

Dalit Women Conclave 2021

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A Report By Ms Tamanna Singh Baraik, Secretary International Affairs, Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement (BDERM)

Translated by Ritwajit Das, Membership Coordinator

Globally there is around 26 Crore (260 million) Dalits. Of which 21 Crore (210 million) or 80% Dalits reside in the South Asian geography. Dalit women are the most marginalized groups in the Dalits in terms of agency, empowerment and rights-based representations. Dalit women are systematically excluded and disenfranchised from society, and it has been historically normalized. Dalit women are at the bottom of the pyramid in any human societal order. Dalit women are the most vulnerable and exploited women in the whole of Asia.

In Bangladesh as per the constitution there is normative equality for citizens belonging to different caste, religion, colour and creeds however, the Dalits are not treated with equality and dignity in the real life or in existent social order. There are constitutional measures and safeguards for women in Bangladesh to avail and claim equal rights and representation for gender equity and development. However, this is a far cry from the reality and Dalit women rights and equity are almost non-existence.

To address these issues of Dalit women in Bangladesh. Dalit women are facing systemic oppression, historical discrimination, targeted annihilation and apartheid in Bangladesh. For this very reason, today, all Dalit women groups came together on 24th September 2021 (Friday) at YWCA Bhavan, 3 – 23 Iqbal Road, Mohammadpur, Dhaka, 1207. The Dalit women came together as a forum to discuss and deliberate on different systemic and institutional challenges prevalent in all spheres of society. The National Dalit Women Conclave 2021 followed stringent government health and Covid-19 protocol.

Bangladesh, and Ms Tamanna Singh Baraik, Secretary of International Affairs, BDERM, designed and curated the context of the conclave. Mr Zakir Hossain, CEO of Nagorik Udyog, was also there at the event. Ms Gloria Jharna Sarkar, Honorable Member of Parliament. And also, an advocate presided over the meeting. Ms Adiba Anjum Meeta, an advocate and a Member of Parliament and Mr Altaf Pervez, a renowned writer and social researcher and a staunch supporter of Dalit Human Rights, was also present. Mr Uttam Kumar Bhakta, the General Secretary of Central Committee of BDERM, was also there in the meeting. Mr Bibhutosh Ray, the Co-Secretary of the Central Committee of BDERM, was also present. Mr Khalid Hossain, the President of the Council of Minority in Bangladesh, was also there. All of these distinguished dignitaries supported the Dalit Women Conclave of Bangladesh with their active and directive participation.

Pinki Rani Das, the leading National Co-ordinator of the Dalit Women Forum of Bangladesh. Because of her efforts, the realization of this conclave was possible. She raised the much agenda on lack on the inclusion of Dalit Women Rights on Education, Health, Livelihoods, Opportunities to Vocation, Government Scheme Entitlements, Entrepreneurship, Finance, Local Level Political Representation and Household Savings in Bangladesh. She talked about advocacy approaches and strategies for creating spaces for Dalit women in different areas of development and public policy in Bangladesh. She also spoke about pragmatic and plausible mechanisms for concretizing and institutionalizing Dalit women welfare and schemes in various government schemes and interventions targeting specific

SDGs goals for 2030. She talked about specific goals under the SDGs which can assist Dalit women in having a rights-based mandate.

Ms Moni Rani Das said that this National Dalit Women Conclave results from our long-standing struggles and continuous rights-based works over the years. She said that we had come a long way where we had nothing, and now, we have something, and we did this on our own. But we have a long way to go. We have achieved a space for Dalit women in Bangladesh without any help from outside. We, the Dalit Women, has risen to the occasion today.

Because of Ms Moni Rani Das, the Dalit Women especially Dalit Widows are getting direct cash transfer benefits from the government. It is because of her continuous advocacy works – Dalit women for the first have the house rights and tenure entitlements under social housing scheme under Dhaka City Corporation.

Mr Zakir Hossain of Nagorik Udyog said that Dalits face different challenges and have to be seen from different perspectives. He said we need to encourage all measures coming from the government and non-government entities for the Dalits. Dalit women should be given access to education and awareness on their rights to capture social and economic opportunities around them especially coming from the government and other development agencies. He emphasized the skills and competence building of Dalit Women.

Dalit workers constitute around 90% of the workforce in the sanitation sector. They don't have immediate access to health, education and housing. Strong and targeted pressure points have to be created on the government to recognize these issues, and further facilitation is needed to acknowledge their informal roles, which is primarily invisibilized.

Honourable Member Parliament Ms Gloria Jharna Sarkar mentioned that we avail the rights and opportunities. Dalit women need to be provided with more access and capacity to develop their skills and overall competence. Dalit women need to have economic empowerment, and these processes need to be further institutionalized.

Honourable Member Parliament Ms Adiba Anjum Mita said Dalit women should be given opportunities to build their overall skills and competence to be truly empowered. The options should be backed with access to education and health services.

