



**Dalit Communities Living in Railway Colonies/Lands in
Northern part of Bangladesh**

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

BDERM- Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement

BDT- Bangladeshi Taka

FGD-Focus Group Discussion

HSC - Higher Secondary School Certificate

NGO- Non-Government Organization

NNMC - Network of Non-Mainstreamed Marginalized Communities

OC - Officer in Charge

SSC- Secondary School Certificate

UP- Union Parishod

Executive Summary

In Bangladesh, there is disagreement over the number of Dalit population in the country, which fluctuates from half a million 'Dalits' to 5.5 million according to different estimates. However, the focus of this study is to understand the multiple aspects of the marginalization and vulnerability of the Dalit Community living in the railway land of North Bengal.

This study has been conducted in Joypurhat, Nilphamari, Bogra and Dinajpur districts. The 'Dalit' have been mostly living on railway land for generations. Over time, the population of 'Dalits' has grown but not the number of settlements, nor the area of those settlements. All the settlements were initially established in isolation, maintaining distance from the settlement of other dominant groups. However, gradually, the dominant Bengali population have moved in from different directions and encroaching on their settlements. Some of them are even threatened with eviction attempts. By observing the condition of their settlements, it can be seen that they live in inhumane conditions.

It is evident among all the communities studied that the major economic activity is sweeping/cleaning. The Railway, municipalities, hospitals, educational institutions, businesses, offices, mills, markets and "Haats" are major sources of work for them. Many also work as independent casual sweepers, peddling their service in the villages like day laborers. Pig rearing is an important economic activity. Pigs play a significant role in their culture and are a lucrative source of income as a livestock. Some members of the communities are involved in illegal liquor businesses. In most cases, the main business belongs to powerful members of dominant groups, and the poor Dalit persons are used as peddlers on commission. Money lending is another source of income for a few in the Dalit communities. Other than the aforementioned activities, there are very few alternative sources of income for the 'Dalits'. Very rarely, members of the Dalit community are employed with different government and non-government services. A very few number of 'Dalits' are involved in manufacturing handicrafts using bamboo.

It is difficult to calculate the average earning for those who work as casual sweepers due to the uncertainty of their income opportunities and their highly fluctuating rate of income. However, from different estimations the average monthly income of the household would be around BDT 4000 to 7000.

The literacy rate in the area studied is very low. Only two persons were found completing higher secondary (HSC) studies and another three had completed secondary (SSC) level studies. Only one girl could reach the University level. Several others dropped out from high school. Major causes besides poverty include distance from school, discrimination, sexual harassment and negligence from the parents.

Because of exclusion, stigma and poverty they historically did not have adequate access to healthcare services. As a result, most of them did not develop a habit of seeking healthcare and instead relied on exorcism and sorcery for treating illnesses. They rarely go to the hospitals or doctors. Nowadays, the rate of

seeking healthcare from public or private medical facilities is gradually increasing amongst them.

The 'Dalit' community has their own traditional leadership system based on experience, age, social influence and status. They are called "Mandol" or "Mondali". They usually mediate disputes among community members. However, nowadays, the 'Dalits' often go to the elected local government officials, when their internal mechanisms cannot satisfy them.

Different dominant groups often construct the 'Dalit'/"Sweeper"/"Harijan" as being the 'other' in general. This 'otherness' attains discursive meaning and significance in the political-social-economic spheres that encompass 'Dalit' lives and lead to different forms of vulnerability, exclusion and injustice. 'Jat Sweepers' are considered to be the most marginalized group- the '*dalits among the dalits*'. They are commonly depicted as being 'dirty', 'alcoholic' and aggressive; as well as quarrelsome and uncouth people. Similarly, it is also claimed that they are not interested to do any work other than cleaning and that they are reluctant to work hard. These depictions are so pervasive and hegemonic that even the 'Dalits' often take many of these claims to be true. Through the construction of these images, social exclusion of the 'Dalit' is often being justified as 'natural' and therefore, the real causes of their vulnerability remain unexplained and unquestioned.

The marginalization of the 'Dalit' is multi-dimensional and it has to be understood within the nexus of economic, social and political phenomena. The 'Dalits' have always been looked down upon by the 'mainstream' who tend to avoid them in public spaces. With rare exceptions, generally "Harijans" are not allowed to enter local restaurants. The local barbers sometimes refuse to cut the hair of the "Harijans" or to shave them. They are also treated differently in the shops and markets. They also cannot rent utensils from decorator shops. The business owners fear that other customers will stay away due to 'Dalits' and they are commonly under pressure from them not to serve the Dalits.

Poverty is one of the major causes of low participation of 'Dalit' in education. The prevailing attitude towards the 'Dalit' also discourages them to pursue education. In the school, 'Dalit' children are discriminated against and rejected by other students and teachers; as a result, many of the 'Dalit' children conceal their identity in the school. They also know they will face discrimination in getting a suitable job due their 'Dalit' identity and lose interest in studies. Nonetheless, the acceptance of 'Dalit' children has been increasing in the school and the discriminatory attitude towards them has been changing.

Due to rejection, it is very difficult for the Dalit to buy land and live in the residential areas of dominant groups. In the railway lands the neighbors are slowly chocking in and squeezing their space to live and make a livelihood. As

the 'Dalit' are poor, helpless and have very little connection with the power structure, they are vulnerable to their neighbors.

The most common allegation against 'Harijans' is that they are inherently lazy people who refuse to do any work except cleaning. Statements like this often enforce a '*victim-blaming*' attitude and mask the true underlying causes. Many of them have tried changing their professions but eventually became highly frustrated and discouraged by all the challenges they encountered. The 'Dalit' face serious discrimination against them in employment and business, especially when it comes to competing with candidates with dominant groups. It is observed that 'untouchability' has political and economic dimensions. Uncertainty and rejection also leads to most 'Dalit' not being able to overcome marginalization.

Historically, 'Harijans' have exclusively performed the task of cleaning. However, nowadays, Bengali Muslims and Hindus are gradually taking over their posts as cleaners and the 'Dalit' are in fear of being deprived of their 'traditional work'. Corruption and bribery; renaming their posts as "Cleaner" instead of "Sweeper" and depriving them of their entitled 80% quota are facilitating this process. This is another reason many 'Dalits' live in constant fear of having their jobs 'stolen' from them.

The relationship between the 'Dalit' and dominant communities is not very harmonious; discrimination and exclusion exist in every layer. This is because of their identity, regardless their class or personal capabilities. Their 'untouchability' often creates conflict with the dominant group, which in turn increase their vulnerability and marginalization. Though their physical proximity is becoming closer, the social boundary is still strictly maintained. It is practiced through untouchability and food plays an important role in it. Members of the dominant communities (regardless their class, social status, religion) generally refuse to take food touched or prepared by them. The notion of purity-pollution/untouchability even exists among the 'Dalit' groups themselves. Raising pig, which is sacrilegious to Muslims, is often a source of social conflict between Dalit and 'Non-Dalit' neighbors (Muslims, as well as the Hindu upper caste). The ideology of a dominant group and their cultural hegemony leads to further marginalization of a minority group.

The status and condition of women belonging to marginalized communities needs to be understood in the light of class, ethnicity, religion and of course, gender. While 'Dalit' women face discrimination both as women and as members of marginalized communities, nonetheless they also suffer gender-based discrimination and violence within their own households and communities. Therefore, it can be said that 'Dalit' women are the 'marginalized among the marginalized'. High rates of illiteracy, child marriages and early motherhood,

being subject to different kinds of violence, economic deprivation, etc. are common struggles faced by 'Dalit' women.

As citizens of the state, the 'Dalit' population's access to government amenities is limited. In some areas the municipalities set up tube-wells, build toilets, access roads for the 'Dalit' communities but those are inadequate. They are also often deprived of social safety net program supports.

The 'Dalits' are among one of the least represented communities in the local governance process. They are often used as the 'vote bank' but they have no real voice and negotiation power. They usually do not contest in the local government elections. Even if they contest, they cannot win due to rejection.

The 'Dalits' in this study were all Hindus. However, the practice of untouchability and exclusion is perhaps more strictly observed against them by the Hindus, which is again varied in places. 'Dalits' face varied degree of discrimination and exclusion to participate in social events such as Puja (worship rituals). In some areas they are not even allowed inside the temple. They are not allowed to use the *Shawshan* (cremation site) in some areas, as they bury their deceased ones rather than cremating.

The sections 27, 28 and 29 of the constitution prohibit any form of discrimination against any citizen based on their religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth or profession. It also promotes affirmative actions for them. To eliminate 'Untouchability' and "discrimination based on decent and profession", the law commission has drafted the "Boishamya Bilope Ain-2014" (Elimination of Discrimination Act-2014). This is the glimpse of first official recognition of the term "Dalit" by the state but it is yet to be enacted. The Prime Minister gave an order on 29th May 2012 to reserve quota for 'Dalit' students in the educational institutions. This quota policy has not yet been implemented in the institutions under the National University. The same order directed to reserve 80% of the jobs of "Cleaner"/"Sweeper" in all institutions for the "Harijans" or 'Dalits'. However, in reality this directive is not being maintained and members of the dominant groups are occupying those posts instead.

The 'Dalits' studied under this research have been living on the railway land for generations but they neither have any legal rights on the land nor any authorization. However, most of the railway officials, government representatives and local people often perceive that 'Dalits' will never be evicted from the lands they are currently living on. Railway officials say that there is no law or policy, which could allow the railway to grant legal permission to the 'Dalits' for their residence; nonetheless, according to the rules the land could be leased out perpetually (for 99 years) for residential buildings. If the government is willing, railway land could be given under perpetual lease to the 'Dalits' for their residence and livelihoods.

