

# DALIT INITIATIVES IN BANGLADESH



Mazharul Islam

Altaf Parvez

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Review and comments:

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Dedicated to

**Damini Goala**

Represented 80,000 tea workers being the only elected female president of Bangladesh Tea Workers' Union. She resigned the post declaring existing process ineffective to claim workers rights. For 30 years till today, is a member in Union Parishad at Moulovibazar. No one spared time to put a single entry on-line to celebrate this glorious women leader.

The authors are indebted to Zakir Hossain (Nagorik Uddyog), Mukul Sikder, Bothanki Solomon & Afsana Amin (BDERM), Bivutosh Roy (Charuibeti), Moni Rani Das (Dalit Women Forum), Milon Das ( Parittran), Nirmal Das (BHOP). Dewan Aktaruzzaman (FAIR), Swapan Das ( DALIT), Achinta Saha ( Bhumija), Dipendranath Sarker (SEBA), Moazzem Hossain (GBK), Alauddin Ali (USS), Khandoker Rizwanul Karim (MJF), Safura Begum (CDMS), Himangsu Chandra Chanda (SERP), Preo Bala Biswas (Sharee), Gabi Jaschke & Walter Hahn (Bread for the World, Germany), Ryan Higgitt, Researcher, for their valuable information, comments and suggestions. We are also grateful to Dalits who were interviewed during the fieldwork.

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## FOREWORD

The existence of Dalits and caste discrimination in Bangladesh treated with utter silence or, even denied. However recently, Dalit movement is growing and taking visibility and gradually articulating their demand as citizens of Bangladesh. This movement is combining community organising with raising public awareness and running with campaign, lobbying, legal interventions and international advocacy.

The development and human rights issues of Dalits are receiving attention both national and international NGOs, civil society organizations and donors. The government of Bangladesh also accepted the issue as human rights and development concerns.

Caste discrimination is still a relatively new area of human rights work in our country but it is an issue of fundamental concern affecting the day to day lives of millions of people across Bangladesh. As a human rights organization Nagorik Uddyog is working with Dalits and excluded communities at national as well as international level to create enabling environment where they can exercise their rights and access to public and private spheres.

The present booklet is a short mapping of the situation of Dalits in Bangladesh as well the actors, who are working to protect and promote the rights of dalit and excluded communities.

I would like to thank Mr. Mazharul Islam and Altaf Parvez for their sincere effort in writing this booklet.

I hope this publication will give an overview to the reader of Dalits community as well as the actors working in this field.

Zakir Hossain  
Chief Executive  
Nagorik Uddyog and  
Advisor, Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement (BDERM)



## INTRODUCTION

*The state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.*

The Constitution of Bangladesh, Article 28(1), 1972

Bangladesh has a progressive Constitution, at least on paper, which guarantees the equal rights of all citizens irrespective of sex, caste, creed or race. Articles 27, 28, 29, and 31 seek to establish equality and non-discrimination on the basis of religion and ethnicity and Article 41 states religious freedom for all. It also states 'special provision for backward sections' although without clarification of what this entails. The first Constitution adopted in 1972 established a secular state, but this was amended in 1988 to establish Islam as the state religion. Muslims constitute 90.4 per cent of the population followed by Hindus who constitute 8.5 per cent with the remainder practicing other religions such as Buddhism and Christianity<sup>1</sup>.

Bangladesh has ratified all major international human rights treaties and conventions and is therefore legally bound to comply with these international human rights treaties, including the:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

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<sup>1</sup> Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics based on 2011 Census

However in practice Dalits and other minority communities across the country continue to experience social exclusion, caste<sup>2</sup> discrimination and practices linked to untouchability. There have been no systematic efforts made to identify and implement measures for the inclusion and equal treatment of Dalits in society. According to sociologist Samuel Koenig<sup>3</sup> a class which has a strictly hereditary basis is a caste. A member of a caste is never allowed to break through its rigid barriers, whereas one belonging to a class may, under certain conditions, change his status. The term "caste" first used by the Portuguese to denote the divisions in the Indian class system, which was derived from *casta*, meaning "lineage" or "bread". The Sanskrit word for caste is *varna*, which means "color". One of the most tragic consequence of caste system is it prevents the development within the population of a general national consciousness and thus denies the individual the feeling of belonging to a common people. (E. Schmidt, Ceylon). Notions of purity and pollution led to the division of occupations into pure and impure, and different castes in terms of their occupations varied accordingly in social esteem. According to Louis Dumont (*Homo Hierarchicus*, 1972) caste and profession were linked through the intermediary of religion.

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<sup>2</sup> Caste systems are a form of social and economic governance that is based on principles and customary rules:

- a. Caste systems involve the division of people into social groups (castes) where assignments of rights are determined by birth, are fixed and hereditary.
- b. The assignment of basic rights among various castes is unequal and hierarchical, with those at the top enjoying most rights coupled with least duties and those at the bottom performing most duties coupled with no rights.
- c. The system is maintained through the rigid enforcement of social ostracism (a system of social and economic penalties) in case of any deviations.

The doctrine of inequality is at the core of the caste system. Those who fall outside the caste system are considered "lesser human beings", "impure" and thus "polluting" to other caste groups. They are known to be "untouchable" and subjected to so-called "untouchability practices" in both public and private spheres. "Untouchables" are often forcibly assigned the most dirty, menial and hazardous jobs, such as cleaning human waste. The work they do adds to the stigmatisation they face from the surrounding society.

In South Asia, caste discrimination is traditionally rooted in the Hindu caste system. Dalits are 'outcastes' or people who fall outside the four-fold caste system consisting of the Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vysya and Sudra. Dalits are also referred to as Panchamas or people of the fifth order. However caste systems and the ensuing caste discrimination have spread into Christian, Buddhist, Muslim and Sikh communities. Caste systems are also found in Africa, other parts of Asia, the Middle East, the Pacific and in Diaspora communities around the world. In Japan association is made with Shinto beliefs concerning purity and impurity, and in marginalized African groups the justification is based on myths. Caste discrimination affects approximately 260 million people worldwide, the vast majority living in South Asia.

Caste discrimination involves massive violations of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. (<http://idsn.org/caste-discrimination/>)

<sup>2</sup> Sociology, 1957

Caste discrimination is a systematic human rights abuse that leads to extreme poverty, violence, inequality and exclusion. Perceived as polluted or inferior, Dalits are prevented from participating in political, economic, social and cultural life. Deprived or excluded from adequate housing, sanitation and transport, Dalits usually work in the most menial jobs. Approximately 96 per cent of them are illiterate.

The word 'Dalit' literally means broken or oppressed. Dalit is the name 'untouchables' (people who are discriminated based on caste or work and descent) have chosen for themselves to signify a growing movement of empowerment.

Since the United Nations World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related intolerance held in Durban, South Africa in 2001, caste based untouchability has become an extreme important issue in global context<sup>4</sup>. But this segregated version of discrimination is a relatively new issue for the Government, donors and civil society in Bangladesh which no more can be just passed with silence as a result of existing and gradually growing studies and research. These studies have illustrated that it is an issue of fundamental concern affecting the day to day lives of millions of people across the country.

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<sup>4</sup> Understanding Untouchability-Navsarjan and Robert F.Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights.

## DALITS IN BANGLADESH

*All States have a duty to acknowledge the existence of discrimination based on work and descent, to take all necessary constitutional, legislative, administrative, budgetary, judicial and educational measures to eliminate and prevent discrimination.*

The Draft UN Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination Based on Work and Descent, 2009

Discrimination based on work and descent or caste is a highly complex issue in Bangladesh - it results from a variety of often overlapping factors, including caste, religion, place of birth or families/descendants place of birth and occupation. In a predominantly rural and semi-urban economy traditional occupations (such as fishermen, sweepers, barbers, washers, dyers, blacksmiths, goldsmiths, cobblers, oil-pressers, boatmen, weavers, butchers, hunters, sawyers, gardeners, tailors, drum beaters etc) play an important role in defining social, political and economic relations- these occupations are usually descent based and these communities often suffer from related practices of discrimination, segregation and untouchability.

Although there have been a scarcity of literatures, leading sample surveys indicate 5.5 to 6.5 million Dalits and people from socially excluded communities living in Bangladesh (3-4 per cent of total population). Even though the 2011 Census provided an unprecedented opportunity to capture national data categories related to work, surprisingly descent and caste were not included. The lack of concrete data contributes to the invisibility, marginalisation and disempowerment of these communities and prevents not only the capture of national disaggregated data but also Dalit and excluded communities' claim for special measures, representation or participation in policy making, development, employment and equality of access to basic services. According to the 2006 Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) report, only 12 households with 63 members are Harijan (sweepers) who live in Khulna Division. This indicates the lack of political will to recognize Dalits and the existence of these communities in Bangladesh. Again according to BBS Census 2001, the total Hindu population was 11,608,268 and Census 2011 revealed 12,299,940<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> See the Daily ProthomAlo report of Shishir Moral on 22 September 2012.

The estimated total schedule caste and other excluded community among the Hindus is 70 per cent. It is important to note that the Hindu population was 28 per cent in 1941, 22.7 per cent in 1951, 18.5 per cent in 1961, 13.5 per cent in 1974, 12.1 per cent in 1981, 10.5 per cent in 1991, 9.2 per cent in 2001 and 8.5 per cent in 2011.

There are three broad categories of Dalits in Bangladesh:

Bengali Dalits who live in villages all over Bangladesh.

Dalits who migrated (or were forced to move) from India to what was previously East Bengal. Though this migration began since 1605 during the Mughal period, a considerable number of Dalits were migrated from 1835 to 1940 during the British colonial period. They were brought by the British colonial rulers to do menial jobs such as sweeping, clearing sewage, working in the tea plantations and at railway stations.

Muslim Dalits who again can be found across the country. Though as a religion, Islam does not recognise any division based on caste or creed, the socio-economic and cultural context of South Asia determine some Muslim communities as inferiors to others based on their occupations.

The following lists combine categories of occupation, ethnicity, language and family name. Some names are very derogatory for them:

Rishi, Rabidas, Muchi, Majhi, Jaladas, Paroi, Kaiputro (Kawra), Beara, Nikari, Shikari, Swarnaker, Kapali, Kumor/ Kulal, Kuar, Sutradhar, Karma-kar, Hari, Goala, Chamar, Bauri, Suri, Mali, Jogi, Bhuimali, Shiali, Kaibarta, Kahar, Keshra, Dholak, Nalua, Dhani, Napit, Bagol, Basar, Bajonder, Buno, Dai, Dhopa, Pandrakshatria (Pod), Patni, Fasua, Shahjee, Meso, Kotal, Bhuputra, Bhagobene, Chandal (Charal), Antoj, Namashudro, Dhangor, Mathor.

