

Full Length Research Paper

Labour voices in the tea plantations: An analysis of trade union practices in Bangladesh's tea industry

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The tea industry in Bangladesh has long been marked by harsh labor conditions, with workers struggling under low wages, poor housing, and limited access to social security. Trade unions have intervened to advocate for workers' rights, but their impact is often debated. This study examines the role of these unions in representing tea plantation workers, focusing on their organization, strategies, and challenges. Through fieldwork, interviews with union leaders and workers, and analysis of labor policies, the research investigates how unions collaborate with plantation owners and the government to push for improved conditions. It also highlights the obstacles unions face, including internal conflicts, lack of unity, and external pressures that undermine their negotiating power. The study considers the broader context, exploring how laws, politics, and employer resistance influence union efforts. Although unions have made some progress, the research reveals that deep-rooted issues limit their ability to effect meaningful change. It advocates for stronger labor laws, increased worker involvement in unions, and greater unity among labor groups. By amplifying the voices of tea workers, this research contributes to the ongoing discussion about labor rights and social justice in Bangladesh's tea industry, emphasizing the need for substantial reform.

Key words: Tea workers, trade unions, labour rights, collective bargaining, Bangladesh tea industry, labour justice.

INTRODUCTION

The tea industry is one of Bangladesh's oldest export-oriented industries, dating back over 170 years, and is a significant contributor to the country's economy. A trade union is an organized collective of employees who unite to protect and improve their working conditions. Establishing a trade union to safeguard workers' rights is considered an obligatory requirement in several respects.

Legally, many national labor laws and international conventions, such as those of the International Labour Organization (ILO), recognize the right to form unions as

a fundamental worker's right. This obligation ensures fair representation, collective bargaining, and protection against exploitation. Ethically, it is also seen as a necessary measure to promote social justice and uphold the dignity of labor. Therefore, forming trade unions is essential both as a legal right and a moral imperative.

The studied tea gardens have a trade union; however, there are claims that the union lacks functionality and fails to fulfill any role in promoting the well-being of workers. Several respondents observed that the trade

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union, although existing in name, lacked visible actions. The majority of respondents did not possess membership, and it was found that few workers declared their affiliation with the trade union.

One participant noted a lack of visibility regarding trade union activity within the organization. The garden authority maintains a connection with union leaders and pursues its interests by utilizing the union. Some leaders within the organization are known to accept bribes from higher authorities to quell the labor movement within the garden.

While the majority of participants expressed dissatisfaction with the trade union's actions, a minority shared accounts of the union's achievements. Nonetheless, there is a desire for greater visibility of union operations to safeguard the well-being of tea garden employees.

Trade unions and trade unionism: Conceptual considerations

The concept of trade unions and trade unionism is a fundamental aspect of labor relations and industrial relations. Trade unions are organizations formed by workers in order to collectively represent their interests and negotiate with employers on matters such as wages, working conditions, and employment terms. Trade unions possess a lengthy and substantial historical background, originating from the initial stages of the Industrial Revolution. The formation of the initial trade unions took place in England during the early 19th century, thereafter proliferating to various regions across the globe. Trade unions have played a crucial role in lobbying for the rights of workers, encompassing equitable remuneration, secure working environments, and the ability to partake in collective bargaining. During the 20th century, prominent national actors arose. The major function of collective bargainers mostly centered on the national level, encompassing certain industries or many sectors. Moreover, in their capacity as "social partners," their primary aim was to exercise considerable influence over the macroeconomic and social policies implemented by national governments (Hyman, 2007). Trade unions have the primary objective of enhancing the overall well-being and working environment of employees, establishing equitable employment circumstances, and safeguarding the stability of employment (Gupta, 2013).

It can be accurately stated that during the 19th and 20th centuries, trade unions aimed to enhance the overall social, economic, and political conditions of the working class by establishing class-based political parties and advocating for legal and social reforms. Nevertheless, at their core, trade unions have consistently focused on representing the interests of their employed members primarily within the workplace (Stephenson and Wray, 2009).

