



Educational Vulnerability and Risk Factors of Tea Garden Workers with Special Reference to Dewan Tea Garden Village, Cachar, Assam, India

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Abstract

Illiteracy, one of the key parameters of dynamic pressure, plays the role of catalyst in the process of progression of vulnerability and enhancing risk factors of a vulnerable community. In general, workers of tea gardens in Assam are backward in education, despite having basic schooling facilities in most of the tea gardens. Moreover, literacy rate among women workers is very low in comparison to their male counterparts. Lack of education and awareness are the major hindrances to overall capacity building of tea garden workers. Perhaps, poor educational status of the tea garden workers has major contribution in increasing risk factors of their community in many dimensions. To understand the correlation among educational vulnerability, occupational dynamics and possible risk factors of tea garden workers, a case study is conducted on Dewan Tea Garden, Cachar, Assam, India, which is more than 100 years old.

Keywords: Literacy, dynamic pressure, vulnerability, risk, livelihood.

Introduction

Basic education is essential to enhance personal knowledge and skill, which enable an individual to operate ideally in the society and manage basic requirements of survival. Traditional or modern technology driven teaching-learning mechanism is necessary to educate common people and develop their knowledge and skill. In present days, the role of mass media is enormous to educate, warn, inform and empower the vulnerable communities¹. Practical education is a combination of knowledge and experience, which molds the attitudes and governs the conduct of individuals irrespective of adult or child². In other words, education is the process of dissemination of information and knowledge to younger generation by the older generation³. Educational backwardness is one of the most important parameters of dynamic pressures that plays vital role in generation of unsafe conditions and thereby making the community susceptible to possible external threats.

The overall development of a society, including economic development, is largely dependent on women empowerment^{4,5}. Gender disparity in education and employment contributes in deceleration of overall development of a community. And hence, proportionate education and employment of women is essential for sustainable development of a society^{6,7}. Hypothetically, women in India hold high position in society and play important role in developmental activities. But, in practice, a vast section of women is lagging behind in every spheres of life to that of their male counterparts. At least, the census reports of India depict this fact. One of the major reasons of backwardness of women in our society is lack of proper

education and awareness about their rights, risk and capacity building approaches.

The literacy ratio among male and female is an important indicator for determination of socialisation, development and gender disparities. According to census reports of India, the literacy ratio for male and female that was 18% and 8% respectively in 1951 moved to 76% and 54% in 2001⁸. The literacy ratio of male and female reached to 82.14% and 65.46% respectively in 2011. Though literacy rates, both for male and female, are increasing significantly, but the female population is still lagging behind considerably in terms of their educational and social status, whereas they constitute almost half of the total population of India. The literacy rate and educational status of tea garden working class communities do not match with national average. The condition of women workers of tea gardens is more miserable in terms of their educational as well as social status.

Tea gardens are highly capitalistic industries. A large number of unskilled male and female workers are engaged in tea gardens for tea plantation, plucking of tea leaves and other works. In spite of their dedicated service and contribution to revenue generation of tea industries, the workers in particular women workers do not enjoy any special kind of rights and privileges. A survey conducted by the researchers during 2009 – 2010 in a tea garden of south Assam showed the illiteracy ratio of male and female workers as 50.17% for male and 71.36% for female.

To study the educational vulnerability, trend of literacy ratio of male and female, possible reasons of poor literacy rate, and impact of poor literacy rate on livelihood and living condition of

the tea garden workers; a tea garden of Cachar district, Assam, India, *Dewan Tea Garden*, which is more than 100 years old was selected for case study. Random survey on 50 households of workers of the garden was conducted to understand the educational status of the workers, in particular the women workers and their children. House to house survey of all the households of workers was conducted to understand their occupational dynamics, living standard and risk factors.

Methodology

It is fact that, the tea garden workers of Assam are deprived from basic education, secured livelihood opportunities, healthy living environment and other basic facilities^{9,10}. Before independence, infrastructural facilities for basic education of workers of the tea gardens were not satisfactory. Moreover, the tea planters were also reluctant to give basic facilities and encourage the workers for basic and higher education¹¹. Perhaps, educational vulnerability of tea garden workers is one of the major hidden reasons for their overall backwardness.