Bashpore, Sabari, Dom, Domar, Harijan, Masuwara, Mushaheries, Methor, Maithal, Balmiki, Lalbegi, Pasi, Sweeper, Mala, Madiga, Magaiya, Raut, Hela/Hadi, Saberi, Chakali, Dewali, Kanpuri, Telegu, Madraji.

Jhola, Tati, Tele, Kolu, Kulu, Behara, Hajam, Bede, Bainna Bede, Darji, Mazi/Khottra, Kasai.

## EVOLUTION OF DALIT IDENTITY

*Why are we always abused? The sentry inspector and the Sahib that day abused my father. They always abuse us. Because we are sweepers. Because we touch dung. They hate dung. I hate it too. I was tired of working on the latrines every day. That's why they don't touch us, the high-castes. ....For them I am a sweeper, sweeper- untouchable! Untouchable! Untouchable! That's the word! Untouchable! I am an Untouchable!*

Untouchable (1935) by Mulk Raj Anand

The evolution of Dalit identity is very complex as Dalits are divided into hundreds of castes and sub-castes and most importantly they are always treated by dominant caste in a derogatory way. In the first census in 1872 the majority of Dalits in Bengal were identified by the term Chandala, a Sanskrit word for someone who deals with disposal of corpses, and a Hindu out caste.

After a long struggle these section of Dalits successfully lobbied the British government to change their name to Namasudra in the census of 1911. The British administration used 'Depressed Classes' in 1919 to identify all the varied groups of outcaste peoples together. From 1936, under the rule of Britain, India, and Pakistan and since 1971 Bangladesh they officially identified as scheduled castes. They also identified as Bengali word Antaj. It is to be also mentioned that the United Nations terms it as discrimination based on work and descent<sup>6</sup>.

In Bangladesh communities who work as cleaners or sweepers are often most discriminated and they still identify as Harijan. These communities fall into another category above, who migrated from India, the majority from Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar. Harijan was previously used by untouchables or low caste people across the entire sub-continent. Mahatma Gandhi coined the term 'Harijan' instead of untouchables, which means children of God (Hari is another name for the god Vishnu).

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<sup>6</sup> Draft UN Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination based on Work and Descent

The term Harijan was considered patronising, and not acceptable to Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956), and his followers. Instead, they preferred the term 'Dalit' to designate the former untouchables. It was first used by Jyotirao Phule (1827-1890) in the nineteenth century, in the context of the oppression faced by the erstwhile "untouchable" castes of the twice-born Hindus. The word Dalit is originated from Sanskrit, meaning suppressed, downtrodden, grounded, broken or crushed and is used proudly by the group itself. According to Victor Premasagar, the term expresses their "weakness, poverty and humiliation at the hands of the upper castes in the Indian society." It implies those who have been broken, crushed or grounded down by those above them in a deliberative and active way. As such, the word itself indicates a system of repression and contains the denial of pollution, karma and caste hierarchy. According to founder-editor of *Asmitadarsh* Dalit is not a caste. Dalit is symbol of change and revolution"<sup>7</sup>. The contemporary use of Dalit is centered on the idea that as a people they may have been broken by oppression but they survive and even thrive by finding meaning in the struggle of their existence towards human dignity as this political identity similar to the way African-Americans in the U.S. moved away from the use of Negro to the use of Black or even African-American<sup>8</sup>. For those who call themselves Dalits, the use of this word has promoted a new awareness of their status and position in society and a path to discovering a self-perception of their loss of human dignity, a found recognition of their immediate community but in relation to both State and civil society<sup>9</sup>. In Bangladesh the term Dalit is gaining popularity.

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<sup>7</sup> Poverty Profile of the Dalits in Bangladesh (December 2007), Chief Researcher Meshba Kamal.

<sup>8</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dalit>, retrived on 15 October 2013

<sup>9</sup> Cosimo Zene, Gramsci and the religion of the subalterns: the case-study of the Dalits (Untouchables) in South Asia (2012)

## FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AND VIOLATION OF RIGHTS

*All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.*

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), Article 1

Dalits and excluded communities in Bangladesh face many complex and overlapping forms of discrimination – social, economic, political, religious and cultural – affecting all aspects of their personal and public lives. For example their caste impacts their ability to access education, jobs, hospitals, the legal system and the right to choose where to live, where to work, who and how to worship and who to marry.

Dalit communities and Dalit women and men experience different degrees and types of caste and social discrimination and range violations of their rights and access to justice. As a result, the majority lack of access to education, health care and other basic amenities, valued employment, the right to own a property or land and exclusion from political power or influence.

This entrenched and systematic poverty, exclusion and marginalization which resulted physical and social segregation, restrictions on occupations, the humiliating notion of pollution and purity and physical abuses have prevented them from uniting and lobbying for change. According to the draft UN Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination based on Work and Descent a number of

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<sup>10</sup> Any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference which is based on any ground as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status, and which the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by all persons, on an equal footing, of all rights and freedoms. UN Human Rights Committee (Non-discrimination), No.18

rights violations occur in relation to caste discrimination which is very common in Bangladesh like :

The right to physical security and life and the right to be free from violence

The right to equal political participation

The right to fair access to justice

The right to own land

The right to equal access to public and social services

The right to freedom of religion

The right to marriage on free will

The right to education

The right to cultural identity

The right to equal opportunity and free choice of employment

The right to equal, just and favourable conditions of work

The right to be free from forced or bonded labour

The right to be free from cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment

The right to health

The right to adequate food, water, sanitation, clothing and housing

## SITUATION OF DALITS IN BANGLADESH

*Ours is a battle not for wealth or for power. It is a battle for Freedom. It is a battle for reclamation of Human Personality.*

Dr. B R Ambedkar

**Dalit Human Rights:** Living in extreme poverty the majority of Dalits are deprived of education, healthcare, secure and safe housing, sanitation and decent work. Dalit communities experience daily insecurity, uncertainty and violence and there are regularly reported cases of physical abuse, rape and murder. For example in July 2009, a teenage Dalit girl was raped in Jessore and she did not get justice<sup>11</sup>. In another case, Zamal Gazi, son of Babor Ali Gazi abducted and forcefully married Moni Mala, wife of Prokash Biswas and converted to Muslim and later she was tortured to death for dowry on 24 October 2010 at Golanibazar, Satkhira<sup>12</sup>. In the majority of cases the perpetrators are not brought to justice as this malice has a deep root. These have gave birth of discrimination within the police service, lack of priority to deal such case, and adverse political lobbying. Often the victim or victim's family are in lack of speed money to pursue the case. Victims and their families are also often afraid of potential repercussions. The forced eviction of Dalits is also common for example many of the Dalit families were evicted from RM Das road at Sutrapur on March 29, 2009<sup>13</sup> where they lived on for four generations. Thirteen families of the Rabidas quarter were evicted in the Goalciamot village of the Faridpur district<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Work Statement (April 2008-June 2011) publisher by BDERM

<sup>12</sup> Dalit Human Rights Situation in Bangladesh (2008-12) published by FAIR, Kushtia

<sup>13</sup> The Daily Star, 10 April 2009

<sup>14</sup> <http://dalitbangladesh.wordpress.com/2012/10/18/protesting-the-eviction-of-dalits/> retrived on 11 October 2013

**Poverty and Employment:** The majority of Dalits live in extreme poverty. Mainstream development paradigms have overlooked their existence as special communities with special needs. Indicators assessing development (e.g. maternal mortality rates are higher amongst Dalit women, levels of education are far lower) have rarely taken them into consideration. Poverty and discrimination have a unique aspect for Dalits as these are forced them as exclusively social pariah. Their traditional jobs belong usually in the informal sector and are badly paid or exploitative. But given the levels of poverty across the whole society, Dalits are losing their prominence in these occupations due to fierce competition for even these jobs. Non-Dalits sometimes pay bribes to employees, for example while City Corporations employ cleaners, Dalits cannot afford to avail through the process. Unemployment and underemployment are major issues particularly given the lack of skills, training and education. On the other hand, their jobs are not regularized even though they work in those posts for long time as master-roll in different government and non-government institutions. For example, Kamal Das had committed suicide on 28 October 2010 to protest the breach of commitment to regularized his job as a cleaner as he worked at district good department in master roll for 26 years<sup>15</sup>. Roughly 95 per cent of them earn less than the national average and they have to take regular loans because of poverty. In a recent survey of the Cobbler community it was found that 53 per cent earn between 2,000-3,000 BDT a month. Another study<sup>16</sup> shows that monthly income of 2-5 per cent family is very low (1000-2000 BDT), 10-20 per cent family is moderately low (2000-3000 BDT), 40-50 per cent family is below average (3000-4000 BDT), 30-35 per cent family is average (4000-5000 BDT) and few people (3-5 per cent) having above 5000 BDT in two tea gardens in Maulvibazar. Dalits in Bangladesh have limited access to most things – from clean water to electricity. The study<sup>17</sup> reveals that only a minority enjoys even the simplest conveniences such as telephone (8.6 per cent and 9.3 per cent among Hindu and Muslim Dalits respectively), radios (10.3 per cent and 8.0 per cent) and bicycles (16.6 per cent and 12.0 per cent).

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<sup>15</sup> Dalit Human Rights Situation in Bangladesh (2008-12) published by FAIR, Kushtia

<sup>16</sup> A Study on Existing WATSAN Condition of Two Tea Gardens in Maulvibazar (2011)- M. A. I. Chowdhury, G. M. J. Hasan and M. A. Karim

<sup>17</sup> Dalits of Bangladesh: Destined to a life of Humiliation (June 2008)- International Dalit Solidarity Network

**Education:** Most Dalits have not completed formal education, the majority have attended for just one or two years. One study showed<sup>18</sup> that school enrolment rates among the Dalits were 10%, dropout rates of those that did attend school were 95% and literacy was around 5% ( national enrolment rates are 85 per cent ). Poverty and caste discrimination within schools from both teachers and students are key reasons why Dalit families choose for their children to work rather than attend school. In one survey reveals 81.7% of Hindu Dalits and 84% of Muslim Dalits have experienced discrimination as early as at the time of admission to school. Once admitted, the pattern continues with Dalits reporting widespread discrimination from teachers as well as other students and many experience discrimination in schools for example being forced to sit on the floor or to clean rubbish or toilets as well as they face widespread discrimination from teachers and other students<sup>19</sup>. Dalit students were barred to attend Independent Day Celebration Programme by their Headmaster in Bhojgati Primary School, Monirampur Jessore in 26 March 2010<sup>20</sup>.

