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DALITS IN BANGLADESH ARE LAGGED BEHIND IN EDUCATION



Bangladesh has attracted considerable attention of international community recently for some major achievements, success in Primary education is one of those. But, it is also true that most of the Dalits in Bangladesh are illiterate. They are unwanted in the schools as the society is yet prevailed with the sense of untouchability based on work and descent. Poverty has another big stake behind their less interest in education. Thus they are struggling within an unending cycle of untouchability, illiteracy and poverty. There are various government and non-government initiatives to spread the boon of education. But unfortunately, Dalits are yet lagged behind in education. As a result they remain secluded from the main stream flow of development. This is a countable hurdle before achieving the Millennium Development Goal.

Article 17 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh states that the basic education will be free and compulsory for all children. National Education Policy-2010 has stated that one of its main objectives is to remove socio-economic discrimination irrespective of race, religion and caste and to eradicate gender disparity; to develop non-communalism, friendliness, global fraternity, fellow-feeling and respect for human rights. It has also committed to promote and develop the languages and cultures of the indigenous and small ethnic groups. But the fact is that Dalits are in the back carriage of this train due to less interest of the concerned authority to admit Dalit children in school. Again, hostile attitude of the teachers and fellow students, social deprivation due to being Dalit, indifference of Dalit guardians toward education, unemployment of educated Dalits, deprivation from deserved jobs, etc. led the Dalit children stay away from education.

The draft Education Policy (2013) has kept the options of learning in mother languages for the indigenous peoples and small ethnic groups at primary level. But in reality, non-Bengali Dalit students are yet deprived of learning their mother tongue. The same policy has stated that measures will be taken to ensure the availability of teachers from ethnic groups and to prepare texts in their own languages so that ethnic children can learn their own indigenous languages. But Hindi, Telegu, Bhojpouri speaking Dalit students has no scope to learn in their own language.

A study has shown that only 5% Dalits can write their name and address while the national average of literacy rate of above 15 years old citizen is 59.82%. The Daily Bhorer Kagoj of 25 March, 2010 has published news on an incident where Ruhi Jolodas, a student of class 2 of Char Aminullah Government Primary School situated at Subarnachar sub-district, Noakhali, was beaten and thrown out of the class only because he is a Dalit. There are some other similar headlines of other newspapers is also very discouraging.

For instances, the Daily Janata of 7 September, 2007 published- "Harijans have to hide their identity to get admission in school"; the Daily Ittefaq of 9 November, 2010 published- "they have to hide identity at school".

A study conducted in 2003 on Rishi community at Dhaka has shown that only 30 percent of the community people are literate when the national percentage is 65%. Among them, 15% have got primary education, 12% secondary education, 3% vocational education and percentage of higher education is zero. Enrolment in school among Dalit is 38 percent. Another study has showed that when 32.4 percent Dalits graduated at pre-primary education, only 10.4 percent of them have gone beyond primary level, 7.8 percent have passed class 8, 2.9 percent passed Secondary School Certificate and only 0.76% have passed Higher Secondary. Education can barely accommodate in the environment where Dalits have to live.

Some of the unstoppable Dalits have succeeded to get graduate and post-graduate certificate but are deprived of deserved job. Their birth identity is the obstacle before a good job. News published has featured on the hostile attitude of the Chairman of Jalalabad Union Council of Kolaroa sub-district, Satkhira who scolded Dalit applicant out of the room saying, "you, the son of cobbler, how dare you to ask for a job!" Literacy situation among the Dalit women are more pathetic. Those who are lucky to get admit in primary school are rarely able reaching secondary school.

However, recently Office of the Prime Minister has circulated a letter to ensure the quota for Dalit students in education institutes. Some non-government organizations, though in small scale, have already initiated education assistance program for the Dalits. Dhaka University has accommodated special quota for the Dalit students in 2013-14.


Dalits of Bangladesh need education program addressing their mode of deprivation & poverty and their exclusive social status.

Immediate tasks

- Ensure compulsory primary education of the Dalit children and provide education assistance for them;
- Introduce quota system for Dalit students in the public education institutes;
- Arrange public scholarship for Dalit students as backward community;
- Introduce quota at jobs for educated Dalits;
- Provision of punishment for unequal treatment toward Dalit students in education institutes;
- Provision of education in mother language for the non-Bengali speaking Dalit students at least in primary level;
- Provision of special allocation for Dalits in the education budget;
- Establish a special cell for the Dalits in the Education Ministry.

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