Introduction

In Bangladesh, there are approximately 160 million people. Although more than 80% of them are Bengali Muslims, there still is significant diversity within this population in terms of ethnicity, religion, language, etc. 'Dalits' are a special category among these diverse groups who are receiving attention in recent years both internationally and nationally. However, while the development agencies and activists are working on the 'Dalit' issue, the academic writing on Dalit here is still evolving conceptually and empirically. There is disagreement surrounding the size of the 'Dalit' population in the country. Some sources estimate there to be around half a million 'Dalit' (Parvez & Islam, 2014: 24), while others estimate the number to be ranging between 3.5 to 5.5 million (Chowdhury 2009:1-2). Again, The Department of Social Welfare survey claims the number of 'Dalit' in the country around 4.35 million (Fair: 2015). Just like there is dispute surrounding the number of 'Dalits' in the country, there is also similar debate around who should be identified as 'Dalit'. However, it is certain that among the 'Dalits' a large section is historically involved with cleaning or sweeping services and they are popularly known as 'Harijans'/'Jat sweepers". Most of their predecessors were brought to what is now Bangladesh mainly from the current states of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh of India by the British colonial administration during the first half of the 19th Century.

'Dalits', in general, are one of the most marginalized groups in Bangladesh and are often subject to discriminatory treatment. They have been oppressed by the dominant groups historically. The majority of the 'Dalits' are very poor, under-privileged and have limited job opportunities. Moreover, they are politically under-represented and many of them have to live in inhumane conditions. Socially excluded, they are stigmatized and isolated from mainstream society. The focus of this study is to understand the multiple aspects of the marginalization and vulnerability of the 'Dalit' Community living in the railway land of North Bengal.

Objectives of the Research:

As specified in the terms of reference, the primary and specific objectives of the study were to:

- To understand the nature and key factors of the cultural, social, economic and political vulnerability of 'Dalit' communities
- To identify their perception of social inclusion and exclusion
- To identify the scope to reduce inequality and exclusion
- To generate recommendations for possible advocacy opportunities for overall 'Dalit' issues
- To provide a strategic direction for advocacy and campaign

Conceptualizing Dalit:

The term comes from the Sanskrit root 'dal', meaning to 'break' or 'crack' and is often glossed over in English as the oppressed, downtrodden, or crushed (Mehta 2013). It is used as a synonym for "untouchable" or/and "outcast". For a long time, 'untouchability' has been seen as an 'Indian' or South-Asian phenomenon. However, the 'Dalit' rights activists are using a comparable shared history of oppression and structural discrimination with other groups to recognize 'untouchability' as a global phenomenon (ibid).

Although popularly it is known that Ambedkar first used the term in 1928 to describe one who had experienced degradation and deprivation, many scholars believe that Jyothirao Phule, the champion of backward classes and other oppressed communities, of Maharashtra in the 19th century (Syam Sunder, 2015), first used this term. Mahatma Gandhi introduced the term 'Harijan' which means the "Child of Hari (God)" for referring to the same groups of people. So to some extent, the terms 'Dalit' and 'Harijan' are used interchangeably but in Bangladesh 'Harijan' refers to Hindu 'Dalits' mostly involved in cleaning services. The other 'Dalit' groups are identified according to their profession or group identity; for example, cobblers are referred to as 'Rabidas', fishermen are called 'Jele', those who do the curing of diseased spleens called 'Dom' (Chowdhury, I. 2009), weavers are referred to as 'Jolas', etc. The term "Schedule Caste" is more widely defined in the official spheres of the Sub-continent and rest of the 'Untouchables' are designated according to their 'Jati' or Caste name (Jodhka & Shah, 2010)

'Dalits' are destined to undertake 'inferior' occupations such as leather working, butchering, cobbling, sweeping, etc. Although 'Dalit' as an identity has been popular in India and Nepal since around 1960s, the term has come into general usage in Bangladesh by different development organizations, activists and academics mainly from the last decade. For official purposes, the term "Schedule Caste" is still used instead of "Dalit".

In Bangladesh, 'Dalit' is very loosely used as an umbrella term that includes members of Hindu and Muslims community who are involved in certain professions viewed as unclean or degrading (Uddin, 2015; Chowdhury, 2009). Therefore, 'Dalit' are those who are oppressed, excluded, marginalized structurally and subjected to inherited inequality for their occupation, descent, caste or group identity based on the notion of 'untouchability' or purity-pollution.

A Review of 'Dalit' related Literature:

A review of the available literature has been conducted to have a better understanding of the issues and debates related to the Dalits. Surinder S Jodhka, and Ghanshyam Shah (2010) in their article "Comparative Contexts of Discrimination: Caste and Untouchability in South Asia" tried to draw a picture of 'Dalits' in the 5 South-Asian countries- Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri

Lanka. The writers argued that though commonly untouchability is associated with the Hindu caste system and Hindu society, this notion exists among the followers of other religions in the region including Islam and Buddhism. It indicates that rather than being a religious phenomenon, the caste system, is a more widespread social phenomenon in the region. They also focused on the fact that there are also Muslim 'Dalits' in places like Bangladesh and Pakistan, who are equally oppressed and marginalized. In fact, their survey showed that the condition of Muslim 'Dalits' is far worse than that of the Hindu 'Dalits' in Bangladesh.

Iftexhar Uddin Chowdhury (2009) in his working paper "Caste-based Discrimination in South Asia: A Study of Bangladesh" also mentioned the existence of 'Dalits' among the Muslims in Bangladesh and tried to draw a picture of socio-economic conditions of the 'Dalits' in the country. A similar attempt was made by Altaf Parvez and Majharul Islam (2014) in their book "Bangladesher 'Dalit' Samaj: Boisamya, Bonchona O Asprishawta". Both works were commissioned by NGOs and were written from an activist's viewpoint.

Louis Dumont (1970) in his book "Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and its Implications", which is seen as one of the most influential books on caste system in India, argues that the caste system is a hierarchical order that organizes people's social life into a stable harmonious structure based on the principle of purity and pollution derived from the religious doctrine. In this order, their political and economic life is also subordinate to their religious life. There is a rigid opposing structure of purity and pollution and this essence of unchanged, hierarchical Indian society has been opposed by the Western societies, which are supposedly based on the principle of equality.

Arjun Appadurai (1986) in his article "Is Homo Hierarchicus," in American Ethnologist and McKim Marriott (1996) in his article "Review of Homo Hierarchicus: Essaisur le systeme des castes," in the American Anthropologist, argued that Dumont's view was similar to that of the colonials. Both Bernard Cohn (1996) and Nicholas Dirks (2001) argued that the trend of interpreting the caste system as a religious system started during the colonial era. Colonial understanding of the caste as a religious system was highly influenced by ancient Hindu texts and by the interpretation of Brahmin Pandits. This style of thought was reinforced by the colonial surveys and ethnological accounts at a later stage.

MN Srinivas in his book "Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India" also sees castes as religious groups. However, he argues that 'varna' is not the "real unit of the caste system" rather 'jati' is the real unit. He describes 'jati' as- "a very small endogamous group practicing a traditional occupation and enjoying a certain amount of cultural, ritual, and juridical autonomy". He also says that the lower castes adopt the "Brahmanic way of life" in a quest for upward social mobility.

Purvi Mehta (2013) in her PhD thesis “Recasting Caste: Histories of ‘Dalit’ Transnationalism and the Internationalization of Caste Discrimination” argued that ‘Dalits’ and the caste system are not exclusive to India. The ‘Dalit’ rights activists used comparable shared history of oppression and structural positions in the respective societies to construct the ‘Dalit’ identity of similar groups across the globe. They tried to establish it as a generalized global category. It was also used for identifying systems of inherited inequalities in the United States, not before facing some controversy though. She argues, “... if ‘caste’ is deemed unique to India, then it appears as an exceptional, cultural practice; in this case, caste inequality cannot be categorized as a form of discrimination, but rather, is given legitimacy under the rubric of culture. Alternatively, if ‘caste’ is a generalizable category, then it appears as a form of a social structure based on inequality, the effects of which violate liberal humanist conceptions of rights.”

G S Ghurye in his book “Caste and Race in India” mentioned that all the groups constitute the caste system accepting the principles of the system. Both dominant and subordinated groups do so in order to maintain harmony. Michael Moffatt states, the upper and lower castes share the same cultural construct and consensus. On the other hand, SC Dube acknowledged that the untouchables do not like their position in society but do not protest either. Joan Mencher, however, rejects this idea of cultural consensus stating that the lower castes do protest and they also possess very different values from the upper caste.

Vani K Borooah and Sriya Iyer (2005) in their article “Vidya, Veda, and Varna: The influence of religion and caste on education in rural India”, examine the variables that affect the education of Dalits. They found that religion and caste are very strong drivers for education. In their words- “*The influence of religion and caste on school enrolment encompasses both sociological factors such as the role of cultural norms, and historical influences such as colonial and post-colonial policy towards education in India. Collectively, these non-economic factors might exert an important role on current schooling decisions, even after controlling for the economic factors that affect them.*”

Methodology

This was a qualitative study and the main methods employed for collecting primary data were Focus Group Discussions (FGD), In-depth Interviews, Key Informant Interviews, Case studies and observations. The study covers a wide range of stakeholders who are related to the lives and livelihoods of the ‘Dalits’ living in the railway localities. Among them are the members of ‘Dalit’ communities (both male and female), community leaders, members of other communities living in the same localities, civil society, railway officials (both national and local), local government representatives and NGO staffs working for

the Dalits. Altogether 20 interviews, 15 FGDs, 6 group interviews/consultations were conducted during the study. Additionally, reports and documents related to the research were also reviewed.

