



## **Multiple Deprivations: Schooling Experience of Dalit Children in Bangladesh**

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This document represents part of the author's study programme while at the Institute of Social Studies. The views stated therein are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Institute.

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## **List of Acronyms**

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| CBO    | Community Based Organization  |
| CEDAW  | The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women    |
| CRC    | Convention on the Rights of the Children  |
| DCC    | Dhaka City Corporation  |
| EFA    | Education for All   |
| HRBA   | Human Rights Based Approach   |
| ICERD  | International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination |
| ICESCR | International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights                    |
| EFA    | Education for All   |
| FH     | Food for the Hungry   |
| MR     | Muster Roll   |
| NGO    | Non-Government Organization   |
| CSO    | Civil Society Organization  |
| QF     | Quantum Foundation  |
| RBA    | Rights Based Approach   |

## **Abstract**

Although Bangladesh has made much progress in school enrolment rate, retention rate and gender parity in both primary and high school, children from different Dalit communities still lag behind in these aspects. This research addresses the reasons behind Dalit children's lack of access to education in Bangladesh. This paper argues that caste-based social exclusion with its effects on income, social relations and networks, access to labour market, schooling experience of Dalit children limit Dalit children access to school.

I have followed a qualitative approach and employed case-study method. Findings reveal that a combination of different economic, social and cultural deprivations arise out of their caste and descent based stigmatization and discriminations exclude them from school. Fixed forms of occupation lead to income poverty which in turn limits parents' capacity to spent in their children's education. Parental low education level and job status, cultural elements, unfitting home environment, poor access to basic amenities are factors outside the school gate that affect Dalit children's access to education adversely. On the other hand, humiliation and maltreatment by the peers and discrimination by teachers in the school environment make Dalit children's schooling experience traumatic drops them out. Exclusion of Dalit from labour market also deeply impacts their access to education and their social integration. Due to labour market exclusion parents don't want to invest in their children's education as it brings no tangible benefits in return. It also makes Dalit students reluctant to education. Thus the study finds that a complex interaction of different social, economic, cultural and physical factors limits the access of Dalit children to education.

## **Relevance to Development Studies**

Education itself is a development process- human resource development- and also a very important element of social and economic development. As a result, education has been identified as one of the goals for sustainable development (goal 4). This research focuses on different rights violation particularly education of a socially excluded and disadvantaged community known as Dalit. According to right-based approach to development, "fulfilment of rights facilitates a process of empowerment for poor and marginalized people and communities" (Rand and Watson 2007: 5). It also affirms that fulfilment of rights is the best way to development. Therefore, human rights must "be integrated into sustainable human development" (Marks 2005: 24). Education itself is a human right and is also regarded as a vehicle for the fulfilment of other social, economic and political rights which in turn ensure development.

## **Keywords**

Dalits, caste discrimination, education, Social exclusion.



# Chapter 1 : Introduction and Methodology

## Introduction

This research paper is about Dalit children's lack of access to education in Bangladesh. Dalits, are historically victims of different types of social exclusions which limits their access to education (Chowdhury 2009). As the census of Bangladesh doesn't include caste, there is neither accurate information about how many Dalits are there nor how many different types of Dalit communities. A survey by Islam et al. (2015), conducted in 2014, reveals that literacy rates among Dalit communities are extremely poor and significantly vary. Survey findings placed the *Jele* (fisherman) community at the bottom of all Dalit communities and also showed that 90 percent of *Jele* surveyed, never attended school and all who attended, dropped out before they stepped to secondary level (Islam et al. 2015: 29). Hence, I took it as an 'extreme case' and thought it would best represent the reasons behind lack of access of dalit children to school. Accordingly, I selected one *Jele* community beside my village home back in Bangladesh.

When I started working with them, I discovered a different reality. The *Jele* community was found comparatively well-off as dealing in fish is a profitable business in Bangladesh and not only their children are going to primary school, but also to high schools, colleges and universities. Initially, I took it as an exception and visited two *Jele* communities at different locations. I also requested my friends, colleagues and relatives working and living at different parts of the country to talk in person with nearby *Jele* communities. I ended up with the findings that education rate among *Jele* community is higher and close to mainstream people. As my research objective is to find the reasons behind Dalits children's lack of excess to education, I needed a Dalit community with poor educational development. Chowdhury (2009) points out that sweeper communities are among the most 'untouchable' and disadvantaged Dalit groups in Bangladesh. Through a field level investigation, I found Telegu sweepers community, living in the Telegu Sweeper colony, Wari, Dhaka, one of the most disadvantages Dalit communities and decided to study this Dalit community.

## Background

The Constitution of Bangladesh requires the State to secure education for all children through establishing a universal, free and compulsory system (Article 15 and 17) (Ministry of Law and Parliamentary Affairs 2008). In 1990, Bangladesh joined the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) and committed to ensure primary education accessible to all children by the year 2000 (Islam et al. 2015: 19). Consequently, to ensure a free, compulsory and universal primary

education for all school age (6 to 10 years) children in Bangladesh, government introduced *The Primary Education Act, 1990* which has been fully operational since 1993 (Emran 2012: 193). However, Bangladesh failed to ensure EFA by 2000. In April 2000, Bangladesh adopted Dakar Framework for Action and committed to ensure basic education for all by 2015 (Islam et al. 2015: 18). By this time, Bangladesh has made much progress in achieving its target of EFA with a national primary school enrolment rate of 97.7 per cent (BANBEIS 2016: 46).

Despite the fact that the state requires to ensure education for all its citizen, evidences show significant difference in educational development between Dalit and non-Dalit children (Islam et al. 2015). A survey conducted in 2008 showed that school enrolment rate among Dalits was 10 per cent, dropout rate among enrolled Dalit children was 95 per cent (Chowdhury 2008, as cited in Islam and Parvez 2013: 20) when national enrolment rate was 93.9 (BANBEIS 2016: 46). Another survey conducted in 2014 shows that 28.5% Dalit children remained out of school (Islam et al. 2015: 12) when national net enrolment reached to 97.7 % (BANBEIS 2016: 46). The survey also found that, a significant number of the enrolled students left school after attending 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and 63 percent of the parents surveyed reported their children's dropout (Islam et al. 2015: 12). Existing literature on Dalit education shows that a very few Dalits tends to continue to a certain level of education that could create value for the labour market. Study by Chowdhury (2009: 23) found 2 percent of Hindu Dalit to have completed secondary level education (10<sup>th</sup> grade), the first formal degree to qualify very low official posts (Chowdhury 2009: 23). Caste based discrimination bars their access to education while lack of education bars them to be recruited in white collar jobs. As a result, Dalits have been trapped in poverty and living a life of humiliation for generations. Education is considered to be a vehicle to lift socially and economically marginalized people and “to obtain the means to participate in their communities” (OHCHR, as cited in UNICEF and UNESCO 2007)

