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Devoted to Studies on Social Exclusion, Marginalized Social Groups and Inclusive Policies

Caste-based Discrimination in South Asia: A Study of Bangladesh

Iftekhar Uddin Chowdhury



Working Paper Series

Volume III Number 07, 2009

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- To conceptualise and theoretically understand social exclusion and discrimination in contemporary world.
- To develop methods and measuring tools for the study of discrimination and exclusions in social, cultural, political and economic spheres of everyday life and their consequences.
- To undertake empirical researches on measuring forms, magnitude and nature of discrimination in multiple spheres.
- To understand the impact of social exclusion and discriminatory practices on inter-group inequalities, poverty, human right violations, inter-group conflicts and economic development of the marginalised social categories.
- To undertake empirical research on the status of different excluded, marginalised and discriminated groups in Indian society *vis-à-vis* their social, cultural, political, and economic situations.
- To propose policy interventions for building an inclusive society through empowerment of the socially excluded groups in India and elsewhere in the world.
- To provide knowledge support and training to civil society actors.

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**Caste-based Discrimination in
South Asia: A Study of Bangladesh**

Iftexhar Uddin Chowdhury

**Working Paper Series
Indian Institute of Dalit Studies
New Delhi**

Foreword

Indian Institute of Dalit Studies (IIDS) has been amongst the first research organizations in India to focus exclusively on development concerns of the marginalized groups and socially excluded communities. Over the last six year, IIDS has carried-out several studies on different aspects of social exclusion and discrimination of the historically marginalized social groups, such as the Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes and Religious Minorities in India and other parts of the sub-continent. The Working Paper Series disseminates empirical findings of the ongoing research and conceptual development on issues pertaining to the forms and nature of social exclusion and discrimination. Some of our papers also critically examine inclusive policies for the marginalized social groups.

This Working Paper “**Caste-based Discrimination in South Asia: A Study of Bangladesh**” has been taken out from our report on Caste Based Discrimination in South Asia. Drawn from the country report of Bangladesh, the paper delineates the forms of descent and work based discrimination in Bangladesh society. Through an empirical study, the paper spells out the nature and extent of untouchability, descent and work-based discrimination and social exclusion in the contemporary Bangladesh where the practice of caste and work-based degradation has become an accepted norm. The paper identifies the nature of discrimination and thereof its consequences on both Hindu and Muslim social groups. The paper also highlights the near total absence of protection initiatives and programmes to address discrimination in all spheres of life. More importantly, the paper offers possibilities of comparative perspective on discrimination across rural-urban and majority-minority communities.

Indian Institute of Dalit Studies gratefully acknowledges DANIDA and IDSN for funding this study. We hope our Working Papers will be helpful to academics, students activists, civil society organisations and policymaking bodies.

Surinder S. Jodhka
Director, IIDS

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Caste-based Discrimination in South Asia: A Study of Bangladesh

Iftexhar Uddin Chowdhury

1. Introduction

Traditionally three major religions-Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism made deep impact on the South Asian societies. The communities in this region trace their inheritance from these major religions as well as from several other races of the world. The dominant socio-cultural feature of Bangladesh is a blend of Bengali culture (predominated by Hindu and Buddhist heritage) along with Muslim traditions (especially introduced by Muslim missionaries and Arab traders). Among various religious groups in Bangladesh, Muslims represent 89.6 per cent majority and non-Muslims constitute the remaining 10.4 per cent of Bangladesh population (BBS Report on Sample Vital Registration System-2003 published in February 2006). As per 1991 census, among the non-Muslims, Hindus are the dominant groups with a population of about 10 per cent and Buddhist and Christians constitute less than 1 per cent of the Bangladeshi population (Statistical Yearbook of Bangladesh 2001). Dalits in Bangladesh are largely identified with their traditional occupations such as fishermen, sweeper, barber, washer men, blacksmiths, goldsmiths, cobblers and oil-pressers. The people engaged in these occupations have been facing various forms of discrimination in the society. They continue to dwell in filthy and polluted environments; either in public housing provided by the local municipalities or privately arranged housing in the slums/squatters in and around the semi-urban and rural areas throughout the country. Statistically, Muslims are the majority, the Hindus make minority and the Dalits represent the most marginalized and deprived sections. The Dalit communities are usually located in the most inhospitable areas which nobody else would covet; at the outskirts of the village because of the prejudice that they are 'unclean'. On the basis of the economic engagements of the people, the percentage of Dalits (fishermen, weaver, blacksmith, potters, and goldsmith) is 1.11 per cent (BBS 2003 published in February 2006). Noticeably, 1 per cent of the total population of Bangladesh is *Harijans* (Akhteruzzaman; Haque; and Bashfire 2006). The number

of *Bedays* (Muslim river gypsy) as per the estimation is about 1.5 million (Maksud 2006) which it is argued is only 0.4 million (Rahnuma and Chowdhury 2003). Though the estimation of numerical strength of Dalits in Bangladesh vary from one source to another; it is however approximated that 3.5 million (Daily Jugantor 24/4/2006), 5.5 million (with about 45 diverse forms) Dalit communities are segregated upon their professions and castes (IDSN, BDHR, 2006).

This paper examines the nature and extent of untouchability, descent and work-based discrimination and social exclusion in the contemporary Bangladesh society through an empirical study. Specifically, the paper assesses the situation of untouchability, its forms and types of discrimination in the field of education, health, access to resources, employment, private and public affairs *vis-à-vis*, the country's overall socio-cultural matrix. The study also addresses other relevant issues regarding social exclusion and discrimination.

1.1 Methodology

The study employed in-depth interviews, Focus Group Discussion (FGD), and case studies to collect quantitative and qualitative data. Information regarding the households and nature and extent of discrimination were collected through in-depth interviews. Data was collected from the following five villages: Bhujpur under Chittagong district, Bijoypur and Sujanagar under Comilla district and Dopi and Lakkatura under Sylhet district. About 50 respondents (35 belonging to Hindu scheduled castes and untouchables and 15 from Muslim communities) were selected, apart from the work-based discrimination and untouchables. Purposive sampling method was adopted while evaluating the criteria such as availability, willingness and convenience of the respondents. Therefore, out of 5 villages, 175 respondents from Hindu and 75 from Muslim communities were selected. Table 1 gives details of respondents for in-depth interview.

Table 1: Sample Size for In-depth Interview

Type		Village					Total
		Bjpur	Sjnagar	Dopi	Lakkatura	Bhujpur	
Hindu	Count	35	35	35	35	35	175
	% within Type	20.0%	20.0%	20.0%	20.0%	20.0%	100.0%
Muslim	Count	15	15	15	15	15	75
	% within Type	20.0%	20.0%	20.0%	20.0%	20.0%	100.0%

FGD were conducted in another set of five villages. These included two Muslim dominated villages: Khurushkul under Cox's Bazar District and Joara under

Satkania Upazila/sub-district of district Chittagong. The two Hindu dominated villages were Katghar under Sitakund Upazila/sub-district and Bhujpur under Fatikchari Upazila/sub-district of Chittagong district and one village of *Adibashi* Communities: Shawnirbhar Bazar, under Khagrachari district. An average of 25-30 persons from different occupational categories of Scheduled Castes and untouchables were included in the FGD. The major focus of FGD was the intensive study of the nature and extent of discrimination. Also seven case studies were conducted on different castes and groups. Furthermore, secondary research based on relevant available literature was also incorporated into the study.

1.2 Legislation and Policies:

Bangladesh, the then East of Pakistan, saw its people clubbed together to raise their voices against exploitation and oppression against Pakistan government which geared its cadence in the Language Movement in 1952. Secular Bengali Nationalism became the bond to unite people of different religions. Thus arose four Fundamental Principles: Nationalism, Socialism, Democracy, and Secularism which became the major spirit in the liberation struggle and nine month's war in 1971; manifested in the Bangladesh Constitution of 1972 in the Articles 9, 10, 11 and 12 respectively. Article 9 recognises Bengali nationalism on the basis of national identity as derived from its language and culture and Article 10 on Socialism and Freedom from exploitation ensures the attainment of a just and egalitarian society. According to Article 11, under Section I on Democracy and Human Rights, "The Republic shall be a democracy in which fundamental human rights and freedom and respect for the dignity and worth of the human being shall be guaranteed; and in which effective participation by the people through their elected representatives in administration at all." Article 12 ensures that the principle of secularism shall be realised by the elimination of: (a) communalism of all forms, (b) granting of political status by the state in favour of any religion, (c) the abuse of religion for political purposes, and (d) any discrimination against or persecution of persons practicing a particular religion. In an effort to behold the newly emerging national entity in real glory, the special declaration of these Fundamental Principles of State Policy were pronounced as the basic foundation of the super structure of the 1972 Constitution. (Justice Bhattacharyya D.C. 1993). Following the constitutional provisions, the then government of Bangladesh banned the political activities of extremist parties.

Article 8 (2) ensures that four fundamental principles as set out in the Constitution shall be fundamental to the governance of Bangladesh, to be

applied by the State in the making of laws, a guide to the interpretation of the Constitution and of the other laws of Bangladesh, and shall form the basis of the work of the State and for its citizens, but shall not be judicially enforceable. Article 25 (a) endorses the respect for International Law and the principles enunciated in the Charter of United Nation, and on the basis of those principles, (b) uphold the right of every citizen freely to determine and build up its own social, economic and political system by ways and means of its own free choice; and (c) support the oppressed people throughout the world waging a just struggle against Imperialism, Colonialism, or Racialism. Thus, the constitutional obligations have assumed importance to establish rights for each individual not only in the country but also on the international front with other provisions:

Article 28 (1) of the 1972 Constitution of Bangladesh proclaims, “The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth”. Other articles concerning non-discrimination are: Articles 10 (participation of women), 27 (equality before law), 29 (equality of opportunity of all citizens in respect of employment or office in the service of the Republic), and 121 (the division of electoral rolls). Article 39 guarantees (a) freedom of thought and conscience; (b) the right of every citizen to freedom of speech and expression; c) freedom of press, subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interest of security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence.

Despite Eighth Amendment to the Constitution of Bangladesh, Islam is declared as a State religion. Article 41 states: “Every religious community or denomination has the right to establish, maintain and manage its institutions”. Further the provisions of Article 41 guarantee an individual’s right to refuse to practice a religion, or be compelled to receive education about the religion other than that they follow. The Constitution of Independent Bangladesh does not recognise the minorities as groups distinct from the Bengalis. Also, the State obligation to ‘conserve the cultural tradition and heritage of the people’ is keen on enriching the ‘national culture’. Matter of fact, the Constitution has been critiqued for failing to recognise the existence of indigenous people in the country.

1.3 Historical basis for Constitutional Amendments

After the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the national father of Bangladesh in 1975, Zia ur Rahman, an army general, seized the power of the country following a brief succession of military coup; which set

the country firmly on the principle of fundamentalism. To comply with the political ambition, Zia had to fall on the support of the so-called pro-Islamic and other fundamentalist groups. The Proclamation Order No. 1, in 1977, which inserted the first sentence of the Holy Quran: *Bismillah-ar-Rahman-ar-Rahim* (In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful), at the beginning of the Constitution not only dismantled secularism in Bangladesh but also deleted the principle of secularism and replaced it by “Absolute Trust and Faith in the Almighty Allah”.

Zia’s assassination paved way for the army general Ershad to come to power and also for Eighth Amendment in the Constitution, in which Article 2 declares: “The state religion of the Republic is Islam, but other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony in the Republic”. With a view to perpetuating his autocratic rule using Islam as a political shield and justifying the Amendment, Ershad declared that the distinct identity of the people of Bangladesh in their culture, language, geographical entity, independent sovereignty and other spheres of nationalism could only be defined through Islam. Through these vicissitudes of history, anti-progressive and anti-liberation forces governed the country and destroyed its spirit and ideals of liberation. This however jeopardized the rights and existence of other religious minority, the majority of who are people of low caste/untouchables of Hindu religion.

The constitution of Bangladesh safeguards equal rights for all people irrespective of any race, caste, creed, and religion, nonetheless social exclusion is manifested in the physical structure of both rural and urban areas throughout the country. Based on various theories such as racial, religious and economical pertinent to caste system and untouchability; social stratification where individuals are divided into different hereditary groups (mutually exclusive to each other arranged in a hierarchical status) could be analyzed for assessing the situation in Bangladesh. According to print and electronic media, different minority communities including Dalits, Human Right Defenders, Media Personnel, Women, Children, NGO Personnel, *Adibashi*, *Ahmedayi* Communities, Progressive Civil Societies are victimized by subjecting them to intense discrimination and deprivation (The Daily Star, Nov. 1; 10, 12; 16; 17; 18; 20; 16, 2001, The Bangladesh Observer of Nov. 22;24; Daily *Jonokantha*, Daily *Prothom Alo*, Oct.10; 13;14; Dec. 6; 2001, *Ain-o-Salish Kendra* (ASK), *Persecuted Minorities Endangered Nation:2002* etc.). Severe forms of violence, abduction, rape, molestation, torture, destruction of houses, land grabbing, eviction from land and different ways of threatening are likely linked to Militant Islamic Groups and unruly miscreants.

2. Composition and Patterns of Social Stratification in Bangladesh:

The Hindus of Bangladesh are traditionally divided into upper, lower and scheduled caste groups. Beside *Brahmin*, *Kashtriya* and *Vaishya*, the lower castes known as *Shudra* include the traditional serfs, craftsmen, agricultural labourers, and out-castes (*Atishudras*), who perform manual labour that is considered to be of degradable kind (Mohanty: 2004). At the bottom of the society these are the stigmatized ritually polluted and despised “untouchables”; upon whom Mahatma Gandhi bestowed the euphemistic name “*Harijan*” (children of God-*Vishnu*). Each caste follows a particular hereditary occupation such as agriculturist caste (*Hakil Gopes* and *Baruis*), artisan caste (goldsmiths, blacksmiths, potters, carpenters, dyers, oil-men, confectioners, spice-dealers, cotton weavers, silk weavers), the most despised castes including hunters, boat-men, barbers, sawyers, fishermen, date-palm juice collectors, watchmen, and untouchables like *Harijons/Methors/Domer* (Sweeper and cleaner), *Dom* (curing of diseased spleens), the *Muchi/Chamar* (cobbler) and so on. (Gupta 1914; Karim 1976; Chowdhury 1978; Shamsuddin 1983; Ali 1985). It appears that the status of scheduled (lower caste) and untouchables differs in Bangladesh as a result of which the nature and extent of discrimination they experience at different levels is different as well.