Description of the Research Population and Area: An over view

This study has been conducted in the four districts of Northern part of Bangladesh. The districts are Joypurhat, Nilphamari, Bogra and Dinajpur. In Joypurhat, two 'Dalit' communities have been studied- one is known as the *Rail Ghunti Harijan Colony* (locally known as the Ghunti colony) in Shantinagar and the other is known as the *Rail Station Colony*. Twenty families live in the Ghunti colony, comprising eighty-nine people. Forty-three people from nine families live in the Rail Station Colony, all of whom are descended from railway employees. In Shantahar, Bogra, two 'Dalit' colonies were studied. *The Cha Bagan (Tea Estate) Colony* is a larger sized 'Dalit' settlement in railway quarter area with four hundred and seventeen people from ninety-six families living there. The other one is known as *the Driver Colony* with twenty families living there. The Driver Colony has a total population of ninety-five people. In Saidpur, Nilphamari, this study covers two communities - one is the *Hatikhana Colony* where forty-six persons live in eleven families and the other one is the *Powerhouse Colony* where one hundred and sixty-four people live. In Sadar, Nilphamari, the 'Dalits' studied were Rabidas (cobblers). Six families of "sweepers" lived in Domar. Two colonies were studied in Parbatipur, Dinajpur. One was the *Jahangirnagar Rail Ghunti Harijan Colony* where a total of one hundred and fifty-eight persons from thirty-five families live and the other was the *Babupara Harijan Colony* that accommodates one hundred and ninety-one people from thirty-eight families. Babupara also has eighteen government quarters. In addition, twenty households of 'Dalits' live on approximately 50 decimals of land in *Bonmalipara*, which is located in Shetabganj in Bochaganj Upazila, Dinajpur. (See also Table:1)

The 'Dalit' settlements studied are all located on railway lands. Most of them have been there for generations; only one settlement was found that started in the past 20 to 25 years. Over time, the population of 'Dalits' has grown but not the number of settlements or the area of those settlements. Some of these settlements are located very close to the rail line. The Railways quarters have never been renovated by the railway administration after they had been constructed during the British period. Instead, as their family grew, they extended the quarters by themselves. Most of the houses are crammed together and are made with bamboo walls and tin roofs. The houses usually have single or twin-room units roofing the whole (often extended) family. Only a few of them have access to power supply and the others illegally sub-rent power from them. Some people still do not have access to power. There are few toilets and tube wells, often only one for the whole community. In some places, these have provided by the municipality, although in insufficient numbers.

All the settlements were initially established in isolation, maintaining distance from the settlement of other dominant groups. They had space within and around their homestead that they could use for kitchen gardens or raising livestock. Gradually however, the dominant Bengali population has moved in from different directions and is encroaching upon their settlements. Some of them are even threatened with eviction attempts; for instance, in 2001, the Bonamalipara community was threatened with a notice of eviction, which they saw as being politically motivated by the then-ruling government. Some of the houses closer to the rail track were also demolished. Similar incidents also took place in Joypurhat as well.

Almost all 'Dalit' are landless and live in government land. It is apparent that they are extremely marginalized just by examining the condition of their settlements.

Table 1: 'Dalit' Community Population in the Field						
District	Upazila Name	Community Name	Households	Total No of People	Jobs in Railway	Use of land for residence
Dinajpur	Parbatipur	Babupara	38	191*	14	Railway
		Jahangirnagar	35	158*	7	Railway
	Bocha goanj	Bonmalipara	20	96	0	Railway
Nilphamari	Sayadpur	Hatikhana	11	46*	4	Railway
		Powerhouse	47	164*	5	Railway
	Sadar	Daroani Dhanipara	3	27*	0	Railway
		Shokher Bazar	3	11*	0	Railway
	Domar	Domar	4	20*	0	Railway
Bogra	Adamdighi	Cha Bagan	96	417*	34	Railway
		Driver Colony	20	95*	3	Railway

Source: Fieldwork 2015;

* Information from HEKS household survey 2013

Economy and Livelihoods

In this section, we will discuss the types of occupation and sources of livelihood of the 'Dalit' Community studied in our field research.

Traditional occupation: Sweeping/cleaning

It is evident among all the communities studied that the major economic activity is sweeping/cleaning. Among those who work as cleaners, very few work with the government institutions including the Railway department; most of them either work in different private businesses and non-government organizations or work as independent casual sweepers, peddling their services in the villages like day laborers, popularly known as "*Baltir kaj*" meaning working with a bucket (carrying buckets during the paddling to service the toilets and septic tanks). Those who have a job are mostly temporary cleaning staffs; they work in the "master role"¹ and spend their lives as such. Only few of them are permanent employees. The Railway, municipalities, hospitals, educational institutions, businesses, other offices, mills, markets and "Haats" are major sources of work for them. In the public sector, the largest section works with the municipalities as casual cleaner. Those who work with institutions usually work for more than one employer. They go out for work very early in the morning and finish sweeping or cleaning within couple of hours and go to another one. Ones who work with municipality, may go to a school or "Haat" after doing his/her sweeping there. Substitution of a family member by other members at work is also very common among them; a wife may work instead of her husband or son for father, and so on. This cannot be done officially but as the cleaning is an urgent service that cannot be left unattended for long, authorities allow this. It is an informal negotiation between the authority and the cleaners, which suits them both for convenience and urgency. Those who are employed with government offices, especially under permanent contract, are considered relatively better off. The work in the markets, especially in weekly "haats", is also better rewarding than other works.

It has been found in the study that in Joypurhat and Shetabganj, no one from the 'Dalit' communities is formally employed by the railway. In both places, local sweepers work temporarily with them under informal arrangements. In Joypurhat, a 'jat sweeper' worked under 'subcontract' for another person and in Shetabganj, another 'sweeper' was employed by the local stationmaster. In Shantahar, 34 of them work with the railway; 5 persons from the Powerhouse colony and 4 persons from Hatikhana colony in Saidpur; 7 persons from Jahangirnagar colony and 14 from Babupara colony in Parbatipur. In Parbatipur region there are a total of 70 employee positions of Cleaner/Sweeper, among

¹The list of daily casual labour, who work on prorata basis in the public sector without long-term contract or benefits is popularly known as master role.

which only 34 sweepers are currently working. Of the 34 working, 26 are "Jat Sweepers" and the remaining 8 are from other communities. In the Saidpur region, there are 52 posts for cleaners in the railway, of which only 19 positions have regular employees (12 male, 7 female), consisting of 12 'Jat sweepers', 5 Bengali Muslims and 2 'Biharis²'.

Rearing Pigs

An important economic activity for the 'Dalit' is rearing pigs. Pigs, in addition to being a food source for them, also play a significant role in their culture. Pork is considered a necessity for arranging feasts for almost every ceremony such as marriages, funerals, etc. One informant said, "If one does not have four to five pigs in their house, he cannot marry off his eligible daughter". Therefore, pigs are demanded in the community and are a lucrative source of income as a livestock for the 'Dalits'. However, rearing pigs is gradually becoming challenging, as many 'Dalits' do not have the space required for pig farming.

Liquor Vending

Drinking liquor is very common among the "Harijan"/"sweeper" communities. It is particularly widespread among the adult males. They are legally permitted to consume and possess certain quantities of liquor in Bangladesh. They are issued with a license for buying, possessing and consuming limited quantities of alcohol. Using this legal privilege, some members of the communities are involved in illegal liquor businesses. It was found that, in most cases, the main business belongs to outsiders, for instance powerful local Bengali Muslims, who use the legal permission of 'Dalits' as a decoy for their illegal businesses and the poor 'Dalit' persons are used as peddlers on commission. In most cases, the 'Dalits' who sell alcohol get only one to two bottles daily as their commission. The Police and narcotics department often raid and arrest them for possession of a higher quantity of liquor than the permitted limit and for illegally selling alcohol.

Money Lending

Money lending is another source of extra income for a few in the 'Dalit' communities. From field experience, it was observed that those who are relatively better off, due to their government job or other income use that extra money for generating more income. They lend money mostly to other 'Dalits' who have limited access to other channels of credit. The interest rate is also very high, reaching up to 20% per month. In some areas such as Shantahar, the 'Dalit' moneylenders are part of the local syndicate along with members of dominant groups.

² Muslim migrants/displaced people from present day India following the partition of subcontinent in 1947

Other Economic Activities:

Other than the aforementioned activities, there are very few alternative sources of income for the 'Dalits'. Very rarely members of the 'Dalit' community are employed with different government and non-government services. Three of the 'Dalit' youths, one male and two females were found to be working as NGO staffs. A very few number of 'Dalits' are involved in manufacturing handicrafts using bamboo. The researchers have also met one person who is better off economically and works as a contractor and runs a residential hotel. Another person is working as a gold smith and owns a jewelry shop.

Income

Those who work regularly with the municipalities, railway or other institutions may be able to calculate their average earning. However, it is difficult for those who work as casual sweepers due to the uncertainty of their income opportunities and their highly fluctuating rate of income. Those who work for municipalities usually receive BDT 1000 to 1200 per month (Fair,2015) but in some places that were studied, this amount is slightly higher. Those who work in private organizations earn around BDT 2500 to 3000 per month. Very few of them earn above BDT 5000 working as laborers for the Municipality. Those who work as casual cleaners earn approximately BDT 4000-5000 per month. One may earn BDT 1500 to 2000 in a single day if he cleans a toilet septic tank or clears a clog; but these tasks are infrequent. A survey shows that three-fourth of the respondents earn less than BDT 5000³ per month (Jodhka & Shah, 2010). Another source estimated it to be around BDT 4,500 to 6,500 (Fair, 2015). Therefore, the average monthly income of the household would be around BDT 4000 to 7000.

Education and literacy

According to Equity Watch 2014, literacy rate among the surveyed 'Dalit' is 56.61% and among them, 36.4% attended primary school, 12.5% attended secondary level and only 4.3% attended higher secondary level. 44.9% respondents never attended school. However, compared to the data in the survey, the literacy rate in the area studied was much lower. The researchers found that only two persons had completed higher secondary (HSC) studies and another three had completed secondary (SSC) level studies. Only one girl could reach the University level. Several others dropped out from high school. The HEKS baseline survey 2013, among the studied population, found that literacy rate among males is 48.3% and for females, this rate is 38.7%. The dearth of education is particularly high among those who are "Sweepers" or work as cleaners. The same baseline report also identified poverty to be the most

³ Approximately USD 65

important cause for poor literacy accounting to 84.3% of the respondent's. Other major causes include-distance from school, discrimination, and negligence from the parents.

