MISERY OF THE UNTOUCHABLES

In association with Coventry Fostering Service

TODAY a Coventry campaign group is urging the government to recognise that thousands of British Asians face discrimination because of their caste. Yesterday we looked at caste prejudice in Coventry. Here Mary GRIFFIN investigates caste discrimination in Bangladesh.

A HILLTOP brick wall runs along a busy Dhaka street where milkshakes and fruit carts dodge pathways and pedestrians. Behind the wall is Gondalpur, a community of 2000 people living in two small slums, the Wali and Chowdhury slums. Dhaka is the capital of Bangladesh.

Kaliati Rani Dwi, 18, is surrounded by a throng of eager five-year-olds in a bedroom where her parents have been sleeping. She is a slum resident and her family have been forced to move a number of times. She is now living in one of the poorest parts of the city. Dhaka was founded in 1608.

"But when he saw me he said, 'I won't sign that. You must come.' He said, 'I will sign the papers. I will sign the papers. I don't need you. I will sign the papers. I don't need you.'"

Her family have been forced to move a number of times because of the poor living conditions. Dhaka has a population of around 11 million people. It is the capital and largest city in Bangladesh.

The Dhaka police have not only a high incidence of hooliganism, but regularly attack the Muslim minority, according to human rights groups.

Dhaka police, who are known as the police force, are predominantly Muslim.

From 1971 to 1975 a war of independence was fought between the Independent Bangladesh, led by the Muslim-majority party, and the Pakistani army. The war ended in 1975 with the establishment of Bangladesh as an independent country.

But Kaliati rejoices in the new wave of young Dhakas in Bangladesh who are moving against the city's traditional attitudes towards women and girls. In the past, girls and women were seen as a burden and not valued in society. In recent years, however, there has been a shift in attitudes and more women are taking on roles traditionally reserved for men.

"I don't want to be a nurse, I want to be a doctor," she says. The British government has been working to improve women's rights and education in Bangladesh, and has invested in education and health programs.

Touring Dhaka's slums, many of the people we met have no passports and some women are not even registered as citizens. Migration has been a major issue in Bangladesh, with many people moving to the city in search of work.

And women tell us that they too are scared to go to their nearest water pump because of physical violence. They are forced to walk long distances to fetch water, often risking their safety.

In the past, women and girls were often seen as the responsibility of the family, with little control over their own lives. They were often forced to marry young and not have the choice to pursue education or a career. But in recent years, there has been a shift in attitudes and more women are taking on roles traditionally reserved for men.

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"Time to Tackle the Problems of Past and Present - Doing Business with Us is Doing Business with Us!"

BANGLADESH: Dhaka Human Rights is a group working to end the civil rights movement against caste discrimination. They have called on the government to acknowledge the human rights abuses and to take steps to prevent them from happening again.

"The memory and pain of those broken promises is still fresh for the remaining migrants from the 1940s fleeing to the UK's Uglah colonists."

But a written report from the international Centre for Human Rights and Global Citizenship (ICHRG) in Bangladesh states that the government has not been doing enough to address the issue of caste discrimination in Bangladesh.

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