**Housing and Eviction:** Adequate housing is a major problem for Dalits in Bangladesh. In urban areas Dalits usually live in so called 'colonies'. These colonies are slum like conditions without adequate water, electricity or sanitation with often three generations of 8-12 people living in one tiny room. In Dhaka city Dalits face evictions by the name of rehabilitation again and again. For example, approximately 200 Dalit families settled down at Miranzilla and Naya Bazar. Later on, with the advancement of urbanization, these areas became very important part of the city with more civic facilities. So they were shifted to Boldha garden area. After few years they were shifted near Hardow glass factory at Wari for the same reason. Now there are around 200 families living in two Dalit colonies. In the same way 120 Dalit families were settled to Hazaribagh area in an abandoned Government hospital and allotted them 200 rooms in 1963. Now the families have increased around 1200. They are living in shanties around the colony along with the dilapidated building. In the same way Phulbaria

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<sup>18</sup> Caste Based Discrimination in South Asia: A Study of Bangladesh (2008) by Iftekhar Uddin Chowdhury

<sup>19</sup> The Daily Prothom Alo on 4 July 2012 and Dalit and Banchito Samachar 13th Issue, September 2012 – February 2013, an article by Advocate Babul Rabidas.

<sup>20</sup> Dalit Human Rights Situation in Bangladesh (2008-12) published by FAIR, Kushtia

Railway Sweeper colony was shifted to Gopibagh in 1980s. Mohammadpur Townhall Madraji sweeper colony was evicted on 28 February 2007 and they were shifted near Gabtoli Bheribadh (dam) area with very little civic facilities<sup>21</sup>. The majority of Dalits are landless and in rural areas live in houses built with straw and mud, often on common land and even than frequently threatened by eviction. They usually live at the edge (mostly undesirable area with poor civic facilities) of villages as they live separately from other dominant people of the village. Access to drinking water is restricted for Dalits in some areas.

**Health and Sanitation:** Around 60,000 Dalits living in Dhaka have no proper water or sanitation with very few toilets. In rural areas it has been reported that between 400 to 500 people often use just one or two water points. Dalits often face discrimination at hospitals and extreme poverty and lack of savings means they are unable to afford treatment if they become sick. United Nations independent Expert on water and sanitation and the independent Expert on human rights and extreme poverty<sup>22</sup> visited a Dalit colony in 2011 in Bangladesh and saw that they had no access to water or safe sanitation. They use a hanging latrine, which emptied out directly into a passing stream. In another Dalit slum, two water points reportedly served 12,000 people. The women and girls have to carry the water up several flights of stairs, which poses a serious threat to their physical well-being. In addition, the women's toilets had a hole in the ceiling where boys watched the girls, depriving them all privacy. The toilets were in a deplorable state, with faeces covering the entire area. The work of the sweeper is to clean out sewers and septic tanks. They are employed by the municipality and private employers. In rural areas, the job of sweepers is akin to manual scavenging, which is the process of cleaning out dry toilets manually. In Dhaka and other areas, where sewerage and septic tanks are used, the job is to clear blocked pipes and empty septic tanks. In both cases, the workers have no protective gear and are subjected to considerable health risks. They reportedly suffer from diarrheal diseases and dysentery.

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<sup>21</sup> Housing Problem of Dalits in Dhaka City (2007) by Mazharul Islam, B Solomon, Moni Rani Das and Mollika Sarkar

<sup>22</sup> Bangladesh, A/HRC/15/55 [75,76] (15th session HR Council, September 2010)

A recent survey<sup>23</sup> conducted in 2011 in a number of tea gardens in the Chittagong area found that their awareness on general health and healthy lifestyle was superficial, knowledge on common illnesses and their prevention poor, and treatment-seeking behaviour not conducive to the maintenance of health. Facilities for sanitary disposal of excreta were poor (53 per cent of the inhabitants used open space for defecation). Delivery at home was most common in all tea gardens (93 per cent) and majority of the deliveries (82 per cent) were attended by traditional birth attendants. Mothers did not continue exclusive breastfeeding for six months. Complimentary food given to the children was often nutritionally inadequate. The under-five children were chronically malnourished as revealed by high proportion of stunting (62 per cent) and under-weight (45 per cent).

**Daily Humiliation and Social Exclusion:** Dalits are often prevented from entering the homes of non-Dalits as 29.2 per cent of Hindus and 45.3 per cent of Muslims report moderate to strong discrimination in this regard. Around 46.3 per cent and 70.7 per cent of Hindu and Muslim Dalits respectively have had to carry plastic bags for shopping at the market. And so the discrimination continues throughout life and even after death as they have met with discrimination at public graveyards when trying to bury members of their family<sup>24</sup>. For example, the dominant caste people did not allow the cremation of Ananda Das, a Dalit of Rishi community, at Bhalukghar, Keshabpur, Jessore on 20 October 2011<sup>25</sup>. Thus Dalits are socially excluded from access to their all rights and entitlements.

**Endogamy:** The fact is that traditionally the descent and work-based discriminated, broken and poverty driven population (Dalit) are the members of a single endogamous group of Hindu or Muslim castes and sub-castes with strong kindred of recognition of kinship and affinity who have been engaged in the respective professions from ancient times. As a result 90.3% of Hindu Dalits who have experienced resistance to marriage with other religions. The corresponding figure for Muslim Dalits is 85.3 per cent<sup>26</sup>. Endogamy is the backbone of the caste system though the marriage

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<sup>23</sup> The tea garden workers in the Chittagong hill tracts area of Bangladesh (2011) – Syed Masud Ahmed

<sup>24</sup> Dalits of Bangladesh: Destined to a life of Humiliation (June 2008)- International Dalit Solidarity Network

<sup>25</sup> A case Study by Paritran (2011)

<sup>26</sup> Caste Based Discrimination in South Asia: A Study of Bangladesh (2008) by Iftekhar Uddin Chowdhury

acts of 1872 and 1923 legalized inter-caste, disregarding the rule of endogamy prescribed under the caste system<sup>27</sup>. But unfortunately these legal measures have very little impact on the lives of Dalits in regard to inter-caste marriage. In the draft UN Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination based on Work and Descent (Para 22), it is recommended that “National and local governments should introduce and apply special measures to eradicate the persistence of social and cultural stigma of impurity and pollution that de facto precludes marriages between members of affected and non-affected communities and, in some societies, gives rise to violence, collective punishment and social exclusion against couples from different communities”.

**Political Representation:** Based on the recommendation of the Indian Statutory Commission (popularly known as Simmon Commission) published in 1930 and Round Table Conferences, reserved seats were provided for scheduled castes (a term used to identify 76 Hindu lower castes including Dalits) in India. British had announced communal award to all the minority groups in India including Untouchables on 17 August 1932. Untouchables were awarded adult franchise, separate electoral with dual vote. With vehement protest from M K Gandhi (fast unto death), finally Poona Pact<sup>28</sup> was agreed on 24 September 1932 and the pact were later included in the second Government of India Act 1935. Under this Act, 20 per cent seats of the Bengal Legislative Assembly were reserved for scheduled caste and they also had the right to contest for general seats. As a result Dalits in what was then Bengal gained political power and in the elections of 1937, 1946, 1954 (East Bengal), these castes emerged as a powerful balancing force in Bengal politics. All the Ministries formed by various political parties comprised some schedule caste members in the Assembly<sup>29</sup>. However the provision of reserved seats for Schedule castes was abandoned in the Constitution of Pakistan (1956) and subsequently in the Constitution of Bangladesh (1972).

Dalits now lack political power and representation and face stiff resistance and discrimination if they are brave enough to stand for elections. A newspaper article in January 2009 reported that a political opponent of Dalit candidate in an Upazila (sub-district) election had chanted ‘stop the

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<sup>27</sup> Caste and Society in Colonial Bengal: Change and Continuity (CSS no 28, 1985) – Sekhar Bandyopadhyay

<sup>28</sup> See the text of Poona Pact in Annexure

<sup>29</sup> Scheduled Castes by Sirajul Islam, Banglapedia

cobbler' during his campaign. In recent past, more than 90 per cent of the Bede community people (nomads who live on boats) were unable to vote as they have no permanent address and this increases their invisibility and marginalisation. The majority of Dalits are not members of any political parties and unlike in India and Nepal there are no parties which mobilise around the issue of Dalit rights. Unfortunately minority community especially Hindu community including Hindu Dalits is the target of any uneven political situation. For example in 2001 general election, about 330 instances of violence against the Hindu community were reported between 15 September and 27 October. These included cases of rape, killing, physical torture, plunder, damage of property, bomb throwing, arson, extortion<sup>30</sup>.

**Dalit Women:** Dalit women, occupying the bottom of both the caste and gender hierarchies, face multiple forms of discrimination (as Dalits, as member of impoverish underclass and as women), and violence, and are particularly vulnerable. As Cosimo Zene describes that one particular group among Dalits worth mentioning ... are Dalit women who, having challenged the double burden of oppression, firstly within their own group as well as the oppression coming from the rest of the society, have also been able to offer a critical, alternative approach to 'feminism' in a post-colonial setting<sup>31</sup>. The endemic gender-and-caste discrimination and violence Dalit women face is the outcome of severely imbalanced social, economic and political power equalities. Dalit communities are often very patriarchal with deeply conservative values about the role of women that leads to severe restrictions on their rights, mobility and freedoms. Many girls are forced to marry young (10-12), are unable to leave their homes without being accompanied and do not have any financial independence. As in all societies notions of purity are used to control women and they are unable to marry outside their caste.

Dalit women who are allowed to work are mainly sweepers or cleaners and face regular physical, verbal and sexual abuse from both employers and the public. The standard government maternity leave is 6 months but Dalit women only receive 2 months for Dhaka City Corporation but in most of the municipalities they have to join just few days after the child birth.

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<sup>30</sup> The Birth of Minority: State, Society and the Hindu Women of Bangladesh (2005)- Imtiaz Ahmed and Amena Mohsin

<sup>31</sup> Gramsci and the religion of the subalterns: the case-study of the Dalits (Untouchables) in South Asia (2012)

The Dalit communities who are governed through a Panchayat system which means a group of self selected older men have the authority to take decisions on behalf of the whole community. Women have no representation or participation within this system.