## **Who are the Dalits in Bangladesh?**

The existence of Dalits has to be seen in relation to the caste system practised in South Asian region particularly in Hinduism. Hindu caste system, popularly known as *Varna* (colour) or *Chaturvarna* (four-fold colour) system, stratifies Hindu communities into upper and lower caste categories and place *Brabman* at the top, followed by *Kashtriya*, *Vaisya* and *Sudra* respectively (Quigley 1993). People outside this *Chaturvarna* framework, known as *Ati-sudra* or *Avarna* (col-

ourless), are considered impure and untouchable<sup>1</sup> by the caste Hindu (Charsley and Karanth 1998: 20). These people are traditionally involved in different menial jobs and historically discriminated in every sphere of life -social, economic, political even religious- therefore, are most disadvantaged social groups. From 1870s, these people were started to term as 'Depressed Classes' (Charsley and Karanth 1998: 21). In 1931, Mahatma Ghandi bestowed them a euphemistic name 'Harijan' which means 'man of God' (Shah 2001: 20) to change the mind-set of caste Hindu and to eliminate untouchability. Many of them started to call themselves in this new name with a hope in mind that it would change their stigma of untouchability (Shah 2001: 21). But new nomenclature failed to bring any change in their fate. In *The Government of India Act 1935*, these disadvantaged people were listed according to their caste to establish entitlements to benefits and a list of their caste names were attached to the act as schedule (Charsley and Karanth 1998:19). Soon they were started to be identified as 'Scheduled Caste (SC)'. Their new identity as Scheduled Caste helped them imagine "as a single political community with a common experience and interest". (Jodhka and Shah 2010: 105). In 1960s, Dalit scholars started using 'Dalit', a self-chosen political identity, in their literary works instead of *harijan* or *achchuta* to refer the most disadvantaged sect of Indian people particularly known as scheduled caste to organize themselves for the struggle of self respect. At the beginning, the term was confined to SCs Hindu communities only but soon it has been started to be used with a wider connotation which includes all of the oppressed and exploited social groups. According to Pantawane, "Dalit is not a caste. Dalit is a symbol of change and revolution" (as cited in Shah 2001: 22).

It is interesting that the term 'Dalit' does not exist in Bengali language. The term, which is now used in Bangladesh is adopted from discourses in the international arena, and has come into the development discourse very recently (Islam et al. 2015: 10). In the context of Bangladesh, the term 'Dalit' has no religious connotation and is commonly used to refer low caste Hindu, Muslim and Christian largely identified by their traditional menial occupations (Chowdhury 2009; Islam and Parvez 201; Jodhka and Shah 2010; Sultana and Subedi 2015). Dalits are broadly divided into two categories- lower caste Bangladeshi origin Dalits and non-Bengali Dalits (Islam et al. 2015: 9; Banglapedia 2015). Non-Bengali Dalit were first brought to Bangladesh from different parts of India in 1620's<sup>2</sup> to remove the dead bodies from different cities following a massacre by the Burmese pirates that took place in between 1624-26. But the

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<sup>1</sup> The idea of untouchability evolves from the notion of 'purity and pollution' where *avarna* (outcaste) people are considered as polluting and are kept segregated from caste people. The segregation could take a form of "physical touch and residential segregation to taboos and restrictions on inter-dining physical movement or pursuing occupation of one's choice" (Jodhka and Shah 2010).

<sup>2</sup> India was undivided that time.

large chunk of Indian Dalits were brought here to do menial jobs during the British colonial rule around 1864 when Dhaka was turned to a municipality (ASB, as cited in Islam and Uddin 2008).

In 2013, the government of Bangladesh introduced a policy<sup>3</sup> for the socially and economically disadvantaged communities and categorized them into three types- Dalit, *harijan* and *bede*<sup>4</sup> and defines Dalit as ‘people who are known as Dalit in the society and who don’t hesitate to introduce them as Dalit’, and *harijan* as ‘people who are known as *harijan* in the society and don’t hesitate to introduce them as *harijan*’(Department of Social Service 2013). On the other hand, Dalit activism and existing literature refer the term ‘Dalit’ as a political identity of socially and economically marginalized and disadvantaged groups where *harijan* and *bede* are included (Chowdhury 2009; Islam and Parvez 2013).

In this study, the term ‘Dalit’ refers to those socially excluded people who are discriminated against on the ground of caste and (stigmatized) occupations. Focus of the study is the non-Bengali Dalits who are generally known as sweepers living in the urban areas of Bangladesh.

## **Statement of the problem**

Although Bangladesh has significantly improved the literacy rate in recent years through different initiatives, Dalits continue to experience poor access to education due to multiple deprivations on the ground of caste and descent based discriminations (Ali 2014; Islam et al. 2015). This study investigates how their caste identity in association with related other elements construct their schooling experience and limit their access to education.

There are few studies on dalits in Bangladesh which examine the multiple factors leading to discrimination. Chowdhury (2009) studied caste-based discrimination in Bangladesh and argued that Dalit children face widespread discrimination in every sphere of their school life which limits their access to education. Discrimination starts with the admission process and continues to selection for scholarships, in participating sports and games, in the seating arrangement and even in the assessment process. In addition, there are discriminated against in using common utilities (ibid). Islam et al. (2015) focused on few elements like- economic hardship, unawareness, discrimination in the school environment, labour market exclusion, etc. in explaining Dalit children’s poor access to education. Habiba and Subedi (2015) who studied resistance of

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<sup>3</sup> Policy for Dalit, *harijon* and *bede* communities’ life-standard improvement activities and implementation

<sup>4</sup> Water gipsy

Dalit community against rights violation in Bangladesh argue that Dalits children are denied mainstream education which the state is providing for its citizen.

In studies on Dalits and education there are different reasons put forward to explain lack of access to education for Dalit children. One approach focuses on poverty; another looks at social factors where even when Dalit children manage to be in school they are discriminated. Rather than looking only at economic or social factors this study aims to explore the linkage between these factors and how they combine to produce multiple deprivations. This requires a qualitative approach to understand the real life experiences of Dalit children who are in and are also out of school. In addition, the study applies an intergenerational approach through the experiences and views of the difference between their early lives and those of their children. This allows for a comparison and show if there has been any change over time between the two generations.

## **Justification and relevance**

Historically, Dalits in Bangladesh have been socially oppressed, economically deprived, culturally subjugated and politically powerless (Chowdhury 2009, Islam and Uddin 2008) due to caste and occupation based untouchability and discrimination. Untouchability and discrimination against Dalit are transferred inter-generationally through unavoidable choice of occupation, residential segregation and restricted social interaction and social mobility (Ali 2014: 7) and is manifested in every sphere of their life. Though there is no reliable disaggregated data, different sources estimate that 3.5 million to 6.5 million people constituting 3-4 per cent of the total population are trapped in “untouchability stigma” and are victims of multiple deprivations (Chowdhury 2009; Ali 2014) where education is one of the key areas.

Very few studies have been done on caste discrimination and education in Bangladesh. However, numerous studies in this field have been done in India and Nepal. Most of these studies provide gloomy pictures of Dalit education. Illuminating the historical context of Indian Dalit, Nambisan (1996) argues that despite inspiration and support from home, Dalit children face adverse treatment by teachers and school administration. Balagopalan and Subrahmanian (2003) investigated newly included Dalit and Adivasi students' experience in the institutions where previously their access was denied, and found “widespread nature of verbal abuse that Dalit children suffer at the hands of their upper-caste teachers in primary schools”. Ramachandran and Naorem (2013: 43) also revealed that schooling experience of marginalized children in India is not positive and rate of dropout among them was higher. Khanal (2015) studied challenges to inclusive education in Nepal and argued that “a range of interconnected school and community factors” affects Dalit

children access to school.