While examining the caste practices, it appears that castes in Bengal and other regions had both hierarchical and territorial characteristics. According to the *Varna* system, there were only two *Varnas* in Bengal - the *Brahmins* and the *Shudras*¹. *Baidyas* (physicians) and *Kayasthas* (scribes) occupied the highest position among the *Shudras* (Sanyal: 1981). As per the census of 1941, 118 castes were notified in Bengal, including 62 SC. (Sarma 1980). Major caste groups included *Bagdi*, *Banik*, *Brahman*, *Goyala*, *Mahisya*, *Mayra*, *Malo*, *Muci*, *Namasudra*, *Tanti*, *Teli*, *Tili* and others among whom *Bagdi*, *Malo*, *Muci* and *Namasudra* are categorized under scheduled caste (Nakatani 2004).

According to 1931 census, five caste groups were numerically dominant in Bengal; of which *Mahisya* was the largest and *Rajbangshi*, *Namasudra*, *Kayastha* and *Brahman* followed in the order. While *Mahisyas* was predominant in *Burdwan* and Presidency divisions, *Namasudras* inhabited in large numbers in *Dhaka* and *Chittagong* divisions of East Bengal (Sarma 1980). It implies that *Mahisya* was the major caste in the western region while *Namasudra* was in the eastern region (Nakatani 2004). *Mahisya* was earlier known as ‘*Casa Kaibarta*’, who were fishermen and thereafter moved to a higher position ‘*Cas*’ (peasant). *Casa Kaibarta* established itself as the caste in late nineteenth and early twentieth century. (Sanyal 1981). *Namasudra*, a non-Aryan caste of Bengal,

was earlier known as ‘*Chandals*’ or scavengers who occupied a very low position in the social hierarchy and were considered to be untouchables. By the late nineteenth century, they emerged as settled peasant community (Risley 1981; Bandyopadhyay: 1995). According to N.K. Bose, many *Namasudras* in East Bengal were boatmen or fishermen; “In Bengal, and especially in East Bengal, wherever there are rivers and canals, one can find the members of the *Namasudra* caste. Hindu society has always deposed this agricultural caste and has gone to the extent of treating its members as untouchables and making them live in the fringes of the village (Bose 1994).”

It is well entrenched that a large number of untouchable castes were displaced in various districts in East Bengal. This was also true for many tribes like *Garos*, *Hajongs* and *Chakmas* (Dasgupta 2004). According to 1941 census, there were 7.1 million SC comprising *Muchi*, *Dhopa*, *Dom*, *Hari*, *Kaura*, *Lohar*, *Bhui* and *Mali* in Bengal at the time of the partition of India. The number of SC’s was 4.43 million in Hindu Bengal and 2.75 million in Muslim Bengal or present day Bangladesh (Chatterjee 1947).

Another estimation showed that the number of SC in East Pakistan was around 3.7 million after integrating *Rangpur*, *Dinajpur*, *Khulna* and *Nadia* parts of Bengal (Dasgupta: 2004).

Table 2: Scheduled Caste Population in Muslim Bengal (Bangladesh)

District	Population	Percentage
Bogura	61, 303	2.25
Pabna	1, 14,728	4.17
Dinajpur	91, 578	3.34
Rajshahi	54, 531	1.98
Mymensingh	3, 40,676	12.40
Dacca	4, 09,905	14.94
Faridpur	5, 27,496	19.22
Bakerganj	4, 27,667	15.57
Tippera	2, 27,643	8.29
Noakhali	81, 817	2.98
Chittagong	57, 024	2.08
Chittagong Hill Tract	283	.01
Total	27, 45,388	100.00

Source: Chatterjee (1947:27)

Islam introduced a new pattern of social stratification, which considered those closest to the Prophet of Islam in blood, faith and geography, the higher in

hierarchy. In the early period of Islam this principle of social stratification was followed while distributing annuity from the state's treasury. Even the Islamic jurisprudence recognizes this rule of precedence. The Prophet's teachings also underscore that in case of marriage, the considerations of birth should be given special attention. It is a matter of fact that even today the upper class Muslims in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh follow these norms in marriage in order to maintain their caste and class distinctions. (Karim 1956)

According to the Sunni School of Jurisprudence, descent or lineage has foremost significance in deciding hierarchies. As per descent and lineage, an Arab is superior to a non-Arab (*Ajami*) Muslim; amongst Arabs, the descendents of *Hazrat Ali* come first, the *Quraysh* are above all other Arabs followed by *Hazrat Ali's* descendents; the descendents of the Caliphs; a learned non-Arab (*Ajami*) is equal to an ignorant Arab; a *Qazi* (a Muslim judge) or a *Faqih* (a Muslim jurist theologian) ranks higher than a merchant and a merchant than a tradesman (Blunt 1931).

These hierarchies are evident in the social life of Muslims in Bangladesh. Distinctions are clearly maintained in marriages based on aforementioned hierarchies; largely based on the caste occupations. According to Islamic laws, although equal marriages are preferred, unequal marriages are not declared void. Therefore, consideration of caste and class distinctions different from those enumerated above arose in Muslim societies depending on the conditions prevalent in those parts of Muslim world. (Karim 1956)

Muslims in Bengal patterned its social stratification among four major castes; *Syed*, *Mughal*, *Sheikh*, and *Pathan*. There are about 35 distinct Muslim castes in Bengal (Talke 1914). In Bengal, up to the early twentieth century, Muslims, especially members of higher divisions divided Muslim society into three broad divisions: 1) *Sharif* or *Ashraf* (i.e., noble born/foreign Moslems), 2) *Atraf* (low-born) and 3) *Ajlaf* or *Arzal* (lowest of all). The *Ashraf* exclusiveness projected itself sharply in its attitude towards language and culture. *Fazle Rubbee*, the *Dewan* of the *Nawab* of Murshidabad, emphasized the foreign origin of the Bengal Muslim in his book 'Origin of Muslims in Bengal'. This appeared to be the projection of *Ashraf* outlook. In fact, the entire *Ashraf* or the aristocrat group strongly refused to be identified with locality. The *Ashrafs* of this region neither expressed their readiness to acknowledge their Bengali identity in cultural heritage nor with regards to language and it continued to remain a permanent *Ashraf's* feature all through the rest of the decades (Dey 1998).

However, recent research has revealed that, the growth of the educated land-holding or service-holding middle class professional was the most uneven among Muslims in Bengal. The practice of modern education neither changed their attitude towards the modernity of life nor improved the total life style of general mass in a befitting manner as it did in other regions and religions. Unlike the Muslims of urban Uttar Pradesh, who could retain their social and economic status through the possession of land at large and retention of Urdu, the Bengal Muslims, majority of who were rural poor and illiterates could not form a viable middle class. The phenomenon came to be considered as the most important drawback of the Bengali Muslim society. Moreover, the 1881 census of Bengal, listing the districts surveyed in the province of Bengal, grouped together, as the five divisions - Burdwan, Presidency, Rajshahi, Dacca and Chittagong, with their twenty eight districts under the heading Bengal. Within this area the language spoken by the Muslims, barring a few upper class residents of major cities was Bengali. Some Muslims also wished to learn Arabic (the sacred language). Abdul Latif says: “unless a Mohammedan is a Persian and Arabic scholar, he can not attain a respectable position in Mohammedan society”.

The upper class Muslims, especially those who claimed to have entered Bengal as Muslims, speak Urdu at home. A large number of the Bengali Muslims, who are converted Muslim, spoke a language mixed with Persian and Arabic words known as *Mussalmani-Bengali*, the language of an extensive popular literature. But they chose Urdu for educating their children because it was likely to raise their social status. The census of 1901 showed that Muslims formed a large part of the agricultural population of Bengal, but the reports also revealed that most of them were tenants rather than landlords. The Muslims were the tenants and their *Zamindars*, with few exceptions, were Hindus (Ahmed 1996). The tenants suffered t at the hands of *Zamindars* because they were mostly absentees and would leave matters in the hands of *Naiibs* (literally deputies or managers). In 1902, the government of India, in a resolution said that in Bengal there were in existence “the evils of absenteeism, of management of estates by unsympathetic agents, or unhappy relations between the landlords and the tenants. The majority of these *Naiibs* are Hindus, who have little sympathy with the Mohammedan tenants”.

Like the higher caste Hindus, foreign Moslems (Arabs, Persians, Afghans) and their descendents consider the acceptance of menial service as a moral degradation (Indian Census Report 1901 Part-1 p.543) and looked with contempt upon all other ranks of Bengal Moslems whom they call “*Ajlaf*”, ‘coarse rabble’,

lower classes including different functional groups such as weavers, cotton-carders, oil-pressers, barbers, tailors etc. The *Arzal* (lowest of all) consisted of the lowest caste such as *Helalkhor* (sweepers, latrine and garbage cleaners), *Lalbegi*, *Abdal* and *Bediya* with whom no other Moslem would associate. The lower castes were forbidden to enter the mosque or to use the public burial ground. (Levy 1933) Bannerjee remarks that, the handloom weavers were found both among the Muslims and Hindus but only the names given to them by the two communities were different. Among the Hindus, they were called *Tantis*, *Tantwas* and *Jogis*. The Muslims called them *Jolahas* or sometimes *Momins*. According to Risley, the weaver class among the Muslims occupied the lowest social position within their own community. Generally, they marry within their own class and inter-marriages were regarded as improper and undignified; and the people doing such marriages were not allowed except on the payment of special penalties. The term '*Jolaha*' was regarded as one of the abused caste in the society and they were considered as unrefined. Also remarked by Allen (East Bengal District Gazetteer Dacca, p.64.) it is a strict caste, with their traditional occupation being weaving or dyeing.

2.1 Dalit Issues in Contemporary Bangladesh

The studies on contemporary rural society endorse existence of caste among the Muslims in rural Bangladesh (Chowdhury 1978; Jain 1975). The Muslims in the villages are broadly divided into *Khandan* (high status Muslims), *Girhasta* (low status Muslims) and *Kamla* (labourers/lowest status Muslims) and there exist sharp cases of discrimination and exclusion in most of the villages in the country. This socially, culturally and economically marginalized people, have least participation in the local power structure and to change the political and economical situation of their own communities in the country.

The major Muslim Dalits include *Tele* (oil presser), *Napit* (barber), *Tati* (weaver from Pakistan and speak Urdu), *Darji* (tailor), *Hajam* (quack for circumcision), *Mazi/Khottra* (boat men), *Bhera* (carrier of bride carriage), *Kasai* (butcher), *Bede* (river gipsy), *Hijra* (transvestites deal with entertainment with dance/songs/sex worker), *Bihari* (refugees from Bihar, India), *Rohinga* (ethnic minority/refugees from Myanmar) and so on.

Most Dalits, particularly the untouchables among the Hindus in Bangladesh, are the descendents of Indians from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh (Kanpur, Hamirbag, and Jobbalpur), Andhra Pradesh and many other parts like Gourakpur, Chapra, Uriya, Maddaparpur, Baliha, Patna, Motihari, and Bhagalpur. From the inception of setting up the capital in Dhaka by Islam Khan during Mughal regime in 1608,

sweepers were appointed for cleaning activities. It is a common opinion that they had been brought largely by the British colonial regime to provide menial services for them since 1830s. They have been popularly known as ‘*Methor*’ (derived from Persian word *Mihtar*’ literally meaning ruler/prince) that signifies degradation and disgust. (Asaduz Zaman 2001).

The major Hindu Dalits include *Bashpor* (bury dead body and speak Bhojpuri and Hindi), *Dom* (bury dead body and help postmortem and speak Bhojpuri), *Hadi/Hela* (sweeper and speak Telegu), *Domer* (Sweeper/cleaner speak Jabbalpuri and Hindi), *Lalbegi/Vulmiki* (sweeper/cleaner speak Urdu and Hindi), *Kolu* (traditional oil presser and speak Bangla), *Pasi* (collector of palm and date juice and speak Bhojpuri), *Risi* /Tanner (shoe/leather worker and speak Bangla), *Muchi/Chamar* (shoe and leather worker and speak Hindi), *Harijon/Methor* (sweeper/cleaner and speak Jabbalpuri and Hindi), *Harijon/methor* (sweeper/cleaner and speak Telegu), *Mala* (tea garden worker/sweeper and speak Telegu), *Madiga* (sweeper/tea garden worker/drum beater and speak Telegu), *Sabari* (sweeper and speak Telegu), *Chakli* (washer men and speak Telegu), *Jaladas* (fishermen and speak Bangla), *Bede* (healing and entertainer with snake/monkey etc. and speak Bangla), *Sutradhar* (carpenter and speak Bangla), *Karmakar* (blacksmith and speak Bangla), *Kulal/Kuar/Kumor* (potter and speak Bangla), *Jugi* (bamboo work and speak Bangla), *Napit* (barber and speak Bangla), *Sharnakar* (goldsmith and speak Bangla), *Goala* (milk seller and speak Bangla), *Dhopa* (washer men and speak Bangla), *Bainna Bede* (food collector after harvest and speak Bangla), *Mali* (gardener/cleaner and speak Bangla), *Masuwara* (pig rearing and speak Bangla), *Tati* (weaver and speak Bangla), *Mushaheries* (mice and eel eater), *Dholak* (drum beater) and so on.

2.2 Economic and Social Status of Lower Caste *vis-à-vis* Other Castes

As mentioned earlier, following the war between India and Pakistan in 1965, the then Pakistan government introduced the Enemy Property (Custody and Registration) Order II of 1965. The Defence of Pakistan Rules, in fact, identified the minority Hindus most of whom belonged to SC and untouchables of the then East Pakistan (present day Bangladesh) as enemies and dispossessed them of their properties. Following, ‘Vested Property Act’, the repression of minorities continued even after liberation in 1972. Minorities mostly Dalits comprising about 90 per cent live in the rural areas bound by country yard, orchard, garden, pond, derelict tanks, drain, fallow lands etc. Such homesteads, in almost all cases are jointly owned by the minority people living in Bangladesh and by the “alleged enemies” living in Indian Territory or elsewhere (Chowdhury P. B. 1993). Thus, the property of the minorities has always been subject to

auction or declared as *Khas*, i.e., land owned by the government, most of which is either leased by the corrupt and influential political leaders/bureaucrats or possessed by trespassers.