A trade union, alternatively referred to as a labor union, operates as an organized body of workers who are united in their pursuit of shared goals pertaining to working conditions and collective interests. By means of collective action, the leadership of the union engages in discussions with employers or management in order to develop labor contracts and address a range of concerns. The aforementioned practice, commonly referred to as collective bargaining, involves negotiations pertaining to remuneration, labor regulations, mechanisms for addressing complaints, and the maintenance of a safe working environment. Throughout the annals of history, the presence of union representation and the practice of collective bargaining have been of utmost significance in fostering a sense of stability within the labour force of advanced economies. Their contributions have led to a more equitable distribution of wealth, which has subsequently resulted in enhanced working conditions and heightened job security for employees.

The relevance of workers' rights, encompassing the ability to organize, engage in collective bargaining, and influence employment conditions, has grown alongside the political, social, and educational advancements of civilizations. In response, the formation of workers' unions has occurred to safeguard and promote the welfare of employees. Unionization has been shown to have a pivotal role in improving the overall quality of life for workers through its support for minimum wage policies, controls on working hours, measures for health and safety, and broader enhancements in working conditions (Rao, 2014). According to Nissen and Jarley (2005), trade unions might potentially strengthen the normative and instrumental value of trade unionism by matching their activities and roles with the control and extension of naturally existing social networks that connect members within workplaces.

The trade union movement is experiencing a global decline, despite the implementation of strategic initiatives. In order to effectively combat issues such as wage stagnation, low salaries, income inequality, and insufficient economic demand, unions must establish themselves as entities capable of questioning the prevailing neoliberal narrative (Kelly, 2015: 526). A trade union is an organized association of workers formed to collectively strengthen their negotiating leverage in interactions with employers. According to Shrestha (2012), Dale Yoder's conceptualization of a trade union emphasizes its enduring nature as an established and sustained organization of workers, with the clear objective of advancing and protecting the welfare of its members within their employment arrangements. According to King (2015), a trade union can be accurately described as a persistent organization comprised of workers who come together to safeguard or enhance their working circumstances.

Trade unions provide vital duties and assume pivotal positions in campaigning for the rights and welfare of

their members inside the workplace. The aforementioned functions can be succinctly summarized in the following manner:

- (1) Negotiating for improved wages and better working conditions on behalf of their members.
- (2) Offering insights and recommendations to management concerning personnel policies and practices.
- (3) Aiding workers in gaining a significant say and influence in the industry they are part of.
- (4) Safeguarding members from employer discrimination and unjust treatment.
- (5) Assisting workers in various issues that align with their best interests.

A trade union refers to a collective entity comprising workers, which seeks to protect and promote their mutual interests by engaging in the practice of collective bargaining. The definition, as articulated in the paper, is based on the theoretical framework of "class struggle" between capitalist bosses and their employees. The labor union functions as a mechanism through which workers can exercise their rights and engage in negotiations with employers, so exemplifying the continuous endeavour to maintain equilibrium in power dynamics within the labour market.

The trade union movement worldwide has been significantly influenced by Marx's theory about trade unions. The concepts he has put forward have been employed to rationalize a range of approaches and methods, encompassing nonviolent diplomacy as well as aggressive measures. In contemporary times, trade unions persist in assuming a significant function within the realm of labor in numerous nations. Karl Marx was supportive of trade unionism and saw it as a central driving force in the International Working Labour Association. Karl Marx's trade unionism focused on the Marxist theory of wages, trade unions and Labor's claim to power, and the party relationship (Moses, 1990).

Karl Marx viewed the relationship between the working class and the capitalist class as a deep and irreconcilable conflict rooted in the unequal distribution of wealth and power. For Marx, trade unions were not merely tools for economic bargaining—they were essential instruments of collective resistance against capitalist exploitation. He argued that through unions, workers could secure immediate gains like better wages and working conditions, while also laying the groundwork for broader social transformation. Trade unions, in his view, held the potential to challenge the very foundations of capitalism and drive revolutionary change. Rejecting reformist compromises, Marx underscored the inherent contradiction between the long-term interests of capital and labor. Over time, trade unionism has evolved beyond its economic roots to become a dynamic force addressing a wide range of social, cultural, and political issues (King, 2015: 201).