Existing literature indicates that Dalits in Bangladesh also face similar forms of social, economic and political marginalization and exclusion (Jodhka and Shah 2010:102), but have always been out of focus both from academics and from political arena. No extensive research on caste-based discrimination and education has done yet. Therefore, there is huge gap in knowledge about Dalit children's schooling experience in Bangladesh. This study is an endeavour to bridge that gap. It also examines educated Dalits' position in the market and how it affects their education. This research also aims to contribute in policy making process to ensure EFA.

## **Research objective**

Objective of this research is to bridge the gap in knowledge about factors that bar Dalit children access to education in Bangladesh and to contribute towards policies to ensure Education for All.

## **Research question**

### **Main question**

What forms of social exclusion limit Dalit children's access to education and the labour market?

### **Sub-questions**

1. What are the reasons children from Dalit communities do not go to the school or dropout from school?
2. What is the experience of children from Dalit communities who do go to school?
3. What are the challenges Dalits face in relation to livelihoods?
4. What is the experience and perception of Dalit parents of these children about the education and the exclusion of their children from school?

## **Methodology**

The study aims at exploring factors that bar education of the Dalit children. Data were collected mainly from two generations one-children of the present time another parents of these children who, around three decades back, were children of school age. The study also aims at identifying and understanding the interaction of social and economic factors which result in social exclusion and effect the education of the Dalit children. Therefore, my approach falls under the 'interpretive' paradigm. This approach helped me to decide about

method of this study. I have followed a qualitative approach using a case study design and collected data from the primary sources. Field data were collected in July, 2016.

### ***Selection of study population and research site***

The case study site was 'Telegu Sweeper Colony' situated in Wari, Dhaka. According to my field investigation, this community is one of the most backward non-Bengali Dalit communities in Bangladesh and education rate is extremely poor among them. This community was selected purposively considering their lower level of educational development to get clearer picture about the lack of access of Dalit children to school.

### ***Data Sources***

Three sources of data were used for this study- documents, interviews and direct observations. Interviews were conducted with current students, children who enrolled but dropped-out and children who have never enrolled to school. Simultaneously, one of the parents of each selected child were interviewed to get an intergeneration perspective of access to education and livelihoods. Parents were selected on the basis of diversity i.e. sex, illiteracy, professions/occupations, level of poverty, etc.

### ***Selection of respondents***

Diverse case selection strategy was employed to select cases. Each of these cases is the unit of analysis. Diverse case selection strategy was applied to cover the full range of variation (Gerring 2007: 89) of barriers that hinder Dalit children's access to school and education.

A total of 32 respondents were selected—eight girls and eight boys with equal number of parents. The following table illustrates the sampling criteria and size. In selecting children, I preferred high school and college students because primary level students from this colony mostly go to community school exclusively for Dalit communities. So they don't experience adverse schooling.

Table 01: Sample frame

| Types of subcases                | Number of Cases |        |       |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|--------|-------|
|                                  | Male            | Female | Total |
| Children who are going to school | 3               | 3      | 6     |
| Dropout children from school     | 3               | 3      | 6     |
| Children who have never enrolled | 2               | 2      | 4     |
| Total (children)                 | 8               | 8      | 16    |

|                 |    |    |    |
|-----------------|----|----|----|
| Total (Parents) | 8  | 8  | 16 |
| Grand Total     | 16 | 16 | 32 |

While interviewing Dalit children and parents I felt the necessity of conducting interviews with educated young Dalits so that more recent information about the position of educated dalits in the labour market could be obtained. So I interviewed three young and educated Dalits (with age range 27 to 30 years) who had recently entered into job and had experience of being educated Dalit in the labour market. Two of them were graduates and were working as teachers at a community school for dalit children, another one was with 10 years of schooling experience working with a private bank as the cleaning worker.

### ***Methods of data collection***

1. An interview guide (Appendix I)—including both thematic and dynamic questions—was developed and pre-tested. Semi-structured in-depth interview technique was applied for collecting primary data from selected Dalit children.
2. Life stories of parents of the children were collected. Selected parents were asked to describe their childhood experiences and how they have become the person they are today. Focus was given on the scope they had for education, factors that hindered their access to school and their perception about exclusion of their children from school.
3. Interviews with four key informants (Appendix-II)— two with teachers, and two with a Dalit leader was conducted.
4. Data was also collected by direct observations.

An unstructured group interview was also taken with four primary teachers of a school located at 'Mirunjula sweeper colony', Armanitola, Dhaka. This school was exclusively for Dalit students but all teachers were from mainstream society. Interview with them helped me to understand the perception of non-Dalit teacher working in school for Dalit students. Main focus was lack of access of Dalit children to education, teachers' attitude to Dalit children, parents' consciousness level, problems that Dalit children face in the school. The group was instructed to bring and discuss any issue they thought important.

Table 02: Coordination matrix between research questions and methodology

| Research questions  | Information set  | Data gathering methods   |
|---|--|--|
| What are the reasons children from Dalit communities do not go to the school or dropout from school?  | Age<br>Reasons for not going to and dropping out from school<br>Involvement in economic activities<br>Outlook toward school/education<br>Home environment<br>Parental support  | Semi-structured interviews with school age children (current students, drops out and never enrolled) and direct observations |
| What is the experience of children from Dalit communities who do go to school?  | Peer relation<br>Relation with the teachers<br>attitude of the peers<br>Classroom performances<br>Discrimination/denial in admission process<br>Participation in the school activities   | In-depth interview with school age children (current students and drops out) and direct observations                         |
| What are the challenges Dalits face in relation to livelihoods?   | Livelihood/occupation<br>Occupational requirements<br>Change in their traditional occupation<br>Income level   | Life-history interview with the Dalit parents and direct observations  |
| What is the experience and perception of Dalit parents of these children about the education and the exclusion of their children from school? | Age<br>Education<br>Profession/Occupation<br>Income level<br>Family size<br>Housing<br>Access to Public services<br>Social relations and networks<br>Perception about children's education, dropout and their future<br>Change in caste-based discrimination over time | Life-history interview with Dalit parents and direct observations  |

### ***Data processing and analysis and reporting***

All interviews were recorded in a digital recorder. Recorded interviews were subsequently transcribed and translated. This process helped me understand data saturation level. Constant reading and re-reading helped me categorise and analysed data.

The study aims at exploring and understanding various factors that have been responsible for lack of access of Dalit children to school/education. There are many interrelated factors that bar the access of Dalit children to school. Therefore, I have applied ‘explanation building’ as the analytical technique. Explanation building is a process of analysing case study data by building an explanation about the case(s) (Yin 2013: 147). According to Yin (2013) “to explain a phenomenon is to stipulate a presumed set of causal links about it, or how and why something happened”.