Dalit women also face higher levels of rape and sexual assault for example in July 2009 in Dakatia village, Jessore a Dalit girl was raped and in the same month a young Dalit woman (19) was gang raped<sup>32</sup>. A study shows that Dalit girls feel insecure as non-Dalit boys feel that it is almost their 'rights' or 'privilege' to touch or push against a Dalit girl when they see her on the street. The insecurity arising from this constant abuse discourages Dalit girls from venturing too far from their homes<sup>33</sup>. In his report on Women and Adequate Housing (E/CN.4/2005/43), the UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, Miloon Kothari, refers to caste as a basis for discrimination of groups of women in vulnerable situations. He reiterates the fact that special attention is required for the same groups of women who are more vulnerable than others, among them women from work and descent based communities<sup>34</sup>.

**Tea Workers:** Dalits (more than 30 ethnic communities) who live and work in tea plantations face specific forms of discrimination. Many live in bonded labour or are paid extremely low wages (approx 30-48 BDT per day which recently increased to 79 BDT)<sup>35</sup> and cannot afford adequate food, healthcare or to educate their children. According to SEHD the first commercial-scale tea garden in Bangladesh was established in 1854. Now the country has 156 tea gardens (excluding seven in the North Bengal) with more than 118,000 tea workers. The workers who keep the tea industry alive are brought from different States of India around 150 years back by the British companies. They had their destiny tied to their huts in the 'labour lines' that they built themselves. They continue to remain as people without choice and entitlement to property. Living conditions in the labour lines of the tea gardens are generally unsatisfactory. Typically a single room is crowded with people of different ages of a family. Cattle and human beings

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<sup>32</sup> Dalit Human Rights Situation 2009 in Bangladesh by Mazharul Islam article published in Annual Human Rights Report 2009 by Neeti Gobeshona Kendra (2010)

<sup>33</sup> Dalit Women in Bangladesh: Multiple Exclusions by Dr. Farzana Islam (2011)

<sup>34</sup> IDSN Annual Report 2006

<sup>35</sup> Daily Prothom Alo, 9 September 2013

are often seen living together in the same house or room. They are socially excluded, overwhelmingly illiterate, deprived and disconnected. They have also lost their languages and cultures<sup>36</sup>. Labour laws are flouted at impunity and the workers remain virtually isolated from the mainstream society. Because of lack of safe water and sanitation facilities in the overcrowded abodes, they are at constant risk of being attacked with various diseases. On the other hand, they remain underprivileged due to illiteracy. Women and children worst sufferers as there is no specialist doctor in medical centres of most of the tea gardens. Only 10 percent children attended primary schools while five percent children aged between three and five years appeared at a pre-primary school. The wellbeing is totally dependent on the will of the owners and management of the gardens where in they live and work from generation to generation<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> <http://www.sehd.org/publications/tea-workers/44-story-of-tea-workers-bangladesh> retrieved on 14 August 2013

<sup>37</sup> Woes of tea garden workers by Md Ahamed Ullah published in the Daily Sun on 18 January 2013

## SOME ORGANISATIONS AND NETWORKS WORKING ON DALIT ISSUES IN BANGLADESH

*All people have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.*

Article 1 of ICESCR and ICCPR

**Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement (BDERM):** The process of formation of BDERM began in Bangladesh in early 2000s, founded by B G Murthy whose work and vision established Bangladesh Dalit Human Rights (BDHR). In 2004 the organisation set up in the office of Nagorik Uddyog. BDHR demanded the full implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and raised awareness about the existence of Dalits and the problems they face politically and during the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) process.

BDHR and Nagorik Uddyog facilitated the visit of Professor Chung, UN Special Rapporteur of the Sub-commission who is one of the members to formulate UN Draft Principle and Guidelines to Eliminate All forms of Discrimination Based on Work and Descent in 12 to 20 October 2006. In April 2008 Nagorik Uddyog and BDHR organized a national consultation representing Dalit people across the country and 17 Dalit community based organizations, coming together for the first time. This consultation launched the national platform Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement (BDERM).

The movement further consolidated in January 2009 through Bangladesh's first National Dalit Human Rights Conference and rally with representatives and leaders from across the country. This conference creates an opportunity for the platform to widen nationally and internationally and focused to include other excluded communities and people who although experience caste/descent based discrimination do not identify with, or recognise the term Dalit.

BDERM is now a national platform with more than 30 member Organisations, representing 45 districts (there are 65 in total). BDERM is a membership-based Organisation working to unite all Dalit and excluded groups under a single platform. BDERM has had key lobbying successes, for ensuring the National Human Rights Commission includes Dalit issues in its 5 year strategic plan. Other successes include:

- Recognition from the government, donors, media, civil society and academics that there are Dalits and excluded communities in Bangladesh facing discrimination and poverty. Initial meetings with the Constitution Review Committee to push for more explicit reference to discrimination based on work and decent.
- Lobbying successes - for example in 2008 BDERM presented all political parties with their demands before the national elections and as a result all parties referred to Dalits in their manifestos.
- Active engagement with the Universal Periodic Review Forum (Human Rights Forum Bangladesh) - attending the Human Rights Council Session in Geneva and submitting an alternative Human Rights Report in 2008 and 2013 .
- Joining the International Dalit Solidarity Network in March 2009 giving BDERM increased visibility and recognition at the international level.

**Research Initiative Bangladesh (RIB):** RIB undertakes Participatory Action Research (PAR) and through this approach has undertaken a number of research surveys and supported specific Dalit/marginalised communities in Bangladesh. RIB has published series of survey reports on the different Dalit and excluded communities like Bede (river gypsies), Sanyasi, Rishi, Tea plantation workers, Sweeper, Pal/Kumar, Rabidas, Santal, Buno, Munda, Methor, Kawra, Hizra, Harijan, Bawali, Chakma, Tanti, Manta, Bhogobeneys, Shing, Khsatriya Barmans and Koch. This research has enabled some organisations to identify and start working with these communities. RIB is also implementing a right to information project for marginalised groups in collaboration with FAIR, Paritran, Gram Bangla Unnayan Committee and IRV.

**Parittran:** Parittran is a Dalit organisation working in the South of Bangladesh. It aims to eradicate caste and untouchability, to develop sustainable economic activities for Dalits, and raise awareness of ecological problems. Its vision is to establish a society free from social, gender, class, caste and religion based discrimination, where every citizen enjoys equal status and dignity. Parittran undertakes a broad range of activities - providing legal assistance, raising awareness of Dalits at the local, national and international level, focusing on the positive role of Dalits through media and publications, developing enterprises through skill training and raising awareness on issues relating to health, nutrition, family welfare and environment conservation.

Bangladesh Dalit Parishad is a network initiated by Parittran, funded by Manusher Jonno Foundation. It works in the Khulna region and holds some national seminars in collaboration with MJF and FAIR. Parittran is funded by Manusher Jonno Foundation, the European Commission and Nowano Peace Foundation, Japan.

**Bangladesh Harijan Oakko Parishod (BHOP):** BHOP was formed in 1996 with the focus of organizing urban Dalit communities primarily involve in cleaning / sweeping at municipality. Majority these groups belong to Telegu and Kanpuri. However, they have six others sub-caste identity. They never raise voices to protect their rights and against untouchability but tried to negotiate with municipalities to reserve the sweeper job for their community. BHOP was involved in the first BDERM committee. However, gradually due to Harijan and Dalit debate they declined to be involved BDERM. At present FAIR is supporting BHOP which is addressing rights issues and providing education and skill training of their communities.

**FAIR:** FAIR started its Dalit activities through RIB's research on sweeper communities and is now working nationally on advocacy, mobilization and research. It is mainly working with sweeper community (Harijan). Its aim is to strengthen of BOHP. It also has an education program for Dalit students. It is funded by Manusher Jonno Foundation, Human Development Foundation and NGO Foundation.

**Dalit and Excluded Women's Federation (DEWF):** Founded by BDERM and Nagorik Uddyog the Federation has 17 women headed member organisations from across the country in November 2010. The Federation aims to develop Dalit women's leadership and provide skill training. Recently their representative attended an international conference for Dalit women in Nepal and in Geneva.

**Government Commitment:** In a relatively short space of time strong progress has been made. For example the Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina proclaimed in a press release on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination to eliminate all kind of discrimination against Dalits<sup>38</sup>. Law Minister Barrister Shafique Ahmed also pronounced in a seminar that anti-discrimination law should be formulated<sup>39</sup>. With growing visibility and awareness, communities who have been faced discrimination and experienced untouchability practices based on their work and descent, for centuries, are coming forward.

She also comments that there should be quota in educational institutes for the admission of Dalit and Harijan students and also quota for job for educated Dalits and Harijans and again in her opinion. government should take special to include Harijans and Dalits measures in its human development programme especially safety-net programme such as old age allowance, widow allowance, disability allowance, VGD-VGF cards) on 29 May 2012. Prime Minister also comments that fair-price cards can be given to them and it is needed to build houses by City Corporation for Harijans and Dalits. She also comments that they are living in very inhuman condition<sup>40</sup>.

**Budget Allocation:** There is the allocation in national budget for Dalits in consecutive years (2011-12 allocation was 10 Million BDT and 2012-13 14.61 Million BDT).

**Quota for Employment:** In regard to the wellbeing of Dalits in Bangladesh Prime Minister approved to appoint sweeper/cleaners in all appointments of government, non-government and semi government institutes including city corporations and Paurosavas at least 80 percent quota for Harijans.

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<sup>38</sup> The Daily Ittefaq, 21 March 2009

<sup>39</sup> Dalit Human Rights Situation 2009 in Bangladesh by Mazharul Islam article published in Annual Human Rights Report 2009 by Neeti Gobeshona Kendra (2010)

<sup>40</sup> Dalit Human Rights Situation in Bangladesh (2008-12)- FAIR, Kushtia

**Construction of Building for Dalits:** The government will construct 1,148 flats for cleaners of Dhaka City Corporations as the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council has approved a project, the scheme involving Tk 10,922 crore. Under the project 'construction of cleaners' colony of Dhaka City Corporations', as many as 13 ten-storied buildings would be constructed to accommodate the flats having an area of 472 sq. ft each. Ten out of these 13 buildings would be constructed at Dhalpur and Dayaganj while the remaining three at Sutrapur at a cost of Tk 190 crore. Earlier in 2005, a project was approved to construct flats for DCC cleaners, which was cancelled following the collapse of an under-construction building under the project. A BUET committee formed to investigate the matter found faults with the construction work at that time. After completing a spot investigation, the IMED of the planning ministry also recommended to stop the project. Under the new project, the buildings would be constructed on the previous spots of the existing three colonies removing nearly 22,475 ft. piles. Besides, about 1.5 lakh sq. ft building will have to be demolished and removed. The project is expected to be completed by June 2017<sup>41</sup>.