The consequence of the continuation of VPA (EPA of the then Pakistan) was devastating, according to estimates made by Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD). A total of 1,048,390 Hindu households have been affected and 1.05 million acres of land has been dispossessed. About 30 per cent of the Hindu households or 10 out of every 34 Hindu households have been victimized by VPA/EPA. According to the Report of *Ain-O-Salish Kendra* (ASK), there were about 29 cases of forceful occupation of land and property of Hindu minorities in 1999. In *Sunamganj* district, out of 21,000 acres of vested land property, 16,000 acres of land have been illegally occupied. Likewise, in *Mymensingh* district, out of 29,722 acres of vested land property, one influential person has occupied 28,000 acres of land and 300 houses. In 1995, 72 per cent of all vested property was acquired by the members of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and in 1998, 44 per cent was acquired by the *Awami* League and 32 per cent by BNP (Persecuted Minorities and Endangered Nations, 2002). With this law, the estimated migration during 1964-1991 was 5.3 million or 538 persons each day since 1964, as high as 703 persons per day during the period of 1964-1971, which acted as an effective tool for the extermination of Hindu minorities (Daily Star, January 6, 2002). As a result, most of the Dalits, particularly the Hindus have relatively no access to capital assets. Ironically, the possession of capital assets reflect similar picture for the Muslim Dalits as well; although coercive legal measures, like the Vested Property Act, are absent.

3. Discrimination in Public Sector Employment against Minority Communities

The overt discrimination against the minority community, lower caste Hindus/untouchables delineates its reflection in every sphere of socio-economic and political life in Bangladesh society. The representatives of minority in the Parliament in 1973 was 3.8 per cent (12 members out of 315), 2.4 per cent in 1979 (8 out of 330), 1.2 per cent in 1988 (4 out of 330), and 3.3 per cent in 1991 (11 out of 330). In terms of population, the minority representatives ought to have been 18 per cent (60 members out of 330) but it has been around 10 per cent in the last two decades (Dutta 1993). As a matter of fact, upon the representation of religious minority in army and civil bureaucracy, it is observed that in defence services there were only 500 *Jawans* out of 80,000 and 1.6 per cent of officers; belonging to the minority community. Table 3.

Table 3: Minority Representation in Army

Posts	Total Strength	Minority
Second Lt. Colonel	900	3
Captain	1,300	8
Major	1,000	40
Lt. Colonel	450	8
Colonel	70	1
Brigadier	65	Nil
Major General	22	Nil
Total	3,807	62

Source: Dutta C. R.: "Different Aspect of Discrimination against Religious Minorities" in *Communal Discrimination in Bangladesh: Facts and Documents, 1993*

In the police department, 2000 recruits belonged to the minority communities out of a total of 80,000 regular recruits and there were 6 per cent at the official level. Table 4

Table 4: Minority Representation in Police Department

Posts	Total Strength	Minority
ASP/Asst. Commissioner	635	40
DSP/Addl. SP	87	2
SP/AIG	123	10
DIG	18	1
Addl. IG	6	Nil
IG	1	Nil
Total	870	53

Source: Dutta C. R.: "Different Aspect of Discrimination against Religious Minorities" in *Communal Discrimination in Bangladesh: Facts and Documents, 1993*

There has been virtually no representation from minorities in the Ministry of Foreign, Home or Defence. The figure of the civil bureaucracy as represented by minority communities is given in Table 5.

Table 5: Minority Representation in Civil Bureaucracy

Posts	Total Strength	Minority
Secretary	49	Nil
Addl. Secretary	26	Nil
Joint Secretary	134	3
Deputy Secretary	463	25
Excise and Customs Officials	152	1
Income Tax Officials	450	8

Source: Dutta C. R.: "Different Aspect of Discrimination against Religious Minorities", in *Communal Discrimination in Bangladesh: Facts and Documents, 1993*

Until 1993, not a single member from minority community was holding the post of chairman or director in the government, semi-government or autonomous organizations. In the banking or financial institutions, member belonging to a minority never holds any managerial post. There was only one minority representative as a general manager among 37 general managers in the nationalized banks. There is also discrimination in the matter of higher education and awarding scholarships. While religious teachers have been appointed in each school for imparting Islamic education, crore of *Taka* is being spent for the development of *Madrasah*. Also, Islamic University has been set up which is not facilitated for imparting education of other religions. Though there are a handful of religious teachers belonging to the minority community, they are discriminated in terms of salary and other benefits. Among the religious minorities, SC and *Harijans* are the most backward; hence they met special treatment in education during the British period. But at present, they are deprived of such facilities (Dutta 1993). According to advocate Rana Das Gupta, acting General Secretary of Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council, the situation of minority representation remains the same in all the spheres of state even in the present day Bangladesh.

3.1 Discrimination through Enemy (Vested) Property Ordinance:

The Muslim League launched in 1905 rooted the discriminatory Enemy Property Law against the minority, particularly the Hindus, in the propagation of separate nation for the Muslim. The formation of Pakistan in 1947 based on 'Two Nation Theory', in fact, created such a situation that it abruptly disrupted the communal harmony. After the emergence of Pakistan, a devastating communal riot in 1949 made a good number of minority Hindus migrate to India, due to the lack of security of lives and properties. Taking this opportunity, the government of Pakistan took over the possession of the properties of the evacuated minority people as "evacuee property" in 1949, 1951 and 1957. Again, in the wake of another riot in 1964 in East Pakistan (present Bangladesh), the government promulgated the Ordinance No.1 of 1964 restricting the rights to transfer lands without prior permission and captured all properties of evacuees, who were found untraceable and kept those properties in the management as in the case of evacuee property. Under the Proclamation of Emergency and Defence of Pakistan Ordinance No. XXIII of 1965 and subsequent rules; such as 171 and 182, government authorized appointment of controller to manage the enemy firms, to carry trade and business as agents of such firms and also appointed custodians of Enemy Property. Even before revocation of State Emergency, the government promulgated the Enemy Property Ordinance

No. 1 in 1969, which provided that the provisions of the Defence of Pakistan Rules should continue in force.

After the liberation of Bangladesh, the government following the sectarian policy of the erstwhile Pakistan, promulgated the Bangladesh (Vesting of Property and Assets) Order 1971, which provided that all properties and assets that were vested in the government of Pakistan should be deemed to have vested in the government of Bangladesh on and from March 26 1971, including the 'Enemy Property' also. The 'Enemy Property' had been renamed as 'Vested Properties' for which another enactment, namely, 'Enemy Property Administration Act' (Act No. XLVI of 1974), 1974 was enacted. The Act was replaced by Ordinance No. XCII of 1976 under Martial Law adding therein; that the vested properties should be administered, controlled, managed and disposed off by transfer or otherwise, by the Government or by such officer or authority as the Government might decide. This forms the basic law relating to Enemy Property or in other words, Vested Property (Chowdhury P. B. 1993). The Law of Vested Property in place of Enemy Property is, indeed, the permanent woe to the minority community in Bangladesh. It is a sharp weapon to evict them from hearth and homes and severe discriminatory concept of 'majority' and 'minority' is classified and established through this law which is real violation of Human and Fundamental Rights of the people. Due to this law, about 5.3 million Hindus migrated in between mid-sixties and 1991, that is, average 538 per day and 1, 96,296 per year. About 40 per cent of Hindu households or 925,050 families were affected and 53 per cent people of this community lost their lands and homesteads. The ruling elite purpose behind this law, as eminent economist Abul Barakat says, was to reduce the number of Bengali speaking population by driving out a considerable part of Bengali Hindu population. Though the law was repealed in the Parliament in 2001, the implementation of the repeal is yet to take place in an effective manner (Gupta 2007).

3.2 Living Conditions of Dalit Hindu and Muslim communities

The survey conducted in different localities of the country reveal that most Dalits; both from Hindu and Muslim communities live in *Kutchha* (Bamboo made/ thatched/ wattle) houses; 76 per cent for Hindu Dalits and 91 per cent for the Muslim Dalits. About 14 per cent of Hindu Dalits and 8 percent of Muslim Dalits live in semi-*pucca* houses and 99 per cent live in 1-2 room houses. Dalits are pushed to live in small and densely populated houses without any civic amenities. The study reflected that only 44 per cent of Hindu Dalits have access to tube wells, 22 per cent to Water and Sanitation of government (WASA),

17 per cent pond and 14 per cent others; whereas 51 per cent, 13 per cent, 12 per cent, and 11 per cent of Muslim Dalits have access to tube wells, WASA, pond and others; respectively. Most of the Dalits have less access to government facilities and mostly managed by themselves either by private tube well or natural resources such as ponds, rivers and so on. Among the Hindu Dalits, only 54 per cent have access to electricity while as it is 32 per cent for Muslim Dalits. This also indicates that many Hindu Dalits live in government or local government arrangements of housing with electricity, which is not so for the Muslim Dalits. About 90 per cent and 91 per cent of the Hindu and Muslim Dalits respectively; do not have access to telephone services and only 9 per cent of Hindu and 8 per cent of Muslim Dalits use mobile phones.

Use of sanitary toilet is limited to 58 per cent of Hindu Dalits and 44 per cent of Muslim Dalits while 37 per cent and 40 per cent of Hindu and Muslim Dalits respectively use non-sanitary toilet. This indicates poor living conditions that contribute to the ill health and environmental pollution of the said population. Cooking gas is not accessible to 81 per cent of Hindu Dalits and 96 per cent of Muslim Dalits. This reflects that the installation of cooking gas connection in the houses by the government or local government is greater for the Hindu Dalits than the Muslim Dalits as most of the Hindu Dalits are living in the housing/colonies arranged by the government. This is mainly because most of them are not allowed to stay within the locality. Radio is not accessible to 89 per cent of Hindu Dalits and 92 per cent for the Muslim Dalits. The Hindu Dalits as traditional fishermen are provided radio by the government or arrange for themselves one; to seek weather information before venturing into the river or sea. Bicycle, as the only form of transportation, is not accessible to about 82 per cent and 88 per cent of Hindu and Muslim Dalits. These figures reflect the dismal living conditions since they cannot afford a bicycle for their basic transportation. Other indicators; like 87 per cent of the Hindu Dalits and 97 per cent of the Muslim Dalits do not have cassette player at home which debars them access to any form of entertainment.

4. Condition of Dalit Hindu and Muslim communities (Survey Data):

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4.1 Economical and Social Conditions:

In terms of employment, income and status of labour, a large number of untouchables are employed in the public/private offices as sweepers and cleaners with very low pay. FGD findings endorse that the average monthly income of the majority Dalits falls between Tk. 3000-5000, which is far below

the national average monthly income of Tk. 7203. Most of the expenses are incurred on festive occasions and on recreation like feasts/drinks/movies and other forms of entertainment; also often to bribe to secure employment. This is pronounced in both rural and semi-urban areas. They borrow money from *Mahajans* (money lender) at high interest rates that lead to perpetual indebtedness and pauperization.

Among the different Dalit group respondents who were interviewed, 88 per cent of the Hindu Dalits who were the household heads were directly accessible (of which 12 per cent constituted old father/mother, spouse or oldest son/daughter as representatives). In case of Muslim Dalits, 91 per cent of head of households were directly interviewed (and 9 per cent as their representatives). Among the Hindu Dalits, 85 per cent belonged to the age group of 30- 59 and 11 per cent in the age group of 70-79. Majority of the respondents, i.e., 35 per cent of the head of the household belong to the age group of 30-39 and 31 per cent of the respondents were under the age group of 40-49. About 19 per cent of the respondents are found in the age group of 50-59 years. The age factor indicates that the largest number of head of households under survey belong to the age group generally not considered to be the average age of a mature household head. The reason may be that most Dalit families marry their children early and have a separate household. Moreover, the survey witnessed that at this age when the young Dalits should develop their skills and talents, are forced to face challenges to continue building their traditional livelihood system. Similar condition is to be found in Muslim Dalits as well. Among the Muslim Dalits, 88 per cent respondents belong to age group of 30-59; whereas 41 per cent, 31 per cent, and 16 per cent belong to age group of 40-49, 30-39 and 50-59; respectively. Only 4 per cent of the respondents are found in age group of 60-69, which indicates the existence of a good number of old people in both the Hindu and Muslim Dalits groups. Noticeably, members at the age of 50 and above, who may not be contributing to the household income are treated as the head of the household. This emerges from the traditional customs of respect and reverence for senior family members among both the communities. The sex-disaggregated data shows that 87 per cent of the respondents as head of their households among Hindu Dalits are male and 13 per cent are female. Among the Muslim Dalits, 76 per cent are male and 24 per cent are female. The contiguous gender scenario compounds the problem of understanding the role of the female in the past and even in contemporary Bangladesh. It can be assumed that females suffer severe domination by their male counterparts; that illustrate the dynamics of power and control over family, government and civil and religious laws. The survey data reveals that in

Bangladesh, patriarchal dominance is common across both Hindu and Muslim Dalits groups.

On the basis of data survey; Hindu Dalits are broadly divided on their occupation such as *Bede* (12%), *Barbar* (12%), Fisherman (11%), *Mali* (10%), *Dome* (9%), *Muchi* (8%), *Dhopa* (8%), Sweeper (6%), *Kumar* (6%), *Goala* (4%), *Mazi* (4%) and so on; about 3 per cent respondents work as *watchman/guard/peon*. On the other hand, the Muslim Dalits include *Mali* (16%), *Bede* (15%), *Kasai* (15%), *Tati* (15%), Fisherman (11%), *Kumar* (8%), *Dhopa* (7%), *Mazi* (7%) and *watchman/guard/peon* included about 5 per cent. Also, among the Muslim Dalits respondents, there were no sweepers or cleaners. A tabular occupational representation of Dalits is summarised in Table 6.