Modern trade unions operate through two distinct

avenues: engagement with the state and politics, and involvement in the labor market and collective bargaining. The significance of their economic and political endeavors varies across countries and global regions, as well as over time and among different types of unions (Streeck and Hassel, 2003). However, modern trade union activity has deviated from its traditional objectives due to changes in labour laws and a shift in union consciousness (Burns, 2012).

METHODOLOGY

The research is conducted across five tea gardens in the Sylhet division, including three in Sylhet Sadar and two in Moulvibazar, covering a mix of urban and rural locations. The study applies trade union models and theories to examine the dynamics of trade unionism among tea garden workers, employing a qualitative descriptive analysis approach.

Primary data are collected through interviews, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and observations, while secondary data are drawn from relevant studies, books, and publications.

The study population comprises male and female laborers, garden management, human rights activists, law specialists, and trade union leaders, with 50 respondents selected via convenience sampling.

Data analysis is performed using narrative analysis techniques, providing a descriptive interpretation of the findings to address the research objectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Trade union practices in the tea industry of Bangladesh

The recognition of freedom of association as a fundamental human right is a significant aspect of International Law. This right is upheld by the majority of civilized nations, including the People's Republic of Bangladesh, as enshrined in its Constitution, which serves as the highest legal authority in the country. The establishment of trade unions serves as a viable mechanism for the practice of the freedom of association, with the primary objective of safeguarding the rights of workers.

Constitutional framework of trade unionism in Bangladesh

The preamble of the Constitution of Bangladesh in 1972 establishes that the primary objective of the State is to achieve a socialist society, devoid of exploitation, through the democratic process. This society is envisioned to uphold the principles of the rule of law, fundamental human rights and freedoms, equality, and justice in both political and socio-economic spheres, ensuring their attainment for all citizens. The Constitution explicitly guarantees a fundamental right that prohibits all forms of

Table 1. Key features of Bangladesh Labour Act 2006.

Key provisions		Limitations
Working conditions and labour benefits	Provision for appointment letter and identity card	Absence of rationing facilities
	Right to minimum wage	No maternity benefits for the workers who have already two children
	Maternity leave for 16 weeks with full payment	Overtime work up to 10 pm
	One-day weekly holiday and one day annual leave for every eighteen days of work	No provision for accommodation and transport facilities
	8 h for each working day, 48 h a week, in exceptional case 60 h	Provisions for punishment of employers in case of violating labour rights are very weak (e.g. 3 months imprisonment or with fine of one thousand takas (US\$ 15)
	Payment date is within seven days after the end of the last day of the wage period	No job protection and social security benefits
Fundamental labour rights	Right to form association and collective bargaining	Minimum membership requirement of 30% of the total permanent workers for approval of unions
	No discrimination at work in terms of wage and employment conditions	Restriction on temporary workers for joining in union
	Minimum age of employment is 18 years	Provision of joining in only one the trade union for each worker
	Freedom from forced and compulsory labour	Only one union in each factory

Source: Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006 (Act No. 42 of 2006).

coerced labor, and any violation of this article is subject to legal punishment. Additionally, it ensures the fundamental right of freedom of association. The primary legislative framework governing trade unionism in Bangladesh is the Bangladesh Labour Act of 2006. The jurisdiction of the Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006 encompasses the entirety of the nation of Bangladesh (Table 1).

Trade unions can be established in Bangladesh by either employees or employers by registration under Chapter XIII of the Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006. The Act permits the establishment and registration of a Federation of Labour Unions. The federation has the authority to establish affiliations with any international organization and confederation of worker's or employer's organizations. A worker's trade union is established to govern the interactions between workers and employers, as well as between workers themselves. Conversely, an employer's trade union is established to regulate the

interactions between employers and workers, as well as between employers themselves (Figure 1).