Health

The healthcare situation among the 'Dalits' is precarious. They rarely go to the hospitals or doctors. Because of exclusion, stigma and poverty they historically did not have adequate access to healthcare services. As a result, most of them did not develop a habit of seeking healthcare and instead, relied on exorcism and sorcery for treating illnesses. Nowadays, the rate of seeking healthcare from public or private medical facilities is gradually increasing among them but the belief in sorcery is so entrenched into their psyche that they often believe that that the sorcerers can cure what medical doctors are unable to cure. Besides, they have a sort of categorization of illnesses and for different categories they seek help from different sources. They associate some illnesses with evil spirits and seek divine intervention for those. At times they even reach across the religious boundaries and seek assistance from Muslim sorcerer or clerics. There is also a widespread belief in palmistry, future telling, controlling future through magic and using magical powers to influence others. They even commonly believe that the sorcerers can find the stolen or lost things through magic.

Socio-political Institution

This study has found that the 'Dalit' community has their own traditional leadership system based on experience, age, social influence and status. They are called "Mandol" or "Mondali". They usually mediate disputes among community members. If issues become complicated they involve "Mondolies" from other communities and to some extent, the "Harijan Oikko Porishod" (Association of Harijans).

In larger communities, the presence of two or more factions is common. These factions usually compete for dominance over the community and have a bitter rivalry. They are often linked with the regional and national organizations for 'Dalit'. Contesting and voting for the leadership posts in CBO elections for different NGO backed 'Dalit' networks along the factional line is common. Very often the traditional leaders and the elected leaders of those CBOs are the same. So, factional rivalry sometimes affects the national organizations at local level and vice-versa. The NGO patronization is facilitating the rise of new generation of leadership and is becoming increasingly important as they are forming regional and national committees and holding elections at those levels.

However, nowadays, the 'Dalits' often go to the elected local government officials, when their internal mechanisms cannot satisfy them.

Marginalization and Vulnerability of 'Dalit' in Bangladesh

Discourse on 'Dalit' identity

Different dominant groups often construct the 'Dalit'/'Sweeper'/'Harijan' as being the 'other' in general. This 'otherness' attains discursive meaning and significance in the political-social-economic spheres that encompass 'Dalits' lives. Indeed, these images lead to different forms of vulnerability, exclusion and injustice. Here, it should be mentioned that sweepers are considered to be the most marginalized group. They are seen as the '*dalits among the dalits*'. They are commonly depicted as being 'dirty'. This refers to their profession and personal hygiene. Besides being involved in 'unclean' or 'dirty' works; it is said that they remain unclean and their residential areas are dirty too. Pig rearing, which is also considered as dirty by dominant Muslim groups, emphasizes this image of 'uncleanness'. The other prominent depiction of 'Dalits' is that they are 'alcoholics'. They are also seen as aggressive, quarrelsome and uncouth people who often quarrel with each other or shout at each other under the influence of liquor. It is said that they cannot speak 'proper' Bengali. They are also accused of being foul-mouthed and lacking decency. Similarly, it is also claimed that they are not interested to do any work other than cleaning and that they are reluctant to work hard. The women and girls are seen as bare-footed, confined and hesitant people who seldom venture outside. However, at the core of the construction of their image as 'untouchable' is their association with 'unclean' or 'dirty' works they do and the 'profane' animal (pigs) they raise. There is also a strong belief that these characteristics are so entrenched within themselves that these become part of their persona.

These images are so pervasive and hegemonic that even the 'Dalits' often take many of these claims to be true. One 'Dalit' Key Informant in Joypurhat said, "*-- they (Dalits) are habituated to remain dirty. The women wear Shari differently; at a certain height, so it looks odd.*" Another Dalit college student in Nilphamiri said- "*I could not invite my friends to attend my brother's wedding. We cooked pork and they would have seen the drunken chaos and quarrels*". 'Dalits' repeatedly blame their earlier generations for these habits. In a way each generation claims to be better than the earlier generation in this respect, yet the age-old image is still equally potent in the minds of the dominant groups.

Through the construction of these images, social exclusion of the 'Dalit' are often being justified as 'natural' and therefore, the real causes of their vulnerability remain unexplained and unquestioned.

Multiple forms and causes of Marginalization of 'Dalit'

Deprivation and exclusion are everyday reality of 'Dalit' lives in Bangladesh. Dalits' work is low paying; they can hardly change their traditional profession. This is a serious barrier to their upward economic mobility. This, along with other structural barriers of poverty perpetuates their impoverished condition. In addition to that, their mobility is restricted in the society, as their status and social capital is very low. They are also perceived as culturally and religiously being at the bottom strata. Their political influence is so low that they are excluded from any decision making process at local and national levels. They are not also able to challenge their marginalization and exclusion due to their lack of political power. All these factors feed into each other and perpetuate their low economic and social status and reproduce it over the generations. Therefore, the marginalization of the 'Dalit' is multi-dimensional and it has to be understood within the nexus of economic, social and political phenomena.

In the following section, different dimensions of the marginalization will be discussed-

Exclusion in Public Space

Even 'public' space is not always open to everyone. It is clearly visible that hierarchy and discrimination exists in places that are supposedly open for all.

In general, the common feeling among the 'Dalits' is that they have always been looked down upon by the 'mainstream'/dominant groups who tend to avoid 'Dalits' in public spaces. The constant pain and suffering they feel by being excluded frequently came up in their narratives.

With rare exceptions, generally "Harijans" are not allowed to enter local restaurants. They have to stay outside and the restaurant staff hand out food to them there. They are also not allowed to use any utensils of the restaurants. They carry their own plate or glass to eat/drink from the restaurant. However, they mentioned that by hiding their identity they can go to restaurants that are far away from their locality. They also added that while, men, especially the young ones, can go to restaurants, the 'Dalit' women with their distinctive style of wearing "Sari", which is considered as an 'identity marker', cannot enter even those restaurants.

The local barbers sometimes refuse to cut the hair of the 'Dalits' or to shave them. They fear that other customers will stay away due to that and they are commonly under pressure from them not to serve the 'Dalits'. An old man from the Saidpur Powerhouse Harijan Colony told that he went to a barber couple of times to shave. On the third time, the barber refused to shave him. This really frustrated him, causing him to remark, *"There must be two gods, one who makes higher status people, and another who makes lower status people"*. This is also similar to the other areas such as Santahar and Parbatipur. They are also treated

differently in the shops and markets; they cannot sit in the cloth shops like other customers and can only go to a few selective tailors.

Some of the members of the 'Dalit' communities expressed their disappointment to the researchers, partially blaming their fellow 'Dalits' for such exclusion. They said that the 'Dalits' go to the restaurants on their way to or from work and carry their cleaning instruments with them; their dress and get-ups are not tidy as well; these are not a very impressive sight for a restaurant. If they went there neatly, they might have been treated in a better way.

Although many development organizations as well as local leaders are trying to facilitate their access to restaurants, the restaurant owners fear that if they allow the 'Dalits' in the restaurants other customers from dominant groups may refuse to take food from them, thus their business will be ruined. In Saidpur, a local NGO tried to organize a meeting with 'Dalits' in a local restaurant to promote the Dalits' access to the restaurants. When the owner of the restaurant got to know about it he refused to serve food. Then the food was served in take-away boxes.

They also cannot rent utensils from decorator shops. In some places, the local government leaders have arranged separate utensils for the Dalit; therefore, the 'Dalits' are kept happy by being made to feel included in society. However, when this measure is examined closely, it is obvious that it is only inclusionary at a superficial level and the politicians are subtly still excluding them.

In contrast, the members of dominant groups who take up the cleaning jobs do not face the same exclusion and discrimination as the 'Dalits' do, although they do the same work that a 'Sweeper' does. Their profession is not considered respectable and they try to hide what they do for a living. However, unlike 'Jat Sweepers', they are not prevented from entering hotels and restaurants and also do not have to live in 'ghettos'. It is said that they are cleaner and tidier than the 'Jat Sweepers' and clean themselves properly after work. The dominant perception is that the 'Jat Sweepers' are inherently dirtier, regardless of their personal hygiene and cleanliness. This phenomenon reinforces the idea that they are not excluded only for the nature of their profession but also for their group identity.

Marginalization in Education

There is no doubt that one of the major causes of low 'Dalit' participation in education is poverty. Nonetheless, there are many other causes that need to be addressed. The acceptance of 'Dalit' children has been increasing in the school and discriminatory attitude has been changing. This provided, the 'Dalit' children face still discrimination in the schools in varying degrees. It also varies according to the locations. In some areas the school authorities refuse to admit 'Dalit' children in their school. 'Dalit' informants of Saidpur Powerhouse Harijan Colony told the researchers that one of their children was refused admission in a local

school. After lobbying with government offices, they promised to accept her in the next session. Similar incidents were also found in other places.

In some places, even if the school authorities accept them, other students often discriminate against the 'Dalit' children. They do not want to sit, play or befriend them. 'Dalit' children cannot use the common glass to drink water either. Other students often call them derogatory terms and bully them. Even the teachers sometimes tell them to sit in the backbench. 'Dalit' youths in Nilphamari have told the researchers that the teachers often accuse the 'Dalit' children of being "naughty" and creating chaos. They also say that "*It is not logical to judge everyone by the same scale*", implying 'Dalits' should be treated differently. As a result, many of the 'Dalit' children conceal their identity in the school. These are identified as being some of the major reasons for 'Dalit' youth not attending schools, which ultimately contributes towards low literacy rate among the Dalit.