### **Reflexivity and ethical considerations**

The fieldwork was more challenging than I anticipated. After I decided to work on sweeper communities, I had several questions in front of me. How to find a suitable Dalit community? How could I access to them? Where to start from? I visited some sweeper colonies but failed to get access as they didn’t want to talk to a stranger. Then I took help from a person who work as a ‘sweeper’ in the same office I was working in Bangladesh. He took me to one of the largest sweeper colonies in the city located at Armanitola, Dhaka. When I was gathering initial information, I met a Dalit activist living in that colony. I shared my research objectives and he suggested me Telegu sweeper community; as they were among the most disadvantaged communities. He also gave me some contacts. One of the contact persons took me to the president of their panchayat committee. I was surprised when the president requested me and my accomplice to sit on the bed and he himself and two other persons of that colony sat on the floor despite my earnest request to sit by me. It was his house and he did not dare to sit by me. It helped me understand how they perceive their position as ‘untouchable’ in the society.

Another important challenge I faced during my field work was to have food with them. At the beginning of my field work, one afternoon we (me and my accomplice) were offered tea and *puri* (local snacks). I did not feel good having food and tea made by a sweeper. For the first time I realized my own prejudice against Dalit, I felt like I didn’t know myself. I was about to refuse, but couldn’t as it might have conveyed my prejudice against them. Later on, when I asked my accomplice’s feelings, he said “How could you agree? I could not refuse because of you”. We felt the same again when we were offered biscuits and drinks in one of my respondents’ home. Biscuit was not the problem as it was bought from shop and was intact, but the drink, offered in a glass,

was a problem. My accomplice refused the drink telling that he did not like sprite. From these experiences, I clearly understood the notion of 'untouchability' and the perception of non-Dalit about Dalit. Though gradually it became normal for me and they used to arrange snacks and drinks every day instead of my request to not to do so.

I explained my purpose and possible use of data I was there to collect in front of panchayat leaders. Having known ins and outs of my purpose, they provided me possible all sorts of support and cooperation which was beyond my expectation. It seemed to me that they wanted to let other people know their sufferings and deprivations they have been tolerating for generations.

I informed each of my interviewee my identity, purpose of the study and possible use of the information I was going to collect and formally asked for their consent. I assured them about the confidentiality I would maintain and also informed that they could skip any question and the interview anytime. I also took their permission to use their name. Some of them requested not to use their name and I have used pseudo names in those cases.

It was also difficult to make them easy with me due to their perceived identity and social status they bear. However, I tried to make them feel easy and to build rapport with them. I used to wear casual outfits and use simple language. It was particularly difficult to deal with women and children due to language barrier so I took help from other persons who worked as translators for me. However, the physical environment of interview place was not very suitable, sound pollution and frequent visits of unexpected people interrupted the interview process.

## Chapter 2 : Conceptual and analytical framework

The study will use the framework of social exclusion and link it with the concepts of Human Right Based Approach, Multiple deprivation and Citizenship rights.

### Human Rights-based Approach (HRBA)

Right to Education has formally been recognized as a human right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 (Article 26) (van Banning et al. 2004: 3). This has further been affirmed in many other human rights instruments which establish an entitlement to free and compulsory primary education for all children<sup>5</sup> as well as equitable access to different forms of secondary<sup>6</sup> and higher education<sup>7</sup>. These rights instruments also establish obligations for the state parties to eradicate all forms of discriminations, along with others, on the ground of race<sup>8</sup> and sex<sup>9</sup> and to protect children from all forms of discriminations<sup>10</sup> (van Banning et al. 2004) establishing a child-friendly learning environment where respect for all children from different backgrounds will be ensured (UNICEF and UNESCO 2017). Furthermore, state parties are required to ensure equal opportunities to education for everyone at all levels to make education available and accessible to every child through appropriate measures and to ensure regular attendance in the school and to reduce drop-out rate<sup>11</sup> (van Banning et al. 2004).

UNICEF and UNESCO (2007: 28) provide the following conceptual framework for Human Rights-Based Approach to Education for all.

Table 03: UNICEF and UNESCO framework for human rights based approach to education for all

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>1. The right of access to education</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Education throughout all stages of childhood and beyond</li><li>• Availability and accessibility of education</li></ul> |
|--|---|

<sup>5</sup> Article 28, sub article 1(a) of CRC

<sup>6</sup> Article 28, sub article 1(b & c) of CRC

<sup>7</sup> Article 28, sub article 1(b) of CRC

<sup>8</sup> Article 2 (1) of CRC; article 2.1 (a, b & c) and Article 5(d) of ICERD.

<sup>9</sup> Article 2 (1) of CRC; article 10 of (CEDAW).

<sup>10</sup> Article 2 (2) of CRC.

<sup>11</sup> Article 28 sub article 1(e) of CRC.

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equality of opportunity</li> </ul>  |
| <b>2. The right to equality education</b>                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A broad, relevant and inclusive curriculum</li> <li>• Rights-based learning and assessment</li> <li>• Child-friendly, safe and healthy environment</li> </ul> |
| <b>3. The right to respect in the learning environment</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect of identity</li> <li>• Respect for participation rights</li> <li>• Respect for integrity</li> </ul>   |

Source: UNICEF and UNESCO (2007: 28).

Along with other international human rights instruments, Bangladesh has ratified Convention on the Rights of the Children (CRC), International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) and The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (Islam et al. 2015). Therefore, according to the HRBA, it is imperative for Bangladesh to ensure rights for all children as stated above. Rights based approach holds duty bearer (the state) accountable in fulfilling their responsibilities towards rights holders by clearly identifying who the rights holders and duty bearer are (London 2008: 70; Shelton 2014:662).

Rights based approaches enable rights holders to claim their rights and oblige the duty bearer to respect, protect and fulfil those rights (UNICEF and UNESCO 2007). This approach needs to be complemented with the concepts of social exclusion and social citizenship. Citizenship rights ensure basic amenities required “to meet social needs and enhance capabilities” (Taylor-gooby 2009: 4) while social exclusion stems from unenforced (citizenship) rights which, according to de Haan (2000: 23), “a failure of the state” and violation of human right (Rand and Watson 2007:4).

## Social exclusion

The notion ‘social exclusion’ was coined by René Lenoir (Sen 2000: 1) in the context of Europe and there is huge contestation whether it fits in other context or not. de Haan (2000) argues that it can be applied in every society as “group formation is a fundamental characteristic of human society and this accompanied by the exclusion of others”. de Haan (2000:27) points out French official definition of social exclusion- “the rupture of social bond”- as the primary definition. On the other hand, Buvinic (2005) defines social exclusion as the “inability of an individual to participate in the basic political, economic and

social functioning of society, and it involves, “the denial of equal access to opportunities imposed by certain groups in society upon others” (as cited in Thorat and Newman 2007: 4121). This definition identifies “three distinguishing features of social exclusion: it affects culturally defined groups, is embedded in social relations between them, and results in deprivation or low income for those excluded” (Hann; Sen; as cited in Thorat and Newman 2007: 4121). Buvinic views social exclusion as a state rather than as a process portraying multiple deprivations which bar excluded people’s full participation in the social life. Thorat and Newman (2007) explain exclusion from the point of discrimination. They argue that discrimination is “particular kind of exclusion” which can “take on both an active or passive form”. Active exclusion through discrimination bars access of excluded groups from different opportunities, entitlements and resources while consequence of discrimination can also result in indirect deprivation and limits access to income or education through discouragement (Thorat and Newman 2007: 4122). Social exclusion, stems from discrimination, thus, leads excluded people to multiple deprivations and bars them from full participation in the social life.

de Haan (2000: 26) points out that “social exclusion focuses on the multi-dimensionality, on the fact that people are often deprived of different things at the same time”. People may be excluded from- a livelihood, secure employment, land, housing, education, welfare benefits, citizenship, public goods, participation in the democratic process, sociability, humane treatment, respect and personal fulfilment, etc. Silver (1994: 541). Silver (1994) thinks that there are many more things people may be excluded from and these aspects cover as a whole social, economic and political dimensions.