The assertion posits that the further implementation of trade unionization will yield numerous advantages for the labour force. Unions play a crucial role in providing workers with a means to effectively address concerns related to hazardous working conditions, inadequately remunerated pay, and exploitation perpetrated by unscrupulous employers. The efficacy of the social compliance mechanism was found to be limited due to its reliance on external actors. In contrast, the trade union mechanism has been identified as a more effective approach, as it operates inside within the organization. This internal mechanism empowers workers by equipping them with effective means to advocate for and secure their own advantages. Therefore, labor unions have the potential to serve as a counterbalancing entity in response to employer exploitation.

Nevertheless, there is a counterargument

suggesting that unions may have limited effectiveness in enhancing productivity and fostering economic growth. Critics argue that while unions can protect workers' rights and improve wages, they may also introduce rigidities into the labor market, restrict managerial flexibility, and reduce incentives for innovation. For instance, Hirsch (2004) highlights that unionized firms often face higher labor costs and operational constraints, which can negatively affect productivity and profitability. Similarly, the World Bank (2013) notes that in some contexts, strong union presence can hinder job creation and adaptability, especially in rapidly changing economic environments. Furthermore, Nickell (1996) finds that excessive union influence in less competitive markets may dampen corporate performance and economic dynamism.

Numerous economists hold the belief that influential labor unions played a pivotal role in undermining the profitability and economic sustainability of said sectors within the United

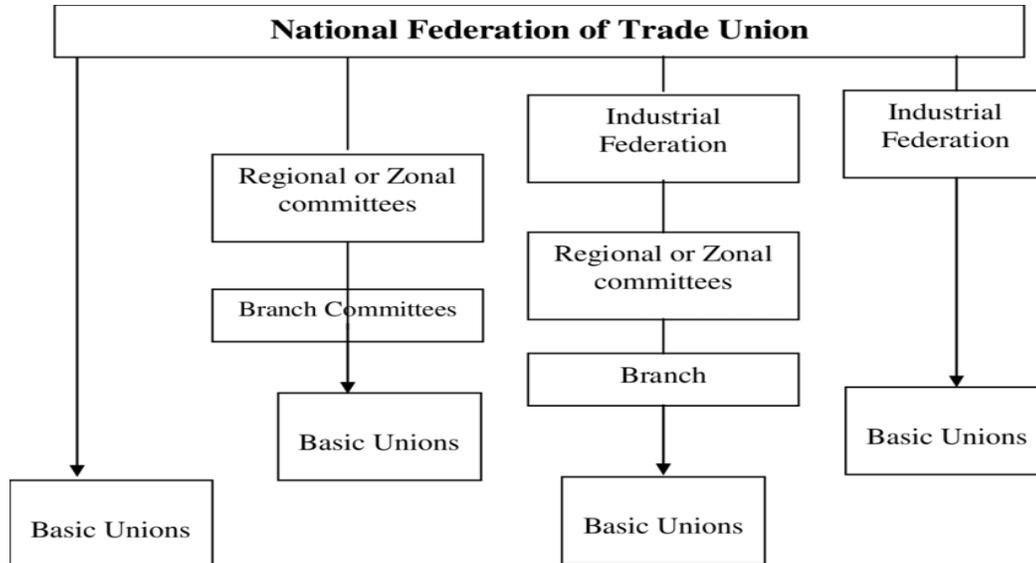


Figure 1. Structures of Trade Unions in Bangladesh.
Source: Ahammad (2017).

States. Consequently, this led to a decrease in investment, growth, and ultimately resulted in the relocation of these businesses to alternative nations. Under the guise of trade unions, union officials are effectively operating a parallel administration, exerting control over staff appointments, promotions, and transfers. South Asia has a rich historical legacy of interconnections between political parties and labor unions. The involvement of unions in political activities within the workplace can negatively impact investment and economic growth by creating uncertainty and operational disruptions. Such activism may lead to strikes or protests, reducing productivity and increasing labor costs. This environment can deter both domestic and foreign investors who seek stability and predictability. Additionally, politically active unions may push for rigid labor regulations, limiting business flexibility and further discouraging investment (Botero et al., 2004).