Among the Hindu Dalits, 34 per cent, 29 per cent, and 11 per cent male children of the respondents are students, unemployed and jobholders; respectively. Among Muslims, 21 per cent are students and 13 per cent unemployed and 16 per cent of male children of Muslim Dalits have some kind of job like servants, teaching small students and so on. About 11 per cent fisherman, 8 per cent *Mazi*, 5 per cent *Kasai* indicates that male off springs of the Muslim Dalits are either trying to adopt their father's profession or looking for alternative options. It is encouraging to note that sons of both Hindu and Muslim Dalits reflect deep interest in education; while as daughters are discouraged for education or not allowed to go out of houses for security or other socio-economic reasons.

Table 7: Income Structure of the Dalit Respondents

Type		Income (Mon)						Total
		1-999	1000-2999	3000-4999	5000-6999	7000-8999	9000-11999	
Hindu	Count	7	69	61	29	7	2	175
	% with in type	4.0%	39.4%	34.9%	16.6%	4.0%	1.1%	100.0%
Muslim	Count	4	31	24	13	2	1	75
	% within type	5.3%	41.3%	32.0%	17.3%	2.7%	1.3%	100.0%

The above data shows that the largest number, i.e., 39 per cent and 41 per cent of the Hindu and Muslim respondents belong to the income groups of monthly Taka 1000-2999. 35 per cent and 24 per cent of respondents belong to the income groups of Taka 3000-4999. Only 17 per cent among both Hindu and Muslim Dalits belong to the income groups of Taka 5000-6999 and 4 per cent

Table 6: Occupation of the Dalit Respondents

Type	Profession													Tc				
	Job	Muchi	Dome	Cleaner	Sweeper	Kumar	Mali	Tati	Fisherman	Dhopa	Goala	Barbar	Mazi		Business	Bede	Kasai	
Hindu	Count	6	14	16	5	10	11	17	4	20	14	7	21	8	1	21	0	1
	% with in type	3.4%	8.0%	9.1%	2.9%	5.7%	6.3%	9.7%	2.3%	11.4%	8.0%	4.0%	12.0%	4.6%	.6%	12.0%	.0%	10%
Muslim	Count	4	0	0	0	0	6	12	11	8	5	0	0	5	2	11	11	7
	% with In type	5.3%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	8.0%	16.0%	14.7%	10.7%	6.7%	.0%	.0%	6.7%	2.7%	14.7%	14.7%	10%

and 3 per cent belong to the income groups of Taka 7000-8999. This reveals the state of poverty among the Dalits. With a family size of more than 6 members, majority of Dalits are living below poverty line, less than the national average of Taka 4366/month per household and Taka 7973/month per household in urban areas (HES 1995-96). The perpetual struggle to fight back poverty makes Dalits more vulnerable to charity or support and thereby greater discrimination and oppression.

In the labour market, Dalits are treated badly with no regulations for wages and in other sectors like farming and cultivation, marketing of sale of fish and agricultural produce, independent business and work on choice , they are severely discriminated and face restrictions. The survey data shows that 14 per cent of the Hindu Dalits face strong discrimination in getting adequate wages. Generally, it is assumed that the Hindu Dalits are discriminated on the basis of wages but the survey data reveals reverse trend, that is, it is more severe for Muslim Dalits. Majority of the respondents from both Hindu and Muslim Dalits did not reveal the restrictions on wage earnings or choice of work. Majority of Hindu and Muslim Dalits feel that they are discriminated at work by giving lower wages since in rural areas there is no fixed wage structure.

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4.2 Higher Incidence of Poverty

The data shows that for both Hindu and Muslim Dalits; 73 per cent have a family size of 5-9 members and 24 per cent have 1-4 members; as against national average of 5.2 (Household Expenditure Survey 1995-96) or 4.9 (USAID 2007). It becomes indicative that both Muslim and Hindu Dalits do not use contraceptive measures beside various other factors that are largely responsible for larger reproductive nature of both Hindu and Muslim Dalits.

Table 8: Household Size of the Dalit Respondents

Type		Family Size			Total
		1-4	5-9	10-14	
Hindu	Count	42	127	6	175
	% within Type	24.0%	72.6%	3.4%	100.0%
	% within Family Size	75.0%	67.9%	85.7%	70.0%
	% of Total	16.8%	50.8%	2.4%	70.0%
Muslim	Count	14	60	1	75
	% within Type	18.7%	80.0%	1.3%	100.0%

Most of the Hindu Dalits have more than one son (83%) and majority of them (78%) belong to the age group of 5-29. Here too majority are in the age group of 15-19 (23%) and 10-14 (22%). Among the Muslim Dalits, the trend is the same with almost 87% having 1-4 sons. Among them majority (28%) belong to age group of 10-14 years, 17 per cent belong to the age group of 15-19 and 16 per cent belong to age group of 5-9. Son-preference emerges strongly across both the Dalits groups and field survey claims that the desire of the parents to have more than one son contributes to the greater number of children. The survey revealed that 52 per cent of the Hindu Dalits have no income except that they receive from major occupational work. About 18 respondents (Hindu Dalits) mentioned that they run small businesses that include selling of vegetables, fish, eggs, chicken, pottery items, toys, and cloth. Most *Bede* and other Dalits workers, except untouchables (*Harijan, Dome*) take loan or money from investors (or *Mahajans*), who run their business through these groups and pay them wage/profit on the basis of the sales generated. This case is similar for Muslim Dalits too.

Among Hindu Dalits 10 per cent are involved with farming as an additional source of income; whereas 12 per cent Muslim Dalits fall under this classification. Majority Hindu and Muslim Dalits do not possess large holdings of land. In villages land-holding is the chief indicator of wealth, since most of the Dalits do not possess land or wealth, they draw income from small jobs like cleaning of houses/*bazaar* on off time, looking after some small business of others. The percentage of loan as estimated is 36 per cent for Hindu Dalits and 48 per cent for the Muslim Dalits indicating that Muslim Dalits have more loan as they involve more with business and other smaller enterprises. The survey data further shows that 63 per cent of the Hindu Dalits take loan for meeting basic living expenses, 3 per cent for education of children and 3 per cent for business; whereas 48 per cent of the Muslim Dalits take loan to meet their basic expenses, 4 per cent for business and 11 per cent for other purposes like marriages of children, purchasing land, repairing of houses etc. The source

of loan is 65 per cent of Hindu Dalits and 49 per cent of Muslim Dalits from NGOs; 9 per cent Muslim Dalits and 3 per cent of Hindu Dalits from *Mahajons* (money lenders) and 2 per cent and 1 per cent of the Hindu and Muslim Dalits respectively take loans from relatives.

4.3 Low Literacy Rate

The respondents in the FGD from Hindu as well as Muslim Dalit communities have no formal education. A few had attended primary education for 1-2 years and are not able to read or write in their native language. Some of them had attended non-formal adult education and could learn calculations. About 64 per cent and 61 per cent of the respondents from Hindu and Muslim Dalits; respectively have had no education at all; 20 per cent and 28 per cent of the respondents from Hindu and Muslim Dalits respectively have completed junior high school education and 14 per cent and 11 per cent are found to have completed primary education till five years against the national average of literacy and adult literacy rates of population 5+, 7+ and 15+ for 47 per cent, 49 per cent and 50 per cent respectively (Statistical Pocket Book Bangladesh 2005). Only 2 per cent of Hindu Dalits are shown to have completed high school, i.e., Secondary School Certificate (SSC) which is the first formal degree to be the criterion applying for any official job like clerk, peon or lower division assistants in government and other sectors.

Table 9: Education level of Dalits

Type		Education				Total
		1-5	6-9	SSC	No	
Hindu	Count	24	35	4	112	175
	% within type	13.7%	20.0%	2.3%	64.0%	100.0%
Muslim	Count	8	21	0	46	75
	% within type	10.7%	28.0%	.0%	61.3%	100.0%

The literacy scenario reflects attitude on both ends; of Dalits on one hand and on the other the effective initiatives taken by the government, private sector or NGOs. It becomes difficult for Dalits to sustain in academic or employment sector with the discriminated identity. About 65 per cent respondents of the Hindu Dalits mentioned that they speak Bangla, 29 per cent speak Bengali and Hindi mixed, and only 5 per cent speak Hindi. Among the Muslim Dalits, the entire respondents speak Bengali. Hindu Dalits such as sweepers, *Muchi*, *Dome*, *Bede* and others speak mixed Bengali and Hindi, since their forefathers/ grandfathers or even fathers were from different Hindi speaking areas of

India. The sweeper class (*Horijons/untouchables*) and their families prefer to speak in Hindi.

Health Conditions and Housing

Most common diseases afflicting Dalits are skin, diarrhea, tuberculosis, pneumonia. Their access to the health centers is meagre. They get treatment mostly from the public/NGO health centers. Dalits are discriminated while attempting access to medical amenities at government, private or NGO facilitated centres. Survey data shows that about 36 per cent of the Hindu Dalits and 37 per cent for the Muslim Dalits feel discriminated in government hospitals. About 31 per cent of the Hindu Dalits and 28 per cent of the Muslim Dalits face discrimination at the hospitals run by NGOs and 38 per cent of the Hindu Dalits and Muslim Dalits respectively; feel discriminated in the private hospitals. About 63 per cent of the Hindu Dalits and 48 per cent of the Muslim Dalits feel discriminated by the doctors and nurses in different health facilities for they belong to lower castes and are not able to provide fees for the services.

Against the backdrop of limited access to capital assets mentioned earlier, it is useful to corroborate the findings from various FGD onto the living conditions; more specifically to housing. Many Dalits are like gypsies with their temporary settlements on the government land (*Khas*) near railway stations, on roads, government offices or vacant private land during non-harvesting period. Their environments are extremely polluted; either in public houses provided by the municipality/city corporation/government offices or privately arranged houses in the slums/squatters in and around the urban/semi-urban centres and rural areas in the country. Most of them use common toilets and access to water supply is either tap or tube well or largely from ponds/rivers in the villages. The untouchables mainly working in town/municipalities face difficulties as their rent, including housing utilities are deducted from their salary every month. Their ancestors were brought into the country by the then authorities for sweeping/cleaning jobs with an assurance that housing, health and other facilities would be free of cost so that they were accommodated in specific localities for years together and are not allowed to rent or build houses outside their exclusive areas.

Given the dismal conditions of living and population density, the government needs to take proactive measures to address the conditions of the Dalits. Moreover, only those with permanent employment as sweepers/cleaners are allocated public housing by the government. Data on parental origins shows

that almost all the Dalits are first generation in Bangladesh as their fathers' being recruited from India are settled in different districts in the country. In terms of fathers' occupation, the data shows that 22 per cent fathers are *Muchi*, 3 per cent cleaners, 15 per cent fishermen, 10 per cent *Dhopa*, 14 per cent *Bede* and others of the Hindu Dalits. Among the Muslim Dalits 17 per cent are for *Mazi*, 11 per cent for *Kasai*, 11 per cent for *Kumar*, 11 per cent for farmer, 17 per cent for *Bede*, 9 per cent for fishermen and so on. The data strongly supports the fact that the caste and work-based discriminated occupations hold strongly and continue with traditional caste based occupations.

5. Nature and Extent of Untouchability and Discrimination:

The Dalits of both Hindu and Muslim communities are denied entry by non-Dalits inside the temples/mosques, religious programmes, tea shops or restaurants, upper caste Hindu community and other community houses, playgrounds, movie theatres, burial grounds/graveyards, club/societies, social gatherings/wedding ceremonies, music concerts and cultural programmes in different forms.

Table 10: Nature and Extent of Discrimination in Entry among Hindu and Muslim Communities

Nature of Discrimination	Hindu				Muslim			
	Strong	Moderate	Less	Not Found	Strong	Moderate	Less	Not Found
1. Inside the house of non-Dalits	✓						✓	
2. Inside house to wish new born baby	✓					✓		
3. Temple/Mandir/Mosque	✓							✓
4. Inside teashops/restaurants			✓					✓
5. Inside home to wish newly married couple	✓					✓		
6. Inside the food factory	✓					✓		
7. In the religious programs	✓						✓	
8. Enter in the kitchen	✓						✓	
9. Enter in the toilets	✓						✓	

The entry into different places of the non-Dalit dwellings (PRA and FGD sessions) shows that most of the Hindu Dalits, especially the untouchables are strongly prohibited from entering the houses of non-Dalits, being impure and low caste.

Goala (milk seller), *Napit* (barber) and *Dhopa* (washer man) can enter only up to the front balcony or living room. *Napit* or barber is called for a haircut particularly for new born baby and washer man or *Dhopa* are allowed to enter home for taking or delivering the laundry. Muslim Dalits are less opposed as there are many professional groups who are required to enter the houses of non-Dalits like sweepers, cleaners, *Kasai* (butcher) and *Hazam* and so on. In case of wishing new born baby, no Hindu Dalits are allowed to enter the houses and strongly opposed, while it is not strongly opposed in case of Muslim Dalits. Also, the entry of untouchables into temple or *Mandirs* are strongly opposed by the *Brahmins*/priests or the care takers of the temples. Muslim Dalits are allowed to enter the mosques.

Earlier the untouchables were not allowed to enter inside the tea shop/ restaurants. They were served outside the restaurant in broken cups/plates although they would pay as other customers. Lately, the discrimination is not as severe. Both Hindu and Muslim Dalits are prohibited from wishing the newly married couple as they are not allowed cordially inside the house. In the religious programmes, the untouchables or the lower caste Hindus are not encouraged to attend the programmes together with non-Dalits who show wary attitude towards the entry of the lower castes/untouchables. The entry into kitchen and toilets inside the houses is not permitted. Though the general understanding is that the Muslim Dalits are not much discriminated but the study reveals the contrary. The cases of discrimination are almost the same for both the Hindu and the Muslim Dalits if their identity is disclosed while renting rooms in hotels, as the latter fears losing customers in case Dalit is being given accommodation.