The present study is conducted based on a specific model called Disaster Pressure or Crunch Model¹². According to this model, a community or system at large would be at risk, if the community or the system is exposed to one or more threats and it has some internal unsafe conditions. For evaluation of risk factors of a vulnerable community, social production of vulnerability needs to be addressed properly.

A physical unsafe condition of the community or system may be generated from some visible or hidden variable factors called Dynamic Pressures, which are mostly related to socio-economic, socio-cultural, socio-political, and motivational factors. There may be some remote root causes, which are responsible for generation of dynamic pressures as well as unsafe conditions of the community or the system as a whole.

The essential condition for risk reduction and sustainable development of the vulnerable community is elimination of

unsafe conditions of the system or community by addressing the dynamic pressures and root causes.

Illiteracy is one of the most effective dynamic pressures, which may have different root causes and potential to generate many unsafe conditions. Such unsafe conditions combined with some external threats may cause different problems of the community or halt the overall progress of the community. So, practical education to all members of the vulnerable community including women is necessary for overall development of the community.

To assess the trend of educational vulnerability of tea garden workers, random survey was conducted on 50 households of Dewan Tea Garden, Cachar, Assam, during 2009–2010. The study also included house to house survey for acquisition of primary data pertaining to livelihood opportunities and risk factors of the garden workers. The primary and secondary data are analysed to understand the correlation of educational vulnerability of tea garden workers with their occupational dynamics, living standard and risk factors.

The Universe of the Study: The study area is located in the Barak Valley of south Assam. The state Assam of India is broadly divided into two river valleys, viz., Brahmaputra Valley and Barak Valley. Dewan Tea Garden is one of the 115 tea gardens of Barak Valley located in Joypur Block, Lallong Revenur Circle, Lakhimpur Sub-division of Cachar District, Assam, India. The Garden is more than 100 year old and was established by the British Company, the Macline Barry Ltd. The ownership of the garden was handed over to Jay Shree Tea Company of Birla Group in 1963.

The garden is located about 31 Km. away from the district headquarter town, Silchar and connected with Silchar town by Silchar – Arcattipur – Kashipur road and Silchar – Udharband road. Total area of the garden village is 19,602.30 hectares comprising 19,497 hectares for tea plantation; 104.32 hectares for settlement of labours and 0.98 hectares for settlement of officials.

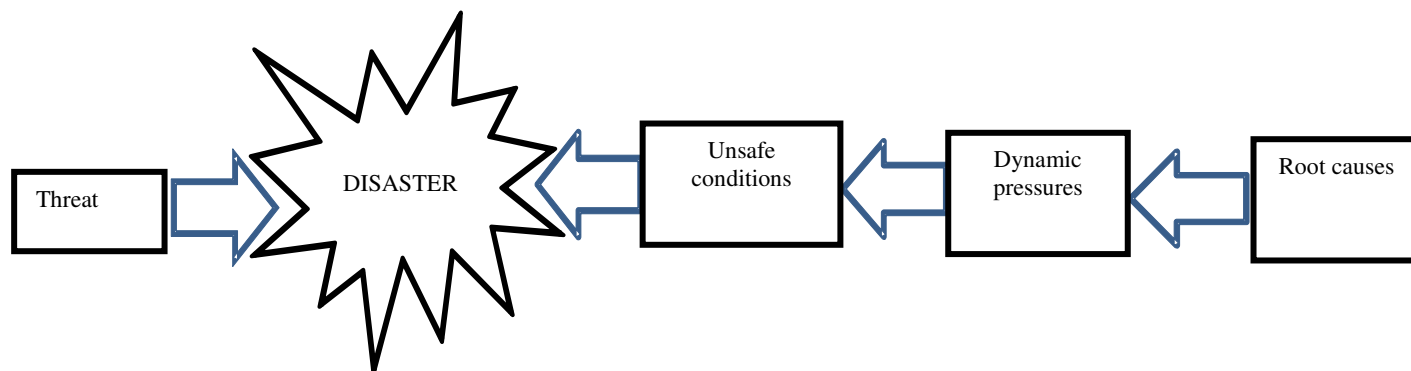


Figure-1
Concept of Disaster Crunch Model

As per garden census report of 2009 – 10, the Dewan tea garden village has 925 households of workers with a population 4,360 comprising 2,226 males (51.06%) and 2,134 females (48.94%). The garden has 877 permanent labours comprising 527 males and 350 females as well as 250 casual labours. The households comprise five linguistic communities viz., Hindustani (Hindi speaking 50%); Bengali (34%); Oriya (15%); Santali and Rangmai Naga (1%). The tea garden community comprises two major religious groups Hindu (73%) and Muslim (27%). The community is divided into four caste/tribe categories – General Caste (2%); Other Backward Class (68%); Schedule Caste (29%) and Schedule Tribe (1%).

