Social exclusion and economic discrimination among the Dalit's in Bangladesh: A Sociological study

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Abstract: The study aims to find out the nature of social exclusion and economic discrimination of untouchable communities in Bangladesh. To make the study comprehensive and more effective questionnaire survey, Focus group discussion (FGD) and case studies were used as method in this study. Dalit as an untouchable community, they are excluded from different opportunities or development, freedom of mobility, resource, and membership in the society. They play an important role for the functioning of the society but they are widely regarded as menial. Highly resistant of religious and social structure and low education rate among them are the important barriers to bring any change or social mobility in their profession. Government and non-government sector should take more initiative that ensures Dalit access to same rights and services enjoyed by mainstream society. Some repaid and effective measure is necessary to identify this discrimination and human right issues and implement affirmative action programs to ensure equal access and opportunities to them.

Keywords: Dalit, Untouchable, Mainstream society, Social exclusion,

1. Introduction

The Dalit or lower caste people are usually treat as untouchables by the both Bengali Hindu and Muslim society and they represent the most marginalized and deprived section of our society According to the international convention on the elimination of all forms of the racial discrimination (CEDR) agreement, the government is bound to fulfill the basic needs of the employment, houses, education, health care services of lower cast people. But they are still considered as pollution, unclean and untouchable .They are denied entry inside the temples of non-Dalits, religious programs, tea shops or restaurants, houses of non-Dalits, playgrounds, movie theatres, burial ground, social gatherings music concerts, cultural program in different manners and extent. After more then forty years of liberation war, their livelihood has not yet been changed a little. Due to their place within the caste system, this group has suffered discrimination and exclusion in all its dimensions for centuries. This group has been historically deprived access and entitlements not only to economic rights but also to social needs such as education, health and housing. Discrimination and exclusion in access to sources of income (land, capital and education) has led to high levels of economic deprivation and poverty among them.

In term of enumeration of Dalit population in the country, there is no specific figure or national statistics by the government or private organization. In Bangladesh about 3.5 to 5.5 million people are belonging to the Dalit (so call lower caste of Hindus) community and the amount is 2.4 to 4 percent of the total population. (Daily Jugantor, 2006). The majorities are landless and live in chronic poverty in rural areas or urban slums. Most of the Dalit in Bangladesh today are the descendants of those bought to the region from India as menial servants to the British colonial regime and they have engaged jobs such as fishermen, sweepers, barbers, washers, dying, blacksmiths, cobblers, goldsmiths, oil-pressers, weavers, sawyers, butchers and drum beaters. Though the constitution of Bangladesh admits citizen's equal rights regardless of their caste, race, ethnicity and religion but the rights of Dalit and excluded community people in Bangladesh always ignored or denied or not recognized and consequently that resulted into segregation, exclusion, exploitation and violence over these people.

2. Objectives of the study:

The specific objectives of this study are:
2.1. to examine the social exploitation and exclusion or different kinds of discrimination against Dalit’s community.
2.2. to assess living standard and occupational status and the nature of their work.
2.3. to identify the professional trend and attitudes regarding their profession and the main barriers to bring any change or social mobility in their profession.
2.4. Recommendation to attain the expected status of Dalits.

3. Methodology:

3.1 Techniques of data collection:

The study have been used multiple methods to collect various information about Dalit. To make the study comprehensive and more effective Focus group discussion (FGD), Questionnaire survey though in-depth interview and some case studies have been used. Qualitative data from brief case studies and focus group discussion –in the forms of narrative analysis and biographical approaches–were collected mainly to complement the quantitative data collected though the house hold survey. In order to bring out flexibility in the data collection, both scheduled and unscheduled questionnaire were used.

3.2 Sample size and data analysis:

Dhaka is the largest city of Bangladesh. The survey was designed to collect data from three Thanas of this city. Mirpur, Mohamdpur and Demra where are living in most of the Dalit. The sample consists of 377 families from the three Thanas. In most of the cases household heads were selected for an interview but sometimes it was not possible such instance data were collect household members. The samples were collected on random basis depending on the availability of the respondents. Both the quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed with the help of SPSS 17.