The prevailing attitude towards the 'Dalit' discourages them to pursue education. No matter how much they study, they will be treated as 'Untouchable', their identity will be as "sweepers"; they will also face discrimination in getting a suitable job due their 'Dalit' identity. Therefore, there is an increasing trend that the parents or the children themselves change their family names to conceal their 'Dalit' identity in order to avoid exclusion. For this, they even have to change family name of their parents. This creates further complications– first, they may have problems during identity verification; second, they face difficulties in claiming the “reserve quotas” for 'disadvantaged' groups.

The dropouts have mentioned in the field that one of the major causes of them being not able to continue schooling was discrimination. Similar issue was identified by Dreze and Kingdon in India. They argued that the 'Dalit' children had a lower probability of going to school, even if other non-caste factors such as household wealth, parents' education etc. were equal (quoted in Borooah & Iyer, 2005, p-14).

Another one of the causes of exclusion from education is that the children, especially the females, have to take certain household responsibilities from an early age due to the nature of their parent's job. The parents leave home very early in the morning and return late. They leave their children home alone. The older children have to look after their younger siblings. It is a big reason for the low attendance and high dropout rates among the 'Dalit' children.

Access to land

The 'Dalit' have been forced to live in the outskirts of villages or in places no one else will want to live (Chowdhury, I, 2009). Until recently the dominant groups used to avoid residing in proximity of 'Dalit' residences. They also have prevented the 'Dalit' from moving in close to their residences. As a result, it is very difficult for the 'Dalit' to acquire land and live in the residential areas of

dominant groups. The researchers have heard about many incidents of refusal of the 'Dalits' by the Bengali Muslims while they tried to buy land from them. In some incidents, they were able to buy land but could not live there or retain it. In Domar, a "sweeper" woman bought a piece of land next to a local journalist's land; both plots were from the same owner. After sometime, the journalist proposed her to buy his part or sell her portion to him. Though it was never spelled out, the implication was clear; they were not willing to live with the "Harijan" next door. As she could not buy the whole land, she sold her share to the journalist. In Nilphamari, informants have said that a 'Dalit' family bought land and built a house within a Bengali neighborhood. Once they moved in, the neighbors realized that they were "Harijans". Gradually complaints surfaced, such as them killing pigs, pork being dropped in the neighboring houses by crows, etc. They could not stay there for long. They also mentioned that after buying land they were initially prevented from building a house and moving in there for living.

The railway lands they usually live on are in urban areas or close to important sites such as rail stations, mill-factories etc. Over time, the price of the land has increased with demand and has even become prime real estates. As a result, this is attracting local influential quarters who are encroaching upon their settlements (see case study 1). Their neighbors are slowly chocking in and squeezing their space to live and make livelihoods as well. As the 'Dalit' are poor, helpless and have very little connection with the power structure, they are vulnerable to their bullying neighbors. Moreover, those neighbors continue to expand their own boundaries towards the homesteads and lands occupied by the Dalits. 'Dalits' have very little or no ability to resist them. It is a common phenomenon and the stigma of being dirty and particularly the 'polluting properties' of pigs are very often used a pretext to this end. The Bengali villagers are pushing the boundary of their paddy fields into the homesteads of the Rabidas families in Nilphamari Sadar. Shopkeepers are building shops within the boundaries of the Rail Ghunti Colony in Jaypurhat and in the Shantahar Cha Bagan Colony. In the Cha Bagan Colony, they are occupying or leasing the ponds within the colony and attempts by the NGOs to facilitate lease of those for the 'Dalits' have failed. Within the studied communities, only six persons, all brothers and descendants of a railway employee, have gotten a lease of a single piece of land in Joypurhat rail station area in 1999. Since then, however, no other 'Dalit' has gotten a lease of the land or are even under the process of getting such land rights. However, the informants have said that local influential Bengali Muslims have got leases of the railway land.

Case study 1

This case is on a local government representative who once was involved with different initiatives related to the Dalits' rights. It shows the complex dynamics

between marginal and dominant groups, powerful political people and the powerless citizens, and reveals a nexus that perpetuates the suffering of the weaker.

In the Joypurhat Railway Ghunti 'Dalit' colony, the 'Dalits' used to use a piece of land for long time. They used it for raising pigs, poultry and as a community land. Afterwards a "Commissioner" (Councilor) of the local Municipality approached them with a proposal to establish a pre-primary school for the kids of 'Dalit' community. She had a NGO of her own and used to attend different events for the rights of the Dalits, so they thought she would be friendlier to the community compared to others. The community agreed and she built a bamboo shack on the land. After three months, she closed the school and destroyed the shack. Later on the 'Dalit' community wanted to build the office for the "Harijan Oikko Parishad" there. The "Commissioner" claimed that that was her land and she had taken lease of that land from the railway. She was actually a Councilor for three terms; besides that, her brother was a known criminal in the town so no one from the community dared to dispute with her. Later she had built her personal office, a few shops and a garage on the land. She also had managed to build a public toilet there with the funds from foreign donors and took lease of it from the Municipality without paying any tender. She continued to take the lease as if it was perpetual. She only paid a meager amount to the municipality. After this occurred, the 'Dalits' decided to boycott her in their events.

Lack of Economic Opportunities

The most common allegation against "Harijans" is that they are inherently lazy people who refuse to do any work except cleaning. However, the reality is more complex and cannot be generalized. Statements like these often enforce a 'victim-blaming' attitude and mask the true underlying causes. It is true that some of them are genuinely uninterested in doing other tasks, as they do not want to have to struggle. However, many of them have tried changing their professions but eventually became highly frustrated and discouraged by all the challenges they encountered.

The 'Dalits' have told the researchers that they face serious discrimination against them in employment and business; especially when it comes to competing with candidates with dominant groups. Some of the 'Dalit' persons have told that they, or someone of their acquaintances, have been denied of jobs due to their identity as 'Dalit' despite being qualified. They also added that the educated 'Dalit' youths do not apply for jobs they are eligible for; instead they apply for the post of cleaner or sweeper because they know that when the recruiting authority will come to know about their 'Dalit' identity they will not select them. The researchers have found some 'Dalit' men who have completed the higher secondary level education but still try for the job of a cleaner or sweeper for the same reason.

They cannot start businesses, as people tend to avoid their shop, especially if they try anything related to food processing. A 'Dalit' man in Saidpur told the researchers *"If I start a restaurant, no one will eat there"*. An NGO in Thakurgaon tried to start an income generating initiative for the 'Dalit' women and supplied paper boxes to the sweetmeat shops for packing sweets. When the shop owners came to know that 'Dalits' made those, they refused to take the boxes. Again, a young 'Dalit' man we met in Domar, Nilphamari, told us that since childhood, he had never wanted to become a sweeper. Therefore, he learned how to work with electronics and electrical appliances and eventually opened up his own repair shop. His business initially prospered but gradually other shopkeepers began telling the customers not to go to his shop, as he was a Dalit. This caused his business to flounder and him to have to close his shop and become a sweeper. Besides these, the persons who are running the hotel and jewelry business also faced serious problem initially as their customers were discouraged to go to their shop. For the goldsmith, when he joined as an apprentice, the local workers union/association tried to force him out but due to the strong stand of the shop owner he could continue. After few years when he opened his own shop the local jewelry shop owner association rejected his membership and tried to close down the shop. He sought help from the local authorities who issued a trade license and mediated with the jeweler association. The authority reminded the association that they (association) do not have the right to deny anyone membership based on their social identity. By analyzing this, we can see that 'untouchability' has political and economic dimensions as well.

The members of 'Dalit' communities who are educated tend to hide their caste or family identity and separate themselves from rest of the community. For that, they also have to take up a different family name in place of their own. Other members of the community usually help them to keep their secret. The community members told the researchers that an OC (Officer in Charge) with the local police department and a Railway Station Master were 'Dalits' but they have changed their identity to avoid exclusion.

Local NGOs took the initiative to train 'Dalits' for alternative jobs and even gave them some job opportunities to become mechanics, salesmen and beauticians. The salary offered for these is around BDT 1,500 per month. They have to work 10 to 12 hours a day. One such apprentice said that he left the work in welding workshop because his BDT 2000 per month salary was not paid in full; the workshop owner used to pay few hundreds of taka at a time. Another man said that there is no guarantee of job after completion of the apprenticeship. They know from experience that they have a very slim chance of finding a job or succeeding in a business due to rejection from the dominant groups. The reward for such work is too low comparing to the casual cleaning work and working hours are too long. The opportunity cost is simply too high for such alternatives.

Thus uncertainty and rejection leads to most 'Dalits' not being able to overcome marginalization.

Loss of Traditional Jobs

Historically, "Harijans" have exclusively performed the task of cleaning. However, nowadays, Bengali Muslims and Hindus are gradually taking over their posts as cleaners and the 'Dalit' are in fear of being deprived of their 'traditional work'. One member of the 'Dalit' community described their situation by saying "They (Bengali or dominant groups) can take away our works but we cannot take up their works". The anguish of denial was clear in his voice. There are several reasons behind such deprivation- it is an open secret that bribes must be paid for government jobs. However, as Harijans are mostly poor they don't have the ability to pay the large amount of bribes. Someone put it as "*Harijaner taka nai, taka charachakri nai*" (Harijan do not have money, and there is no job without money). In Santahar, the researcher met a woman who got the job in the railway along with her brother by bribing the officials with three hundred thousand taka. On one hand, this rampant corruption is depriving the impoverished 'Dalits' from government jobs of cleaners, who are unable to pay bribe, on the other hand facilitating the occupation of those jobs by 'Non-Dalit'⁴. The educational qualification criteria for the post of 'cleaners' sometimes work against the Dalit. Modern terminology of the "Cleaner" instead of "Sweeper" itself also works in disfavor of the 'Dalit' from government jobs, said by a 'Dalit' woman. Earlier, Bengali Muslims and Hindus did not want to be a sweeper but as they increasingly find the job of a cleaner to be less derogatory, they are showing more interest in it these days.

