

Housing problem of the Dalits scenario of deprivation and vulnerability

In Bangladesh, there are around 65 lakhs Dalits. This community is victim of inequalities due to their birth and occupation. They are deprived of the fundamental and citizen rights albeit Dalits are citizens of Bangladesh. They have their nationality by birth, national identity card, voter rights, and all state documents.

The constitution of Bangladesh has secured equal rights, status and opportunities towards all its citizens. However, Dalits are deprived of all these constitutional commitments. Bangladesh is a signatory in almost all international human rights conventions. But the position and role of state is frustrating in the question of preserving and ensuring the rights of Dalits. There is no plan for the overall improvement of their condition. Currently the GDP is increasing at around 5% and poverty is reducing around 1%. Due to the absence of balanced distribution of income, poverty is not reducing proportionality to increased national income. The Dalits are the worst victim of this unequal system of distribution.

Most of the Dalits are landless and homeless, untouched by the so-called upper class. And above all they are deprived and suppressed due to their birth and occupation. Their deprivation and vulnerability can be realized if someone visits their colony. It seems a to be different world, the colony is detached from the main stream society. The mainstreaming society declines to rent house to Dalits due to lower caste and untouchability.

Thus this large Dalit community is bound to stay to reside for years at the colony built in the underdeveloped government's khash land in the village and towns. This densely populated unhygienic colonies with almost no air and light are known as Rabidashpalli, Rishipalli, Horizonpolli, Methorpotti, Dompara, Sweeper colony, City Colony, etc. These colonies have some varieties according to its location at village or city.

The scenario of Dalit colony in towns/cities

The Dalits colonies are predominantly very old one or two storied buildings risky to collapse. Most of the Dalit families live in eight to ten feet room of these buildings. Almost 175 people of 35 families of Telegu community live in the city colony of nearby Gabtoly Beribadh. They were the inhabitant of nearby town hall of Mohammadpur and were evicted and given a small piece of land instead.



The Gonokotuli city colony is under Laalbagh Thana. Inhabitant of this colony were evicted while developing Eden Girls College and repatriated at this present location. Almost 450 to 500 families reside in this colony. Some of them are living in building and some of them are living in fence made small shelter.

Around five thousand people live at Nazira Bazar Pakistani Colony at Central Aga Sadek Road in Dhaka. Except few living in building, most of the inhabitants live in shabby huts. The number of new faces is continuously increasing but the size of house remained unchanged.

The Rabidashpara is situated at Wari of Dhaka is a Dalit colony. Victim of communal conflict of British period were repatriated here. They legally got the leases of this space. The outlook and character of this colony are as same as other colonies. 105 families live here in two hamlets divided by a road. Each family has got allocation of one room. Three generations live in each room. The size of each is 15 feet X 15 feet.

The scenario of urban Dalit colonies

The rural Dalit colonies are small hamlets situated nearby river, pond, swamp or abandoned field, on khas land nearby the road or grazing land. In general they live in one or two room huts made of bamboo, straw, and mud. Most of the villages depend on pond, river or well for water. But rural Dalits are allowed to use these common water bodies. Consequently, they have to rely on distant water bodies away from so called village of the elites. This is a cause extreme suffering. All women and men take shower, wash clothes, clean utensils at the same water body at a time.

Government Initiative

BDRM has successfully attracted the attention of government on the Dalits housing problem. National budget of 2013- 2014 has allocated 12 crore 30 lac taka for Dalit, Bede and third gender community. There was an allotment of 10 crore taka in the 2012-2013 national budget for Dalits housing. The government has decided to construct 1148 apartments for the cleaners of Dhaka City Corporation under the 'Construction of Cleaner Colony of Dhaka City Corporation' project. It was decided on the meeting of Executive Committee of National Economic Council (ECNEC) held on October 1, 2013.

Immediate tasks

1. Allotment of khas land for the rural Dalits as priority basis
2. Proper monitoring for the effective use of already allotted money for Dalits housing and ensuring their permanent allotment
3. Long term program to solve the Dalits housing problem after conducting country-wide study
4. Necessary changes in national policies and strategies to engage the Dalits in the socio-economic main stream.

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