Majority of the community members of the garden belong to labour class and low income group. The people have the notion of caste inequality and thus every caste has a panchayat to maintain unity among its fellow members. In absence of any dominant caste the caste hierarchy remains a fluid and unstable phenomena.

Excluding children below 6 years of age, 61% of total population of worker families is illiterate. Among illiterate population, 71% are female and 50% are male. The majority of the garden community speaks in Bagani Bhasha, which is mixture of Bengali, Hindi, Bhojpuri, Santali, and Oriya. Different communities celebrate mostly common festivals of the region as well as their own festivals. Patriarchy is a common feature of majority households across the community, caste/tribe and religion. The class, culture and patriarchy have homogenized gender perception among the villagers. Therefore, the variables like community, religion and caste/tribe are not applied in the following analysis.

Results and Discussion

Data Collection and Analysis: To assess educational status of women along with their male counterparts and children of Dewan Tea Garden, 50 households of the Garden belonging to Other

Backward Class, Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe were selected randomly. Primary data on specific parameters related to the educational status and poor literacy rate of workers were collected based on personal interview with women respondents and their male counterparts. The acquired data and information are compiled and presented in tabular form in tables 1, 2 and 3. The data also presented in graphical mode as bar diagram in figures 2, 3 and 4 for comparative studies.

Data relevant to teaching-learning facilities, occupational dynamics, housing pattern, health and hygiene and other issues pertaining to risk factors of the workers of all 925 families are collected to study the interrelationship between educational status and risk factors of the workers. The relevant data are presented in tabular form in tables 4,5 and 6.

Primary data are collected directly from the field survey and personal interview with the respondents. Secondary data are collected from the office of the Dewan Tea Garden, Schools of the garden and other relevant references.

The tables and diagrams are incorporated in this paper as appendix.

Discussion and Major Findings: Analysis of primary and secondary data clearly depicts the sad picture of literacy rate and gender disparities among tea garden workers. Direct observation reveals, majority of worker families of the garden are at risk of multiple threats mainly due to their poor economic condition, insecure livelihood opportunities, lack of awareness and confidence, motivational vulnerability, as well as lack of knowledge about government policies/schemes. The poor educational status of the workers has been playing the role of catalyst between vulnerability and threats and subsequently enhancing their risk factors in many folds.

Table-1
Educational status of female respondents and their male counterparts

Educational Status	Respondents							
	Other backward class		Schedule caste		Schedule tribe		Total	
	Women respondents	Male counterparts	Women respondents	Male counterparts	Women respondents	Male counterparts	Women respondents	Male counterparts
Illiterate	29	19	9	7	2	2	40	28
Literate	2	6	nil	1	nil	nil	2	7
Primary	2	5	1	1	nil	nil	3	6
Middle school	3	4	nil	nil	nil	nil	3	4
HSLC	2	3	nil	nil	nil	nil	2	3
HSSLC	nil	nil	nil	1	nil	nil	nil	1
Graduate	nil	1	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	1
Total	38	38	10	10	2	2	50	50