Mr Altaf Pervez said that the rights of the Dalits have to be institutionalized and cemented, and Dalits should think of occupying political positions in Bangladesh. Political representation of Dalits in Bangladesh is severely lacking.

All the speakers and dignitaries agreed that Dalit women and children should have rights to education and higher education has to be there. Dalit women should have opportunities for economic development. Laws and policies have to be reviewed and amended in this regard. Strong targeted advocacy has to be pushed and accelerated.

Skilling and capacity development programmes have to be initiated in different districts of Bangladesh. Sanitation facilities like toilets and washroom have to be built for Dalit women near Dalit colonies and ghettos.

A Report By Kailash Rabi Das

Dalit Women's Conference-2021

Out of the 26 crore Dalit community worldwide, 21 crore or 80 percent of them live in South Asia. South Asian Dalits especially women are living the most discriminated, oppressed and humane lives. Depriving women from their rights has become a rule. Women are enjoying less rights than men all over the world and women's position in Asia is more fragile. Even though the constitution of Bangladesh talks about equal rights for all people irrespective of race, religion, caste, Dalits and minority community are suffering from different types of discrimination. Despite various positive initiatives by the government to ensure equal participation of women in various developmental activities in Bangladesh, women especially Dalit women are far behind socially. Today 24 September 2021 (Friday) at the initiative of the Dalit Women's Forum to discuss about all kinds of discrimination against Dalit women and to bring them forward by establishing their social status at YWCA-Hallroom, Bangladesh YWCA Bhavan, 3/23 Iqbal A special gathering of Dalit women was held in accordance with hygiene rules at Road, Mohammadpur, Dhaka-1207).

Chaired by Mani Rani Das, General Secretary of Dalit Women's Forum and BDERM International Affairs Secretary Tamanna Singh Baraik and Kailash Ravidas, the advisor of Bangladesh Dalit and Deprived People's Rights Movement (BDERM) and others at the conference organized by Bangladesh Dalit and Deprived People's Rights Movement (BDERM) Chief Executive Zakir Hossain, Hon ' ble Member of National Parliament Advocate Gloria Jharna Sarkar & Adiba Anjum Mita, True Friend of Dalit People Renowned Writer & Researcher Altaf Parvez, General Secretary of Central Committee of BDERM Uttam Kumar Bhakt, Vice President Bibhutosh Roy, Council of Minorities Dalit women leaders including Chief Executive Khalid Hossain.

Among others were present, Ad. Utpal Biswas, General Secretary, Minority Rights Forum, Bangladesh. Bhimpalli David Raju, Organizational Secretary, BDERM, Central Committee, Development Worker Nadira Parveen, ABM Anisuzzaman, Basanti Shah, President of Dhaka District BDERM, Gaganlal, General Secretary Johnny Das Pramukh.

Dalit Women's Forum leader Pinky Rani Das presented the original article in the conference. In her presentation, she highlighted the various disabilities including education, health, career and employment opportunities for Dalit women, government service availability, extraction system and discussed the position of Dalit community in our country in light of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In a welcome speech, the president of the union Mani Rani Das said that this day of joy is not our one day achievement. For a long time, we have started working from different levels of family and society and today we have achieved this position where we are able to show our rights and demands without anyone's help. In her statement, she demanded the guarantee of widow allowance for Dalit women in Dhaka city and increase in the number of housing provided by City Corporation.

BDERM's advisor and chief executive of Civil Initiative Zakir Hossain, praising the positive outlook of government, private organizations and administration to solve various problems of Dalit and deprived community, said there is no lack of opportunities around us. But to utilize this opportunity we have to qualify ourselves through education and skills. Hon ' ble Member of Parliament Gloria Jharna Sarkar said that we must qualify for the aim of fulfilling our needs in order to get our rights. That's why you

have to hold a place of dignity. This trend of participatory development of Dalit women must continue with awareness.

Hon ' ble Member of Parliament Adiba Anjum Mita said, Dalits and deprived community have to come out of the force of introduction. We have to be aware and practice merit in order to earn our rights. We must go through the proper process to change our circumstances.

Renowned writer and researcher Altaf Parvez, focusing on solving the extraction problems and resolving the housing crisis, said the civil rights of Dalits and deprived communities must be assured and political rights should be ensured to change their status.

Leaders at the Convention implementing discrimination laws, taking necessary steps to ensure education for female children, engaging Dalit women in the muldhara profession through higher education, prevention of child marriage, ensuring maternity facilities for professional Dalit women, development of skills and making Dalit women useful for other professions Arranging technical training, demanded necessary steps to set up separate toilets and bathrooms for women in Dalit colonies.

Dalit women leaders from different districts and sub-districts from Dhaka and outside Dhaka participated in the conference and raised their demands.

The cultural episode highlighted the culture of different communities of Dalit community including dance with patriotic songs.

Message Sender -

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