



1

Untouchability and Dalit Community Perspective Bangladesh

All children are born free with independent entity. But for the Dalits of Bangladesh, it is close to impossible to dream of living as a free citizen of the country. This community is employed with some specific occupation from remote past. These occupations are physical labour based and embedded with perpetuate poverty and disparity. People of this community are suffering within a stiff enclosure of economic, social and political oppression and exploitation in all over the South Asia.

Dalits are regarded as unholy and unclean due to their birth and occupation. This factor compelled them to live seclude from the so-called 'clean' or mainstream society. It seems to be destined that a Dalit child will be a sweeper, a cobbler or a barber because it is her or his fathers' ancestral job. Changing occupation is not enough for this community to get rid of the image made of a perpetual time frame.

They are identified in the society as downtrodden untouchable people. It is thought that anything they touch will become impure. They are often barred to enter in restaurants or in hair cut salon. This untouchability is more evident in rural than urban area and it is made of by 1) birth and 2) occupation.

Institutionally educated person is rare among the Dalits. School admitted interested Dalit child often get victimized of discrimination by their teacher and or fellows which are hard enough to make indifferent to formal education. Those who are fixed enough to get educated overcoming these obstacles are mostly deprived of proper job just for their birth identity.

They are poor than rest of their fellow citizens of mainstream and denied of equal rights to access to health, education, work and of housing. Society is not flexible enough to let Dalit people rent or build house outside of their ghetto. Their accesses to non-Dalit community temple or religious rights are most often not allowed.

The case of Nirmal Chandra of Gaibandha can be placed as an instance of untouchability. Owner of a street side tea stall denied serving him tea because he belongs to Dalit community. But the pet monkey of the owner was drinking tea beside the stall. Nirmal retorted, "Even a monkey can drink from the stall but not me! This tradition is ongoing for hundred of years. We are born as human being but in reality we are not. We are Dalits". Babul Robidas, a lawyer, has faced similar attitude recently by his colleagues in the Jaipurhaut court canteen. The canteen owner was forced to change the cutleries after Babul and some other of Dalit and indigenous community people took from the canteen. And it was Babul who had o pay for the new cutleries.



Chairman of Jalalabad Union Council, Kolaroa subdistrict, Satkhira district turn out a Dalit applicant youth saying, "you son of the cobbler, how dare to ask for the job!"

Head Master along with his colleagues of Bhojgati Government Primary School situated at Monirampur Sub-district of Jessore expelled 70 Dalit students from the national liberation day observance event because, according to his comment, "you are from downtrodden unholy community, you are not suppose to participate in such a big event." Guardians of the Dalit students stop sending their children at school as protest and complained the occurrence to sub-district Education Officer.

Mundomala, Head Master of the local High School of Tanor subdistrict, Rajshahi, was forced out from a restaurant. He was denied of serving the meal because the restaurant has no provision of separate cutleries for the Dalits. 11 Santhal students were compelled to leave the Tanor Degree College hostel as their cutleries were separated.

Article 27 of the constitution of Bangladesh has declared that all citizens are equal before law, article 28 has renounced all kind of discrimination, and article 29 has said equality of opportunity in public employment. Article 7 of universal declaration human rights, article 2 of International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, article 19 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) has asked for equal rights and honor for all human being irrespective of their birth, caste, religion or nationality. But instead of all these good thoughts, Dalit and deprived people of this country is yet are being discriminated in the sphere of politics, society, citizenship, culture and economy. There is no law against social discrimination and untouchability, as a result its victims can not even ask for legal assistance.

Dalits and socially deprived people of Bangladesh are facing major problem of untouchability along with poverty and dispossession. From cradle to grave they are cured with the disgrace of untouchability. These factors have subdued them with the identity of the lowest class in the society and deprive robe them of their basic citizen rights.

Immediate tasks

1. Formulate and enact law against untouchability and discrimination declaring untouchability as punishable offence
2. identify presence of Dalits in the constitution
3. government development program for the Dalits
4. raising public awareness to abolish untouchability
5. Dalits remain out of public facilities and relief and rehabilitation support due to untouchability. Proper steps needed to ensure their access.
6. identify Dalits separately in the national census

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