5.1 Segregation and Denial of Access:

Generally, dwellings of the Hindu and Muslim Dalits in Bangladesh are segregated within the community. They live either in the locality called '*Methor* (untouchables), *Patti/Bede* colony/sweeper colony, *Jele* (fishermen) *Para* (village), *Napit* (barber) *Para* (village) etc or on the periphery of the government *Khas* land near canals/rivers/forests etc. They

The survey data shows that 19 per cent Hindu Dalits are strongly discriminated against renting rooms/ houses outside their exclusive areas; while as the number stands 28 per cent for Muslim Dalits. It was found that 13 per cent of the Hindu Dalits and 25 per cent of the Muslim Dalits are strongly prohibited from entering into the houses of non-Dalits. About 38 per cent of the Hindu Dalits and 23 per cent of the Muslim Dalits are strongly opposed to enter the

toilet of the non-Dalits. This reflects that it is rather worse in the case of Muslim Dalits, particularly the untouchables compared to the Hindu Dalits. 31 per cent of Dalits are not allowed to enter houses to wish new born baby of the non-Dalits and are strongly opposed. About 3 per cent of the Hindu Dalits are strongly opposed to enter the tea shop/ restaurant. It is quite reverse or very much unexpected in the case of Muslim Dalits as 27 per cent of them said that they are not allowed and strongly opposed to enter the tea shop.

In case of drinking water sources provided by the government/other authorities like WASA, municipality or Union Parishad, i.e., tube wells or other water supply arrangement by the government, both the Hindu and Muslim Dalits are not discriminated. But the discrimination surfaces while using private ponds/ lakes in the villages. Also Muslim Dalits are allowed to set up separate *Ghat* (place to bath and wash) for their use. Table 11 illustrates the degree of discrimination faced by Hindu and Muslim Dalits while accessing common resources like water, sanitation, electricity, forests and other resources including accessibility to scholarships.

Table 11: Access to Common Resources (FGD Findings)

Nature of Discrimination	Hindu				Muslim			
	Strong	Moderate	Less	Not Found	Strong	Moderate	Less	Not Found
1. Drinking water source			/				/	
2. Other water source (Pond, Tube well etc)		/				/		
3. Gas/Electricity/ Telephone			/					/
4. Facilities/Toilets etc. inside the school premise.			/					/
5. Walk at the trails, horse trails and streets				/				/
6. Access to scholarships	/					/		
7. Access to common crematory				/				/
8. Use of community forests	/					/		

The Dalits are compelled to divert water required for cultivation into the lands of non-Dalits. There may not be much discrimination while using toilets or other facilities such as school ground or sports etc. but in the selection of scholarship for children, the respondents stated that there is strong discrimination. The non-Dalit school teachers and school committees do not

treat their children well. Though they are seriously opposed for using community forests, they are allowed place in the public graveyard.

5.2 Access to Common Resources:

The survey data highlights that 63 per cent of the Hindu Dalits face discrimination while using public water facilities. A large number of Dalits have difficulty in procuring pure drinking water as a result of discriminatory practices. In the case of Muslim Dalits, the scenario is more acute; since Muslim Dalits live at the village periphery and or in the exclusive nomadic localities, the facility is severely discrimination. Discrimination while using water from private sources like tube well, ponds, lake etc is severe for both Hindu Dalits where 46 per cent reported discrimination and worse for Muslim Dalits with 71 per cent. Thus, the Muslim Dalits are at times in a worse. About 29 per cent of the Hindu Dalits feel discriminated strongly with regard to access to electricity connection which is 21 per cent for the Muslim Dalits. This could be attributed to expensive electricity connections which they are unable to afford and or highly bureaucratic where both the Hindu and Muslim Dalits do not have much economic or political power to ensure connection and adequate supply of electricity. About 21 per cent of the Hindu Dalits feel discriminated while getting cooking gas connection but in case of Muslim Dalits, it is 24 per cent. In case of use of public graveyard the Muslim Dalits face stronger discrimination with 15 percent as compared with 8 per cent of the Hindu Dalits. About 6 per cent of the Hindu Dalits feel strong discrimination while using government forests or hills; whereas 8 per cent of the Muslim Dalits feel strong discrimination in this regard.

Nearly 6 per cent of the Hindu Dalits feel that they are strongly discriminated while traveling by train and 7 per cent Muslim Dalits feel strong discrimination in this respect. Traveling by bus shows 7 per cent strong discrimination against the Hindu Dalits and 11 per cent for the Muslim Dalits. It is a positive indicator that 78 per cent and 80 per cent Hindu and Muslim Dalits feel they are not discriminated while traveling by bus.

In the service sector, the Hindu untouchables except the traditional *Goalas* (milk seller) are strongly opposed to sell milk and supply milk from house-to-house besides supplying to tea shops and restaurants. For the Muslim Dalits, there is no such discrimination. Usually, the Hindu and the Muslim Dalits are not allowed to seek loans from upper castes or non-Dalits. They take loan from money lenders (*Mahajans*) at exorbitant rate of interest. At times they are required to mortgage property (if any) or any valuable accessories. Dalits are

always encouraged to pay interest rather than the principal amount of the loan which results in pauperization/landlessness.

Table 12: Discriminated Treatments in Public Services (FGD Findings)

Nature of Discrimination	Hindu				Muslim			
	Strong	Moderate	Less	Not Found	Strong	Moderate	Less	Not Found
1. Sale of milk	✓						✓	
2. Take loans		✓				✓		
3. Rent rooms/hostel	✓						✓	
4. Seek relief or rehabilitation help		✓					✓	
5. Priestly works	✓					✓		
6. Sacred thread	✓							✓
7. Give or take <i>Prasad</i> (offered fruits, food etc.) and <i>Tika</i>	✓							✓
8. Eat food or drink tea etc. without washing utensils/glass	✓						✓	
9. Apply for government land/housing	✓				✓			
10. Touch or carry dead bodies	✓						✓	
11. Health care			✓				✓	
12. Sale of meat	✓						✓	
13. Legal services by practitioners			✓					✓

The survey revealed that the Dalit students are not allowed to stay in the hostels or dormitories. In terms of accessing relief and rehabilitation at the time of disasters, both Muslim and Hindu Dalits face discrimination to some extent. They are not given due help or co-operation because of their identity. In the villages, the local authority tries to oblige the non-Dalits, even though they might not need any help/co-operation for disaster mitigation. Again, in the selection of items during relief etc, the Dalits do not have any voice or choice; whereas the non-Dalits are allowed to select items at their own choice. The Hindu untouchables are discriminated for taking and giving *Prasad/Tika* at the *Mandirs/*temples. The *Brahmins/priests* do not allow them to enter and touch the Holy Books. They are not allowed to utter God's name in front of others in the *Mandir* premises if they are known as untouchables or belonging to other discriminated caste.

Both the Hindu and Muslim Dalits are discriminated strongly and less respectively while sharing food/tea in the same plates/cup/utensils by the non-Dalits. Since these groups are treated to be 'dirty', the perception stands in the way that their touch also makes the things dirty and as a result, they need to wash whatever they use for making it pure. Both the Hindu and Muslim Dalits are strongly discriminated while applying for or being allocated government lands (*Khas* land) for temporary or permanent use. The Hindu untouchables are not allowed to touch the dead body of non-Dalits and carry the dead body, but in the case of Muslims Dalits, they are not allowed to give the dead body bath or wash before funeral but they carry the dead body. Though most of the Hindu and the Muslim Dalits do not feel any discrimination in the government hospitals/health centers, they face severe discrimination in the private clinics and also in many NGO clinics. No untouchable from both Hindu and Muslim community is allowed to sell meat. Only Muslim Dalits called *Kasai* (butcher) are allowed to deal with slaughtering *Halal* animals and sell meat. Nowhere in the village can they sell pork or other animals' meat which would be prohibited in Islam while as the Hindu untouchables who eat pork can sell it within their local colonies.

5.3 Restrictions on Participation in Public Places/Ceremonies:

Invitation to Dalits by non-Dalits in any private feast is quite rare; whereas the Dalits always try to satisfy non-Dalits and invite them on all occasions. Though the latter join, they do not take food in most cases. In the villages, the Dalits take undue efforts to satisfy the non-Dalits by preparing separate menu and dishes beyond their capacity. In many cases, if the non-Dalits like to invite the Dalit in private/community/marriage ceremony, they arrange separate seating and menu for the Dalits. In fact, the non-Dalits use the Dalits for different errands and simply compensate them by changing few words of gratitude and manage to write-off their due wages or recognition. The Hindu Dalits feel strongly discriminated in the arrangement of feast by private/community or in other marriage feasts in the locality; whereas the Muslim Dalits are less discriminated in feasts organized by private/community or marriages. In the funerals of non-Dalits, normally both Hindu and Muslim Dalits attend but they are discouraged and are not allowed to stay longer. On the contrary, the presence of non-Dalits in the funerals of Dalits is very rare in villages.

In most of the cases in the villages, the Dalits are not invited to any government programmes, like national, international days etc. They may stand outside

and view the programmes from distance. At NGO programmes, both Muslim and Hindu Dalits are less discriminated. In the marriage procession or religious ceremonies, both the Hindu and Muslim Dalits are less discriminated the untouchables, for they are not allowed to attend the religious programmes. In the policy making or decision making programmes of the local authorities, both the Hindu and Muslim Dalits are strongly discriminated. They are not invited and if at times their leaders are invited who maintain to keep silent; thereby all decisions are taken by the non-Dalits without any opposition.

Table 13: Discriminatory Restrictions in Participation by Dalits (FGD Findings)

Nature of Discrimination	Hindu				Muslim			
	Strong	Moderate	Less	Not Found	Strong	Moderate	Less	Not Found
1. Feasts: Private	✓						✓	
2. Feasts: Community	✓						✓	
3. Feasts: Marriage	✓						✓	
4. Attend funeral of non-Dalits			✓				✓	
5. Attend Dalit funeral by non-Dalits				✓				✓
6. Government programmes		✓				✓		
7. NGO programmess			✓				✓	
8. Attend marriage procession			✓				✓	
9. Religious programmes		✓					✓	
10. Policy/Decision making	✓				✓			
11. Socio-cultural programmes		✓				✓		
12. Judgment/Dispute Settlement activities			✓				✓	

The Dalits among both Hindu and Muslims have no representation in the power structure of the locality. Disputes are largely settled through negotiation or arbitration as the community leaders or *Sardars* of respective communities settle the disputes. The common disputes among the Dalits are mainly quarrel between the children or spouses on non-issues which makes them vulnerable to victimization by group of miscreants. In many cases in the villages, the Dalits bow their heads to show respect to the non-Dalits; also the Hindu Dalits touch the feet of non-Dalits with their heads/foreheads to show utmost respect and also inculcates an elated feeling in the non- Dalits.

Table 14: Restrictions in the Forms of Dominance (FGD Findings)

Nature of Discrimination	Hindu				Muslim			
	Strong	Moderate	Less	Not Found	Strong	Moderate	Less	Not Found
1. Bowing head for respect	✓					✓		
2. Touch feet with head/forehead	✓					✓		
3. Take off shoes		✓				✓		
4. Walk below the trail or path			✓				✓	
5. Not to wear sunglasses		✓				✓		
6. Use of abusive language/words	✓					✓		
7. Ignored due to illiteracy and poverty	✓				✓			
8. Not to cast votes		✓					✓	
9. Not to support against party		✓					✓	
10. Not to raise voice	✓						✓	
11. Not to attend ceremonies		✓					✓	
12. Sprinkle holy water if touched by Dalits	✓							✓
13. Tolerate whatever is done by non-Dalits	✓					✓		
14. Not to sit on chair in front	✓					✓		
15. Not to laugh in front		✓					✓	
16. Force to sell goods/serve cheaper		✓				✓		

The usage of abusive vocabulary is a common practice in villages. Both the Hindu and Muslim Dalits undergo the humiliation by verbal abuse and use of derogatory words particularly in relation to their occupational status. The non-Dalits, especially the influential non-Dalits of both religions use abusive words for the Dalits in place of their names. They are not allowed to cast their votes without the permission of the influential non-Dalits or their leaders in their community who are invariably puppets in the hands of the influential non-Dalits. They are not allowed to support candidates of their choice from their locality.

In many cases, if the untouchables touch any item of the non-Dalits, particularly holy items of worship or things at the offices, the non-Dalits sprinkle water to purify. The discrimination and oppression impose upon the Dalits is at such menial levels, for instance, non-Dalits do not allow the Dalits to sit on the chair in front of them. The Dalits continue to be victims of social boycott for reasons such as, looking for jobs beyond their traditional employment, inter-caste marriages, going against the community norms/values. Dalits from both the religions are skeptical about the judgment of outsiders.

Table 15: Restrictions in the Forms of Social Boycott (FGD Findings)

Nature of Discrimination	Hindu				Muslim			
	Strong	Moderate	Less	Not Found	Strong	Moderate	Less	Not Found
1. If traditional occupation is not to be maintained	✓						✓	
2. If enter into inter-caste marriage relationship	✓						✓	
3. If rebelled against traditional norms and values	✓					✓		
4. Prevent attending funerals	✓		✓				✓	
5. Make alienated	✓					✓		
6. Declare as wrong doer	✓					✓		
7. Prevent attending socio-cultural programmes			✓				✓	

Due to bias towards the Dalits, judgment other than their own community to resolve their disputes or conflicts is preferred than the government jurisdiction.

Table 16: Restrictions in Attitudinal Untouchables (FGD Findings)

Nature of Discrimination	Hindu				Muslim			
	Strong	Moderate	Less	Not Found	Strong	Moderate	Less	Not Found
1. Belief that Dalits lack qualification	✓					✓		
2. Belief that Dalits lack ability	✓					✓		
3. Deny offering teaching jobs	✓					✓		
4. Deny offering official status	✓					✓		
5. Deny touching Holy books	✓							✓
6. Deny pronounce God's name		✓						✓
7. Believe that politics is something that should be done by Dalits	✓		✓					✓

In terms of attitudinal discrimination, the Hindu Dalits face strong discrimination in the community. It is the public perception that they lack qualification and ability so they should not be offered any teaching job or job with status. Being identified as untouchables, they are not allowed to pronounce God's name or touch the holy books and made to work according to their traditional occupations and serve the non-Dalits for being superior by birth.

Labour Market Discrimination

In terms of physical labour, the Hindu Dalits are real victims in villages. Dalits from both the religions render physical labour such as cleaning, carrying goods, caring cattle, and pleasantries to the non-Dalits without any monetary benefits or gifts. But sometimes the Dalits in villages have to seek help and cooperation in other means; therefore, they serve the non-Dalits for the service they receive. If the non-Dalit meets the Dalit in the market place, he would be ordered to carry shopping bags and help the non-Dalit fellow in buying things.