Some railway officials also see the centralization of the railway recruitment process has contributed to deprivation of jobs for local 'Dalits'. In the centralized recruitment process, they have to go to other districts for job interview. For instance, the people of North-Bengal have to go to Rajshahi city to attend job interviews, which is very expensive for a 'Dalit' person. Additionally, they are never sure if they will get a place to stay there, as they may be refused accommodation or place to eat if their identity as "Sweeper" is disclosed. It practically put these jobs out of reach for most of the 'Dalit' people.

Another factor that is also reducing the work opportunity of the 'Dalit' in the Railway is "outsourcing" of certain services such as cleaning. The railway is sourcing out the cleaning services of certain "lines" or routes to private contractors. These contractors are employing temporary cleaners. As a result, the 'Dalits' are losing job in those areas. If this trend continues, employment opportunities of the 'Dalits' will be severely affected. The senior railway officials have said to the researchers that the government employment rules are also

⁴ Those who in the society are not considered as Dalit; mostly dominant Bengali Muslims and Hindus

applicable to subcontractors so 'Dalits' should not worry. On the ground, however, reality is different as the 'Dalits' are faced with newer challenges. For instance, the local level railway officials have said that the cleaning work in railway requires good understanding of the railway system and movement of the trains. Therefore, the temporary cleaners employed through outsourcing are not right to do it properly. To many of them however, there is no alternative to becoming a permanent cleaning staff of the railway. The same 'subcontracting' process is taking place in the hospitals, another major source of employment for Dalit, perhaps at a greater scale than the railway. If the authorities make sure that the quota and employment opportunities of 'Dalit' are preserved, only then the situation will become better.

Many of the Bengali Muslims and Hindus who took the job of a "Cleaner" do not do the work themselves. They rather "subcontract" it to a 'Dalit' person who does the work for them in exchange for a meager amount. Some of the 'Dalits' who have government jobs, especially with the Railway, and are posted in a faraway place from his/her residence usually "sub-contract" it to a local 'Dalit' person. They visit the duty station once or twice a month. This practice of substitution may have partly contributed to the normalization of "subcontracting". It is also not uncommon for the local supervisors of those cleaners to receive money from them for allowing such practices. In Joypurhat the researchers found that the cleaner in the rail station was on "subcontract", and it was alleged by some local 'Dalit' persons that the stationmaster was receiving bribe of taka one thousand each month for turning a blind eye to the matter. In Saidpur, a Bengali Muslim girl has taken the job of 'cleaner' in the power house allegedly by paying a bribe of a sum of two hundred thousand taka generated from selling land. She is getting the cleaning work done by a 'Dalit' person who gets paid only 300 taka per month and she herself does the household work for the officer. Yet another employment opportunity has been taken away from the 'Dalit' community.

'Dalits' already have a limited scope for work, and their job opportunities are decreasing. New posts requiring their services are not being created and many vacant posts are not being allowed to be filled. This has led to large levels of unemployment among the 'Dalit' youth. It is generally said by some of the railway officials at the local levels that as the service latrines are phasing out in the process of modernization, the need of sweepers is also decreasing. However, many other officials emphasized that, number of train passengers have also increased manifold. A greater number of people are using the railway now. Number of train and frequency of movement is also increasing. Along with this, the numbers of shops are also increasing in the station premises. Therefore, the need of cleaning has increased substantially. Even though they actually need more cleaners now in many places, posts have been reduced. For instance, in Parbatipur, previously there were 154 posts of cleaners, which have now been reduced to 34. Even all the existing posts have not been filled up. The

researchers found only 26 cleaners working at the time of fieldwork of this study. The similar incidence was also observed in Sayeedpur where out of 52 post, only 19 are working.

Earlier the public toilets were leased out to the 'Dalits' but nowadays; the Bengali Muslims are taking over these leases through their political contacts and money. The research team found only one 'Dalit' woman who have got lease of two public toilets in Domar, Nilphamari through her contacts with the influential local people.

The government has created a policy, which states that 80% of cleaning staff recruited should be "Harijan". Often however, it is alleged that this policy is not followed and Bengali Muslims take up their jobs through bribery. This is another reason many 'Dalits' live in constant fear of having their jobs 'stolen' from them.

Although in our field research, this policy was seen to be maintained, it is often said that that this rule has been broken. For example, in 2013, only 11% percent of the cleaning staff employed in the Mymensingh Medical Hospital was 'jat sweepers'. Also, in some advertisement for recruitment of cleaning staff, this quota is not mentioned, subtly allowing non-"Harijans" to take up the majority of the positions (Fair 2015).

Social relationship: Exclusion and conflict

"They are of different caste and creed; they should at least care a bit about us. If we the Muslims unite they can not come out of their houses" says a shopkeeper in the colony. This briefly indicates the view of dominant groups towards the 'Dalit' in the society. Another woman has said, *"If a Sweeper become a magistrate I would not want to offer him a chair in my house; but I may have to because of his official status"*. The relationship between the 'Dalit' and dominant communities is not very harmonious; discrimination and exclusion is exists in every layer. This is because of their identity, regardless their class or personal capabilities. Their 'untouchability' often creates conflict with the dominant group, which in turn increase their vulnerability and marginalization.

Though their physical proximity is becoming closer, the social boundary is still strictly maintained. It is practiced through untouchability and food plays an important role in its manifestation. Members of the dominant neighboring communities refuse to take food touched or prepared by them. The Bengalis (regardless their class, social status, religion) have often told the researchers "Why would we receive food from them? They are of lower caste." During ceremonies the Bengali neighbors give food to the poor 'Dalits' from a distance and the 'Dalits' have to carry their own utensils. One private tutor who lives beside the Santahar Cha Bagan Harijan colony have been teaching 'Dalit' children for almost two decades. She has never touched any food or drink from the 'Dalits'. In Nilphamari, a 'Dalit' collage student has said that he doesn't go to the snacks

vendor in the college premises with his friends fearing that the vendor may refuse to serve him, which would be very embarrassing to him. Even the people who regularly go to 'Dalit' houses for buying liquor refuse to have food from them or with them in other occasions.

'Dalits' sometimes invite members of dominant groups and local leaders from their acquaintance to attend their ceremonies. For them they arrange feasts in some restaurants or outside their living area. Yet, the guests are usually local government representatives who want votes from the 'Dalits'. Among the other categories of guests are local people who play the role of community arbitrators or mediators and have frequent contact with the 'Dalits'. The notion of purity-pollution/untouchability even exists among the group themselves. It is observed that living in the same colonies the Bashfores and Haris do not eat each other's food.

Though it is very rare, in some areas, there are incidents of inter-caste or inter-religious love affairs or marriages between the 'Dalit' and 'Non-Dalit' boys and girls. In fact, such incidents in the neighborhood played a catalytic role in the relocation of one 'Dalit' community in Domar, Nilphamari. Yet, some of the members of 'Dalit' community have moved away for their community and married upper caste Hindu partners. If the 'Dalit' identity is not disclosed before marriage, the relationship may end when the 'Non-Dalit' partners learn about their true identity. In one such incident, as the informants described, one 'Dalit' doctor married an upper-caste Hindu girl, who studied in the same institution as him. When she came to the house of that man and realized that he was from a 'Dalit' background, she secretly left him and never came back. Therefore, upward social mobility or getting rid of untouchability through marriage always do not work.

Apart from Dalit-'Non-Dalit' taboo in relationship, there is also proscription on inter-caste marriage among the 'Dalits' of different castes. This is often a source of internal conflict among the 'Dalits'.

As it is already mentioned in previous section that Pig is a very important livestock to the 'Dalit' people. The pork is a must-have item in the menu of any ceremony and its cultural value is very high. However, in Islam eating pork is prohibited and pig is considered as a sacrilegious animal. As a result the Muslims do not touch it, its presence, even uttering its name, is deemed polluting. So, they rather refer to it as beast, dirty beast, or more popularly as "Kala Khashi" (black goat), a pseudo name perceived to be less polluting. Hindus also do not eat pork and look at pigs as unclean, filthy animals. 'Dalit' communities usually live in densely populated, tightly confined 'colonies' or enclaves surrounded mostly by majority Muslims and sometimes Hindus. When they raise pigs they keep it in pen or tied with ropes or chains. However, it is not uncommon to set those free, while they forage for food or mud in the vicinity. As the animals do not have any

idea of manmade boundaries and some people's disgust towards them, they often trespass to the premises of the Bengali Muslim and Hindu neighbors of 'Dalits', as well as in the public spaces such as streets, ponds, playgrounds etc. These presences are awful nuisance to the 'Non-Dalit' neighbors. It makes them very uncomfortable and furious at times. As a result, confrontation develops.

In Setabganj, Dinajpur, an old woman showed the researchers her homestead- the yard was full of ditches, bamboo walls of house were damaged and even the earthen plinth was burrowed. One of the major issues raised by them is the stray pig entering the houses of neighbor, especially the kitchen. The pig entering a house in the presence of visitors/relatives could have serious consequences on the status and honor of that household. There are also incidents of pigs entering mosques. In such situations, it becomes a very serious issue and goes beyond the boundary of the neighborhood.

There are also complaints by the Bengali Muslim neighbors against the 'Dalit' that they slaughter pigs and prepare pork in the open, and places like roadsides. The scattered blood and pieces of meat also cause discomfort for the Muslims, especially when these are picked by birds and dogs and dropped in the houses.

On the other hand, 'Dalits', pushed out of the 'mainstream' of the society, squeezed into the ghettos, live in such a compact space that they themselves do not have enough space to live, let alone the pigs. The public land once available to them in the surroundings is being encroached by the dominant population. Dalit's spaces for living and for their animals are ever shrinking. Pig raising is one of very few opportunities for them to earn some substantial extra cash. This reality creates broader social conflict between the communities. It also shows how the ideology of a dominant group (here Bengali Muslim) and their cultural hegemony leads to further marginalization of a minority group.