The Bangladesh Tea Employees' Union is experiencing a decline in its influence over tea plantation workers due to the ineffectiveness of its leaders in advocating for workers' rights during the recent wage raise movement. The union's compromising stance in negotiations with the government and estate owners has resulted in a loss of trust among the general workforce. Despite agreeing to establish a fixed daily salary, workers persisted in their demonstrations, refusing to accept the outcome. The emergence of new labor organizations has raised concerns that estate proprietors may exploit vulnerable workers by dividing them. According to Narayan, an employee at the Malnicherra Tea Estate in Sylhet, "The efficacy of their leaders has diminished since they lack the fortitude to advocate for labor rights."

In August 2022, approximately 150,000 tea plantation

workers across over 200 estates in Bangladesh initiated an indefinite strike, demanding a daily wage increase from 120 Taka to 300 Taka. The strike followed daily two-hour work stoppages starting on August 9, 2022, after the workers' ultimatum for a wage hike was unmet. The Bangladesh Tea Workers' Union played a central role in organizing these protests. Although the union's efforts were significant, plantation owners offered only a 14-taka increase, citing declining profits and rising production costs. The strike concluded after 19 days when an agreement was reached to raise the daily wage to 170 Taka.

During the same period, tea plantation workers in India also mobilized for higher wages and better working conditions. In Assam, workers demanded an increase in their daily wages from 167 rupees to 350 rupees, leading to protests and strikes. Similarly, in West Bengal, tea workers called for higher wages and bonuses. These movements were driven by rising living costs and longstanding issues of low pay in the tea industry. While both Bangladeshi and Indian tea workers faced similar economic challenges, there is no direct evidence linking their mobilizations to global tea market prices. Instead, domestic factors such as inflation, cost of living increases, and local economic conditions appear to have been the primary triggers for these labor actions.

The incident involving Pankaj Kand, the Ex-Vice-president of the Bangladesh Tea Workers' Union, and Nripen Pal, the Ex-General Secretary, visiting the Kalighat Tea Garden in Moulvibazar, highlights the growing distrust among tea workers towards their union leaders. On August 22, 2022, the two leaders attempted to persuade workers to return to work after a wage dispute, but Pankaj Kand was physically abused by

protesting workers. This incident showcases the depth of frustration among workers regarding the union's handling of wage negotiations. The workers were demanding a daily wage increase from 120 Taka to 300 Taka, but the union's agreement to a daily wage of 170 Taka was met with resistance. Ovan Tanti, President of the Panchayat Committee of Kalighat Tea Garden, criticized the union for not consulting workers before making decisions, particularly regarding the daily compensation rate. The union's decision to establish a daily compensation rate without seeking worker input or involvement has contributed to the growing distrust. The Srihatta District Tea Workers' Union, as a trade union organization, was established on June 3, 1948. On April 30, 1970, its first executive committee was established. The union was governed by labor laws and operated to create workers' rights under its own constitution from June 1948 until May 2006.

In order to lessen the influence of their political rivals from the independent and traditional trade unions, local officials of the then-ruling parties intervened directly in the organization in 2006, according to labor leaders. They said that over the years, the concerned owners and ministries compelled the employees to choose their union leaders through absurd elections at various points, which caused the union members to become divided. President of the Bangladesh Jatiya Sramik Federation Shamim Ara said when asked about the division in the leadership of the tea workers.

The tea workers' grievances escalated progressively due to the perceived subservient behavior of their leaders towards the tea plantation owners and management. In the event that novel labor organizations come into being, it is likely that their conflicts will intensify, perhaps leading to increased exploitation by tea plantation owners in subsequent periods.

