

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE OF THE WORKERS

A very less number of people of Farakka block have got chance to be employed to this power project. Their social life with the other employees to be discussed in this chapter. The impact of FSTPP to those local people who did not get chance to employ here will be discussed in the next chapter.

Before construction of the Farakka Barrage and Farakka Super Thermal Power Project, the people of Farakka Block were generally poor and mostly illiterate. At the time of construction of the barrage, a section of the people could earn cash through wage labour. After completion of construction of this barrage, that source of earning dried out.

Although at present a few earn something through deployment by this power station, they will be jobless no sooner the construction of this power station is completed. Therefore, what lasting socio-economic impact the barrage and power station will have on the life of the local people needs to be closely watched.

Social Life of the Local Employees

Since Farakka is located at the border of Malda and Murshidabad districts of West Bengal, for the purpose of this dissertation the people of these districts have been referred to

as the local people. The total number of employees of Malda and Murshidabad Districts is only 559 (Malda 289, Murshidabad-270). This is out of a total of 1630 employees. Among the local employees very few are from Farakka Block who are actually land oustees. It is difficult to find out any significant number of employees of FSTPP from Farakka Block except the land oustees. Since the local people do not have adequate technical qualification, they are not well prepared to earn a job in the power station. It is to be mentioned here that the literacy rate of the people of Farakka Block is only 20.75 percent (according to the 1981 Census).

To discuss the social life of the local employees we would like to divide them in two categories viz. Employees staying at the quarters of FSTPP and Employees staying at their own village. We will discuss these separately one after another.

(A) Local Employees Staying at the Quarters of FSTPP

It has been discussed earlier that we have considered those employees as local employees whose residence is in Malda or Murshidabad district. Therefore the employees of these two districts who are staying at the quarters either they have residence to unavoidable distance from the project or they were not interested to stay in their natal villages. Few exception were also there who managed quarters by their personal or

political influence. Most of these employees were staying at quarters with their own family.

It has been observed that some of these employees were interested to stay in isolation from their kith and kins. These employees were passing their non-duty hours with their family members or by doing domestic works. The employees who compelled to leave their native place due to their service are interested to visit their home when they get time. They maintain the relation with their colleague and the neighbours just as courtesy. Instead of this they are more interested to continue the relation with those people who are staying to their native place. Incidentally most of these employees are of workman category. These employees were observed as almost isolated in the plant also. They have less number of friends. It was also observed that they were less interested to the union activities. Generally their wives did not have higher education as they did not have also. They are more interested to pass their time with T.V., radio and chief literature. Generally they have found to maintain the relation with the same type of association.

On the other hand these are another type of employees who were interested to make relation with a number of employees. They have a number of friends, in the plant as well as in their residential areas where they passing their time with the colleague. They were more interested to the union activities. Most of them

have higher education (graduation and post graduation). Incidentally many of them have the cases of love marriages. They are also interested to visit their native place but they have less interested than the former one. Interestingly it was observed that many of them were first generation educated and service holders.

These category of employees were found to be more interested in organising and participating in different social and cultural activities within the plant and in the residential areas. It was observed that their family members are also participating in these activities.

#### (B) Local Employees staying at their own Villages

Employees of these category were found to come to the plant by bus or by cycle. Just after completing the duty hours they were found to busy to go to their home. In most cases they were interested to choose friends with those employees who were also of the same place. Most of these employees had separate association in their native place too. These employees were passing their leisure time and holidays by doing domestic works, by watching movie and Television and listening chief radio programme. Many of these employees were living to their home in joint family. Due to this, in most of the cases, they were in a position to follow their traditional cultural life. A very few of these employees were participating in the union activities

and other social and cultural functions of the plant. It is to be mentioned here that many of these employees had cultivable land at their native place (those who belong to rural area). They looked after the land and cultivation during their leisure time. They also utilised the holidays and leaves for their agricultural needs. It was noted that most of these employees were supporting cultivators.

#### Social Life of the Employees of other places

Most of the employees of this power plant were from outsidies of Farakka Block. Among them the majority, as already stated, were Bengali-speaking people. These employees stayed at the quarters of FSTPP. The informal relations of these employees have already been discussed earlier.

It was observed that though there was a lack of cordial relation among the employees, they at least maintained the formal relation with each other. Sometimes they were visiting the neighbour house but giving priority to visit the house of close friends.

There were some employees who were really interested to do some social and cultural activities within the plant and in the residential areas. It is to be mentioned here that most of these employees were of second and third generation service holders.