Social exclusion is still an evolving concept (Silver 2007) and take different forms in different context. Hence, there is no universal set of indicators to measure social exclusion. Barnes et al. (2002) measure social exclusion in the areas of “housing, health, education, social relations, and participation” (as cited in Silver 2007:13). Though Silver terms these indicators as old fashioned, they seem fit well in the context of Dalits social exclusion in Bangladesh. On the other hand, Gordon et al. (2000: 54) has investigated poverty and social exclusion in UK on the basis of four broad themes- “exclusion from adequate income or resources; exclusion from the labour market; exclusion from public services; and exclusion from social relations”.

‘Social exclusion’ concept is central in this study. It provides a useful framework for analysing the present situation of Dalit people in Bangladesh in relation to their citizenship rights. I have used some indicators from the exclusion criteria developed by Barnes et al. (2002) and Gordon et al. (2000)’ to analyse different forms of exclusion that take place in Dalits’ life cycle and impact Dalit children’s schooling and education. Link between specific research questions and these indicators have been shown in the methodology section (Table

02).

## Multiple deprivations

Deprivation refers “to unmet need caused by lack of resources” (Noble et al. 2006: 169) or “lack of access to the available resources”. Townsend (1987) elaborated the concept and defined deprivation “as a state of observable and demonstrable disadvantage relative to the local community or the wider society or nation to which an individual, family or group belongs” (Townsend 1987: 125). He further explains that “...people can be said to be deprived if they lack the types of diet, clothing, housing, household facilities and fuel and environmental, educational, working and social conditions, activities and facilities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged and approved, in the societies to which they belong” (Townsend, 1979: 413). In his view, deprivation is not an absolute term rather it’s a relational term which is to be observed in relation to the prevailing situation of the society. Adam Smith also viewed social exclusion from this perspective and “investigated the characteristics of social exclusion within a broader concept of deprivation in the form of inability to do things that one has reason to want to do”. According to Smith, deprivation of “necessaries for leading a decent life’ leads to social exclusion” (Sen 2000: 6). de Haan (2000: 26) points out that socially excluded people are often deprived of different things at the same time.

Townsend’s (1987) concept of multiple deprivations which he defined as “an accumulation of single deprivation” can best define socially excluded people, and the Dalit people in Bangladesh particularly. Multiple deprivations exclude people and cause ‘rupture of social bond’. In Britain, social exclusion is frequently identified as a phenomenon linked to multiple deprivation (Walker and Walker, as cited in de Haan and Maxwell 1998: 2).

## Social Citizenship

Social citizenship refers to “the rights and duties associated with the provision of benefits and services designed to meet social needs and enhance capabilities...” (Taylor-Gooby 2009: 04). It ensures ‘a certain level of material well-being’ to enable citizens to exercise their “rights to full participation in the community” (van Steenbergen 1994: 03). It refers to an array of benefits accrue as entitlement for citizenship that will not only enhance the capacity of the person as citizen rather help every citizen to live a minimum standard of life prevailing in a society. As Marshall described, “the whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards

prevails in the society' (Marshall 1950: 10-11).

The central focus of social citizenship is social integration through full participation in the social life and van Steenbergen (1994), Andriaansens (1994) and Wilson (1994) argue that participation in the labour market is the best way for social integration. Wilson (1994) suggests a race-neutral policy to integrate social underclass people to labour market. He also suggests an improvement in public education, health care system and economic security to ensure social rights for all citizens (Wilson 1994: 5). Along other social provisions, Marshall also particularly emphasized on education and health service and envisioned that these two services (Fraser and Gordon 1994: 92). Marshall envisaged that social citizenship rights will channel socially excluded people to integration process and minimize gap between rich and poor.

Social citizenship emphasis on the participation in social, political and economic life equally for all citizen of a state and Marshall in his concept of citizenship considers every citizen as full and equal member of the society (Marshall, 1950) and irrespective of class position shares 'equity of status' (Dwyer 2010: 2)."

Kabeer (2006) critically assesses Marshall's notion of citizenship which does not take into account the colonial context and consequences and argues that the citizenship is intrinsically connected to the identity of personhood and the status a person holds in the social hierarchy. She also points out that it is practiced differently in different context based on "prevailing material realities and associated ideas about personhood". Kabeer finds the notion of citizenship as "highly partial, incomplete and fragmented" which "often serve to reproduce, rather than disrupt, the socially ascribed statuses of kinship, religion, ethnicity, race, caste, gender and so on in the public domain" (ibid). She further argues that "these differentiated notions of citizenship resonate more closely with the cultural contexts in which they occur.... They correspond to the hierarchies of affiliation which prevail and acknowledge the implications of diversity and difference in ways that are likely to be overlooked in more universalist notions of citizenship" (Kabeer 2006). Differentiated citizenship excludes some citizens from accessing some rights while includes others. Social citizenship, therefore, provides an analytic framework to assess the "status of certain individuals or groups in relation to access to rights and resources available to the citizens of a particular society and also to explore the dynamics of social exclusion taking into the levels and causes of inequality in access to those social rights" (Dwyer 2010: 2).

In analysing Dalits' children's access to education, my analytical framework is based on the interdependence of social exclusion, human rights based approaches, multiple deprivation and social citizenship. Analysis, made above, shows their interrelatedness of these four concepts.



## **Chapter 3 :Economic, social and cultural deprivations as a community**

The main focus of this chapter is economic and cultural factors that construct their identity as 'Dalit' in the society. However, it also discusses related social and physical aspects arise out of economic and cultural factors and their linkage with lack of Dalit children's access to school.

### **Housing and physical environment**

Sweeper communities in the city usually live in ghettos, known as 'sweeper colony', provided by the government. These colonies are densely populated areas with haphazardly and compactly constructed buildings. Spaces between two buildings, used for their commuting, are so congested that two persons cannot pass each other without touching their bodies. There are total 350 single room residences known as *ghar*. Each of the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC<sup>12</sup>) sweeper is allotted one such *ghar* to live with his/her family. Out of 350 single-room *ghars*, 300 have no water supply, toilet and washroom facilities inside instead they have 16 communal toilets- 8 for men and 8 for women- where they have to queue up in the morning. Two underground water reservoirs facilitate their bathing and washing. They, both men and women, pull out water by buckets from these reservoirs and bathe under open sky and wash their cloths besides the opening of these reservoirs. Due to lack of proper sewerage system, when they take bathe or wash their cloths at these open spaces, water spreads around and makes nearby areas muddy and filthy. There is no waste bin in the colony and they pile up their daily garbage beside the entrance to the colony. They clean the whole city, but their colony remains dirty and filthy.