**Quota for Education:** In response to demand from Dalit right group Dhaka University introduces one per cent Dalit quota for Dalit student in 2013. This is a remarkable achievement for Dalit community. Hope the other public universities will follow the pioneering step taken by the Dhaka University in next academic session.

**Initiative for Anti-discrimination/untouchability Act:** It is also encouraging that Law Commission and National Human Rights Commission of Bangladesh has been working to propose an anti-discrimination and untouchability act. NU and BDERM has jointly submitted a draft act for in response to law commission. It is a long demand to enact such law from Dalit right groups especially BDERM organized series of consultation to raise this demand.

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<sup>41</sup> The Daily Newage, 3 October 2013

## SOME ISSUES RELATED TO DALIT MOVEMENT IN BANGLADESH

*To be excluded common facilities or benefits that other have, can certainly be a significant handicap that impoverishes the lives that individuals can enjoy. No conception of poverty can be satisfactory if it does not take adequate note of the disadvantages that arise from being excluded from shared opportunities enjoyed by others.*

Amartya Sen (Social Exclusion 2004)

**Ideological Tensions between Terms and Identities - Dalit, Harijan, Antaj:** Different groups prefer different names based on their historical and political backgrounds; however Dalit is gaining in popularity partly due to the success of Dalit movements in India and Nepal and internationalisation of the issue. All Harijans are Dalits but not all Dalits are Harijans as it refers specifically to 8-10 castes engaged in mostly sweeping and cleaning.

**Muslim Dalits:** Like many religions Islam promotes a society of non-discrimination and tolerance. However many Muslim communities in Bangladesh experience discrimination based on their work and descent. It is challenging to raise these issues with Muslims who are often not prepared to acknowledge the existence of discrimination or practices of untouchability within their own societies and perceive it as a problem or cultural practice related to Hinduism.

**Conversion:** It is reported that some Christian Church and church oriented organisations are more interesting in converting Hindu Dalits to Christianity especially in Jessore and Khulna region. Moreover, some church organisations are only willing to support Christian Dalits for their well being not the community as a whole. This is a deeply problematic process and can be extremely divisive and unhelpful, particularly as the motivation is on conversion rather than on development or fulfilment of Dalit rights.

**Debates between Dalit and non-Dalit Organisations:** Organisations working on Dalit rights include Dalit organizations (established by and headed by Dalits) and mainstream human rights and/or development NGOs.

As with campaigns and struggles on Dalit rights there is a debate over ownership and who has the authority to work or speak out on behalf of them, particularly during at the early stages of this movement. There is no doubt that continuous dialogue and joint collaboration is possible but respect, strong communication, solidarity is essential.

**Conflict or Differences among Dalit Communities:** Even within Dalit communities there are sub-castes and internal discrimination is extremely common, particularly in regard to marriage. Unfortunately, Dalit organisations have not addressed this sensitive issue as yet.

**Networks:** Networking is essential for joint advocacy and very quickly several Dalit networks have emerged working at both the national and local level. Networks have to be collaborative to avoid duplication, competition and confusion and this has not always been the case. Networks also need to be sustainable – where they have been established or pushed by donors some have only lasted while funding has lasted.

**Lack of Coordination among Organisations:** As the Dalit issue starts to emerge and become a priority, sporadic funds are emerging. Dalit organisations should co-ordinate activities to avoid duplication, competition and to maximise the benefit of external funds. This could be solved through an extensive and inclusive Dalit network.

**Role of Donors:** A vast influx of money can also cause problems, particularly in an extremely poor environment where many organisations do not have the capacity to manage funds or experience in implementing development projects. Donors need to be more responsible, for example working in a consortium to co-ordinate funds. Transparency, accountability and clearly established objectives are essential both for networks and for the role of donors to promote and support Dalit programmes.

**Difference in Approaches:** As in all developing countries work on Dalits is currently divided between those who take a rights based holistic approach and organisations that are welfarist, focusing on distribution or meeting basic needs.

**Heterogeneity:** Dalits in Bangladesh are not homogenous in context of their exclusion, untouchability, poverty, belief, culture, size of community, living standards, geographical location, profession, ethnicity, language etc. Again, there are many similarities among Dalit communities as well. So, any action or programme either by State or Non-State Actors for Dalits cannot be fit for all as one pair of shoes does not fit for all.

**Legal Issue:** To ensure non-discrimination adhere with CERD, it is important to enact non-discrimination law. Government should enact legislation. This Constitutional scheme should include a general equality guarantee, a specific anti-discrimination provision, and express authorization for affirmative action provisions. The legislation will holistically deals with discrimination which seeks to deal with discrimination comprehensively by being responsive to changing social and legal realities, addresses discrimination of private persons, encompasses indirect/ intersectional discrimination and focuses on the victims' agency and enables them to directly seek remedies for discrimination<sup>42</sup>. It is also important to strengthen National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) for the safeguard of Dalit community of Bangladesh.

**Lack of Emphasis on Dalit Women:** Issues facing Dalit women need to be prioritized and their situation will not change unless issues such as their right to property, reproductive health, early marriage, dowry and lack of financial independence are addressed. Dalit men and some women have prioritized tackling caste discrimination from mainstream society rather than discrimination within their own societies – seeing women's rights as secondary to the issue of Dalit human rights overall. Urgent training and sensitization of Dalit men is needed as well as leadership training for Dalit women. A comprehensive study on Dalit community with particular focus on the socio-economic and cultural diversity and dynamics of Dalit women seems to be a top priority as this community requires different strategic intervention.

**Area of Coverage:** Up to now Dalits programmes and activities have been concentrated in specific areas and regions with many Dalits unserved or unreached by NGOs and community organisations.

**Research and Study:** Unlike India and Nepal, there is very little research on the issue in Bangladesh. There is a critical need for more statistics and data to inform policy and development planners, and to understand more about caste identity and reality in Bangladesh. The importance of securing accurate and disaggregated data on Dalits/and excluded communities affected by discrimination based on work and decent cannot be underestimated.

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<sup>42</sup> Seminar paper of the need and scope for laws against discrimination in Bangladesh (Jan 2013) by Sara Hossain

## A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF SOME DALIT AND EXCLUDED COMMUNITIES IN BANGLADESH<sup>43</sup>

### ■ **Assemese**

Also known as Asam, came from Asam province of India. 2000 of them live in Asam slums and Majir slums in Tabalchari, Rangamati and few more in Bandarban and Kagrachari. Their ancestors were the members of Asam Regiment of British Army in India. They have lost their mother language and now speak in Bangla. They are landless and agricultural day labourers.

### ■ **Bagdi**

They live in greater Faridpur, Kushtia and Jessore districts. Mostly live on agriculture, fishing and day labour with extreme poverty. Majority of Bagdi people are landless. They were migrated to present area as Indigo (Nil) labourers. Around 100 thousand Bagdi live in Bangladesh.

Bauri They are tea labourer and live at Kamalganj and Chunarughat tea gardens. Around 2-3 thousand Bauri live in Sylhet region. They are very poor.

### ■ **Bawali**

They collect woods and leaves from the Sundarbans, also work in agriculture and shrimp farm as labourers. Most of them live in 15 Upazilas adjacent to the Sundarbans.

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<sup>43</sup>Described communities are mainly derived from Diversity and Social Exclusion (Volume I), 2nd Edition (2013) by Altaf Parvez & Ramen Biswas and Dalit Community in the South West Part of Bangladesh edited by Achinta Saha

### ■ **Bede**

Approximately 500,000 people belong to this community. They are gypsies. Majority of them live in Munshigonj, Savar in Dhaka and Sunamgong. A large number of them live in river boat and roam around major river basins all the year round. They catch fish, snake, perform snake charming, sell traditional medicare etc. They are Muslim by religion. They become voter in 2008.

### ■ **Bajander**

They play local musical instruments like Dhol, Dhak, Khol, Sanai, Kashi, Bansi etc in various religious and social occasions. Due to changing social scenario, they had to depend on collecting lime and selling burn lime. Now most of them are day labourers or run small businesses or cultivation. They are considered as lower-caste among the Muslims. Around 45.59 per cent of them are landless with monthly average income of below BDT 1000. Around 93 per cent of Bajander are illiterate.

### ■ **Bonaz**

They are tea garden labourers in Srimangal living with financial vulnerability. Around 4-5 thousand people belong to this community.

### ■ **Bhasfor**

They are one of the Harijan communities. Some of them are also called Kanpuri for their language. Most of them live in the northern districts. Sweeping and cleaning are their major occupations.

### ■ **Bihari**

They are around 3 million Urdu speaking Bihari in Bangladesh. Majority of them are Shiites Muslim. Most of them supported Pakistani ruler during liberation war in 1971. Biharies are emigrated from Bihar and other parts of northern India during 1947 partition. They live in different UN refugee camps in Dhaka, Syedpur, Khulna etc. They live a very vulnerable life. They are granted Bangladeshi citizenship in 2008.

### ■ **Bhuiya**

They are tea labourers. Around 2-3 thousand people live in the tea gardens of Kalighat, Alinagar of Srimangal. Women also work as workers. They are extreme poor with very low literacy rate, believe in Sanatan Hindu.

### ■ **Bhuinmali**

Also known as Mali or Malakar, mainly live in Joypurhat, Pabna, Sirajgong and Tangail as landless. Their traditional profession was flower cultivation and making garlands. They have changed their professions; many of them now make paper made flowers. Financially they are very wretched. Some of them live on carrying Palki.

### ■ **Bhogobene**

Also known as Bhogobenia or Kartavaga. They have traditional local medicinal knowledge. Locally they are treated as the backward community who are neither Hindu nor Muslim. Around 55 per cent of them are day labourers. Monthly average income of 70.21 per cent is below BDT 1,000, literacy rate is 12.40 per cent.

