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Status and Deprivation of Dalit Women

Prevailing social values, cultural and religious practices and beliefs of Bangladesh is patriarchic which has helped to keep intact the male dominance over female. On the other hand, though the constitution has commitment of equality between male and female, in reality some laws are making hurdles before equal status of women. Women are yet to reach the constitution proclaimed equality.

There are 6.5 million Dalit in Bangladesh. Women and girl children are worst victim of suppression among this suppressed community. They are facing inequality and deprivation first as Dalit in greater society and than as women in own community.

Education for women is largely denied in Dalit community. A study has shown that Dalit community faces deprivation and inequality in education institutions. Elders are in opinion that women's education is useless and they better learn household jobs. Most of the Dalit girls are dropped before completing primary level. Guardians are reluctant to send girls to school because of frequent incidence of sexual harassment in the way to school.

Dalits live in colonies as a close and secluded community. Women have to bear the liability of the physical or mental harassment of which they are the victim. They do not go out of colony alone even in dire need.

Most of the women of this community work as sweeper. According to Dalit Women Forum, in Pakistan period they were entitled for three month maternity leave along with leave for caring sick children. But now they are devoid of this right though according to public policy women are entitled for 6 month maternity leave with salary. While pregnant, they have to arrange replacement to retain the job. They pay their replacement from their meager amount of wage.

Few Dalit women who are engaged with informal sector are use to get unequal wage as they are of low caste. Unmarried girls allowed to work only within the colony. A good number of women interested to work in garment factory were not allowed by family. Earning Dalit women are compelled to handover the income in the hand of their father or husband or else are harassed.

According Dalit males, girl children should be put under strict control to keep the purity and honor of the community. Male children frequently go out of the colony and lives in relatively broader realm while girls live within the colony being largely ignorant of the world out. This obstacle is imposed by the male in the name of protecting the girls' dignity.



Early marriage is very frequent among the girls of Dalit community. Many of them are forced to get married at the age of 10-12. A late marriage shall be judged as a sign of being a bad girl. Tendency of grabbing dowry is increasing day by day. Many girls are remaining unmarried due to inability of their parents to arrange enough dowries. These girls are most disgraced in the family. Giving birth of female child is a curse for the Dalit mother.

Women are largely absent in the traditional Dalit panchayet system. There are no female members in the panchayet. They are not allowed to go in the family arbitration. Male members represent them and ask females inside the house if they ever deemed to be asked of anything. They are bound to submit to the arbitration without question.

Dalit women are not free to decide on anything personal. They have to follow the decision of their male counterpart or father on marriage, bearing child or even going anywhere out of home. As there is no option of divorce, many women have to suffer and remain with their tormenting husband. Girls are accused even if they are tortured by their husband. Community use to force women to leave husband if they marry a non-Dalit man and once separated, will be treated with humiliation.

Women and adolescent girls have no separate toilets to use in the colonies. Horijon women of Kushtia have said in a study that they face frequent sexual harassments in the colony and some time the incident are open to all without any step against the culprit. Common excuse in favor of the guilty person is – a mishap, he was drunk. Women are not treated with honor in social functions.

Awareness level of the Dalit community on maternal and neonatal health is extremely low. Mother and new born often face fatal end due to malnutrition of the mother in pregnancy. They often face reluctance and less attention in the public health centers as they belong to 'low birth'.

Dalit women have no right over property in their society. Property is usually distributed according to Hindu custom.

Immediate Task

1. Specific steps in the National Women Development Policy for socio-economic development of the Dalit women
2. Raising awareness of the Dalit women on Family and Women Law and effective implementation of the laws
3. Skill development trainings to help Dalit women to change the occupation of sweeper

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Photo: Jakob Carlsen, Abir Abdullah

November 2013

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