For household use they are supplied water three times- in the morning, at noon and in the evening- a day through a specific water tap. "We have to queue up for water in front of the tap. Sometimes I have to wait more than half an hour to collect water" Kajal (10). They have no kitchen instead a gas burner is installed in the corridor in front of each *ghar* where they cook their meal.

The single room is their living room, dining room, everything where, in most cases, more than two generations live. The total space of a *ghar* is barely

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<sup>12</sup> DCC has been divided into two parts 'Dhaka South City corporation' and 'Dhaka North City Corporation'. For the purpose of this study DCC will mean both of the part.

enough for all family members to sleep. As a result, children hardly get their home environment suitable for study. They have no space to keep their books and related other materials. Every family has television in this tiny room which further degrade the scope for study. The problem is intensified by the compactness of home arrangement

We cannot study in the home, we don't even have any space to set up a study table and chair. All of our family members live in this small single room house. In the evening when its time for study, sound of television from neighbouring *ghars* disturbs us making the colony chaotic place (Ravi, 14).

Finding shows that they face multiple deprivations like minimum standard housing, water, sanitation and other basic amenities. It is also important to note that the entitlement to accommodation comes with government jobs which is their social citizenship rights. However, the housing arrangement and poor access to basic amenities shows the discrimination and deprivations Dalits face everyday. All other government colonies have minimum standard with required facilities like- kitchen, washroom with running water, toilet facilities, and minimum space for a family. These are like slums where the inmates can merely sleep. They don't have rights to land nor can they move to a private accommodation as they don't afford to hire a private accommodation with the poor income they have.

## **Livelihoods and employment of the Dalit community**

It was confirmed by all individual interviews that people from sweeper community have limited or no livelihood choice and are mainly confined to sweeping and cleaning jobs at different government organization mainly in DCC. Because of their fixed form of occupation as 'sweeper' for generations they are termed as *Jaat* sweeper (sweeper by birth). Previously, almost all of the sweeper posts of these government organizations including DCC used to be filled up by these non-Bengali Dalits and they were called upon to join the job. The city corporation maintains a hereditary form of employment and the job pass on through generations. When someone dies or loses ability to continue the job due to illness, another member of his family can take over the job. Usually one of the male family members takes the place, but in absence of eligible male women also can takes the place. DCC recruits sweepers under two set of different rules- regular employees and Muster roll (MR). Regular employees are entitled to fix salaries with some benefits while MR employees are paid on daily and 'no work no pay' basis no additional benefits. Most of the recent recruitment are on MR basis with no job security and secure livelihood.

Although earlier members of this community were assured of a job but now as number of job seekers among Dalits has increased with time and poor

people from mainstream society have also started stepping in this job, getting a job in these government organizations, however small the post is, has become difficult. As per a government order 80 percent of the sweeper posts in government organizations are to be filled up by *Jaat Sweeper* (as cited in Rasheed 2014: 6). But this rule is not followed. They are being replaced by the non-Dalit people from their traditional job. The president of the panchayat committee described,

For last five years none from this colony has been appointed as sweeper. We are jaat sweeper and these post is supposed to be filled up by our people, unfortunately Bengali people are getting the job not we (Naidu, 54).

As the scope of job with the city corporation has been narrowed, many young Dalits are trying to get into private organizations now but in the same post. As they work in low posts their income level is too low to run their families and they try to take on additional cleaning jobs. Having a differential working hour starting from dawn to morning, only sweepers working with DCC can avail this multiple livelihood opportunity. Yet, managing an additional job is not easy. Thus they have been confined to poorly paid and undesirable forms of work and deprived from adequate standard of living.

## **Exclusion from adequate income and its effect on education**

Average monthly household income of the interviewed Dalit was found around tk. 9,500/- (US\$ 120) (Appendix-III) which is far low than the national average monthly income per household. Most of household's income was found in between tk. 7000 to tk. 9000/-. The average shows a bit higher as there were some households where both parents were working. According to the latest household income and expenditure survey, conducted in 2010, national average monthly income per household was tk. 11479/- (US\$ 120) while for urban areas the average was tk. 16475/ (US\$ 209)- (BBS 2010: 28). Findings indicate that they are deprived of adequate income to manage their family which affect their decision to send their children to school. Although at every level, education requires expenditure, there is a clear distinction between primary education and the rest as primary education if free in Bangladesh.

### ***Primary Level***

Primary education is free only in the government schools and findings shows that children from Dalit community experience limited access to these schools. There are two primary schools just outside the colony but very few students

from the colony get chance in these schools as there are high number of applicants for each seat and school authorities arranges a lottery system to select students. Dalit students who get chance in these schools usually leave these school because of adverse school environment (for details please see chapter 5). Parents of rather send their children to *Rajdhani Adorsho Bidyapith* (Capital Ideal School), a school founded by [Food for the Hungry](#) (FH), an international NGO, and currently run by [Quantum Foundation](#) (QF), a local social organization. Although the Foundation bears majority of the expenses, participating children (their family) are also required to take some financial responsibilities for admission fees, tuition fees, examination fees and for buying education materials. The Foundation arranges free coaching and tiffin in the evening considering their inappropriate home environment. Yet, many of the parents don't afford this trivial cost either. A mother of a dropout student was describing the reason her daughter left school.

“I sent my daughter to school, but could not pay her tuition fees. So they confiscated her books and told my daughter that she could not attend classes unless her tuition fee had been cleared. I could not pay her tuition fee and she stopped going to school. She was supposed to be at class three now, but she is in the home” (Durgeswari, 32).

It is also important to note that although government primary schools are tuition fee free and also provide books free of cost, still parents are required to spend substantial amount of money for buying pen-pencils, papers, notebooks, uniforms, etc. In addition, Dalit children require extra cost for at least two reasons. Firstly, these children have none in the family to help them prepare their homework. Secondly, their home environment hardly allows them to study in their homes. Hence, they have to go either to a private tutor or to a coaching centre both of which are expensive. Thus findings show that education for Dalit community is even costlier than other people of the society which they hardly afford for their children.

### ***Secondary and post secondary levels***

Secondary education is not free. The expenses increase as number of classes/grades increases so is the possibility of drop out. At this level, a student is required to spend a significant amount of money for admission fee, tuition fee, examination fee and other fees. Besides, a student is to study many subjects requiring extra expenses for buying books, notebooks, writing paper, pen pencils etc. and most of all for coaching. Sweeper families with their scanty income don't afford these expenses which push many of their children out of school.

“After completing my sixth standard, I did not continue my study further. My monthly tuition fee was tk. 350/-. Other than tuition fee I had to pay admission fee and examinations fees three time a year.... My

family could not afford my educational expenses.... I passed all the subjects at my last examination and was promoted to class seven but could not continue...." (Lakkhi Rani Das 17).

Dalit students who want to continue their studies have to search for part time jobs to manage their educational expenses and to supplement their family expenditure. The case of Bijoy (27) and Karni Lal (16 years) are best illustrative. Bijoy, a motivated youth, joined World Vision, an international NGO, as a part time employee in a very low post after his Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examination to earn money for his family and for his further studies. Karni Lal had to join a part time job after his HSC examination as his parents were continuously putting pressure on him to leave study and join a job.