### ■ **Bhunjar**

There are Bhunjar families at Biral Upazila of Dinajpur. Very small ethnic community in Bangladesh. They are agricultural day labours and very poor. Earlier they used to carry Palki.

### ■ **Chouhan**

Also known as Nunia. They are approximately 2000 Nunia tea garden workers live in the tea gardens of Moulavibazar. Belongs to Sanatan Hinduism.

### ■ **Dai**

Only group indentified by the profession of women. Men were engaged in selling the oil in the market produced from mustard, sesame and linseed by the hand oil mill. The women were known as foster-mother as they used to serve the umbilical cord of new born babies. Now most of them are day labourers, running small businesses and fishing. Around 69 per cent are landless and 92 per cent are illiterate. They are Muslim.

Dhopa Their occupation is washing and ironing clothes. Found both among Muslim and Hindu communities. Mostly illiterate. Around 70 per cent of them are landless.

### ■ **Ganju**

Also known as Kheroar. Tea plantation workers in tea gardens of greater Sylhet. Around 5,000 and are like bonded labourers. Believe in Sanatan Hinduism.

### ■ **Garh**

Around 5,000 of Garh live Patharkhola, Terapasha, Bagachara Tea gardens in Sylhet region. Extremely poor. Believe in Sanatan Hinduism.

### ■ **Ghasi**

Also known as Naek. Tea plantation workers in tea gardens of Kamalganj and Srimangal. Around 2-3,000, extremely poor and isolated.

Hazam Muslim community. Their main occupation was Khatna or circumcising male children of Muslim community. They have shifted their profession as day labourers, small businesses etc due advancing medical facilities.

### ■ **Jele**

Also known as Malo, Kaiborti, Rajbongshi or teor, porobasi. They belong both to Muslim and Hindu community. They live especially in major river basins and coastal areas; many are seeking work elsewhere due to environmental pressures. Census of 1931 counted 18,000,000 as Rajbongshi in Bengal. Only 10-15 per cent is literate and 82.33 per cent landless.

### ■ **Jola**

In occupation traditional weavers and are mainly Muslim. Hindus of the same profession are known as Bosak. 200,000 live in Kushtia and others are living in Khulna, Sirajgonj and Tangail.

### ■ **Kaora**

Also known as Kaiputra. Traditionally nomad pig raisers. Found mainly in Jessore, Gopalganj, Khulna, Gazipur, Meherpur, Lalmonirhat and Dinajpur. Approximately 100,000 populations face high degree of untouchability. Believe in Sanatan Hinduism.

### ■ **Koch**

Also known as Pani Koch. They are Adibasi. Mainly agricultural labourers, lives in Sherpur, Gazipur, Rangpur districts. Approximately 16-17,000. Literacy rate is around 10 per cent. They speak in Thar – a mixture of Bangla, Garo and Assemese.

### ■ **Kanpuri**

Divided into many clans and found mainly in urban areas in most of the towns of Bangladesh. They were brought to Bangladesh as sweepers and cleaners by British government. They speak Hindi and approximate numbers estimated between 0.5 - 0.7 Million.

### ■ **Koiri**

Also known as Deswali or Bhujpuri. Tea plantation workers in tea gardens of greater Sylhet. Between 5-7,000 population. Their ancestral home is in Alahabad, Kanpur of India.

### ■ **Kolu**

Also known as Tele. Muslim by faith. Their profession was to extract oil from oil seeds using indigenous technology and selling oil in the market. Now they are day labourers and agriculture labourers. Majority live in Kushtia, Mymensingh, Rangpur, Sirajgonj, Satkhira and Jessore. They are treated by others as untouchables. Around 60 per cent of them are landless and literacy rate is 8 per cent.

### ■ **Kol**

A small ethnic group living in Kushtia, Rajshahi, Noagoan, Chapainawabgong and Dinajpur. Most of them are Landless. Around 1600 in Bangladesh.

### ■ **Kara**

A small ethnic group mainly living in Dinajpur. Most of them are landless being the victim of Bengali land grabbers and now live as poor day labourers. Karma is their main festival.

### ■ **Kahar**

Also known as Behara. Muslim. Their traditional job was to carry higher class people on Palki or Palanquin. The name comes from the combination of words kadh meaning shoulder and ahar meaning food. They use to be seen everywhere in Bangladesh but now most of them are day labourers and hide their identity. At present then be found to attach with their traditional profession in a very small number in some places at Khulna region. Around 3700 in number and 80 per cent of them landless and 95 per cent are illiterate.

### **Khariya**

Around 10,000 Khariya live in the tea gardens of Moulavibazar. Around 90 per cent of them are tea garden labourers, mostly landless close to work as bonded labourer. They speak in Karuk and Sadri. Believe in Sanatan Hinduism but some of them converted to Christianity (around 7 per cent).

### ■ **Lyngam**

Adibasi community, matrilineal society and have similarity with Garo and Khasi. Divided into 20-25 clans. Most of them converted to Christianity. Bride goes to bridegroom's house after marriage. 2500 live in Kalmakanda of Netrokona and some live in Tahirpur of Sunamgong.

### ■ **Munda**

Also known as Buno. They were brought to this region from Ranchi of India around 200 years ago. Believe in Hindu religion though they have their own god and goddess. They speak in Nagri language, live mainly in Satkhira and Khulna districts. Around 5-10 thousand people belong to this community. Their main professions were hunting and cultivation. Now they are day labours and 93.23 and 7.16 per cent are landless and literacy rate respectively. There are some Munda families in the tea gardens in Sylhet region also.

### ■ **Manta**

Fishing is their ancestral profession. They (Approximately 20,000) mainly live in the coastal district of Patuakhali, Barisal, Bhola, Pirojpur and Borguna. They are nomads and live in boats. They have little contact with land. They catch fish through fishing rods. They have their own language. Muslim. They enlisted as voter in 2008.

### ■ **Malo**

Professional fishers, also known as Mallobormon or jele.. They usually live by the bank of river, canal and waterland. They live across the country with concentration in Tangail, Barguna, Jessore, Chittagong and Brahminbaria districts. They believe in Sanatan Hinduism, worship Lord Krishna and Shiva. Dol is their main festival. Belonged to scheduled caste and treated as untouchable.

### ■ **Mushohor**

There are two Mushohor communities in the two ends of the country separately. Few hundred lives in Sadar, Chiribandar, Parbotipur, Birol, Bochagong of Dinajpur and around 3,000 live in Rema and Teliapara tea

gardens of Habigong as tea garden workers. Mushohor of Dinajpur is known as hunting community, though now most of them are day labourers. Mushohor of Habigong district works as tea labour. They speak Musha or Napali (Hindi origin). Believe in Sanatan Hinduism and Holi is their principal festival.

#### ■ **Mowal**

They collect honey from the Sundarbans. They also collect woods and leaves in the different seasons. They live in Bagerhat, Satkhira, Khulna, Pirojpur districts. They were brought to this region by local Zaminders for cultivation. This community usually lives in the secluded place. They show respect to Bonobibi and Pargazi, two mythical characters. Extreme poor. Only 10 per cent literate.

#### ■ **Mahali**

They live in the tea gardens in greater Sylhet and Rajshahi also lives at Dinajpur, Rangpur and Joypurhat districts. Around 60,000 Mahali in Bangladesh. Most of them converted to Christianity but have a prevailing practice of animist culture. They have their own language. Have similarity with Santal and Kol community and also considered as a branch of Munda community. They came from Jharkhand, Odisha, Paschim Bangla and Moddho Prodesh of India. They are skilled at producing different products using bamboo.

#### ■ **Napit**

Also known as Khourokar and Paramanik. They are barbers by profession. They are found across the country. Though they are relatively financially solvent but people consider them as low caste. Live in a significant number at Jessore, Chittagong and Rajbari districts.

#### ■ **Nikari**

Muslim community. They catch fish and sell it in the market like Hindu Jele and Rajbongshi. They are backward compare to other Muslim communities. 58.54 per cent landless and around 93 per cent illiterate.

#### ■ **Namashudra**

The largest Dalit community in Bangladesh. Previously they were identified as Chandala or Charal. It is believed that they were the first settlers in south-west coastal region of Bangladesh. In 1911 Census they were named as Namashudra. Guru Chad Thakur and Hori Chad Thakur, religious leaders and social reformists are from this community and they

preached Motua religion. Most of the Namashudra live in the greater Faridpur, Jessore, Barisal, Dhaka and Khulna region. It is assumed that at present 70 per cent of total Hindus in Bangladesh belong to this community. Generally they live on cultivation, day labour, fishing, fish cultivation. But they also engage in other professions being educated. Believe in Hinduism and worship Sitala and Bastu. 23.67 per cent are landless 27.83 per cent literate.

#### ■ **Oraon**

Adibasi community. Live in Naogaon, Chapainawabgong, Rajshahi and Sirajgong. According to government statistics, population is around 15,000.

#### ■ **Patni**

Their ancient profession was boat riding and also made local instruments for fishing. Now, they are changing their profession. Most of them are landless. Still some Patni families are living in group in Pirojpur, Khulna, Satkhira and Gopalgong districts. One of their sects known as Patia mainly lives in the Tangail region. 80 per cent are landless and 80.65 per cent illiterate. Believe in Sanatan Hinduism.

#### ■ **Pundra Khatra**

Also known as Pod, a very defamatory name for them. Most of them live in Khulna and Jessore region. They are considered one of the first settlers in this region. There is a canal named Podekhali in the Sundarbans. They are involved with agriculture and shrimp cultivation, fishing, mat sewing etc. Traditionally they are ignored and overlooked by the dominant caste Hindus. They worship Basanti and Sitala and respect Thakur Anukul Chandra. They are found of performing cultural activities like Bhasan song, marriage song, kirton, Doljatra and play local musical instruments like Dhol, Khol, flute, Sanai. 31.11 per cent are landless and literacy rate is 26.83 per cent.

#### ■ **Paradhon**

They live in the tea gardens of Phultala, Longla, Sonatala, Dhamai etc. in Sylhet. Extreme poor. Population is around 1000 to 2000. They have their own language but have no alphabet. Believe in Sanatan Hinduism.

### ■ Pahan

They live at Nachol in Chapainawabgong, Nimatpur in Naogaon, Tanor in Rajshahi and at the adjacent areas of Mahasthangarh, Bogra. 60 per cent are landless. Now they are agricultural labourers. Believe in Hinduism.

