
Socio economic Conditions of Dalit Communities in South-west Bangladesh with the focus in India

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Abstract

Dalit in Bangladesh is a recent adoption, and thus not yet well known. Before that, the term indigenous or *antaz* were used but in recent times, Dalit communities are used in Bangladesh and nearly 30 Dalit communities live in the South-west part of Bangladesh. Socio-economically these communities are backward/poor and vulnerable. Their social status or position are not highlighted to the main stream communities or upper caste Hindu or Muslim communities. Still now their traditional occupations are the chief sources of their livelihood. To get an idea about their socio-economic condition a study was carried out in south-west Bangladesh which is presented here with focusing on Indian Dalit. The common similarity of Dalit in India and Bangladesh is many households are living in abysmal poverty.

Key Words: Extreme poverty, Dalit, socio-economic condition, livelihoods,

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Introduction

From the geographical point of view, Bangladesh is as placed in a unique position of the world atlas, in the same way the territory of Bangladesh is in unique for diverse human settlements. Adapting various ecological or geographical settings, many Dalit communities come here to dwell in their residence from the very beginning and contain their own cultural heritages. These Dalit communities are sometime identified by the mainstream people as tribal, ex-tribal, ethnic, untouchable, schedule caste people. In the southwest part of Bangladesh these types of people are known as untouchable. “The term untouchable refers....to those castes at the bottom of the caste hierarchy whom the other castes historically regarded as irredeemably polluted,” (Sharma: 2002:47). To get an idea about their socio-economic condition a study was carried out in south-west Bangladesh which is presented here with focusing on Indian Dalit. The common similarity of Dalit in India and Bangladesh is many households are living in abysmal poverty.

Methodology

The study was conducted by adopting interview method for which a schedule was prepared. The relevant data were collected from the sample of 215 households of nine Dalit communities of South-west Bangladesh. Two-stage sampling selection procedures were used in this survey. In the first stage, the study selected randomly 22 villages of 15 Unions. In the second stage, a total of 215 households covering 1074 persons were selected randomly among the selected villages under three Thanas (Police Station) in Satkhira (Tala and Debhata) and one in Khulna district (Dumuria) in 2014. The number of sample households in each selected village depends on the population of these Dalit communities.

Findings of the Study

The Dalit communities in Bangladesh live in close proximity with nature and they have a lot of inherited knowledge. It is pertinent to mention that *Bhumija* Foundation has identified such nine Dalit communities in the Southwestern region of Bangladesh based on their occupation

and distinct culture. The identified nine Dalit communities are *Rishi*, *Nanoshudra*, *Jele*, *Paundra-kashtria*, *Kaiputra*, *Behara*, *Bajandar*, *Nikari* and *Hazam*. Broadly speaking these communities can be categorized into two viz., Hindu and Muslim Dalit communities. The first five or Hindu Dalit communities are identified as the lower caste based on Hindu caste system. On the other hand, the rest communities or Muslim Dalits belong to the lower portion of the Muslim society. Though their position is not determined by birth, their social position or status is

rarely recognized by the larger Muslim society.

Socio-economic Condition of Dalits:

Looking at the grand total data, out of 1074 people surveyed from both Muslim and Hindu communities, it is observed that, 8.29 percent was in the age of between 0 and 4, which almost stands same for both Muslims and Hindus. The dependent population based on age of 0 to 14 and 60 years and above is high nearing to 40 percent.

Table 1: Age wise distribution

Age group	Hindu						Muslim					Grand Total
	Rishi	Namoshudra	Jele	Paundra	Kaiputra	Total	Behara	Bajandar	Nikari	Hazam	Total	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	
0 to 4	8.84	7.75	7.81	4.20	12.50	8.29	12.96	10.47	5.52	5.56	8.28	8.29
5 to 9	10.20	9.30	14.06	9.79	13.19	11.00	17.59	13.95	12.41	13.89	14.32	12.38
10 to 14	10.88	10.08	20.31	11.89	11.81	12.12	16.67	12.79	12.41	12.96	13.65	12.76
15 to 49	48.98	53.49	54.69	62.24	52.78	54.39	38.89	50.00	60.69	58.33	52.80	53.72
50 to 59	9.52	8.53	3.13	6.99	5.56	7.18	5.56	9.30	6.21	3.70	6.04	6.70
60 +	11.56	10.85	0.00	4.90	4.17	7.02	8.33	3.49	2.76	5.56	4.92	6.15
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Field Work, 2014

Regarding sex of the household table-2 clarifies the data. Out of 1074 persons, 51.96 percent were male and 48.04 percent were female. Interestingly, *Namoshudra* and *Hazam* had more female than male.