Political engagement in the mainstream

Equal rights for all citizens were guaranteed by the People's Republic of Bangladesh's constitution, regardless of their ethnicity, race, language, religion, or geographic region. Tea garden employees in Bangladesh often face systemic discrimination that extends beyond economic exploitation to include social and political marginalization. One significant form of this discrimination is their limited participation in political processes, which is largely due to their historical exclusion, low literacy rates, and geographic isolation. These communities are often viewed as politically insignificant, leading to their underrepresentation in local governance and policy-making forums. This marginalization is further exacerbated by their ethnic and caste identities, which place them outside the dominant socio-political networks. As such, they remain largely voiceless in decisions that directly impact their lives and livelihoods. Scholars like Uddin (2020) argue that this exclusion from political

participation is a continuation of colonial-era labor hierarchies, which have been perpetuated in postcolonial governance structures. The majority of tea garden workers in Bangladesh are not affiliated with any political parties.

The labour situation within the tea industry

The exploitation of tea workers by plantation owners has persisted for an extended duration. However, the matter gained widespread attention until recently when these employees initiated a large-scale protest, advocating for a wage of 300 BDT (USD 3.15) every workday. Previously, their wage was at a mere 120 BDT (USD 1.25). The tea garden employees' quality of life has been significantly deteriorating due to the combination of an exceedingly low daily salary, escalating inflation, and increased prices. Moreover, these individuals reside in some of the most geographically isolated regions inside the nation, where access to adequate medical and educational resources is severely limited. During the early stages of plantation development, laborers were sourced from famine-stricken disadvantaged tribal populations, enticing them with the prospect of improved living conditions. However, the underlying objective was to establish a captive workforce characterized by low remuneration. Over the course of the past 170 years, tea garden workers have diligently labored for five successive generations. Presently, the circumstances surrounding these workers necessitate the attention and support of the governing body.

Despite the claims made by tea garden owners regarding the provision of USD 4 per day, which includes benefits such as a medical fund and retirement benefits, the actual reality is that tea workers are only receiving a meager ration of 3 kg of flour per week. This inadequate provision leaves them in a state of constant hunger. Furthermore, alarming statistics reveal that 46% of adolescents in these tea gardens are subjected to child marriage, while 15% of females suffer from cervical cancer. The workers' protest culminated in the intervention of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, resulting in the finalization of the daily wage at 170 BDT. However, it remains uncertain whether this amount adequately caters to the needs of these workers, who have been characterized as "modern-day slaves" by journalist and Society of Environment and Human Development (SEHD) Director Philip Gain. Specifically, concerns arise regarding their access to essential healthcare services and their ability to maintain a sustainable lifestyle.

Underlying difficulties facing the tea sector in Bangladesh

Bangladesh's tea sector is now dealing with several difficulties. Earlier, it was mentioned that the volume of

exports is steadily declining. In addition to this, there are many other problems to solve.

Old-fashioned irrigation system

The irrigation infrastructure in the tea sector is incredibly outdated, which significantly reduces the production. Bangladesh's productivity per hectare is significantly lower than the global average, at only 1245 kg, while that of Kenya and Sri Lanka is 2321 and 1763 kg, respectively.

Dependence on a single labour source

Only the tribal casts, who have been employed in the tea industry for many years, make up the labour force in the nation. However because both the local and worldwide demand are rising, there will soon be a severe labour shortage if the source of labor is not diversified. Even the current labour force has societal problems like child marriage, receives a very meagre daily income, and has very limited access to medical and educational resources. Their subpar lifestyle demotivates them to work and, to some extent, lowers their productivity.

Climate change

Global warming has emerged as a significant issue due to its implications for sustaining optimal weather conditions. In recent times, the consequences of global warming have manifested in several forms, including heavy rainfall, thunderstorms, heightened air humidity, and conversely, prolonged periods of drought. Both of these scenarios lead to decreased tea yields.

Lack of customer interest for premium quality tea

As tea consumption habits continue to gain popularity among local customers, there appears to be a lack of enthusiasm for high-quality tea varieties, primarily attributed to their relatively higher price points. However, the premium quality tea industry exhibits significant variations when examined within an international framework. In regions such as Europe and America, there is a significant and potential demand for these high-quality teas. In addition to this, the tea business in Bangladesh exhibits numerous opportunities for expansion and possibilities for innovation.