Another issue of contention is the liquor consumption of the 'Dalits'. It is claimed that they often drink and start shouting and quarrelling. They even start fighting with each other and neighbors under the influence of alcohol. It is considered as a nuisance in the neighborhood. They also sell liquor and it is alleged that the young men in the area buy alcohol from them and become alcoholics. It is also alleged that the business of illegal drugs often accompanies the sale of alcohol. Their neighbors have informed the researchers that strangers come into their neighborhood to buy alcohol and the crime rate supposedly increases due to this. As it has already been mentioned, the costumers are mostly from dominant groups and corrupt police officers; other officials and local influential people back the business. It has been alleged that even the leaders of the 'Dalit' organizations are involved in this trade to some extent. Therefore, the people in the locality cannot do much to prevent the sale of alcohol and their anger is mounted against the weak 'Dalits' who work as peddlers or petty selling agents.

The above-mentioned accusations are also often used against the 'Dalit' to prevent them from doing business, buying lands and residing in the neighborhoods outside their ghettos.

Case Study 2

An elderly lady is living in her house across the street of the Bonomalipara 'Dalit' settlement. She is a widow and has only one daughter. She got the daughter married to a suitable man. When her son-in-law came to visit their house with her newly married daughter for the first time after the marriage, a pig entered their house while he was eating. By the sight the son-in-law was so upset that he immediately left their house with his wife. He told his mother-in-law that if they wanted to see her daughter they could visit his home anytime but he would never come back with his wife in that house. They have not come to her house since then. The son-in-law did not even allow her daughter to come to their house during pregnancy, which is a tradition and emotionally important event for a pregnant woman.

'Dalit' Women: Marginalized among marginalized

The status and condition of women belonging to marginalized communities needs to be understood by taking into account different dimensions of inequality that shape their lives—class, ethnicity, religion and of course, gender. While 'Dalit' women face discrimination both as women and as members of marginalized communities, nonetheless the women within their own households and communities also suffer gender-based discrimination and violence in that sphere. Considering these issues, it can be said 'Dalit' women are the 'marginalized among the marginalized'. High rates of illiteracy, child marriages and early motherhood, being subject to different kinds of violence, economic deprivation, etc. are common struggles faced by 'Dalit' women.

Widespread child marriage prevails among the communities. Apart from poverty, one of the significant reasons identified by the informants was that the parents go out for work in the morning leaving the young girls alone at home, therefore parents feel insecure and try to marry them off sooner. Unmarried women are not allowed to transgress the community boundary and work outside. Even the newly married women usually do not work outside. They start working after being married for some time, usually after having children. Some NGOs are trying to promote income-generating activities among the young 'Dalit' girls but their success rate is very low. The parents are not willing to allow their girls to go out for training or work. The fear is that if the girls are sent outside they may be harassed by others or that they themselves may become involve in affairs and then elope. Eloping is considered as stepping outside the boundary of social norms. These are regarded as a question of losing their family's 'manshonman' (honor/reputation).

One informant has said that his daughter used to be teased by a vagabond street boy who called her as "Methrani" (sweeper woman) on her way to and from the school. He was of such low status that could not dare to tease anyone from the dominant groups. He could only do this to his daughter because of her 'Dalit' identity. In another incident, while a 'Dalit' girl was going to school with other schoolgirls, some boys stopped her on the way and told the other girls to go away and tried to drag her away. After some scuffle, she managed to get rid of them. The 'Dalits' took the matter to the local elders of the dominant community and the boys were cautioned. This, understandably, did not resolve the problem. The community lacks its own self-protection mechanism and is dependent on local influential people for that. The passivism is apparently their strategy due to lack of power and organization.

The rate of domestic violence is also very high in the 'Dalit' communities and there is an increasing prevalence of dowry. According to Chowdhury, Syed Lutful Kabir (2011), 65% of households pay dowry during the marriage of their members for which they take loans at a high interest rate, sometimes reaching as high as 300% annually. The dowry is known as "demand" within the Northern 'Dalit' communities. The grooms who have government jobs fetch more than BDT 100,000 and other amenities. Those who have stable jobs, such as in municipalities, get more than BDT 50,000 and those who are casual "Sweeper/Cleaner" get around BDT 40,000 to 50,000. It, however, is a recent phenomenon within the 'Dalit' communities. Traditionally they had to pay a very small dowry. It is claimed by 'Dalit' leaders that dowry has been increased in their community in early 1990s as a result of "Golden Handshake" in the railway. In 1991, a lot of railway employees were given early retirement and the government offered some extra benefits to inspire them. Many of the railway sweepers were also part of that "Golden Handshake" and they suddenly became possessor of a good amount of cash. They offered money to marry off their daughters to their chosen candidates and it gradually became a norm. They therefore call the "Golden Handshake" as "Golden Mair" means golden blow. It indicates how an apparently benign government policy could have a serious adverse impact on a marginal community.

Thus the 'Dalit' women face two kinds of vulnerability –first, they are in one way subjugated within their own community; second, they are also vulnerable to abuse by members of the dominant groups.

Limited access to social services:

As citizens of the state, the 'Dalit' population is entitled to the government amenities in Bangladesh. Moreover, they most often work for local government bodies such as municipalities who deliver such amenities to the citizens. Yet their access to such amenities is limited. During the study, the local government

officials have commonly claimed to the researchers that they are concerned about the wellbeing of the 'Dalit' communities. In reality, however, they receive very little services from those institutions. In some areas the municipalities set up tube-wells, build toilets, access roads for the 'Dalit' communities but those are far from being adequate. In fact, most of their 'colonies' or enclaves lack proper infrastructure and basic services to the extent that they are barely livable. Access to the essential services such as water, power supply, drainage and sewage system are at their minimum levels. The lack of legal rights on the land and residence they live in is a barrier to accessing those services legally. On the other hand, the local government authorities often defend themselves saying that the 'Dalit' 'colonies' are situated on the land owned by railway or other autonomous or semiautonomous bodies where they cannot intervene or do any construction without the authorization from those institutions.

In addition, they are sometimes deprived of social safety net programs; however, they receive aid cards such as elderly allowance, widow allowance, etc. The observation of the study team is that the number of aid cards is often not adequate for the community demand. It was also found that a Rabidas woman was deprived of government '100 days employment generation program' as she could not pay the bribe demanded by the local Union Parishad Councilor. They have said that those who could pay higher amount got the opportunity. They even could not agree on the required amount of bribe.

Power, politics, exploitation

The 'Dalits' are among one of the least represented communities in the local governance process. They do vote during the elections but they have almost no influence in its outcome and neither have the negotiating nor bargaining power in the local government bodies. Though they are voters like any other Bangladeshi, no member of the 'Dalit' communities usually contests in the local government elections. Even if they contest, they cannot win. In Domar, Nilphamari, one 'Dalit' candidate ran for the councilor post in the Union Parishad election, then all the other candidates and 'Non-Dalit' dominant people became united against him with the slogan - "resist the Sweeper". The 'Dalit' community is often used by the local politicians as a vote bank but they have no real negotiation power.

Religious Marginalization

Most of the 'Dalits' are followers of Hinduism. In fact, the 'Dalits' studied under this research were all Hindus. However, the practice of untouchability and exclusion is perhaps more strictly observed against them by the Hindus. The acceptance and exclusion of 'Dalits' in the religious sphere are varied geographically among the Hindus of dominant groups in Bangladesh. In some areas, the 'Dalits' participate in such social events such as Puja (worship rituals).

In other areas they are tacitly accepted and have a lower status. They have to go with their offerings later than the worshipers of the dominant groups. In these situations, sometimes some members of dominant Hindu groups try to avoid them and at times pass derogatory comments. In some other areas, such as Shetabganj, Dinajpur, they are not accepted by the dominant Hindus groups and therefore arrange their own Puja. Many of the 'Dalit' communities have their own temples within the community.

They also have problem with funeral rights. The dominant Hindu groups do not allow them to use the Shawshan (cremation site) as they bury their deceased ones rather than cremating. In Shantahar, Bogra, after prolonged efforts a piece of land was given by the municipality for using as Shawshan by Dalits. However, as it was for all the Hindus, the dominant groups locked the gate and denied the 'Dalits' access to it in the pretext that the 'Dalits' dispose the bodies improperly, which render that place unusable for others.

Reviewing relevant policies, Law and constitution

Constitution

The constitution of People's Republic of Bangladesh, the supreme law of the land, unequivocally guarantees that all its citizens are equal and so shall exercise equal rights. This is one of the basic safeguards against discrimination and exclusion. In this connection, relevant sections of the constitutions articulate -

"Section 27.

All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law.

Section 28. a

(1) The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.

(2) Women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of the State and of public life.

(3) No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, be subjected to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to access to any place of public entertainment or resort, or admission to any educational institution.

(4) Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making special provision in favor of women or children or for the advancement of any backward section of citizens.

Section 29.

(1) There shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in respect of employment or office in the service of the Republic.

(2) No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, be ineligible for, or discriminated against in respect of, any employment or office in the service of the Republic.

(3) Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from –

(a) making special provision in favor of any backward section of citizens for Republic;

(b) giving effect to any law which makes provision for reserving appointments relating to any religious or denominational institution to persons of that religion or denomination;

(c) reserving for members of one sex any class of employment or office on the ground that it is considered by its nature to be unsuited to members of the opposite sex."

It is clear from the mentioned sections of the constitution that the law and fundamental policy of the state do not support any form of discrimination against any citizen based on their religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth or profession. It also allows affirmative actions for the disadvantaged sections of the population such as 'Dalits'. However, in reality, the 'Dalits' are being discriminated against and excluded from most of their rights and opportunities.

On the other, the 15th amendment in the constitution states, "*The people of Bangladesh shall be known as Bengalis as a nation and citizens of Bangladesh shall be known as Bangladeshis.*"

The amendment on one hand claimed to 'restore secularism'. On the other hand it kept Islam as the State religion.