## Family of the Employees

Employees staying at their own village, many of them were living to the joint family system. All of these were paternal joint family. This family was composed of a man, his wife, parents, children and their unmarried offspring living together in their own household. In some cases it was also observed that mother-in-law of the employee and/or his widow aunt were also living with him.

In very few cases, it was observed that the employees were living in the nuclear family which composed of a man, his wife and children.

On the other hand, in most of the cases, employees staying at the quarters were living in the nuclear family. In very few cases, parents were living with him.

In the family of these quarters, wives of the employees were generally addressing him by name in private. But this was not to be taken as an understanding of equality. Females are generally subordinate as it is in most cases in India.

Mother tongue of most of the non-Bengalee employees of this power station is Hindi. The ratio of Bengalee and non-Bengalee employees of this power station is 3:1 (approx.).

There are so many non-Bengalee employees who can speak Bengali. They talk in Bengali at the time of conversation with the Bengali employees/colleagues. By this way they are trying to adopt themselves to the local situation.

#### Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Employees

There were 199 Scheduled Caste employees, 41 Scheduled Tribe employees, 30 Ex-serviceman and 16 physically handicapped workers in the Farakka Super Thermal Power Plant. Table 7.1 shows the categorywise Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, Ex-Serviceman and physically handicapped employees.

Table 7:1

Categorywise Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, Ex-Serviceman and Physically handicapped employees of FSTPP

Service Category	Scheduled Caste employees	Scheduled Tribe employees	Ex-Serviceman	Physically handicapped	Total
Executive	23 (5.6%)	01	01	-	25
Supervisor	27 (10.4%)	01	08	-	36
Workman	149 (15.6%)	39	21	16	225
Total	199 (12.2%)	41 (2.5%)	30 (1.8%)	16 (1%)	286

Source : P & A Section, FSTPP, May, 1989.

From the given table it is clear that 12.2 percent of the total employees of the project were Scheduled Castes. Among the Scheduled Caste employees, 11.5 percent were executives who constituted 5.6 percent of the total executives of FSTPP. There were 27 Scheduled Caste supervisors which constitutes 13.5 percent of the total Scheduled Caste employees and 10.4 percent of the total supervisory staff. Nearly 75 percent of the total Scheduled Caste employees were workmen who constituted 15.6 percent of the total workmen.

There were 41 Scheduled Tribe employees which was 2.5 percent of the total employees; 30 ex-serviceman constituted 1.8 percent of the total employees; and 16 physically handicapped constituted one percent of the total employees of FSTPP.

#### Family Background and Industrial Culture

Most of the employees belonged to middle class families. The family-occupation of most of the employees was agriculture. Very few had business as the primary occupation. Those who came from the background of agriculture and business, most of them belong to the clerical cadre. Those who are in technical cadre or officers, the family-occupation of them was service (Government or private). They were service-holders for two or three generations.

Employees coming from agricultural background had nominal participation in Union/Association activities as they were not interested in that. They were maintaining a close relation with their family members (father, mother, brother, sister, etc.) and with the village-life. The local employees of this category were maintaining the industrial norms inside the plant and they were converting to 'non-industrial people' no sooner they are outside the plant. In some cases they could not fully adopt themselves to the industrial norms

Among 410 respondents, there were 149 local employees. Out of these 149 respondents, there were 82 of Malda District and the rest 67 employees were of Murshidabad District. Analysing the collected data it is observed that there were 52 and 44 employees of Malda and Murshidabad Districts respectively who could not adopt themselves to the industrial norms and this were 63.4 percent and 66 percent respectively among the respondents.

The employees who were service-holders for generations had a tendency to acquire more benefits/facilities. If they could get that in any other organization, they would not have any hesitation to leave the service of FSTPP. Many of them had active participation in the Union/Association activities. The majority of the Union/Association leaders belonged to this category.

## Social life of the Employees to the Quarters

The employees who are industrial workers of the first generation, have a close relation with their natal home. Those who are from nearby places, they visit their family every weekend. Many employees of this group stay alone at Farakka to do their duty. Their wives and children stay at their native places with other family members. This group of people by great emphasis on their connection with their natal place.

The Bengali employees who are industrial (or non-industrial) workers for the second generation or so have relatively less connection with their natal homes. If they have old parents, back home, they communicate with them through letters once a month or so. Some of them send money to their parents every month. Occasionally they arrange to get together with their parents and other family members.

Very few of the first category live at Farakka with their respective wife and children. They, therefore, visit their natal home at every opportunity. Very few of the second category maintain a close relation with their parents and other family members. The non-Bengali employees mostly live at Farakka with their wives and children. The majority of them (specially the employees of U.P., Bihar and Orissa) send a reasonable amount of money to their home after obtaining salary any month. They

generally visit their natal homes once a year but maintain the relation by exchange of letters from time to time.