"My parents don't want me to continue my study anymore... They want me to try to find a job and support the family. But I want to continue my study. So I started working as sweeper in a pharmaceutical company". (Karni Lal 16)

Although some male students were found to use their agency in continuing their education, no girls were found to do the same. The case of Lakkhi Rani Das (17), shows that despite her zeal to continue, she had to leave school as her parents wanted her to leave.

Financial vulnerability multiplies when someone falls sick within the family. Morbidity among middle aged Dalit man was found common which may be stemmed from excessive liquor addiction, lack of knowledge about general health rule, malnutrition due of poverty, occupational hazards, lack of cleanliness etc. and complex interaction of all these factors. Whatever the reasons are, when someone fall sick, it weakens their already fragile financial capacity.

"My husband is sick for last couple of years. I work on behalf of my husband. I can not run my six-member family with the money that comes from the job.... My elder son (of 13 years old) is already out of school... I wanted to send my youngest son (7) to school this year. I can barely meet my family need with the money I earn. How can I send all my sons to school?" (Mugamma, 30).

Findings indicate that Dalit parents are excluded from adequate income and it has significant effect on the education of their children. Findings also show that Dalit children have limited access to government primary schools; primary level education even in the government school also requires expenses; education cost increases with the number of grades/classes and education for Dalit children is even costlier. Dalit parents with their income deprivation can-

not afford that cost. It is also needed to mention that private tuition has become a norm in the education system of Bangladesh (Cameron 2010). Biswal (1999) argues that teachers themselves could create a space so that students seek private tuition (as cited in Nath 2008) which increases the cost of education and affects adversely on Dalit students schooling.

## **Parental education, working status and support for children's education**

Education level of Dalit parents interviewed was found very low. Nine (11) out of 16 parents had no institutional education and literacy rate among parents significantly vary on the ground of sex variation. Out of 8 female Dalits, only 1 had institutional education of third grade while four (04) out of eight (08) male parents were found to have few years of schooling (Appendix- III). Parents with little educational background were comparatively younger (below 45). It is worth mentioning that younger Dalit parents were of school age when FH initiated school 34 years back (in1982) for this colony. They had no access to mainstream schools in their childhood. "Actually none of us ever thought of joining to school that time. FH made some our people to go to school." Kin-chuk Codi (43). Findings clearly indicate that neither their parents nor they (Dalit parents of this study) were conscious about the necessity of the education.

Parental education level and the kind of job they had were found to have a strong impact on their children's education. Parents who work at an office as sweeper were found more conscious about the importance of their children's education than parents who work as 'sweeper' on the road and parents working in an official post, though lower, were found more conscious than the both of the previous categories. This could be due to interaction with wider society. In general, (sweeper) parents experience lack of social interaction. However, parents who work in a lower official post has little interaction with other office staff, sweepers working as cleaning worker at different office has the scope to understand the value of education while sweeper working on the road are devoid of these opportunities. However, all children interviewed reported that they get no help from their parents in their school work.

Parents with few years of schooling tend to spend money and undertake more hardship for their children's education, than parents who are illiterate. Sanker-1(46), a helper to electrician in a govt. office, sent both of his sons to two private institutes so that they can change their life. Conversely, parents of Karni Lal (16), who were illiterate, didn't want him to study further and were continuously putting pressure on him to leave school and join a job.

Findings show that literacy rate among Dalit parents is extremely poor and they had no access to mainstream educational institutes in their childhood. They were deprived of education and it now affects their children's education.

## **Social relationships and Networks**

It seems to be important to revisit the reasons these on-Bengali Dalits were brought here from India to understand their social relationships and networks. The forms of jobs, they were brought here to do, were undesirable to the local people. Consequently, their identity was constructed as 'alien' to the wider society and was stigmatized as 'dirty' and 'polluting'. This stigmatization has been continued inter-generationally as their occupation to their progeny. From their advent to Bangladesh they have been facing a 'rupture of social bond' which de Haan (2000) terms as primary definition of social exclusion. They are untouchable since then. They have always been excluded as practice of untouchability prohibits the 'social and relational interaction' of Dalit people with wider society (Kurian 2014).

Findings of the study show that they face widespread discrimination from the dominant Bengali society. Their alienation in the form of restricted living place and confinement to menial occupation continue their stigmatization. Consequently, they perceive their status as 'inferior' in relation to wider society and show a tendency to avoid interaction with mainstream people. They don't send their children to government primary schools where most of the students are from mainstream society. They don't feel safe sending their children there and also try to avoid interaction with the school administration and teachers. When asked the reason Dalit parents didn't send their children to government primary schools, Sanker-1 (46) explained, "Sending children to government primary school requires parents to go to the school and meet the school administration. Our people don't want to go there".

It is important to note that most of the Dalits are Hindu by religion and Hindu community represents only 8.54% (BBS 2015: 51) of the total population. Therefore, Hindu Dalits are minority within minority. Being minority, Hindu community is supposed to maintain cohesion among them. But the study found that caste Hindus are even more discriminatory to Dalits. It could be due to religious belief in 'untouchability'. However, findings show that Dalits still face considerable resistance in entering temples where caste Hindus offer their worship. Data from group interview shows that being all children from Hindu Dalit community, Mirunjula Sweeper colony government school was lacking a Hindu teacher to teach students Hindu religious studies, a compulsory course for fourth and fifth grade students. The post for Hindu religious teacher had been vacant for unknown time period (teachers could not confirm if there was any Hindu teacher ever).

The study also finds caste practice among them. Though their common identity is ‘sweeper’, they bear different caste identities and maintain caste hierarchy and practice untouchability among them. “I cannot sit on the bed in a family who are higher than us. Change of religion has not changed this practice”, James (27), a converted Christian, was explaining caste practice within the community. The manifestation of caste practice among them was also found in selecting/electing their panchayat<sup>13</sup> head. The panchayat president was describing how he became president-

“My maternal uncle used to be the head of panchayat. After him, people primarily selected me for the same post as I am from comparatively upper caste. Later on, I contested for the post of president of the committee and my people elected me for the post” (Naidu 54).

Caste practice among them manifests its prevalence among Hindu community. However, the study also finds some positive changes that took place over time. Dalit parents reported that in their childhood, Dalit people did not have access to public spaces like- common playgrounds, restaurants, parks, etc. but now they don’t face such problems. Though this types of untouchability are heard to be prevalent in some other places but Dalits in Dhaka city now don’t face such problem.

This section shows that Dalits experience a widespread discrimination from main stream society and due to caste and occupation based discrimination Dalits experience a rupture of social relationships and network with main-stream society.

## **Labour market exclusion: effect on education and social integration**

“What is the benefit of higher education?” was a frequently asked question during my field work. All of the Dalit interviewed reported that they don’t have access to labour market. When asked how did the employers know your identity, an identical answer from everyone, our address ‘sweeper colony’.

Many of the Dalits, particularly the educated one, don’t want to involve in their traditional occupation as they are being stigmatized because of this occupation. In the past, they had no alternative as the previous generations were not educated and qualified for white collar jobs. But the situation is changing. Rate of education is increasing so is the number of Dalits with higher educational qualification. But their access to white collar job has not been opened yet. Bijoy (27), a graduate, was describing his experience,

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<sup>13</sup> A system of community governance.