Through the inherently contradictory statements in the 15th amendment, religious minorities are being marginalized. Also, by making "Bengali" a national identity, those of different ethnicities are also being marginalized. Thus, the 'Dalits', who are generally minorities both in terms of religion and ethnicity, are becoming even more vulnerable this way.

Elimination of Discrimination Law (Draft)

To eliminate 'Untouchability' and "discrimination based on decent and profession", the law commission has drafted the "Boishammya Bilope Ain-2014" (Elimination of Discrimination Act-2014). The significance of this law lies in the fact that it addresses the issue of Dalits, which is the first official recognition of the term "Dalit" by the state. It has now become a moral obligation on part of the government to enact the law as soon as possible.

Policy related to higher education quota

Prime Minister of the Government of People's Republic of Bangladesh gave an order on 29th May 2012 to reserve quota for 'Dalit' students in the educational institutions.

This quota policy has not yet been implemented in the institutions under the National University and still the education ministry has not issued any official circular on it. The institutions also do not mention about the 'Dalit' quota in their advertisements (Fair, 2015).

Railway Policy

Railway policy related to land

The 'Dalits' studied under this research are living on railway land. It should be noted, though, that they are not the only occupiers of this land. The researchers found that the railway land everywhere is occupied mostly by dominant Bengalis, particularly by the local politically influential people. Compared to them, 'Dalits' are occupying only a fraction of the land. However, all of the Bengalis living on

railway lands often claim that they either have legal rights on that land or that they have taken lease from the railway. Of course, no one usually checks their claims. Even if they take lease they do not pay the fees nor do they renew their license duly. Yet, despite all this, they have been occupying these lands for years, even decades. A number of unscrupulous railway officials collude with such occupiers to facilitate lease or perpetual lease of railway land that could otherwise not be done according to the rule.

The 'Dalits' covered by this study have been living on the railway land for generations but they have neither any legal rights on the land nor any authorization. The railway land does not only possess economic value to them; in fact; it has great emotional value as they consider the land to be an inseparable part of their identity as their ancestors have lived in the same place for generations. For this reason, they strongly oppose to the idea of being relocated to other areas by the local administration and they demand that this land be leased out to them.

However, among most of the railway officials, local government representatives, local people and even among the 'Dalits', there is a perception they will never be evicted from the lands they are currently living on. Even the high level railway officials believe that the 'Dalits' will not be evicted despite them having no legal ownership of the land. Apparently, the railway does not have any plan about giving them any sort of rights, legal status or opportunity for rehabilitation. Rather, they have said that there is no such law or policy, which could allow the railway to grant legal permission to the 'Dalits' for their residence.

Despite these assurances, there are incidents of eviction. For instance, the Rail Ghunti Harijan Colony in Jaypurhat was once demolished along with the Rail Station colony. The Dakbanglo Harijan Colony in Domar was relocated, as well as a colony in Saidpur. The Bonmalipara settlement also faced an eviction attempt in 2001. There are many other such incidents throughout the country (Parvez & Islam, 2014, p-47).

Interestingly, the 'Dalits' in Joypurhat seem to be assured that, following verbal commitment from the Director General (DG) of the Railways, they will not be evicted. He even gave his phone number to them so that the 'Dalits' could contact him urgently if there is a threat of eviction. It is self-evident from this incident that there is a risk of eviction, and DG is aware of it. Unless he felt the need, he would not have given his phone number to them.

On the other hand, according to the Bangladesh Gazette (Extraordinary Gazette, 23 March 2006, Ministry of Communication, Rail Administration; MoC/RA/Policy-47/2004-200-) Section-3, the land under control of Railway department is classified into three categories–

3.1. The land is being used by the Railway and that will be needed immediately,

3.2. The land is not needed now but that will be needed in future, and

3.3. The land that will not be needed by the Railway in future.

The land classified under section 3.2 could be leased out for short-term for commercial agriculture, fisheries, plant nurseries, and other purposes. The lease is given under a master plan and through open tender. Under this license, no permanent or temporary construction is allowed on the leased land, only construction of semi-permanent structures according to the approved design is permitted. Such leases could also be given to public institutions or educational and religious institutions.

The land classified under section 3.3, which will not be needed by railway could be leased out perpetually (for 99 years) or could be sold out through tender. This permission can only be given by the Ministry that oversees the railway, with a recommendation from the Director General. Such perpetual lease could be given through tender for export oriented industries or industries related to rail services but also for joint-venture commercial projects such as multi-storied commercial or residential buildings, offices, shopping malls and hospitals. Such leases could also be given to public institutions or non-government institutions for the welfare of the public. Such non-government institutions, however, have to be registered with appropriate authorities and have at least 15 years of experience.

It is clear from the above mentioned government order that the opinions given by the officials are not based on careful review of the policy. There are lands, which cannot be leased in any way, but there are lands (classified under Sec-3.3) that cannot only be leased out but also be sold, or at least perpetual leased. In practice, Railway has leased out significant number of such lands. It is said that the whole of Saidpur and most of Shantahar and Parbatipur towns are situated on Railway land. If the government is willing, railway land could be given under perpetual lease to the 'Dalits' for their residence and livelihoods.

Policy related to Employment

Prime Minister of the Government of People's Republic of Bangladesh gave an order on 29th May 2012 to reserve 80% of the jobs of "Cleaner"/"Sweeper" in all the government, autonomous and non-government institutions for the "Harijans" or 'Dalit'. This was published in the Bangladesh Gazette on 4th April 2013. However, in reality it is seen that in many cases this system is not being maintained and members of the dominant groups are occupying those posts instead.

It should be noted that over reliance on this quota could reproduce and perpetuate the stigma, marginalization and untouchability; however it is also important to ensure the livelihood and economic stability of a large number of the 'Dalit' until alternative opportunities are created.

Other Policies

In addition, other national policies such as the Sixth Five Year plan, National Education policy 2010, National Health Policy 2011, National Women Development Policy 2011, National Children Policy 2011 and National Labour Policy 2012 mentioned "marginal social groups", "minor ethnic groups", backward groups, etc. and recognized the need of special attention for their development. The 'Dalits' were not specifically mentioned but they are potentially covered under these groups. However, some of the very important policies such as National Land Policy 2001, National Agricultural Policy 1999 and Draft Agriculture Policy 2010, National Population Policy 2011, Draft National Housing Policy 2008, National Food Policy 2006, National Water Policy 1999 and National Social Welfare Policy 2005 has hardly any mention about marginal groups, let alone the Dalit.

Recommendations

1. The railway provides perpetual leases. The government can take a rehabilitation program for the 'Dalits' living on railway lands and under this program, the lands they are living on could be leased out to them perpetually. The NNMC can strongly advocate for the leases to be given to them as they are marginalized and also have been living in the railway land for generations. If this land can in no way be given to the sweepers, government may take resettlement projects involving the local government bodies to ensure their housing rights.
It should be noted that there is a tendency to push them to the outskirts of town for resettlement. However, this takes them away from their place of work. As they are habituated to living in urban areas, such relocations must be near their existing locations. Such places must be selected with full consent and after consultation with these 'Dalit' communities. All the necessary civic amenities must be ensured in such places.
2. As the railway is being expanded, there is plenty of scope to create new posts for cleaners. Therefore, the NNMC can advocate with the railway to create these posts and have the vacant posts be occupied by recruiting Dalit.
3. The focus for development of these communities should be on the future generations and youths. Long-term programs are needed for this. Ensuring proper education and facilitating decent work could be the most effective way to get them out of present exclusion and misery.
4. Focus should be given on promoting the interaction between the 'Dalit' and 'Non-Dalit' children at schools and off campus. Making the 'Non-Dalit' children aware about the dignity and rights of the 'Dalits' is very important.
5. Awareness on the rights, dignity and importance of the 'Dalit' and other similar excluded groups should be included in the school textbooks and teacher training manuals.
6. Positive interaction between the 'Dalit' and the dominant people should be encouraged and promoted.
7. The participation of 'Dalit' in the political parties should be promoted to facilitate their inclusion in decision-making, providing them with a greater voice and reducing their exclusion.
8. The quotas for the 'Dalit' in the higher education institutions must be implemented as fast as possible. To ensure this, NNMC can advocate the Education Ministry to take these steps.
9. Government has a directive to preserve 80% of the cleaning jobs for the "Jat Sweepers". NNMC can network with other human-rights groups and activists to pressurize the government for ensuring that this measure is implemented.
10. Advocacy should be carried out to ensure that in all the advertisement for job openings and admissions in the higher education institutions mention about the 'Dalit' and other quotas.

11. The alternative employment opportunities offered by the NGOs are often not suitable for the 'Dalit' youth. For such initiatives, long-term support is needed. Trainings should be followed by the decent employment placements that will ensure a regular salary.
12. During creating networking activities and organizations of "Dalits", NGOs should keep in mind the factional competition among them. Otherwise, the old structures will be reproduced and will hinder the targeted development process.
13. Corruption and bribery in railway and other public offices must be tackled to ensure job, accommodation and other livelihood opportunities for the Dalit.
14. NNMC, with other like-minded organizations, can take an active role in facilitating enactment of the Elimination of Discrimination law as soon as possible.
15. New laws and policies may be helpful but emphasis should be given on enforcement and best use of existing laws and policies. Especially to prevent eviction of 'Dalit' settlements. They can collaborate with human rights organizations and legal aid agencies for that.
16. The relevant NGOs should coordinate with each other and create a unified national platform for advocacy with the government.
17. Any development intervention should be focused on building their capacity to claim rights and entitlements from the state rather than making them dependent on aid and NGOs (some of their leaders accused NGOs to make them dependent and using as pawns). However, there is a need for aid as well at present.
18. The performances of the NGO activities for 'Dalit' should be periodically assessed and necessary measures should be taken to ensure effectiveness. Underperforming NGOs should be replaced and held accountable for their actions.

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