The potential for growth and innovation

Despite encountering various hurdles, the tea sector

presents remarkable prospects for future expansion. The market for both traditional and high-quality tea, at both local and worldwide levels, is currently experiencing an upward trend. Consequently, if the country successfully increases its tea production capacity, it is likely to yield a substantial return on investment. This is mostly due to the existing disparity between the demands, which exceeds the available supply.

The government's policy towards the tea sector has consistently been supportive since its inception. Tea production has been successfully launched in the low-lying areas in the northern section of the country, specifically in Panchagarh and Thakurgaon, with the aid of this initiative. If unutilized and idle arable land that is unsuitable for other agricultural purposes can be repurposed for tea cultivation, it has the potential to significantly contribute to satisfying the growing demand for tea in both domestic and international markets. It is anticipated that the government will play a role in promoting the development of novel tea varieties, as well as improving the processes of production, marketing, and auctioning. The conversion of flat terrains into cultivable places for tea cultivation has exhibited considerable promise, as evidenced by the fact that 12% of the present overall tea production is derived from these regions.

Given the rapid increase in demand, it is imperative to utilize level terrains for the cultivation of tea. A current and pioneering strategy within this sector involves the promotion of tea as a skincare and beauty commodity. The utilization of tea leaf by-products in the production of skincare products has the potential to establish a novel business that not only satisfies domestic demand for beauty products but also facilitates international exportation. This is due to the globally recognized medicinal and health properties associated with tea.

The primary objective at present should be to explore strategies for maximizing domestic output in order to facilitate the exportation of tea products while adequately meeting local demand. In order to address unpredictable or adverse weather circumstances that may pose obstacles, modern and artificial irrigation systems are needed and lack viable alternatives. It is recommended to replace the ancient tea bushes, which exhibit declining production capacity, with young trees, as tea plants often experience a decline in their peak productivity rate over a specific duration. Furthermore, it is imperative to prioritize the utilization of natural fertilizers in plantation gardens. Other countries that produce tea are currently experiencing a significant competitive edge as a result of their low production costs and high levels of productivity.

In the context of Bangladesh, it is imperative to consider providing the current labor force with increased daily pay in order to improve their standard of living. Additionally, it is crucial to have sufficient training. The current availability of land is inadequate to simultaneously augment export quantities and meet local consumption demands. Consequently, it is imperative for authorities to

support and promote the exploitation and extension of such land. The optimization of the supply chain, reduction of impurities, and amplification of marketing initiatives for newly released tea variations may serve as effective strategies to enhance the productivity of the domestic tea business.

Conclusion

The labor conditions on Bangladesh's tea plantations stand as a stark testament to the enduring inequalities within the industry. Tea workers, many descendants of generations of laborers, endure daily struggles for fair wages, dignified living conditions, and fundamental human rights. Despite their relentless, backbreaking labor, they remain ensnared in a cycle of poverty and marginalization. Trade unions have emerged as vital champions in this battle, offering a voice to the voiceless and pushing for improved working conditions. Yet, their efforts are frequently thwarted by internal divisions, resistance from employers, and labor laws that seem more intent on quelling progress than fostering empowerment.

This study provides an in-depth exploration of union practices, revealing both the triumphs and the ongoing struggles of these movements. While unions have achieved some hard-earned victories, such as modest improvements in wages and benefits, these gains are often overshadowed by the scale of the deeper, systemic injustices at play. Real, transformative change demands more than these incremental steps—it requires stronger legal protections, enhanced solidarity among workers, and a profound shift toward more inclusive, democratic representation.

With the change in government, there is a discernible shift in policy focus toward the tea plantation sector. The new administration has placed a higher emphasis on labor rights, improved working conditions, and better wages for workers. Additionally, there is a push to modernize the industry through technological innovations and sustainable practices. However, the road to meaningful change remains fraught with challenges. While the government's approach appears to strike a balance between immediate relief and long-term reforms, the true impact of these measures will ultimately depend on their effective implementation. The question remains: will these changes be enough to break the cycle of exploitation, or will the workers continue to bear the brunt of an industry entrenched in inequity? Only time will tell.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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