team does not go to the field physically, and thus the land becomes divided at their willingness (Daily Khulna News).

In the research areas, 15 families found that there is no habitation after the riverbank erosion, but most of them hope to get their land back in the chars. Although the victim of the riverbank erosion, wapda (embankment) is now awakened, but the sufferers does not posses to take the lands. Because after the breakdown, people do usually busy doing their jobs. However, their hope is that if the local government takes initiative to get them back the lands, then they will get it. But they have no plans to take the chars (Halder: 69-82).

2.2 Immigration

Families often choose the city or adjacent areas as place of habitation first. Because the affected families, due to the breakdown of the river, usually go to the town for lack of work in the village. But in Padmapukur village it has been found that for a short time people have

been permanently staying in town. For example, they are in the city for six months of the year. Six months later, they come to the village. But they are employed in different occupations. Analyzing the theoretical aspects of migration, it can be seen that immigration has two forms.

A) Immigration to seek shelter

B) Immigration to seek livelihood (Halder & Bulbul, 2000: 45).

In the study area, 15 families in Padmapukur village have been shifted from breakaway areas to other places in the village, but they have initially stayed in the village in search of livelihood. However, there are two more types of migration cases.

A) Immigration keeping family distance

B) Immigration with family (Halder & Bulbul, 2000: 47).

Head of the family usually migrated to the town in search of employment, has left the family. They are mainly located in Khulna city and other cities of the country. However, the people of this area have the highest number of jobs for their families in Dhaka and its surrounding cities. Here they adapt themselves to any minimum work.

However, people of all classes do not participate in this migration. Most of the people are from the middle class. These people are mostly affected by river erosion. Besides, they do not find any type of work during the breakdown. After a certain time they returned to their own area.

Some affairs are seen when migration is done elsewhere with the family. In this case, due to both shelter and livelihood, people affected by riverbank erosion generally to migrate. Migration within family is seen among all the people. Here people from all classes of high, middle-class and low paid move here and there. Although low paid people leave the area demanding their shelter and livelihood. On the other hand, main aim of the upper and middle class is to teach their future generation, so they migrate.

However, it is seen in many affected areas that those who have political intimacy with the local government will get benefits during breakdown, they do not go anywhere despite the difficulties.

However, one thing has been observed in the study area, whether the family will decide wherever to migrate or not it will depend on the decision of family head.

In the study area, one family has found that most of the family members were involved in the trade of fishing, but now their homes are broken into the river as the family moved to the city in search of work.

3. Case Studies

3.1 Case Study: 1

“Where will I go from the Father's land”

Abul Sana-55. He was a farmer in profession. The number of his family members is six. His used to live with wife, three girls and one son. Abul was the only son of his father. At once time Abul's house was filled with cows, ponds filled with fish. After all, Abul was happy with his family. But his happiness did not last long. Suddenly his wife had a plague disease. Day by day his wife started to dry. Before Abul's father Karim died, he left 10 bighas of land for Abul. Due to Abul's wife being ill, Abul could not save her wife by paying less than 5 bighas of land.

All of a sudden, sorrow came down to his family. On the rest of the land, he again started to produce crops, but result was not satisfactory live previous years.

But suddenly, his happiness was triggered by riverbank erosion. In the last erosion of Kodabak river, two-thirds of the land of his house was destroyed. During the river erosion, Abul had to pass through a very difficult time. It was very unfortunate that a little girl and boy had to overcome their hardships. At the time of breakdown, Abul lost all of his belongings.

After the disruption of the river, initially, they moved to nearby village Choramukha, a nearby villiage, but returned a few days later. Now Abul is working with the wages of daily basis. During the river erosion, various government and non-governmental organizations were financially supportive, which were far less than the requirements.

Abul's biggest relief is that he can still pick up the house in his own place. Most victims were not able to do that. With the help of the Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF), victims were financially assisted for several times. They also offered rice, pulses, oil and some other daily necessities.

3.2 Case Study: 2

“Conduct family with own income”

Monowara Khatun-35. Father Mofiz Fakir. Monoara studied till the 5th grade. Monowar was married to Kalam Gazi, the eldest son of Hakmat Gazi, of the neighboring village. After 5 years of marriage, Monawar lost her husband. Then Monowar's life came down under the sad shadow. Meanwhile, Monwar's two daughters borne. Later, she separated from her father-in-law family. Even from the rights of her husband's property. Later, Monoara went to Padma Pukur with her two daughters to her former village. She gets some part of his father's land and

settles there. They were sent to school. Then Manojara started to do business. But the river erosion embraced her happiness.

Monwara received a plot of land from her father was also destroyed by riverbank erosion. In the last few years, due to breakdown of the river, almost all parts of his areas have been disappeared in the river. There is only one room to roam and stay-eating work together. Suddenly her older daughter got married to the son of her sister. But their family is not well. They are also victims of riverbank erosion. Then Monowara works as a laborer. Then begins with her life with little girl.

During the river erosion, many NGOs helped and cooperated with money and emergency reliefs, but it was inadequate compared to the requirements. Monoara Khatun used to rearing chicken and cow for profits. But now it is not possible due to lack of space. The present house is also very dangerous. As a result, now there was a house and a kitchen before the trouble was reduced.

During the breaking of the river, he could not pay much attention to eating and drinking. Moreover, the state of mind was not as good at all. Although there was always rice and pulses in the house. During the era of disaster, Red Cross helped them in returning cards.

The card holders who got the help were in that position. 8 kg rice, 5 kg pulses and 3 kg soybean oil. But she did not get help from NGOs. She hoped that she would get back to the land when the char would awaken. Though she does not have the same situation as before, she thinks that she has some respect because she still has room in her own place.

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