Source: Sample survey conducted by the researchers during 2009-2010

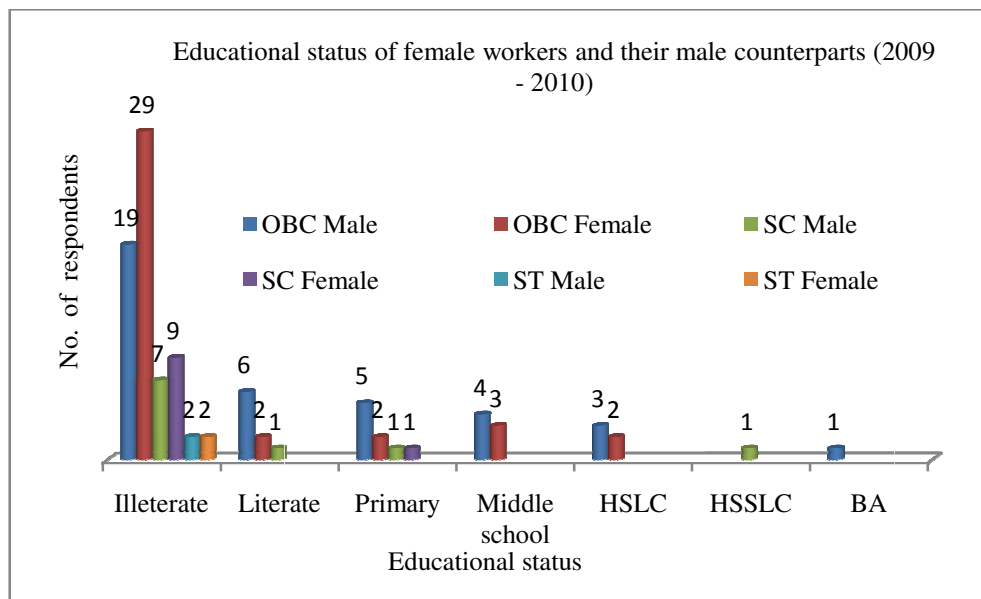


Figure-2
Educational status of female respondents and their male counterparts

It is evident from table 1 and figure 2 that, 80% among female and 56% among male respondents are totally illiterate, who cannot read, write or sign their name. Amongst the respondents, only 4% female and 14% of their male counterparts are simply literate, but do not have any formal education. Other 16% female and 30% of their male counterparts could be considered as educated in the sense that they completed formal education at primary, middle school, high school or college level education.

The progress of literacy rate among the workers is disappointing in comparison to national average. It is to be noticed, among the female respondents only 4% of them passed the high school level, other 6% crossed middle school level and 6% have primary education. The figures also indicate that, female literacy rate is about two and half times lower than that of their male counterparts and limited up to high school level only.

The survey on educational status of 114 children, above 6 years of age, of 50 respondents does not reflect much encouraging result for younger generation too. More than 40% children are still illiterate. About 12% children are literate but, do not have formal education. Less than 50% children have formal education, but percentage of educated children beyond high school level is very negligible.

As evident from table 2 and figure 3, gender disparity persists in case of younger generation also. Out of 55 female children 27 are totally illiterate in comparison to 19 illiterate male children out of 59. Not a single female student has formal education beyond high school level, whereas about 5% male children have education beyond high school to graduation level. Table 3 and Figure 4 indicate, poverty is the prime reason behind dropout of school going students.

Table-2
Educational status of children of the respondents

Educational Status	Respondent's children		
	Male	Female	Total
Illiterate	19	27	46
Literate	6	8	14
Primary	17	10	27
Middle school	8	8	16
HSLC	6	2	8
HSSLC	1	nil	1
Graduation	2	nil	2
Total	59	55	114