Table 2: Sex distribution

Sex	Hindu						Muslim					
	Rishi	Namoshudra	Jele	Paundra	Kaiputra	Total	Behara	Bajandar	Nikari	Hazam	Total	Grand
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Male	51.32	48.06	55.74	53.44	58.04	52.65	53.68	54.88	47.58	49.11	50.85	51.96
Female	48.68	51.94	44.26	46.56	41.96	47.35	46.32	45.12	52.42	50.89	49.15	48.04
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Field Work, 2014

“Education is an important medium of acquiring skills and knowledge. Our education begins at home. Thereafter, as we grow we go to schools, colleges and other educational institutes. Education brings positive changes in human life. It enhances the knowledge, skill, and intelligence of a person and enables him to lead a successful life”

(VikashChamaria/http://www.importantindia.com/19774/short-essay-on-education-and-its-advantages/12/10/16). According to Malala Yousufzai, “I do not mind if I have to sit on the floor at school. All I want is education. And I ‘m afraid of no one’.

(http://mydailyalerts.com/importance-women-education, 12/10/16). In this survey it is observed that 39.96 percent were illiterate, 6.44 percent could sign, 30.40 percent had primary education and 17.79 percent had secondary education. Only 1.64 percent passed HSC and above that too nil among the Muslims and Jele Hindu indicating Dalits did not give importance to education. Further the study reveals a little bit of education of the

boys' turns them as costlier commodities in the marriage market and their demand for dowry goes up depending on their educational status.

Table 3: level of education

Education	Hindu						Muslim					
	Rishi	Namoshudra	Jele	Paundra	Kaiputra	Total	Behara	Bajandar	Nikari	Hazam	Total	Grand
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Illiterate	34.72	28.44	40.00	13.79	53.64	33.33	44.94	75.41	58.65	31.46	51.02	39.96
Sign knowledge	13.99	4.59	0.00	0.86	3.64	6.46	13.48	0.00	4.81	5.62	6.41	6.44
Primary	32.12	24.77	35.56	31.03	25.45	29.49	31.46	22.95	29.81	41.57	32.07	30.46
High school	14.51	26.61	24.44	44.83	8.18	22.51	8.99	1.64	6.73	20.22	9.91	17.79
SSC	3.63	10.09	0.00	7.76	4.55	5.58	1.12	0.00	0.00	1.12	0.58	3.71
HSC & above	1.04	5.50	0.00	1.72	4.55	2.62	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.64
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Field Work, 2014

Southwestern Bangladesh has a district ecological location. It is a formidable challenge for development with its given deltaic geographical setting and complex socio-economic situation. The Indigenous communities of *Rishi*, *Namoshudra*, *Jele*, *Pundrakashtria*, *Kaiputra*, *Behara*, *Bajandar*, *Nakari*, and *Hajam* live in many villages of southwestern part of Bangladesh. The socio-economic condition of these indigenous communities is very bad. These people live in a particular ecological zone and they have a lot of experience related to environment. Due to the location of dwelling, these indigenous people are considered by larger society as a sub human group. From the table, it is observed that out of 215 households 50.70 percent dwells at the end of village, 34.42 percent lives marshy area and only 14.42 percent lives inside the village indicating level of living as sub-human.

Table 4: Location of dwelling/homestead

Area	Hindu						Muslim					
	Rishi	Namoshudra	Jele	Paundra	Kaiputra	Total	Behara	Bajandar	Nikari	Hazam	Total	Grand

	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Independent unit	2.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.71	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.47
Inside village	12.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	4.29	0.00	0.00	25.00	100.00	33.33	14.42
At end of the village	78.00	73.33	100.00	0.00	20.00	56.43	100.00	20.00	35.00	0.00	40.00	50.70
Bog/Marshy	8.00	26.67	0.00	80.00	38.57	0.00	80.00	0.00	40.00	0.00	26.67	34.42
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Field Work, 2014

It is evident from the table -5 that only 1.98 percent households had *pucca* dwelling and 3.56 percent had semi-*pucca* homestead structure. Most of the homestead structure were by tin -shed (24.11) and tile- shed (37.15%). So housing condition indicates poor economic condition.

Table 5: Structure of dwelling/homestead

Type	Hindu						Muslim					
	Rishi	Namoshudra	Jele	Paundra	Kaiputra	Total	Behara	Bajandar	Nikari	Hazarm	Total	Grand
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Pucca	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	6.67	1.35	0.00	0.00	6.67	3.33	2.86	1.98
Semipucca	4.17	4.55	0.00	5.71	3.33	4.05	3.33	0.00	3.33	3.33	2.86	3.56
Tin-shed	27.08	27.27	69.23	8.57	23.33	25.68	16.67	40.00	3.33	36.67	21.90	24.11
Tile-shed	66.67	45.45	23.08	22.86	3.33	36.49	36.67	53.33	53.33	16.67	38.10	37.15
Leaf	4.17	18.18	23.08	20.00	20.00	14.86	3.33	0.00	0.00	6.67	2.86	9.88
Khar (straw)	2.08	40.91	0.00	14.29	3.33	10.81	6.67	6.67	0.00	0.00	2.86	7.51
Others	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	6.67	1.35	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.79
Total	104.17	136.36	115.38	71.43	66.67	94.59	66.67	100.00	66.67	66.67	71.43	84.98

Source: Field Work, 2014

Most of the household members (74.42%) were using *kuccha* latrine and only (11.16%) households had pucca latrine. Hanging latrines were also used by the indigenous people

as 7.4 percent use this type of latrine. The people who had no latrine use open space for this purpose and around 7 percent people use open space for their natural call.