In other jobs like palanquin bearers/carrying *Dula/Dulhan* (bride/bridegroom), prostitution, carrying children etc., the extent of discrimination is less for both Hindu and Muslim Dalits. But for massage service, Dalits from both the religions are not by and large discriminated but untouchables are not allowed to lay their hands on these kinds of services.

Table 17: Discriminatory Labour (FGD Findings)

Nature of Discrimination	Hindu				Muslim			
	Strong	Moderate	Less	Not Found	Strong	Moderate	Less	Not Found
1. Physical Labour (<i>Gatar Khata</i>)	✓					✓		
2. Bonded labour (<i>Haliya</i>)			✓				✓	
3. Carry shopping without wages		✓				✓		
4. Household and Farm works without wages			✓				✓	
5. Work either with no wages or little wages			✓				✓	
6. Caring cattle		✓					✓	
7. Carry <i>Dula</i> (bridegroom)	✓						✓	
8. Prostitution			✓				✓	
9. Carry children			✓				✓	
10. Massage head and body		✓				✓		

Data shows that 33 per cent of the Hindu Dalits and 25 per cent of the Muslim Dalits say that they had experienced strong discrimination on giving their labour by force; while 21 per cent and 31 per cent of Hindu Dalits and 29 per cent and 21 per cent of Muslim Dalits experienced moderate and less discrimination. Only 16 per cent of the Hindu Dalits have no experience of forced labour while it is 24 per cent for Muslim Dalits. About 6 per cent of the

Hindu Dalits feel strongly that they have been underpaid; 15 per cent and 3 per cent of them feel moderately and less respectively to have worked with less money. 23 per cent, 35 per cent and 20 per cent of Muslim Dalits also have the same experience of strong, moderate and less discrimination respectively. Only 23 per cent of Muslim Dalits replied that they were underpaid. 2 per cent, 15 per cent, and 29 per cent of the Hindu Dalits have strong, moderate and less experience of carrying shopping bags of non-Dalits with less or without pay respectively. And for this, 13 per cent, 28 per cent and 29 per cent of the Muslim Dalits also have the experience of strong, moderate and less discrimination respectively. About 2 per cent of the Hindu Dalits and 8 per cent of the Muslim Dalits strongly feel that they need to bribe to avail leave. About 15 per cent of Hindu Dalits and 5 per cent of the Muslim Dalit respondents stated the discrimination while getting pension even after the bribe. The data endorses nearly equal discrimination for both the Dalit groups.

Discrimination in Other Markets:

About 41 per cent respondents of the Hindu Dalits stated that they have been strongly discriminated in the possession of land and opine that their lands are forcefully occupied by miscreants or powerful men rich/politicians. Almost 11 per cent of the Hindu Dalits and 17 per cent of the Muslim Dalits feel that they are strongly discriminated during eviction from their own land by the hoodlums or the powerful people in the community. Among the Hindu Dalits, 14 per cent respondents face strong discrimination when crops are taken forcefully from their fields and 11 per cent of the Muslim Dalits stated strongly discrimination for the same.

Discrimination in Consumer Markets

According to survey data, 19 per cent of the Hindu Dalits feel strong discrimination at the time of buying and selling land while 11 per cent Muslim Dalits feel the same. In case of selling land at cheaper price by force almost 22 per cent of the Hindu Dalits and 23 per cent of Muslim Dalits feel strong discrimination. About 18 per cent of the Hindu Dalits and 7 per cent Muslim Dalits responded that they feel strong discrimination in the forceful selling of the land. Generally, the powerful and socio-economically influential people force the Dalits to sell their land such as homestead/pond and or other piece of land. Although both the Dalit communities do not possess such land in the village or countryside, yet they are forced to sell whatever land they possess and face humiliation in various ways.

Consequences of Economic Discrimination

Economic discrimination against the Dalits has severe consequences. It is closely related to powerlessness, being dependent on non-Dalits for work and employment which inherently has greater possibilities of enslavement and exploitation. The Dalits are deprived of education, health and other social benefits and their voices constantly suppressed. In the village, economic empowerment is the key to power and decision making process and other socio-cultural and political measures of control. In terms of access to capital, 13 per cent of the Hindu Dalits and 8 percent of the Muslim Dalits feel strong discrimination to avail loans from the bank. Though Bangladesh has a well developed micro-credit program, yet majority Dalits do not avail any benefit or coverage under the scheme. About 16 per cent of the Hindu Dalits and 7 per cent Muslim Dalits feel strong discrimination in getting loans from NGOs.

While accessing loan from money lenders, 17 per cent of the Hindu Dalits and 1 per cent Muslim Dalits feel strong discrimination and about 18 per cent of the Hindu Dalits and 11 per cent of the Muslim Dalits feel strong discrimination while getting loan from different religious groups other than their religious group or community. About 16 per cent of the Hindu Dalits and 9 per cent of the Muslim Dalits feel strong discrimination while being charged high interest rates in taking loan from different sources. This may be attributed to the inability to pay back the money with interest on time as expected by the organizations and money lenders, who hesitate lending because the economic conditions of the Dalits does not guarantee monetary returns. Moreover, there is no property to mortgage so as to ensure security.

6. Discrimination in Political Sphere

FGD findings indicate that the Dalits of both the religions in Bangladesh have least power in politics and decision-making process. They have very limited access to organising trade unions, electing their leaders for their own benefits, entering polling booths at their convenience, participation in political rallies, representing themselves as candidates in administrative units, casting vote in support of the candidate of their choice particularly in villages. Sometimes they encounter serious violence created by upper caste Hindus in seeking support from the Dalits for a particular candidate, and in most cases, threatened to not to go to the polling booth. In case they take part in rallies or other activities in support of someone else, they become the victims of violence and threats after the election. If someone wins election without the support of upper caste Hindu, repercussions are severe.

6.1 Participation in Political Process (Survey Findings)

While participating in political activities in the locality about 11 per cent Hindu Dalits stated strong discrimination while as 67 per cent of the Hindu Dalits responded that they do not feel any discrimination while participating in political activities. Only 5 per cent of the Muslim Dalits feel strong discrimination in the matter of taking part in the political activities. Surprisingly, though the Muslim Dalits are large in number in comparison to their Hindu counterpart, they feel more discriminated in participation in the political activities. About 17 per cent of the Hindu Dalits feel strong discrimination in participation in political processions and among the Muslim Dalits, 4 per cent feel strong discrimination in participating in political procession. On an average, about 22 per cent of the Hindu Dalits responded strong discrimination in taking part in the national election either as a candidate or a supporter while as among the Muslim Dalits 8 per cent responded to strong discrimination in taking part in national election.

The above scenario correlates to the representation of minorities of whom majority are the Dalits in the country as reflected in 1954 where there were 72 minority representatives from a total of 309 parliament members in the then East Pakistan. This representation dropped down in 1973 to 12 out of 315. In 1979, it was 8 out of 330 and 1991 it was only 11; while as per population, the minority representatives ought to have been 60 but it has been around 10 in the last two decades. The Dalits have, in fact, least representation in the National Parliament through elections. About 22 per cent of the Hindu Dalits feel strong discrimination in the participation of local level election while among the Muslim Dalits 9 per cent feel strong discrimination. Though minority of the Hindu Dalits is treated as a vote bank by some political parties or leaders, they are exploited even at the local level politics. About 16 per cent of the Hindu Dalits feel strong discrimination participating in the election for labour union which is 16 per cent among the Muslim Dalits.

The Dalit groups cannot represent themselves in labour union, which plays a very important role for employment, increment of wages, bonus, and job security. In local decision making process, about 24 per cent of the Hindu Dalits feel strong discrimination whereas it is 12 per cent for the Muslim Dalits. About 50 per cent of the Hindu Dalits and 25 per cent of the Muslim Dalits feel strong discrimination in the formation of local committee or Panchayat for their community benefit. It indicates severe discrimination for both the groups powerless at their local level. About 15 per cent of the Hindu Dalits and 17 per

cent of the Muslim Dalits feel strong discrimination while casting their vote for a candidate of their choice.

Rights and Local Governance

In terms of political rights, the Hindu Dalits are strongly discriminated as compared to the Muslim Dalits. They are discouraged to take part in politics even at the local levels, volunteer as a candidate in the election or a representative in political parties, hold positions as office bearers or be members of Parliament or any other important political positions. The Dalit women are also discouraged by both their own communities and others. Dalits are discouraged to participate in the polling, for fear of the Dalits supporting candidate in their favour. Most of the politicians and candidates are of the opinion that both Hindu and Muslim Dalits cast their votes in favour of progressive or pro-liberation politics and therefore, they are discouraged and threatened where opposite politicians are strong and dominant. Sometimes the Dalits are used as vote banks for many politicians/political parties by bribing leaders of the Dalit communities.

Table 18: Political Right (FGD Findings)

Nature of Discrimination	Hindu				Muslim			
	Strong	Moderate	Less	Not Found	Strong	Moderate	Less	Not Found
1. Discourage to represent high level political positions	✓					✓		
2. Discourage to represent high level positions in political parties	✓					✓		
3. Discourage Dalit women to participate in politics	✓					✓		
4. Discourage to become candidates	✓					✓		
5. Casting votes for candidate of choice		✓				✓		
6. Easy to go poll center and cast vote		✓				✓		
7. Misuse Dalits as vote banks	✓					✓		

6.2 Government Policy and Programme

The discussion so far, shows apathy towards the eradication of poverty and discrimination both at local authority as well as other Government agencies.

The Dalit question of poverty, discrimination, violence or socio-economical variables are not attended to by the policy makers. No significant instance has come up that could stir up the influential civil forums/NGOs to voice in favour of Dalits to mitigate discrimination against them. The Dalits are majorly excluded from the governmental policy/programme.

Table 19: Government Policy and Program (FGD Findings)

Nature of Discrimination	Hindu				Muslim			
	Strong	Moderate	Less	Not Found	Strong	Moderate	Less	Not Found
1. Not to give priority to policies and programs concerning Dalits in long-term and short-term plans	✓					✓		
2. No implementation of Dalit Development Program	✓						✓	
3. Not to recognize	✓						✓	
4. No presentation of Dalit Bill in the Parliament	✓					✓		
5. Discourage Dalits to get loans from the banks	✓					✓		
6. Exclude Dalits in the formulation of policies and programs	✓				✓			

Both Dalit groups, Hindu and Muslim, in fact have least participation in local leadership coupled with the fact that the non-Dalits discourage them in different ways not to take active participation.

Participation in Development Process

Both the Hindu and Muslim Dalits feel discriminated in offices like post office, police station and other services provided by the government. Their issues/complaints are not given due attention by the police or other authorities. They are discouraged to look for jobs in police/military or other law enforcing agencies and their participation is absolutely undermined or ignored. They are not involved in the formulation of policy and programs. The Dalit women are not included or consulted in the policy matters and programmes towards the development and empowerment of women. Many a times, the programmes sponsored by the Central Government for benefit or poverty eradication at local levels do not find any implementation of the policies or programmes. The government has not drawn any policy to attend to Dalit employees like watchmen/guards, peon or other lower division staffs required in the offices; to make their jobs permanent or promote them to higher positions and increment in their salary.

Table 20: Development Programs of the Government/Donors (FGD Findings)

Nature of Discrimination	Hindu				Muslim			
	Strong	Moderate	Less	Not Found	Strong	Moderate	Less	Not Found
1. Low or inadequate budget	✓					✓		
2. Discourage Dalit women to participate in women's development programs	✓					✓		
3. Exclude Dalits in formulation of policies and programs	✓					✓		
4. Non- implementation of Central policies at the local level	✓				✓			
5. No encouragement for promotion of Dalit employees	✓					✓		
6. No priority in employment	✓					✓		
7. Employers do not hire Dalits	✓					✓		
8. No priority given to proposals submitted by Dalits	✓					✓		

6.3 Discrimination on Dalit/Lower Caste/Untouchable Issues:

In terms of religion and other socio-cultural factors, the Hindu Dalits feel strongly discriminated in the main stream Hindu society. They are not allowed to enter the temples/*Mandirs*, and are explicitly excluded in performing various customs and rituals. Deprivation and discrimination against Dalits continue unabated.

The cases of atrocities, issues of victimizations/discrimination are prevalent to a maximum extent in villages of Bangladesh. Violence against the Dalits of both religions is a common practice. The notorious young or old people of non-Dalit groups still create nuisance in the locality and make situations volatile for violence upon the Dalits. Rape, physical injury, beating, physical and mental torture, vandalism, burning houses/huts etc. are common threats to the Dalits in their localities. Woman trafficking is a common issue related to atrocities in the locality of Dalits by non-Dalits. In many cases, the non-Dalits victimize the Dalits with false allegations and sue against them in the local union offices, police station or other formal and informal agencies. The survey depict that about 54 per cent of the Hindu Dalits are victims of physical torture, including their feelings of discrimination as strong, moderate and less. The number of Muslim Dalits is less in this regard. Only 28 per cent of the Muslim Dalits feel they are somehow discriminated and have become the victims of torture by

the Muslim non-Dalits. About 7 per cent of the Hindu Dalits and 8 per cent of the Muslim dalits expressed strong discrimination when their houses are burnt by other non-Dalits or the Muslim fundamentalists or powerful people in the community. About 8 per cent of the Hindu Dalits feel strong discrimination to be punished by false allegation against them by the non-Dalits or the Muslim fundamentalists or powerful people in the locality and 8 per cent of the Muslim Dalits feel strong discrimination in this regard. An important finding in terms of caste-based discrimination is that 70 per cent of the Hindu are discriminated and forced to leave their home/villages either by the Hindu non-Dalits or by Muslim fundamentalist/influential people while it is 66 per cent for the Muslim Dalits. It is because they are either forced to sell their lands/homesteads or serve the non-Dalits of both the religions otherwise they become the victims.

