

The Situation of Hearing-impaired People and Their Communication Problems in Bangladesh:: Overcoming Their Isolation in Rural Areas

Year: 2014

Place of fieldwork: Bangladesh

Name: Nanami Yamanaka

Key Words: Bangladesh, People with disabilities, Hearing-impaired people, Deaf, Sign language

- Research background

Bangladesh is one of the poorest countries in Asia. As international organizations and national governments have addressed the problem of poverty, the poverty rate has steadily reduced. However, people with disabilities have not yet sufficiently obtained the benefits of development. The welfare system is not satisfactory and there is no systematic government policy about disability. Deaf people who live in rural areas among other people with disabilities are reported to be especially isolated and inactive. The most serious problem for deaf people is not simply hearing impairments in themselves, but the secondary and tertiary problems of communication difficulty and lack of access to information. Deaf people in Bangladesh face deep-rooted problems.

- Research purpose and aim

The primary aim of this research is to clarify the current situation of deaf people in Bangladesh from the point of view of communication problems. I focus particularly on deaf people's isolation and how they overcome it in rural areas.

- Results and achievements by fieldwork

Welfare policymakers tend to regard deaf schools as simply providing education and imparting practical skills to the hearing-impaired. On the other hand, previous research on the hearing-impaired tended to regard deaf schools as contributing to the construction of "deaf culture," a distinctive culture of the deaf community that contributes to their positive identity and solidarity. My study, by focusing not only on communication within the deaf community, but also between deaf and hearing people, was able to highlight how deaf people's experience in deaf school also helped them to communicate better with hearing people. For example, after receiving education at a deaf school, some people taught sign language to their non-deaf family members, and that contributed to overcoming isolation within their family. I also found evidence that deaf schools contributed to marriage and employment opportunities, as well as the enhancement of communication skills. In a society like Bangladesh where welfare is inadequate, deaf schools play multiple and important roles beyond those expected by policymakers and previous researchers.

- Implications and impact on future research

My proposal for future research is to re-examine the concept of “welfare.” I would like to consider as a promising aspect of Bangladeshi society the fact that it contains practices of voluntary mutual aid that tie people together, without them needing to resort to the government welfare system.



Pictures : Exterior of a government deaf school (left), classroom scene in a non-government deaf school (upper right), and classroom scene in an NGO-run deaf school in Rajshahi (lower right).



Pictures : Schoolyard of a government deaf school (left), students of a government deaf school (upper right), and classroom scene in an NGO-run deaf school in Dhaka (lower right).



Pictures: Mr. B (a deaf person) carrying out design editing (left) . billboard soap advertisement designed by Mr. B (upper right), and soap package designed by Mr. B in Dhaka (lower right) .



Pictures : home sign language conversation between a deaf person and her hearing cousin (left) and local sign language conversation among a group of deaf people in Rajishahi (right)

※ home-sign: signing that is created spontaneously in families.

※ local-sign: signing that is shared and used among several deaf people in a certain area.