Source: Sample survey conducted by the researchers during 2009-2010

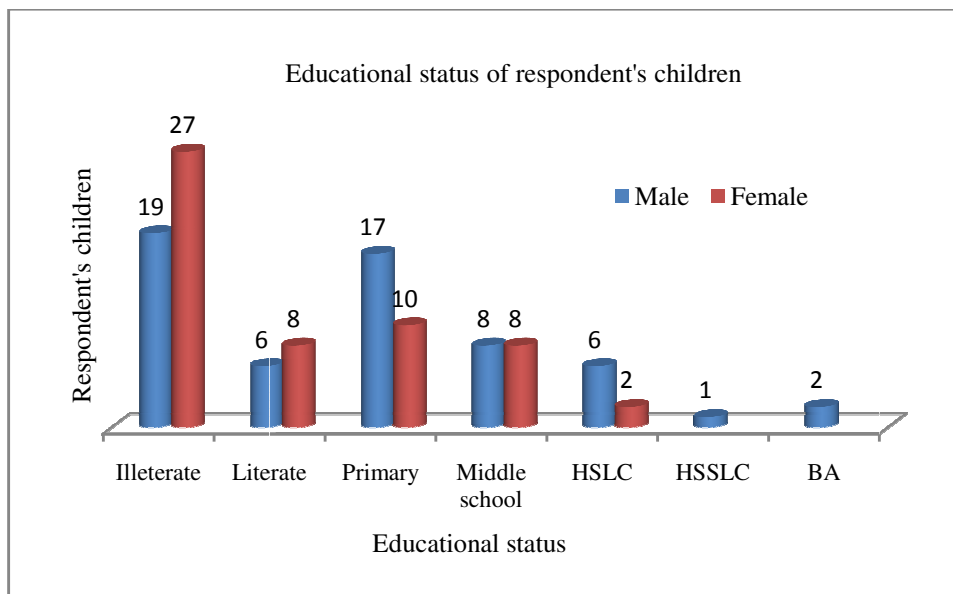


Figure-3
Educational status of children of the respondents

Table-3
Reasons for dropping out of school by educated respondents

Reasons for dropping out from schools	Respondents			
	OBC	SC	ST	Total
Poverty	3	1	-	4
Looking after younger sibling	3	-	-	3
Marriage	1	-	-	1
Inability to pass the examination	2	-	-	2
Total	9	1	-	10

Source: Sample survey conducted by the researchers during 2009-2010

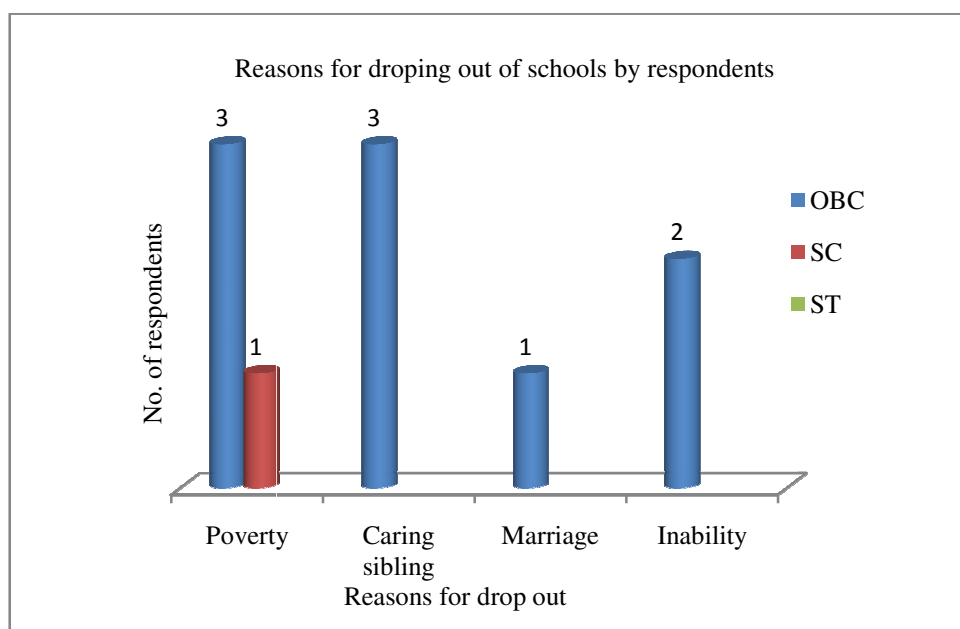


Figure-4
Reasons for dropping out of school by educated respondents

It is observed, livelihood opportunities of the tea garden community are mainly confined within the garden itself. According to table 4, occupational dynamics of the garden workers involves permanent garden worker, wage labour, shop keeping, cycle rickshaw pulling, agriculture, firewood and bamboo collection, basket making, wine shop etc. Irrespective of gender, till date adult workers earn within the range Rs. 40/- to Rs. 80/- per day depending on nature of their jobs. In addition, only permanent workers get the benefit of weekly ration, free residential and medical facilities. Among the workers, women section plays great role in family and garden economics. It is evident from Table 4, less than 1% family members of the workers are engaged in government service. The pattern of such occupational dynamics of the tea garden workers with limited earning avenues is largely related to poor educational background of the community.

Status of shelter, health and hygiene are the indicators of the level of development and socio-economic condition of a community. Table 5 shows, more than 73 % families of Dewan tea garden are living in 1/2 rooms thatches huts. These huts do not have

adequate space, kitchen, proper sanitation and drinking water facilities, and other basic amenities required for a healthy environment. Very negligible percentage has Assam Type or RCC houses.