Discrimination in Education

In education, the Dalits, particularly the Hindus Dalits, are most deprived and discriminated. They are denied participation in school executive committee, discouraged to be teachers, to get their children admitted into schools and also taking other jobs in the schools. Their children do not have quota in the allocation of scholarships and the selection for scholarships is not fair in most cases. The school committee shows irregularities for allocating scholarships to the Dalit students. There are also irregularities in selection for sports and games, i.e., in most cases the Dalit students are not given due chances to prove their talent or performances in the schools. The Dalit students are generally teased by the other community students and shown hatred inside the schools or outside. Therefore, the dropout of Dalits' children from the schools is high.

Table 21: Discrimination in Educational Institutions (FGD Findings)

Nature of Discrimination	Hindu				Muslim			
	Strong	Moderate	Less	Not Found	Strong	Moderate	Less	Not Found
1. Deny to be in the executive committee	✓						✓	
2. Discourage teaching	✓						✓	
3. Discourage to admit in	✓						✓	
4. Denial of jobs	✓						✓	
5. Inadequate scholarships	✓						✓	
6. Irregularity in scholarships	✓						✓	
7. Irregularity in sports in	✓						✓	
8. Teasing by school mates		✓					✓	

All the target respondents were interviewed to know whether they face discrimination in education in terms of overall difficulty for their children to get admitted into school, opportunity for their community members to be school teachers, chance for joining as school executive or governing body, discrimination in the selection and allocation of scholarship, discrimination in examination result, in case their children are teased by school mates and the school teachers, discrimination over drinking water in the school, discrimination in the use of toilet, discrimination in sitting amongst Dalits and non-Dalits, discrimination in the selection of sports, discrimination to touch things like chalk, duster, tables and chairs etc. and also Dalit teachers are teased by fellow non-Dalit teachers. Survey data shows that 21 per cent of the Hindu Dalits and 27 per cent of the Muslim Dalits feel strong discrimination related to admission. Though the Hindu Dalits, particularly for the *Harijans*/sweepers in town or semi-urban areas, have some schools in their locality for their children, the Muslim Dalits do not have such facility anywhere in the country. The discrimination in the enrollment of children into school is almost the same for both the groups. About 29 per cent of the Hindu Dalits and 36 per cent of the Muslim Dalits feel strong discrimination to be appointed as teachers in schools.

Discrimination by Peer Groups

About 10 per cent of the Hindu Dalits and 28 per cent of the Muslim Dalits stated about their children being teased in schools by school mates. The scenario of discrimination in this case is interesting in the sense that it is a general idea in the country that the Hindu Dalits and children are highly discriminated by the fellow or school mates. But the survey findings endorse that the situation is more severe in case of Muslim Dalits and their children. The reason maybe the Hindu Dalits have some schools for their own communities; whereas it is not available for the Muslim Dalits in the country. As a result, the Muslim Dalits' children have no other option except going to the same school with non-Dalits. It was reported that 51 per cent of the Hindu Dalits and 80 per cent of the Muslim Dalits feel that their children are treated badly or discriminated while sitting beside the non-Dalit children in the school. A comparison between the Hindu Dalit children with the Muslim Dalit children reflects a severe discrimination in case of the Muslim Dalit children which is quite astounding as it is thought unlikely to happen. About 13 per cent of the Hindu Dalits feel strong discrimination in accessing drinking water in schools. Dalit children are considered impure and dirty and among the Muslim Dalits 17 per cent feel strong discrimination for the same in schools. The scenario again delineates the picture of the Muslim Dalits in the country. About 13 per cent of the Hindu

Dalits and 16 per cent Muslim Dalits feel strong discrimination in their children using toilets in schools.

Discrimination by Teachers and Management

About 27 per cent of the Hindu Dalits feel strong discrimination in being elected or nominated in school management committee. For Muslim Dalits, 44 per cent feel strong discrimination in being included in the executive committees of the schools. About 8 per cent of the Hindu Dalits and 24 per cent of the Muslim Dalits feel strong discrimination in their children being teased by teachers in schools. In case of the scholarship awards, 13 per cent of the Hindu Dalits and 47 per cent Muslim Dalits feel strong discrimination in the selection for scholarship in schools by school management committee. This again brings to light the fact that the Muslim Dalits face severe discrimination in the schools to avail scholarships for their children. This is an underlying reason for the Muslim Dalits discontinuing their education in the absence of financial support and adverse situations. While evaluating examination paper of Dalit students, about 9 per cent Hindu Dalit and 29 per cent of the Muslim Dalits feel strong discrimination in this regard. The children of Muslim Dalits are deprived and suffer since they do not have separate schools and have to compete in the examination with the children of non-Dalits.

It is a common opinion about Muslims that they show reluctance in participation in cultural activities. Indeed, children of both communities are treated badly and are not allowed to participate in cultural activities in schools. Though the society is progressing towards modernity, the biased attitude and discrimination towards lower castes and untouchables of both the religious community still remain crucial for Bangladesh society. On the contrary, the scenario is as hostile for the Muslim Dalits as it is for the Hindu Dalits.

7. Bonded Labour and Violence on Women:

The underlying causes of bonded labour are linked to unemployment, under employment, abject poverty, and deterioration of socio-cultural norms and values to a greater extent. It also ranges from the expansion of global market forces and a growing materialism perpetuated by media to a rapid social transformation. In a country like Bangladesh, 40 per cent of its 140 million people live below poverty line. More than half of all the children are malnourished. About 70 per cent of the workforces are involved in agriculture, which accounts for one-fourth of the gross domestic products. The industrial

sector is growing albeit slowly, largely based on manufacturing of garments and textiles by privately owned companies. The general conception is that the push-and-pull-effect plays a vital role in migration of people from rural areas to cities. But in Bangladesh, the push-effect is stronger that drives villagers towards the cities on account of extreme poverty and unemployment. This huge number of poor migrants does not find place to sleep in the cities except on sidewalks, railway station, steamer *Ghat* (harbour), and open government land (*Khas*). They are generally called 'floating people' among whom the majority is women and children. They fall into critically vulnerable situations and become the victims of forced labour.

The Constitution of Bangladesh prohibits forced or compulsory labour, including child labour. However, the government does not enforce this prohibition effectively. The Factories Act and Shops and Establishments Act, both passed in 1965, established inspection mechanisms to enforce laws against forced labour. But practically, these laws could not be enforced due to the scarcity of resources. There is no large-scale bonded or forced labour; however, numerous domestic servants many of whom are children, work in enslaved conditions and suffer physical torture in most cases leading to death. Also, there is an extensive trafficking of both women and children, mainly for purposes of forced prostitution (Bangladesh: Country Report on Human Rights Practices-2000, Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labour, February 23, 2001). There is no law that uniformly prohibits child labour and as a result, child labour has become an alarming crisis. The Factories Act of 1965 bars children under the age of 14 from working in factories and The Shops and Establishment Act prohibit the employment of children under the age of 12 in commercial workplaces. The Employment of Children Act 1938 prohibits the employment of children under the age of 15 in railways or in goods handling within ports. According to a government survey of 1996 on forced labour, the country had 6.3 million child labourers between the age of 5 and 14 years who were not enrolled in schools. Previous surveys of ILO and UNICEF indicate that among children of 6 to 17 age group, 21 per cent of boys and 4 per cent of girls work as paid labour with long working hours, low wages and very often in hazardous conditions. Against this backdrop, the scenario of forced or bonded labour need be focused sternly in Bangladesh.

Our survey findings indicate that about 2 per cent of the Hindu Dalits feel strong discrimination in terms of *Haliya* or bonded labour in farming and among the Muslim Dalits, 7 per cent feel strong discrimination. About 2 per cent of the Hindu Dalits feel strong discrimination at the time of debt or loan bondage.

Though the country is well known for the success of micro-credit, however, many Dalits are victims of debt or loan bondage. Among the Muslim Dalits, 12 per cent feel strong discrimination. About 19 per cent of the Hindu Dalits and 9 per cent of the Muslim Dalits feel strong discrimination. It reveals the existence of forced labour for food which determines the level of discrimination of the low caste people across both religions. About 14 per cent of the Hindu Dalits feel strong discrimination while 5 per cent and 37 per cent feel moderate and less discrimination on the ground of cleaning work for food. It is an established fact that Dalits perform the cleaning job in return for food and in many cases it is a forced occupation since generations; among the Hindu Dalits 14 percent and among the Muslim Dalits 8 per cent feel strong discrimination in this regard.

7.1 Children as Forced/Bonded Labour:

Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated countries with more than 40 per cent of its inhabitants living below poverty line and frequently susceptible to natural disasters. According to the National Sample Survey of Child Labour in 1995-96, it was found that children are working either in profit making organizations or farm-houses or engaged in economic activity. As mentioned earlier, 6.3 per cent of total 34.4 million children in 1995-96 were engaged in labour with 19 per cent of the total child population as economically active. Out of this, 12 per cent were in the age group of 5-9 and the male-female ratio of the children was 60:40. The children were working in manufacturing units, black-smith, shoe cleaning, street cleaning, pottery, baking bricks and stone chips, printing press, welding, motor garage, light engineering workshops, construction work, waste picking and so on. According to survey conducted by ILO and UNICEF on Hazardous Child Labour in Bangladesh in 1996, there are 300 different kinds of activities where children are engaged of which 47 activities are hazardous. There is exposure to flames, working with electricity, exposure to harmful chemical substances (carcinogens, neurotoxins, gas, fume and organic dust), handling garbage, high-speed machinery, inappropriate hand tools, sharp equipments, extreme heat or cold, insufficient light, heavy load, continuous working with ice and water without gloves and stressful working conditions (Begum S A. 2002). According to Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum (BSAF), children are engaged in 430 different kinds of activities of which 63 could be categorized as hazardous to children. These included ship breaking, prostitution, collecting shrimp fries, working in brick kiln, slaughtering, smuggling and political violence (BSAF, 2002).

According to the UNICEF Report of 1995, about 10,000 girls belonging to the age group of 12 to 17 are active in flesh-trade, vulnerable to repression and exploitation (Child Labour Situation in Bangladesh: A Rapid Assessment Study by ILO in 1997). As per the information available, there are about 12 brothels in the country with 25,000-35,000 sex workers and children. The estimated number of floating sex workers and their children is about 100,000 in the major cities and towns in Bangladesh. According to the estimate of Bangladeshi police, there are between 15,000 and 20,000 children engaged in street prostitution (Begum S A .2002). According to the Child Labour Survey, 28 per cent of girls between the age groups of 10-14 are economically active. Many of them engaged in household activities such as cooking, looking after younger siblings and others. The recent phenomenal growth in the number of domestic child workers in Bangladesh indicates a new trend in child labour. It is estimated that from 250,000 to 300,000 children, most of them are girls, work as maids in Dhaka alone. This is reticent form of child labour and can be treated as forced labour.

Reports from various NGOs indicate that kidnapping of children and trafficking of them for bondage labour and prostitution has become a serious and widespread problem. There is an extensive trafficking of children, primarily to India, Pakistan and other destinations including Bangladesh largely for forced prostitution. According to the press reports, over 200,000 women and children have been trafficked from Bangladesh to India in the last 10 years including those smuggled to various Middle East Countries and Pakistan; most of them were coerced into prostitution. Statistics provided by Action Against Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation of Children (ATSEC) at the Press Conference in Dhaka on June 1, 2003, showed that in the last 30 years over one million women and children were trafficked out of the country and many of them were forced to become prostitutes, domestic helpers, camel jockeys and beggars (Rahman M. 2004). Another important form of bonded labour in the case of children is camel jockeying, which is a popular traditional sport in the Gulf. In camel race, the Arabs use children or minors as jockeys to spur the animals into coveted winning positions or to enhance their racing efforts. Since 1989, reports have been coming in national and international news media that children or minors are being smuggled out of Bangladesh to some Gulf countries, especially UAE. With horrifying stories demonstrated about the number of casualties in the electronic media, the UAE government banned the use of children under the age group of 14 years or less than 45 kg for this sport in 1993. But it hardly helped the government as many cases have been identified and reported by media even in recent years.

Status of Bonded Labourers

There are 445,226 street children in 6 cities in Bangladesh among which 235,483 (53%) are boys and 209,743 (47%) are girls. These street children are basically homeless orphans or abandoned, and in most cases socially and economically exploited as forced or bonded labour. Data shows that the highest percentage are the street children (37%) who are sexually harassed while the second largest of them (19%) are victims of bad/offensive remarks and rape victims during night sleeping on the streets.

Table 22: Estimation of Street Children by Sex in Six Divisional Cities

Name of City	Street	Boys	Street	Girls	Total
Dhaka (75.2)	172287	(38.7)	162520	(36.5)	334807
Chittagong (9.9)	25337	(5.7)	18766	(4.2)	44102
Rajshahi (2.4)	6387	(1.4)	4427	(1.0)	10814
Khulna (8.5)	2100	(4.7)	17070	(3.8)	38070
Barisal (2.6)	6409	(1.4)	4991	(1.1)	11400
Sylhet (1.4)	4063	(0.9)	1970	(0.4)	6033
Total (47.1)	235483	(52.9)	209743	(100)	445226

Source: Baseline Survey of Appropriate Resources for Improving Street Children's Environment (ARISE) on Street Children on Six Division Cities, September, 2001

7.2 Discrimination against Women

Though Bangladesh is a signatory state to comply with UN-CEDAW, the implementation of women's rights and the prevention of ideological resistance to the women's rights are challenged in the absence of state machinery. The right to take part in the governance of one's country is a basic human right as recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1943) and later it was reaffirmed in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995). Bangladesh, as a signatory is committed to achieving equal participation of women in decision-making. The National Policy for advancement of women in 1997 emphasized that political empowerment of women could be promoted by implementing programmes towards achievement of women's political rights, taking initiatives for direct elections in reserved seats at all levels of national and local government system, employing a considerable number of women in the highest levels of decision-making and encouraging political parties to nominate more women candidates.

Within the framework of beliefs, tradition, culture, rituals based on religious systems, women status is determined in terms of two basic divisions (a) *Bhadramahila*, in broad sense, the mothers, wives, daughters, sisters, other female relatives of the same status and doctors, lawyers, teachers, government officials, mid-level traders who make up educated urban-based professional upper and middle class, and (b) *Mahila*, the women of lower status, including all females related to working class, peasants and others living in the villages or semi-urban areas. This distinct classification of women based on socio-economic and religious background still determines their roles and status to a large extent in Bangladesh society. Such classification is essentially rooted within the elements of patriarchy.