### ■ Paharia

Also called Mala, a small ethnic group of Dravidian clan mainly living at Natore, Pabna and Rajshahi. Most of them are landless and agricultural labourers. Around 7-10 thousand people belong to this community. Believe in Sanatan Hinduism but some of them converted to Christianity.

### ■ Rishi

Also known as Ruidas. Mainly shoe makers living in Jessore, Satkhira, Bagerhat, Joypurhat, Nilphamari, Noagoan, and Mankiganj. Their profession is to work with leather (shoe making, polish, repairing etc.) and skin dead cow. They also make handicrafts by using bamboo and cane. They are divided into two groups - boro begi who conduct their business with cleanliness and choto begi who take away skin from dead cow or eat their meat. There is no marital relation between two groups. Experience high degree of untouchability - forbidden to touch temples and marriage stages. Advance in cultural activities and makes musical instruments and perform Dhak, Dhol, Sanai, Flute, Khol, Drum etc. Early marriage is common. 67.92 per cent are landless and around 96 per cent illiterate.

### ■ Rabidas

Also known as Ruhidas or Muchi, Chamar and Charmakar like Rishi. They were brought to this region from Darbhanga, Muzzaffarpur, Baliachapra, Kaunoj, Patna, Munger, Bhajonpur, Kasi etc of British India. Though they live across the country (Approximately 100,000) but a large number live in Niamatupur of Naogaon. They speak in Nagri language. Their profession is to work with leather (shoe making, polish, repairing etc.) and skinning dead cow – same as the Rishi community. Now, many Rabidas are engaged in agriculture. Believe in Sanatan Hinduism but some of them converted into Christianity. They face high degree of untouchability.

### ■ Rajoar

A small Adibasi community, also known as Rajuar. They mainly live in the greater Rajshahi region and Faridpur. Believe in Sanatan religion and claim themselves as Khatria, karma is main festival. Lost their ancestral language and now speak in Bangla.

### ■ **Rasua**

Main profession was repairing household metal commodities. Most of them are now day labourers or cultivator. Around 85 per cent are landless and 97 per cent illiterate.

### ■ **Sabar**

Known as hunter community, around 2 to 3 thousand in number, presently work as tea workers in different tea gardens of greater Sylhet and are approximately.

### ■ **Sabdokor**

Around 300 families live in Maulavibazar district. Their profession is performing music through musical instruments like Dhol, Dhak, Kartal, Khol etc. They belong to Hindu religion. 70 per cent landless.

Sahaji Belongs to Muslim community and small in number. Ancestral profession was snake catching and charming. Most of them are now day labourers, curve stone or live on cultivation. Around 80 per cent of them landless and 92 per cent illiterate.

### ■ **Santal**

Adibasi community. 70-80 per cent landless and agricultural labours. Approximately 150, 000 belong to this community. They mainly live in Dinajpur and Rajshahi region. Believe in animism but many of them are converted to Christianity, have their own language. Baha and Saharai are their main festivals.

### ■ **Sikari**

Ancestors earned their livelihood by hunting in forest and selling animals. Have similarity with nomadic gypsies. Now they are day-labours, van pullers, and small businesses etc. Around 81 per cent landless and 92 per cent illiterate.

### ■ **Telegu**

Cleaners living in urban areas. Brought to Bangladesh by British. Speak Telegu and divided into many sub-castes. Most of the Telegu people live in Dhaka (around 35,000), Iswardi, Pabna, Kushtia and Sylhet.

**Note:** The list is not comprehensive and it is prepared on the basis of discrimination based on work and descent, so some Adibasi and other ethnic communities are also included in this list.

## ORGANISATION/ NETWORK/ FOUNDATIONS/ INGO WORK ON DALIT ISSUE

### A. Dalit Lead Organisations

Organisations	Area of intervention	Location
Bangladesh Dalit Human Rights (BDHR)	Dalit human rights, advocacy, campaign, network	Dhaka
Dalit Women Forum	Dalit women human rights, community development, education	Dhaka
Parittran	Dalit human rights, Climate change, advocacy, campaign, education, health	Satkhira
Bhumija	Dalit human rights, education, livelihood, legal aid support, network	Satkhira
DALIT	Education, health, water sanitation, handicrafts	Khulna
Bangladesh Harijan Oakko Parishad	Human rights, advocacy	Dhaka
Telegu Community Development Society	Development of Telegu community	Dhaka
Namashudra Rights Movement	Dalit human rights	Magura
Charaibeti Tofshili Adibasi and Kalyan Sangha	Education, human rights, skill development	Jessore

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Area of intervention</b>	<b>Location</b>
Moulovibazar Tea Community Adibasi Front	Tea labourer development	Moulovibazar
Mrit Shipa Unnayan Samity	Pottery development, IGA	Khulna
Dalit Empowerment Trust	Dalit Rights	Jessore
ISA	Adibasi and Dalit empowerment	Moulovibazar
Ovijan	Dalit women rights	Dhaka
Ashrumochon	Women empowerment	Jessore
Dhrubo	Dalit rights	Khulna
Dalit Education Trust (DET)	Education	Dhaka
<b>Clubs, Forums of Dalit</b>		
Dalit Youth Forum	Dalit youth development	Dhaka
Harijan Women Development Association	Dalit women development	Nilphamari
Harijan Samaj Seva Sangha	Community activities	Narayangonj
Rainkhola Panchayat Committee	Community activities	Dhaka
Gopibagh Unnayan Jubo Songha	Community activities	Dhaka
Samaj Kallayan Jubo Sangha	Community activities	Dhaka
Antaj Student Union	Student activities	Satkhira

## B. Development/ Non-Dalit Human Rights Organisations

<b>Organisations</b>	<b>Area of intervention</b>	<b>Location</b>
Nagorik Uddyog	Dalit human rights, Dalit women rights, advocacy, networking	Dhaka
FAIR	Education , advocacy, human rights, institution building	Kushtia
CDMS	Education, Dalit human rights	Narsingdi
Gram Bangla Unnayan Committee	Empowerment, education, health, research of Bede Community	Dhaka
Gram Bikash Kendra	Education, alternative employment, awareness, housing rights	Dinajpur
SERP	Dalit human rights, empowerment, alternative employment, education and health	Thakurgoan
ESDO	Dalit human rights, empowerment, alternative employment, education and health	Thakurgoan
ARCO	Dalit human rights, empowerment, alternative employment, education and health	Naongoan
Sharee	Education, health, mainstreaming Dalits	Dhaka
RDC	Research	Dhaka
PSSK	Education, IGA	Lalmonirhat

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Area of intervention</b>	<b>Location</b>
SEBA	Action Research, sanitation, education, skill training	Nilphamari
SUS	Working with bede community	Barisal
IRV	Rights of Munda Community	Khulna
Progoti	Rights of Munda Community	Satkhira
Nice Foundation	Rights of Kaora Community	Khulna
CCBVO	Dalit human rights	Rajshahi
SEBA	Education	Kushtia
USS	Action Research	Nilphamari
Jante Sheka Samaj Kalyan Sangstha	Dalit empowerment	Jhenaidah

### **C. Campaign and Movement**

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Area of intervention</b>	<b>Location</b>
BDERM	National level network, Member IDSN	Dhaka
Dalit Parishad	Khulna region	Satkhira
Bangladesh Antaj Network	Jessore region	Satkhira
Bangladesh Antaj Forum	Khulna region	Satkhira
Dalit and Excluded Women Federation (DEWF)	National platform of Dalit women Organisations	Dhaka

## Donors/Partners Supporting Dalit Activities in Bangladesh:

### A. National Foundation/Donors

Manusher Jonno Foundation	ActionAid Bangladesh
Research Initiative Bangladesh (RIB)	Jamil Sarwar Trust
Bangladesh NGO Foundation	Human Development Foundation

### B. International Foundation/Donors

European Union (EU)	Christian Aid, UK
Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, Germany	Niwano Peace Foundation, Japan
Royal Dutch Government	Oxfam
HEKS, Switzerland	Manipese, Italy
COE- Italy	Miserior, Germany
Bread for the World, Germany	Asia Foundation
CUORE AMICO, Italy	KIOS, Finland
Congregation of Christian Brothers Trustees, UK	MANITESE, Italy
ICCO & KiA, Netherlands	Dan Church Aid, Denmark
One World Action, UK	

## International Network/ Regional Organization Working on Dalit Issue

<b>India</b>	
The National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights	People's Watch
National Confederation of Dalit Organisations	The National Federation of Dalit Women
Navsarjan Trust	Safai Karmachari Andolan
REDS	Dalits Media Watch
Indian Institute for Dalit Studies (IIDS)	
<b>Nepal</b>	
Dalit NGO Federation	The Feminist Dalit Organisation
Nepal National Dalit Social Welfare Organization	Nepaldalitinfor
JUP-Nepal	Empower Dalit Women of Nepal
Samata Foundation	
<b>Pakistan</b>	
Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network	Thardeep Rural Development Programme
Pakistan Institute of Labour Education & Research (PILER)	All Pakistan Schedule Caste Federation
<b>Sri Lanka</b>	
Human Development Organization	International Centre for Ethnic Studies
<b>Japan</b>	
Buraku Liberation and Human Rights Research Institute	International Movement Against all forms of Discrimination and Racism -Japan Committee

## Europe and Australia

International Dalit Solidarity Network - Denmark	Dalit Solidarity Network - UK
Dalit Solidarität Deutschland - Germany	Dalit Network Netherlands
Dalit Solidarity Network - Norway	Dalit Solidarity Network - Denmark
Dalit Solidarity Network - Sweden	Solidarité Dalits Belgique – Belgium
Dalit Solidarity Network - Finland	Dalit Freedom Network- Australia

## Human Rights Organizations (International and UN Bodies)

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)	International Movement Against all forms of Discrimination (IMADR)
Minority Rights Group International	Amnesty International
Human Rights Watch	Asian Human Rights Commission
Asian Centre for Human Rights	Anti-Slavery International
The Advocacy Project Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative	Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
Anti Caste Discrimination Alliance (ACDA)	Castewatch UK

**Note :** The list may not be exhaustive there are growing institutions interested to work with Dalit community. BDERM and Nagorik Uddyog have taken an initiative to prepare a comprehensive directory for the organizations working and supporting for Dalit community.

## **Extract from the Constitution of Bangladesh (15th Amendment, 2011)**

### **The state religion**

2A. The state religion of the Republic is Islam, but the State shall ensure equal status and equal right in the practice of the Hindu, Buddhist, Christian and other religions.