### Entertainment

Competitiveness is a common criteria among the modern people. Some amount of competition is there even in the material possession of the people. We observe that colour T.V./V.C.R., freezers, scooter/maruti etc have become the status symbol of the modern people. One of the interesting phenomena of the contemporary society is that an uneducated rich man gets more respect than an educated poor man in the society. This is relatively more conspicuous in the industrial establishments. The industrial workers were interested in reading the film magazines/women's magazine, etc. rather than cultural or literary magazines. They spend their free time by watching the T.V./Movie or shopping or roaming about here and there.

It has been observed that the employees of FSTPP get much salary. But they are mentally materialistic rather than cultural. Due to lack of interest of the majority of the employees, proper cultural atmosphere is not there.

### Life Among the Labourers Under the Contractors

There were a number of contractors in this power station who were doing the construction works of FSTPP. They have a number

of workers and labourers. Few contractors have their own quarters for their workers. Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL) is one of the important contractors. The community life of such workers is to some extent of same like the employees of FSTPP. It is to be remembered here that only those people (workers of the contractors and not of BHEL) enjoy the quarters facilities who belong to the supervisory category. The construction workers (labourers) of these contractors are come from their houses to attend to their duties. Few labourers are there who are outsiders (mainly from Bihar). They are stay in huts or houses with fellow people.

To their house though the male member was appear as the head of the family, in some cases the females also had priority. It was generally observed to those family where husband and wife both were working as labourer. These families were generally controlled by females.

The practice of caste system is not very rigid among the employees of FSTPP. Perhaps this is the general pattern of the labour class in most of the factories or industries. The official records do not maintain caste identity of the employees except for those belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. But caste identity seems important among the labourers of contractors who generally came from the so-called lower case background.

The poor local Muslims also work as labourers. Local contractors and manual labourers of this plant are mostly local Muslims.

The management of FSTPP as well as the contractors were trying to keep the local musclemen within their fold by variously satisfying them. The Muslims constitute the major group in the immediate neighbourhood and most of the musclemen belong to this faith. Perhaps due to this affinity, most of the local contractors, their supervisors, trade union leaders of their labourers are Muslims. Not only that, even the local political trends mostly depend upon the tendency of the Muslims. The majority of the local political leaders are also Muslims.

#### Way of Life

The local employees of FSTPP maintain the same type of way of life like the other service-holders. They work to the plant as per their duty. Some employees engaged themselves to agriculture in the leisure time and holidays which have discussed earlier. Some enjoy the free time/holidays watching movie and Television, roaming about here and there, gossiping or by doing household work like the other service-holders. A very few were observed as interested to local politics. It is better to say that there were no difference between the mode of life of the local employees of FSTPP and the other service holders, i.e., the mode of life of industrial workers was observed more or less the same as those of

the non-industrial workers.

The non local employees stayed at the residential quarters of FSTPP. Passing of leisure time of these employees have discussed earlier. Their enjoyment and time passing wre the limited residential complex oriented. Though it appeared that these employees were more industrial workers comparing to the local employees but it is not true. Since they had no other alternatives to pass their time, sometimes their matter of discussion was the power station, NTPC etc. A very few employees were observed who were fully adopted the industrial way of life.

For contract labourers, this was more disappearing because it was observed that there was no difference between the mode of life of the labourers of contractors and the rickshaw puller, coachman of horse drawn cart or even small shop-keeper. They enjoy their leisure time by domestic works or by playing cards and etc. Sometimes they take drinks and play small gambling also. Some labourers were observed to earn some extra money to their leisure time by cottage industry.

The habit of playing cards among the bachelor employees was conspicuous. In some cases they indulge in gambling. This practice is, however, not that popular. Bachelors generally play cards to pass their time. Few of the bachelor employees were used to taking drinks but this was not a regular habit. Most of them

preferred having beer. No drinking bout or abnormality among the employees inside or outside the industry was observed.

Perhaps drinking is a common habit or has become status symbol among the higher officers i.e. Executives. When the present investigator visited their residence several offered him drinks.

Before setting the FSTPP, Farakka was almost a non-industrial area. There were only a few cottage industries viz., bidi making, weaving, etc. After inception of the FSTPP some changes have observed in socio-cultural life of the local people.

Above discussion reveals the fact that some changes have taken place in the social and cultural life of the people in and around Farakka due to the inception of the power project in this locality.