4. Results:

4.1 Age and sex distribution:

Among the Dalit 85 percent households leaders belong to the age group of 30 -60 and average age leaders is 45 years. It is interesting to note that most of the cases the eldest person of the household are treated as the head of the households. But he is not able to contribute his family budget for his old age or illness. The tradition of Bangladesh is the seniors are always respected in their households by the junior members or others. Gender is almost equally distributed among the household members.

4.2 Major classification of Dalit:

Bangali Dalit means both Hindu and Muslim Dalit people. Non- Bengali Dalits who mostly migrated from India. Mid eighteen century when establish of municipalities in East Bengal, a large labor force from different parts of India hired and employed by the British authority. As a matter of fact, they and their fore-fathers brought in this country by the British authorities for the sweeping or cleaning jobs, working in the tea plantations and at railway station subject to a condition that they would be provided free housing, health and other facilities for livelihoods. During British period they also enjoy special facilities in employment, housing, health and education but at present they deprived of such facilities.

4.3 Distinct Language and dress pattern:

The Dalit communities have their own languages but nearly all of they speak good Bengali too. The study indicates that 77 percent Hindu Dalits replied that they speak Bengali and 23 percent Bengali and Hindi mixed to communicate outside or their working place. Dalit also have restriction on the mode of
construction of their house, types of dress and patterns of their ornamentation. They have particular types of wearing cloths that make easy to distinguish them from the mainstream people. 73 percent of the Dalit not feel well and even they want to change their traditional ways of wearing dress and ornaments.

### 4.4 Educational status:

The study shows that 63 percentage of total respondent's are illiterate and they can not even read or write in their native language. Out of 37 percent literate person, there are 36 percent are school going children who belongs to class one to five. Only two percent people are studying in college or higher education. It is notable from the study that some of the adult illiterate had attended non-formal adult education and learned little knowledge about numerical and can understand about monetary calculation. The study suggests that 83 percent of Dalits experience discrimination admission to school of their children. Dalits thought that education was not necessary for their profession. So they were not conscious about their education. Many of them seem to have taken the idea that education will not provide them to a better place. They think their untouchable identity would follow them to be refused from mainstream society.

### 4.5 Size of the household:

In this study data shows that two third Dalit have a family of 5-9 and one third family have 1-4. It is definitely larger than average 4.9 (USAID 2007). Dalit are not aware of adopting the methods of fertility control and reduction of family size due to illiteracy, lack of awareness, poverty and other socio-cultural reasons. Unemployment, job discrimination, social exclusion, taking alcohol regularly, negative attitude to saving, lack of pleasure that may be the reasons behind large number of family.

### 4.6 Income and expenditure of the households:

The survey(table-1) findings endorse that the average monthly income of the majority Dalits falls between Tk. 4500-6500, which is far below the national average monthly income of Tk. 7203.

#### Table-1: Distribution of income and family size of the respondent’s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of income</th>
<th>No of family</th>
<th>No of family member</th>
<th>Total income</th>
<th>Per family income (monthly)</th>
<th>Per-head average income (monthly)</th>
<th>Per-head average income (per day)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1500-2500</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>59350</td>
<td>2374</td>
<td>467.32</td>
<td>15.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2500-4500</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>629</td>
<td>485850</td>
<td>3950</td>
<td>772.42</td>
<td>25.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4500-6500</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>803</td>
<td>1016550</td>
<td>6275</td>
<td>1265.94</td>
<td>42.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6500-8500</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>262582</td>
<td>7723</td>
<td>1526.64</td>
<td>50.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8500-10500</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>219010</td>
<td>9955</td>
<td>1871.88</td>
<td>62.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10500 above</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>140305</td>
<td>12755</td>
<td>3188.75</td>
<td>106.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>377</td>
<td>1892</td>
<td>2183647</td>
<td>5792.17</td>
<td>1154.15</td>
<td>38.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field survey on Dalit community, 2012

According to the survey, the minimum daily expenditure of mainly for food items and alcohol of the Dalit’s households, constituting of four members is about 150 taka i.e. at least T.K. 4500 is required monthly. The monthly expenditure of some households varies 3500 to 7000. In fact, the daily household’s expenditure for basic requirement varies mainly on the basis of income, household’s size and quality of food items and consumption patterns. As per the opinions of some other respondents their daily household’s expenditure varies between TK 120 to 220 i.e. their monthly expenditure varies between Tk 3600 to TK660. In this study it seems that few households whose head maintain that his daily expenditure is around 300 taka, i.e. monthly 9000 taka with a few exceptions.
4.7 Status of woman:

Dalit women are subjected to exclusion suffer from many forms of exclusion. They are excluded due to caste and ethnic reason but though they are woman then they are further excluded. Dalit communities are often deeply patriarchal with severe restrictions placed on women’s right, mobility and freedom. So they face various discrimination and violence in everyday life. The standard government maternity leave is six months but most of the Dalit women often are denied leave or only enjoy one or two month. Male person of the community think that to earn money and maintain their family and children's are their duty. Although the man is Karta of the household, it shows that above 82 percent illegible female have been working and have strong role in respective their family budget that is very high rate than the mainstream society.

4.8 Child labour and discrimination:

Nearby all children of the Dalits both male and female are involved in the cash earning work. From about the age of six or seven children help their parents in work and many of them earn and contribute to the household budget separately. Almost all the people are belongs to the poverty line so their total income necessary to maintain a household’s expenditure. The study shows that around 37 percent children below 18 years have been found engaged with lobour and 70 percent of them are discriminated in work with fewer wage than the non-Dalits.

4.9 Household’s condition:

Dalits have been living in nasty and polluted environment either in public house provided the municipality or city corporation, government offices, privately arranged house in the slums or squatters in and around the urban or semi-urban centers and rural areas in the country. In urban areas Dalits usually live in so called colonies in slum like conditions with often three generations of 8 to 12 member living in one small room. 84 percent of the Dalit complained that they have not enough latrines, separate bath place or kitchen, pure drinking water, electricity or gas supply. There is no scope to fresh breath because of the huge congested slum house in these ghettos. The study shows that 53 percent of Dalits are not aware of good sanitation practice.

4.10 Marriage and dowry system:

The average marriage age for the men is 18 and women were 13 respectively. Marriage is highly restricted with other caste or religion. 81 percent household has the record to pay dowry in the marriage of their daughters. In the event of failure to fulfill the commitment of offering dowry for their poverty, marriage sometimes break down and in some cases physical and moral torture and insult takes a bitter experience in their married life.

4.11 Food habit of Dalit:

Dalit always take cheapest food due to their poverty. Rice, dal, vegetable and small fish are common foods among them. It seems that some families take big fish and meat in the early the first month but rest of the days they take only vegetables or dal. They are not concern about their food items and food habits or balance diet. They prefer milk but they can't afford it.

4.12 Health facilities and discrimination:

During last six month one or more person from 25 percent household were suffered from different types of disease. Average treatment cost of suffered household is 7.95 percent of their total income. Only 4 percent patient taken treatment from private sector and rest of the patient received treatment from
government hospital and other place and study and 84 percent of Dalits face discrimination in private sector.

4.13 Economic discrimination in labor market:

Dalits who are not forced into degrading occupations are discriminated against by means of lower wages, longer periods of unemployment, and fewer opportunities for work. Some Dalits are excluded from crop processing, residential construction, and restaurant work. Dalit agricultural laborers also earn less money on average, work less often, and are paid later than non-Dalit workers. In nonagricultural sector, 73 percent household response discriminated in labour market and they earn a lower daily wage than higher caste laborers and mainstream society.

4.14 Savings, loan and investment:

Since the Dalit enjoy their life, in different ways through ceremonies, festivals or drinks, they spend much amount of their income for such kind of entertainments. They are always on loan from friends, relatives and Mahajans (money lender) with high rate of interest that kept them in cycle of poverty. (Chart -1) shows that most of the family have loan burden and few have small amount of saving and investment in different sectors.