Table 6: Toilet facility

Type	Hindu						Muslim					
	Rishi	Namoshudra	Jele	Paundra	Kaiputra	Total	Behara	Bajandar	Nikari	Hazam	Total	Grand
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Pucca	8.00	16.67	0.00	8.00	15.00	10.00	0.00	13.33	15.00	25.00	13.33	11.16
Kucca	82.00	73.33	33.33	80.00	60.00	71.43	80.00	80.00	85.00	75.00	80.00	74.42
Hangin g	6.00	6.67	40.00	4.00	15.00	10.71	0.00	6.67	0.00	0.00	1.33	7.44
Open field	4.00	3.33	26.67	8.00	10.00	7.86	20.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	5.33	6.98
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Field Work, 2014

Indian situation about Dalits:

Education:

Education is sine qua non for development of human beings irrespective of caste, creed and religion. In this regard Dr. B. R. Ambedkar may be quoted, “The backward classes have come to realize that after all education is the greatest material benefit for which they can fight. We may forego material benefits, we may forego material benefits of civilization, but we cannot forego our right and opportunities to reap the benefit of the highest education to the fullest extent. That the importance of this question from the point of view of the backward classes who have just realized that without education their existence is not safe.”

To get an idea about Dalit in India, a published report under the title of “Strategies Towards Combating Dalit Marginalisation” published by the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRD&PR), Hyderabad (2014) may be quoted. This published report is the proceedings of a National Symposium held in 11-12 July 2014.

“The word "Dalit" is used to identify roughly about 250 million people in India who are found at the bottom of the social structure called the "Caste System", under which they were treated as "untouchables". The word "Dalit" is a recent coinage and came into

existence from 1970s onwards when the "Dalit Panthers", a revolutionary group invented this world to identify themselves with dignity as opposed to derogative word which were traditionally used to identify them such as untouchables, outcastes, un-approachable and unseeables, etc.” It is pertinent to mention that *albeit* Dalit is now –a-days used in India but as per record of Government of India Scheduled Caste (SC) is used.

With respect to education, data reveal that the educational progress of scheduled caste is quite remarkable during past decades. The total literacy rate for scheduled caste at all India was 54.7 percent in 2001 which increased to 66.1 percent in 2011 (Table -7) indicating SCs have been progressing and situation is far better in India than Bangladesh.

Table7: Literates and Literacy Rate in India

Indicator	Literates		Effective Literacy Rate(%)	
	2001	2011	2001	2011
Total Population				
Total	56,06,87,797	76,34,98,517	64.8	73.0
Rural	36,17,36,601	48,26,53,540	58.7	67.8
Urban	19,89,51,196	28,08,44,977	79.9	84.1
Scheduled Castes				
Total	7,53,18,285	11,37,59,907	54.7	66.1
Rural	5,58,06,266	8,20,20,232	51.2	62.8
Urban	1,95,12,019	3,17,39,675	68.1	76.2

Source: Primary Census Abstract for Total population. Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, 2011. Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India

It is pertinent to mention that the working definition of literacy in the Indian census since 1991 is the total percentage of the population of an area at a particular time aged seven years or above who can read and write with understanding. Here the denominator is the population aged seven years or more. To promote qualitative education amongst SC students, by providing full financial support after 12th class, leading institutions include all IIMs, IITs, NITs,

Commercial Pilot License training institutes and reputed Medical/Law and other institutes of excellence have been identified SC students whose total family income is up to Rs. 4.50 lakh per year are eligible for scholarship from the academic year 2012-13 (Annual report 15-16).

Other Issues pertaining to Dalit in India:

While question of toilet arises which is sine qua non for health and hygiene, census data reveal that while a little more than half of all Indian households did not have a toilet at home, for Dalit

households it was two-thirds. Of the total 168 million rural households, 67.3 percent persons go out of doors. On the other hand, the data for Dalit rural households, (about 33 million), was 75 percent. In urban areas, 12.6 percent of households depend on the outdoors whereas for Dalit urban households the figure was 24 percent. Regarding dwelling house, about 37 percent of households across India live in just one room, that figure was nearly 47 percent for Dalits. In case of cellphones while 47.9 percent of rural households rely on cellphones, the percentage for Dalit households was 42.8 which in urban areas was 61 percent for Dalit and almost was same percent for all communities *i.e.* at 64 percent.

Conclusion

The problems of the Dalit communities living in the region vary from the mainstream Hind and Muslim communities. They have some distinct identities. Culturally and politically they are backward from the mainstream population. Larger society considers them as the lower segment population and their complete citizenship status is violated through diverse social practices.

The Dalits of India is little better as educationally they are advance than the Dalits of South-west of Bangladesh. Lastly, the data with regard to India evince the gap between Dalit households and the Indian average may have narrowed over the last decade, but still they are lagging in many respects.

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