The status of women, their rights and duties as regards to their control over property, their own bodies, degree of seclusion and veiling, participation in politics and community development, social contact, employment etc are all intertwined in tremendous complexity of demonstrations on the basis of both Islamic and Hindu code of life. For example, the women right to vote or to exercise their rights in political process particularly in Islam is still decided by their male partners or male guardians based on *Fatwa* or religious decree by *Mullahs*/religious leaders in many areas. It has similar domination in most cases in Hindu religion too. The role of *Purdah* (veiling system through which women are secluded from the public view), ritual, work and judicial status of women such as marriage, divorce and dowry are highly influenced by both Muslim and Hindu laws which are not in favour of the rights of women.

Pre-election and Post-election Political Violence

Pre-election and post-election political violence by the political gangsters is the real threat and measure for materializing the discrimination against women; particularly the women of S C or Untouchables of the Hindu minority. All people in the country witnessed thousands of events of communal atrocities during the Pre-Parliament election of October 1, 2001. The Home Minister acknowledged in Parliament, on 18 November 2001 that some 266 murder cases and 213 rape cases were recorded in the first 25 days of October across the country. Higher figures were reported in newspapers. These exceeded all records of atrocities in previous elections. Women have been subjected to violence as political workers, relatives of politicians and members of religious or ethnic minorities. Table 23 shows the nature of atrocities and the figures of the victims.

Table 23: Communal Atrocities from 15.9.2001 to 10.12.2001

People killed	27
Raped women	269
Raped child	1
Physically tortured men	2, 619
Physically assaulted women	1, 430
Male and female kidnapped	100
Evicted families	38, 500
Churches, temples and deities demolished	155
Business and dwelling houses set on fire	4, 551

Source: Reports of PRIP Trust, Adhikar and Mass Medias

In the face of continued government indifference and even denial of incidents across the country, ASK filed a writ petition (No 6556 of 2001) on 24 November, on the grounds of reported incidents of assault, intimidation, torture, rape, sexual assaults and arson on the person and property of citizens belonging to religious minority communities, especially the Hindu Dalits. The High Court Division of the Supreme Court issued a rule on 27 November asking the government to explain why it should not be raised so as to take proper steps to protect the religious minorities from attack and harassment. The Court further asked the government to investigate into the incidents and submit its report by 15 January 2002.

Police Violence

Violence against women by police in socio-cultural and political affairs is also a common scenario in the country. Dalit women are victimized easily as they either fail to satisfy policemen with bribe or lack influence. They are harassed in the police stations when they lodge complaints against miscreants. Lately, the police have targeted women politicians in particular, perhaps to prevent them from participating in rallies or meetings. Violence against women political activists may be an upcoming threat as has happened during the past two elected governments. Though minority issues and extent and duration of violence against them had become the leading news in both print and electronic media in the post-election period, police did not file complaints nor recorded the cases properly, therefore, the numbers and types of violence recorded by the government differed from the media reportage.

Right to Freedom from Violence

Lack of political power of women in public forums is reflected through their marginalization in the community. The consequences of marginalization of women are noted in the discriminatory attitudes and practices towards girl children and women, which defy their talents from developing and also hampers them in acquiring skills to participate equally in social, economical and political life. The other notable consequences are the subjugation of women to patriarchal norms often resulting in violence against women by the community members. The major criminal action against women and girl children are instigated by *fatwa* as described below or through rape, acid attacks, and women's insecurity at homes.

7.3 Fatwa Instigated Violence

During the last decade, an important aspect of violence, as reported through media, has been the illegal use of *fatwa* as a form of physical and psychological punishment. In the absence of historical evidence, it is difficult to define the trend in *fatwa*-instigated violence, but media reports show that *fatwas* were issued for a variety of perceived deviations from patriarchal norms. These included women participation in public life, exercising choice in marriage or non-conformation with conventional norms of sexual behaviour, mobility in accessing health, education and employment or merely seeking legal redress. In many cases while the perpetrators of *fatwa* related violence were not prosecuted and remained unpunished, the women were thus victimized and faced social ostracism or exclusion from their families and communities. Community leaders tend to enforce *fatwa* against women arbitrarily as a means of control. Over the years, *Fatwa* has been found to violate both Constitutional and International Rights to:

- Freedom from cruelty, humiliation and atrocious treatment (lashing and stoning, forcible shaving of the head, beating by shoes, throwing shoes at women after half-burial in the ground, etc.)
- Life (burning to death, compelled to commit suicide)
- Family or private life (social ostracism, forcing unlawful divorce, forcing women to contract a *Hilla* marriage (marriage with another person for time being to legitimate the marriage again with previous husband if that happens verbal *Talaq* divorce between them), denial of religious rituals after death
- Education (compelled to abandon education)

- Economic activity and work (preventing women from taking bank loans or their repayment, destruction of mulberry trees planted by women and obstructing participation in other income-generating or development activities)
- Political participation (prohibiting women from casting votes)
- Exercising choice such as in procreation (preventing women from using contraceptives).

In the year 2001 almost 34 cases of violence instigated by *Fatwas* were reported in the newspapers. Of these 53 per cent related to insistence on *Hilla* marriage following verbal *Talaq* (divorce). Other instances included women demanding punishment for rape (18 per cent) or for pre-marital or extra-marital affairs/ pregnancy (15 per cent) and for about 14 per cent the causes were unknown. The punishments included forced *Hilla* marriage, flogging in public, social ostracism and physical violence. (Source: Neela Matin, ASK, 2001).

8. Conclusion

It is evident from the study that major population of Dalits in both Hindu and Muslim communities face discrimination in almost all spheres of life. Their access to essential amenities is severely limited and discriminated. The access to modern education or switching on to another profession and participation in administration structure for motivating the change is yet to come about for the Dalits. This study in fact attempt at identification of the nature of discrimination and investigate its extent through different mechanisms. Since the present Bangladesh society is highly fundamentalist in character both Hindu and Muslim communities, it becomes sensitive enough to address the issues of discrimination widespread on the basis of caste and occupation. However, this study could measure the extent with an unbiased approach and objectively to delineate the practice of caste and the work-based humiliation of human beings in Bangladesh which has become more of an accepted norm across the communities. The methods adopted in this study such as PRA, FGD, in-depth survey and case studies demonstrate the key findings through which frequent reviewing of the nature and extent of discrimination could be underwritten. The comparison between the information through FGD and in-depth sample survey are interesting in the sense that it various types of discrimination which sounded severe and vocal in FGD failed to correlate with the data collected through the survey. The predominance of caste structure among different professions is severe not only on account of birth or work but also being institutionalized through rules and regulations adopted by the stakeholders

like government, NGOs, social and religious communities and other market organizations; which as a matter of fact has helped to strengthen the existing mode of social acculturation.

Most Dalits do not possess land except homestead and that too in very few cases even in the villages. Both the Hindu and Muslim Dalits have very low access to capital assets and live in *Kutchha* (Bamboo/thatched) houses with 1-2 rooms, with limited access to water and sanitation, electricity, telephone, toilet, cooking gas, etc. Dalits of both communities face severe discrimination in labour markets, resource ownership and most importantly there exists wider discrepancies in the income levels of Dalits and non-Dalits. Dalits, including a large number of untouchables are employed in the public and private offices as sweepers and cleaners with low pay mostly on temporary or casual basis. In sectors like farming, fishing, crop sale, small shop business or work on choice; they are seriously discriminated and face restrictions in contracts like *Dadan* in fishing or share cropping etc. Most of the Dalits have no formal education and the number of graduates is almost negligible. It should be noted that both low level education and discrimination of educated Dalits in the labour market have its roles in limiting the social and economic upward mobility of Dalits. Therefore, in many cases Dalits in Bangladesh do not look for alternative jobs other than the inherited ones. Access to health care services is yet another area where forms of discrimination are evident. The inability to afford health services has higher incidence of diseases and suffering for Dalits.

Different means of socio-cultural and political discrimination is often attributable to the non-participation of Dalits in the process of decision-making; whereas Dalit representation is negligible in the policy-making bodies of local and state governments. The practice of sprinkling water on things touched by Dalits for purification brings forth both magnitude and intensity of discrimination. Often Dalits cannot cast their votes without the permission of influential non-Dalits or their leaders as the agents of non-Dalits else they become victims of social boycott for any simple reason. Sometimes Dalits are also discriminated within their own community if they look for jobs other than the traditional ones, enter into inter-caste marriage or stand against the prevailing norms/values of their own community. They generally do not get equal and just verdict primarily due to the fact that in most of the situations disputes are settled or negotiated through informal authorities mostly by non-Dalits. Though there is no such strong bonded labour system, Dalits are often forcibly made to do cleaning, carrying goods, caring cattle etc. without remuneration by the non-Dalits. In this regard children and women are victimized more easily and face severe discrimination.

Dalit women suffer multiple forms of discrimination, both as Dalit and as Women in a patriarchal society like Bangladesh. Their lives are overwhelmingly controlled by men, even young women over 20 years of age do not have a role in decision making in the households, or least in individual capacity, such as planning and pursuing their education, choosing a career or a marriage partner. The status of women and their rights with regard to control over property, over their own body, the degree of seclusion and veiling, their participation in politics, community development, social contacts, employment etc. are intertwined in the complexities of the Islamic and Hindu codes of life and controlled by its patriarchal instruments and norms. The life of women is vulnerable further in conflict situations such as civil, political and communal violence and atrocities.

Civil Society organizations are very much active in Bangladesh in the fields of poverty eradication and human rights. Nevertheless, it appears that little effective interventions are being made by such groups against the discrimination of Dalits. This could be due to the fact that discrimination as an issue of human right violation has not been adequately imbibed into their programmes. It is important to note that even policy-makers in Bangladesh do not clearly reflect upon the exclusive programmes for the protection of the social, economical, cultural and political rights of Dalits. Despite growing protest, and exposures by some civil forums and NGOs against the negligence by the government, poor implementation of the policies for protecting Dalit rights and their weak representation in decision making bodies; caste and work-based discrimination persists in its severe forms in Bangladesh which demands substantial research to explicate and expose the degree of discrimination and changes in the Dalits communities. There is a wide gap of information on the forms and types of discrimination in both rural and urban Bangladesh.

In terms of status of education, most Dalits have no formal education except a few with 1-2 years of formal and non-formal education. The number of graduates is also negligible. It should be noted that there is a general feeling among the people that even if one is educated up to the level of graduation from the Dalit community, it appears to be difficult for him/her to obtain even a low grade job in the public and private sectors. In effect, both low level of education and discrimination of educated Dalits in the labour market have its roles in limiting the social and economic upward mobility of Dalits. Therefore, in many cases Dalits in Bangladesh do not look for alternative jobs other than the inherited ones. Access to health care services is yet another area where forms of discrimination are evident. Health system and health service systems in Bangladesh are organized in such a fashion that it discriminates the poor,

mostly Dalits in the country. It is noted that, economic burden of diseases and suffering is high for Dalits primarily due to un-affordability of health services.

Dalits are also the victims of various types of socio-cultural and political discrimination. Part of the problem is attributable to the non-participation of Dalits in the process of decision-making. For instance, Dalit representation is negligible in the policy-making bodies of local and state governments. The magnitude and intensity of discrimination could be understood from the practices such as sprinkling of water on things which are touched by Dalits for purification in religious places.

In many situations, Dalits cannot cast their votes without the permission of influential non-Dalits or their leaders as the agents of non-Dalits. They are the victims of social boycotts for any simple reason. Sometimes Dalits are also discriminated within their own community if they look for jobs other than the traditional ones, go for inter-caste marriage or stand against the prevailing norms/values of their own community. They generally do not get equal and just verdict primarily due to the fact that in most of the situations disputes are settled or negotiated through informal authorities which consist of non-Dalits. Though there is no such strong bonded labour system, Dalits are often forcibly made to do cleaning, carrying goods, caring cattle etc. without remuneration by the non-Dalits. Mostly Dalit children and women are the victims of forced and bonded labour.

Dalit women suffer multiple forms of discrimination, both as Dalit and as Women in a patriarchal society like Bangladesh. Women's life is still overwhelmingly controlled by men giving her little independence or self-determination. It should be noted that even young women over 20 years of age do not have a role in decision making in the houses, most importantly in individual decisions, such as planning and pursuing their education, choosing a career or choosing a marriage partner. The status of women and their rights with regard to control over property, over their own body, the degree of seclusion and veiling, their participation in politics, community development, social contacts, employment etc. are intertwined in the complexities of the Islamic and Hindu codes of life and controlled by its patriarchal instruments and norms. The life of women is rather difficult in conflict situations such as civil, political and communal violence and atrocities.

Civil Society organizations are very much active in Bangladesh in the fields of poverty eradication and human rights. Nevertheless, it appears that little effective interventions are being made by such groups against the discrimination

of Dalits. This could be due to the fact that discrimination as an issue of human right violation has not been adequately imbibed into their programmes. It is important to note that even policy-makers in Bangladesh do not clearly know the exclusive programmes for the protection of the social, economical, cultural and political rights of Dalits. Despite growing protest, though in a low tone, and exposures by some civil forums and NGOs, against the negligence by the government, poor implementation of the policies for protecting Dalit rights and weak representation of Dalit in decision making bodies, caste and work-based discrimination is still persisting in its severe form in Bangladesh. Substantial research is required to explicate and expose the degree of discrimination and changes in the Dalits communities since there is a large gap of information on the forms and types of discrimination in both rural and urban Bangladesh.

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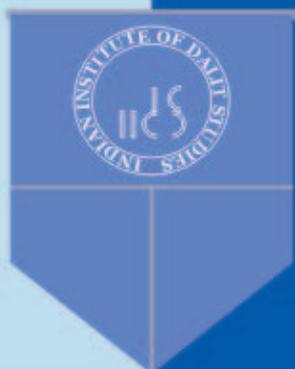
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Office for Publications and Dissemination

Indian Institute of Dalit Studies

DII/1, Road No. -4, Andrews Ganj,
New Delhi, India, 110 049

TEL: +91-11- 26252082

FAX: +91-11- 26251808

EMAIL: publications@dalitstudies.org.in

WEBSITE: www.dalitstudies.org.in