Chart-1: Percentage distribution of savings, loan and investment of the respondent’s

4.15 Trend of traditional occupation:

Dalits are handicapped due to their origin inborn occupational status, religion and immigrant status, lifestyle and their culture. Moreover their segregate settlements and isolated position has made them more dependent on their own community. It found that most of the Dalit have tendency still trying to hold and continue their fathers’ profession and practice caste and tradition. However they can’t find a suitable alternative as they lack educational qualification and society is not yet fully ready to welcome them to any new job and go to better position. They believe that their inborn religious identity and low literacy rate among them is the biggest barrier to getting a better job and better position. Moreover, the survey found that when the time of Dalits children to develop their skills through education or others then they are forced to take challenges to build traditional career of their fathers for their poverty. It found that most of the Dalit have tendency still trying to hold and continue their fathers’ profession and practice caste and tradition and study found that the respondent have been changing the traditional profession to other job at the rate of 8.5 percent.
4.16 Land ownership and other assets:

52 percent of Dalit have no extra income from other sources except the income they receive from major profession. In fact 97 of the Dalits belong to the extreme poverty line. So it found that no household have land in urban or rural area. But they enjoy the simplest conveniences such as 67 percent have telephones, 5 percent have television, 45 percent have refrigerator and 90 percent have Cot and Almira.

4.17 Social exclusion in everyday life:

In the context of Bangladesh, Dalit community is the most excluded segment of the population. This form of exclusion under the caste system gets legitimacy from religious texts. Dalits in Bangladesh generally lives in ghettos and they are isolated or excluded socially, culturally, politically and some time geographically from the main stream ethnic people. This community is also excluded from opportunities, outcome of development, freedom of mobility, resource and citizen ship in polity and membership in society. They are not allowed to enter in tea shops or restaurant, outside religious occasions, burial ground and other political and cultural festivals. They are deprived or actively excluded from adequate facilities like housing, health care, education, employment opportunities and participation in public life which have made their status low and consequently to a certain extent isolated them from the main stream ethnic people and social mobility or social change is highly constrained for profound social, political and economic changes by rigid hierarchies and social disparities.

4.18 Discrimination in social and national occasion:

Invitation to Dalit by non Dalit or upper caste in any private feast is a rare case. In many cases, if the mainstream society likes to invite any Dalit in the private or community or marriage ceremony, they make also separate sitting arrangement and menu for them. In most of the cases the Dalit are not invited to any government programs like observation of national, international days etc. If they go to enjoy any such ceremonies, they are not welcomed warmly. It also found that 83 percent of Dalit have experience to discernate in social and national occasion.

4.19 Participation of politics:

The finding of the study suggests it clearly that the level of involvement in politic is yet to reach any significant level. Dalits have become active as regards to their right in the community, but they are not allowed to hold any political post in the local or national level but it has been seen that they are aware about many of their political rights and responsibilities – one of the expression of this awareness is that they cast their votes in different elections regularly. The study suggests that only 3 percent are involved in politics and Hindu Dalit is more conscious about their rights then the Muslim Dalit in our society.

4.20 Participation of policy making programme:

Dalit are also hindered from taking part in both national and local level government policy decision making process. They are never invited for any such program. Sometimes their leaders invite if anything relates issues to their community, but they are kept silent and whatever main stream society decide, the Dalit leaders are to follow those without any opposed.

5. Recommendation:

1. Discrimination against Dalits in Bangladesh should be recognized by the Government as a serious impediment to the enjoyment and fulfillment of human rights in Bangladesh and the constitutional
measures and specific legislation protecting them from attacks, harassment and unlawful behaviour should be enforced effectively and offenders should be prosecuted and

2. Free primary health care, primary education opportunities, job facilities, quota and particular stipend for education, allowances for the elderly, sufficient levels of electricity, gas and water supply should be provided to people living in these colonies.

3. Initiatives for creating awareness among the sweepers regarding social education should be undertaken by the Govt. NGOs with the help of mass media to improve the status of the sweepers.

4. Dalit representatives should be included in all committees of political parties at national and local level and government should be obtained reservation or quota system in parliament to get access into the strategic plans that can produce power. Power or its power distribution considered as an ultimate means to cope with their problem of untouchability or downtrodden people.

6. Conclusion:

Dalits face many complex and overlapping forms of discrimination like social, economic, political, religious and cultural affecting all aspects of their personal and public lives.

In brief, if Dalit are properly educated, skilled, trained and supported by alternative financial resources for their subsistence, survival and substantial up gradation of their livelihoods throughout the year with countrywide programs, they are sure to produce more social goods instead of treated as liabilities from which the whole nation will be benefitted.

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