Majority of families of Dewan Tea Garden village are living in unhygienic environment. As a result, average health condition of the garden population is not satisfactory. Diseases like malaria, tuberculosis, diarrhoea, chronic weakness, cold fever, gastroenteritis, jaundice, chicken pox, high blood presser, low blood presser, general weakness, eye problem, blindness, paralysis, epilepsy, and also cancer are common among the villagers. Lack of awareness and poor economic condition of the community are mainly responsible for this.

Dewan tea garden community has its access to three schools. Dewan Bagan L. P. School and Pearson Institute of M. E. School are located within the tea garden. Dewan Group High School is located in the vicinity of the Tea Garden. Despite having three schools in the vicinity of the tea garden, more than 80% female and 55% male workers of the garden are totally illiterate.

Table-4
Occupational dynamics of Dewan tea garden workers

Occupation	No. of persons out of 1689	Percentage
Permanent labour	744	44.4%
Permanent labour along with wage earning and fire wood collection	227	13.38%
Casual labour	245	14.50%
Casual labour with wage laboure, firewood collection	163	10.36%
Collecting bamboo, firewood and selling them	55	3.25%
Wage labour along with firewood collection	127	13.29%
Basket making and wage labour	10	0.59%
Tea stall	7	0.47%
Carpenter	8	0.48%
Cycle rickshaw pulling	18	1.06%
Auto rickshaw driver	2	0.14%
Beggar	9	0.52%
Shop owner	27	1.57%
Farmer	10	0.59%
Fisher man/wage labour/cow boy	22	1.22%
Shop owner along with money landing	1	0.07%
Government service	13	0.80%
Barber	1	0.07%
Total	1689	(100)

Source: Field survey conducted by the researchers during 2009-2010

Table-5
Housing pattern of the workers of Dewan Tea Garden village

House Type	Ownership of Houses		Total (%)
	Private	Garden authority	
Hut	300	376	676 (73.08%)
Assam Type	89	nil	89 (9.62%)
Pacca House	10	150	160 (17.29%)
Total	399	526	925 (100)

Source: Field survey conducted by the researchers during 2009-2010

Table-6
Use of mass media in teaching learning process by the workers

Media type	Total families	Having (%)	Not having (%)
Electronic media (TV and Radio)	925	463 (50.05%)	462 (49.95%)
Print media (News papers)	925	68 (7.35%)	857 (92.65%)

Source: Field survey conducted by the researchers during 2009-2010

Table 6 shows the status of teaching-learning facilities in the garden through mass media. It is the matter of concern that, in this age more than 92% community members of the garden are detached with print media. About 50% population of the garden do not have access to electronic media.

The present study suggests many important facts.

Poor educational status of the tea garden workers is one of the major reasons for insecure livelihood and miserable living condition of the community. On the other hand, poor economic condition of the community is also equally responsible for educational vulnerability of the workers.

Another reason for poor literacy rate among children of workers is engagement of the children of 10 – 12 years age to minor jobs by their parents for earning out of financial constraints. Lower rate of female education and gender disparity are mostly correlated with socio-economic and socio-cultural conditions of the garden communities. Poor literacy rate of women has negative impact on educational status of their children.

Lack of confidence among children, inability of children to cope with the situation and pass the formal examinations, lack of proper initiative and schemes of garden management and government to support the concerned families and motivate children towards formal and higher education are other major hindrances to improve the educational status of working class population of the garden.

Conclusion

The present study clearly shows, the overall literacy rate among the workers of the Dewan Tea Garden Village is very low in comparison to national average due to various reasons as mentioned in discussion and major findings. Moreover, in comparison to male, literacy rate of female population is disappointing. The poor literacy rate of workers has direct negative impact on educational status of their children.

The study further reveals direct correlation of poor educational status of garden workers with their socio-economic and socio-cultural conditions; livelihood opportunities and living standards; nutrition and health condition; level of awareness about their rights and responsibilities; and other risk factors. The findings of present study may be considered as benchmark for other tea gardens of Assam also.

Holistic and proactive approaches of the tea garden management and government as well are essential to motivate and support the vulnerable communities of the tea gardens for practical and job oriented education. This will help them to get secure livelihood opportunities outside the boundary of selective gardens and improve their living standards.

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