### **Citizenship**

6. (2) The people of Bangladesh shall be known as Bangalees as a nation and the citizens of Bangladesh shall be known as Bangladeshies.]

### **Secularism and freedom of religion**

12. The principle of secularism shall be realised by the elimination of -  
(a) communalism in all its forms ;  
(b) the granting by the State of political status in favour of any religion ;  
(c) the abuse of religion for political purposes ;  
(d) any discrimination against, or persecution of, persons practicing a particular religion.

### **Equality of opportunity**

19. (1) The State shall endeavour to ensure equality of opportunity to all citizens.

### **The culture of tribes, minor races, ethnic sects and communities**

23A. The State shall take steps to protect and develop the unique local culture and tradition of the tribes, minor races, ethnic sects and communities.

### **Equality before law**

27. All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law.

### **Discrimination on grounds of religion, etc**

28. (1) The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.

(3) No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth be subjected to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to access to any place of public entertainment or resort, or admission to any educational institution.

(4) Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making special provision in favour of women or children or for the advancement of any backward section of citizens.

### **Equality of opportunity in public employment**

29. (2) No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, be ineligible for, or discriminated against in respect of, any employment or office in the service of the Republic.

(3) Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from –

(a) making special provision in favour of any backward section of citizens for the purpose of securing their adequate representation in the service of the Republic;

(b) giving effect to any law which makes provision for reserving appointments relating to any religious or denominational institution to persons of that religion or denomination;

### **Freedom of religion**

41. (1) Subject to law, public order and morality –

(a) every citizen has the right to profess, practise or propagate any religion;

(b) every religious community or denomination has the right to establish, maintain and manage its religious institutions.

## **Extract from the Constitution of Pakistan (1956)**

### Article 5

- (1) All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law.
- (2) No person shall be deprived of life or liberty save in accordance with law.

### Article 13

- (3) No citizen shall be denied admission to any educational institution receiving aid from public revenues on the ground only of race, religion, caste, or place of birth: Provided that nothing in this Article shall prevent any public authority from making provision for the advancement of any socially or educationally backward class of citizens.

### Article 14

- (1) In respect of access to places of public entertainment or resort, not intended for religious purposes only, there shall be no discrimination against any citizen on the ground only of race, religion, caste, sex or place of birth.

### Article 20

Untouchability is abolished and its practice in any form forbidden and shall be declared by law to be an offence.

### Article 28

The State shall endeavour to (a) promote, with special care, the educational and economic interests of the people of the Special Areas, the backward classes and the Scheduled Castes;

### Article 204

The castes, races and tribes, and parts or groups within castes, races and tribes which, immediately before the Constitution Day constituted the Scheduled Castes within the meaning of the Fifth Schedule to the Government of India Act, 1935, shall, for the purposes of the Constitution, be deemed to be the Scheduled Castes until Parliament by law otherwise provides.

Article 205

The Federal and Provincial Governments shall promote, with special care the educational and economic interests of the Scheduled Castes and backward classes in Pakistan, and shall protect them from social injustice and exploitation.

Article 206

(1) The President may appoint a Commission to investigate the conditions of Scheduled Castes and backward classes in Pakistan and make recommendations as to the steps to be taken and grants to be made by the Federal backward classes, or Provincial Governments to improve their conditions.

(2) The Commission appointed under clause (1) shall investigate die metiers referred to them and submit a report to the President with such recommendations as the Commissions thinks fit, and copies of the report shall be laid before the National Assembly and the Provincial Assemblies.

Article 207

(1) There shall be a Special Officer for the Scheduled and backward classes in Pakistan, to be appointed by the President.

(2) It shall be the duty of the Special Officer to investigate all matters relating to the safeguards provided for the Scheduled Castes and backward classes by Article 205, to investigate the extent to which any recommendations of the Commission appointed under Article 206 are carried out, and to report this findings to the President at such intervals as the President may direct and the President shall cause all such reports to be laid before the National Assembly.

[http://therepublicofrumi.com/archives/56\\_00.htm](http://therepublicofrumi.com/archives/56_00.htm)

## **Poona Pact**

Agreement between leaders of Caste-Hindus (signed by M K Gandhi, GD Birla, Madan Mahan Malaviya, Rajagopalchari, Jayakar, Sapru) and of Dalits ( signed by Dr. BR Ambedker and Rao Bahadur Srinivasan), at Yerwada Central Jail in Pune (Poona) on 24 September 1932. The Pact had great impact on subsequent Indian politics.

1. There shall be seats reserved for the Depressed Classes out of general electorate seats in the provincial legislatures as follows:

Madras 30; Bombay with Sind 15; Punjab 8; Bihar and Orissa 18; Central Provinces 20; Assam 7; Bengal 30; United Provinces 20; Total 148. These figures are based on the total strength of the provincial Council, announced in the Prime Minister's (British) decision.

2. Election to these seats shall be by joint electorates subject, however, to the following procedure :

All members of the Depressed Classes registered in the general electoral roll of a constituency, will form an electoral college, which will elect a panel of four candidates belonging to the Depressed Classes for each of such reserved seats by the method of the single vote; four persons getting the highest number of votes in such primary elections shall be the candidates for election by the general electorate.

3. Representation of the Depressed Classes in the Central Legislature shall likewise be on the principle of joint electorates and reserved seats by the method of primary election in the manner provided for in Clause 2 above for their representation in the Provincial Legislatures.

4. In the Central Legislature eighteen per cent, of the seats allotted to the general electorate for British India in the said legislature shall be reserved for the Depressed Classes.

5. The system of primary election to a panel of candidates for election to the Central and Provincial Legislatures as here-in before mentioned, shall come to an end after the first ten years, unless terminated sooner by mutual agreement under the provision of Clause 6 below.

6. The system of representation of Depressed Classes by reserved seats in the Provincial and Central Legislatures as provided for in Clauses 1 and 4 shall continue until determined by mutual agreement between the communities concerned in the settlement.

7. The Franchise for the Central and Provincial Legislatures for the Depressed Classes shall be as indicated in the Lothian Committee Report.

8. There shall be no disabilities attached to any one on the ground of his being a member of the Depressed Classes in regard to any election to local bodies or appointment to the Public Services. Every endeavour shall be made to secure a fair representation of the Depressed Classes in these respects, subject to such educational qualifications as may be laid down for appointment to the Public Services.

9. In every province, out of the educational grant an adequate sum shall be earmarked for providing educational facilities to the members of Depressed Classes.

**.A. The Govt. of India (Scheduled Castes) Order,  
1936:**

At the Court at Buckingham Palace,  
The 30th day of April, 1936.

Present.

THE KING'S MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY  
IN COUNCIL

WHEREAS by certain provisions in the 1st, 5th & 6th Schedules to the Govt. of India Act, 1935, His Majesty in Council is empowered to specify the castes, races or tribes or parts of or groups within castes, races or tribe which are to be treated as the Scheduled Castes for the purposes of those Schedules:

AND WHEREAS a draft of this Order was laid before Parliament in accordance with the provisions of subsection (1) of section three hundred and nine of the said Act and an Address has been presented by both Houses of Parliament praying that an Order may be made in the terms of this Order:

NOW, THEREFORE, His Majesty, in the exercise of the said powers and of all other powers enabling Him in that behalf, is pleased by and with the advice of His Privy Council to order, and it is hereby ordered, as follows :--

1. This Order may be cited as "The Government of India (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1936."

2. Subject to the provisions of this order, for the purposes of the First, Fifth and Sixth Schedules to the Government of India Act, 1935, the castes, races or tribes or parts of or groups within castes, races or tribes specified in Parts I to IX of the Schedule to this Order shall, in the Provinces to which those Parts respectively relate, be deemed to be scheduled castes so far as regards members thereof resident in the localities specified in relation to them respectively in those parts of that Schedule.

3. Notwithstanding anything in the last preceding paragraph—

(a) No Indian Christian shall be deemed to a member of a ScheduledCaste;

(b) In Bengal no person who professes Buddhism or a tribal religion shall be deemed to be a member of any Scheduled Caste; and if any question should arise as to whether any particular person does or does not profess Buddhism or a tribal religion, that question shall be determined according to the answers which he may make, in the prescribed manner to such question as may be prescribed.

4. In this Order the expression "Indian Christian" has the same meaning as it has for the purposes of Part I of the First Schedule to the Government of India Act, 1935, and the expression "prescribed" means prescribed by rules made by the Governor of Bengal, exercising his individual judgment.

5. Any reference in the Schedule to this Order to any division, district, subdivision, tehsil or municipality shall be construed as a reference to that division, district, subdivision, tehsil or municipality as existing on the first day of July, nineteen hundred and thirty six.

..Extracted from Pamphlet No. 14 by the Bharatiya Adimjati Sevak Sangh (Society of Servants of Primitive Tribes In India), Harijan Sevak Sangha's Office, Kings way, Delhi on the Articles of the Constitution relating to Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and Other backward Classes carrying a foreword by LM Shrikant, Commissioner for Scheduled and Scheduled Tribe, Govt of India.

## SCHEDULE

### PART III– BENGAL

A. Scheduled Castes throughout the province: -

1. Agariya	27. Hari	53. Mallah
2. Bagdi	28. Ho	54. Malpahariya
3. Bahelia	29. Jalia Kaibartta	55. Mech
4. Baiti	30. Jhalo Malo or Malo	56. Mehtor
5. Bauri	31. Kadar	57. Muchi
6. Bediya	32. Kan	58. Munda
7. Beldar	33. Kandh	59. Musahar
8. Berua	34. Kandra	60. Nagesia
9. Bhatiya	35. Kaora	61. Namasudra
10. Bhuimali	36. Kapuria	62. Nat
11. Bhuiya	37. Karenga	63. Nuniya
12. Bhumij	38. Kastha	64. Oraon
13. Bind	39. Kaur	65. Paliya
14. Binjhia	40. Khaira	66. Pan
15. Chamar	41. Khatik	67. Pasi
16. Dhenuar	42. Koch	68. Patni
17. Dhoba	43. Konai	69. Pod
18. Doai	44. Konwar	70. Rabha
19. Dom	45. Kora	71. Rajbanshi
20. Dosadh	46. Kotal	72. Rajwar
21. Garo	47. Lalbegi	73. Santal
22. Ghasi	48. Lodha	74. Sunri
23. Gonrhi	49. Lohar	75. Tiyar
24. Hadi	50. Mahar	76. Turi
25. Hajang	51. Mahali	
26. Halalkhor	52. Mal	