After my graduation my mother took to his boss and requested him to provide me with a job. He offered me to join as sweeper or peon.... May be he looked at my caste not my qualification... Being a graduate how can I join in such a low position? I would have joined even if he would offer me in the post of clerk. Is this what I struggled for my whole life?... This is why our parents and fellow juniors get frustrated. Because they know whatever their educational qualification are, they will not be appointed in a good position. (Bijoy 27).

The case of Bijoy shows how Dalits are being treated in the labour market. Labour market exclusion could be explained by what Kabeer (2000:86) points out as 'religiously sanctioned segregation and ordering to occupations'. Lack of social relations and networks could be another explanation. Studying social content of labour market in Dhaka city, Opel (2000) argues that access to employment is highly dependent on ones' position in social network and kinship relation. This could further be explained by Max Weber's (1968) theory on 'Economy and Society'. Weber explained how social closure reduces inferior or groups access to economy. He also argued that status group "seek to monopolize values of economic opportunities" (as cited in Thorat and Attewell 2007: 4142).

However, labour market exclusion seems to have a deep impact on their education and social exclusion. Being educated, Dalits have to join lower jobs which they could have joined with a lower educational qualification. "How will you feel if you find that your friends are in good positions but you, with same educational qualification, are a sweeper? Asked Sankar-1 (46). Labour market exclusion increases probability of unemployability among young Dalits. "After being educated one doesn't want to join as sweeper at the same time he doesn't get a decent job. This make our people not to pursue higher education." Sankar-1 added.

Limited or no access to labour market makes parents decide not to educate their children. Becker (1964) and Mincer (1958) argue that investment in education is made with an expectation of future return. Dalit parents find no prospect for their children's future in the labour market and end up with the decision that they should not send their children to school.

## **Self perceptions of Dalit parents and children**

Most of the Dalit parents believe that the Creator made them lower caste and they should stick at the position they were born in. As one of the 12<sup>th</sup> grade student explained,

"Our parents think they are sweepers and their children will be sweeper. They think that we are lower caste people so sweeping is our pro-

fession by birth. We should be stuck to our traditional profession. This is determined by God. So they don't want to educate their children" (Teja, 17).

They are not conscious about their rights as citizens. Many of them said they were happy with the life they were living. The president of panchayat was describing, "Government is ensuring our fundamental needs such as electricity, water, gas, accommodation, etc." Naidu, 54).

Most of the parents send their children to school as the post of 'sweeper', now, requires educational qualification of eighth 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Parents usually don't try to know whether their children going to school or not. It doesn't bother them if their children go to school or not. "They want their children to complete 8<sup>th</sup> grade as now the post of sweeper requires this level of qualification" (Parul, key informant). Group interview also confirms it. Parents are not conscious about their children educational outcome or attendance at school. As a result, absenteeism was found common among them and very often they come late which leads to grade repetition and finally dropout.

In many cases, this perception is transmitted inter-generationally from parents to their children. Their children know that they will take their parents' places in future and they don't need to invest much effort for educational achievement. When asked about his future, Raju (16 years), a dropped out student clearly mentioned 'I will assume my mothers' job soon'. Overall consciousness about their future was also found very low among Dalit students. During my field work, I meet few students who were reluctantly awaiting their HSC result. Students, in general, start studying harder after their HSC examination as admission into a university is highly competitive. Last year (2015-16 session), 2,54,404 students competed against 6,685 seats for admission to Dhaka university, a leading educational institute in Dhaka (*The Daily Star* 2015). However, these students seemed to be unaware about the competition or didn't have confidence to compete for admission to public universities.

Findings clearly indicate that as they have long been deprived of the rights they are entitled to as a citizen, they have internalized these deprivations as natural. The fixed form of occupations with degraded accommodation not only construct their identity as different types of 'citizen' to wider society; they also internalize same identity which bar them to act as a citizen because they don't know that they have agency and they can act (Kabeer 2016: 99).

## Cultural life and Traditional practice

Traditional and cultural living style of Dalit have manifold effect on their economic vulnerability, health and their children's education.

Legally, sweepers were allowed to drink liquor when they used to remove waste manually from offices and private homes as drainage system was not developed. This practice stopped in 1983 (Rasheed 2014: 7) but their habit of taking liquor has not been changed. Findings clearly indicate that liquor consumption has been a part of their culture. They have different celebrations like- marriage, veneration, birthday etc. in these celebration, liquor is arranged where even young male member of the community can also drink liquor and develop a habit for and dependency on it. Now legal regime doesn't allow them to drink liquor. But still a significant share of their income is spent on liquor consumption. These poor people cannot afford good quality liquor therefore consume locally produced liquor which result in morbidity among them and increases their medical expenditure.

These festivity has manifold negative impact on their children's education. Firstly, they usually spend huge amount of money in marriage. Brides' families have to spend more than the grooms' families. As their income is very low, they usually take loan from their rich neighbours. There are few people who have money and operate loan business. As formal banking requires collateral for loan, they don't have access to banks for loan so they have to go to informal loaner who charge huge interest. Previously, the rate was 10% per month now it reduced to 5% per month which means 60% interest per year. Once they take loan, it become very difficult to get rid of that loan which further weaken their financial condition.

From one side they live very compactly and from the other they celebrate different festivals which means that they have regular festivals. During the festivals they use loud speakers making huge noise which eventually create such a chaotic situation that no one can study. In celebrating these festivals, they don't care their children's education be it the examination time or normal.

“During festivals, the whole colony becomes a chaotic place. Our people don't listen to each other. They don't care about our education” (Ravina 14).

Thus findings show that their traditional and cultural practice affect their life. It is important to note that though liquor transportation, sell and consumption is strictly restricted, liquor is sold in their colony and administration seems not to be concerned about it.

## **Gender differences in access to education**

Educational development among girls' were found poorer than boys'. Along with factors common for both sexes, there are some other elements that cause gender discrimination in accessing education and affect girl children's access to education.

Poor access to basic amenities makes Dalits' household chores complicated and time consuming and compels girls to assume a major part of household responsibilities. Collecting water for household use takes considerable amount of time everyday and also requires someone to be standby for a particular time. Similarly, a mother is required to go outside her home to use toilet, take bath or wash their clothes and she cannot leave her small kids or person with illness unattended. So she needs her daughter's help. This is particularly true for families where women work outside. Girls often cannot attend schools rather stay home and manage the family. Seven out of eight Dalit girls interviewed reported that they had to share household responsibility with their mothers.

"My mother leave home at the dawn. I have to look after my brother and my sick father. Even when my mother come back home I have to help her... As my brother is a kid and father is sick so we consistently need someone in the home". (Pinky 13)

Second element that push girl children out of school is early marriage. Marrying the daughter off at an early age is a general norm for them. If a girl is not married at an early age, people start thinking that she might have some problems and it becomes difficult to find a husband for her. They have a custom of celebrating girls' onset of menstruation. Parents arrange a programme so that people around know about her adulthood and can help parents to marry the girl off and withdraw their daughters from school.

"I stopped sending my daughter to school because she has been grown up (13 years). Boys may harass her on the way to school. What is the necessity of her higher education as she will manage her household chores in her in-law's home? Besides, I need her to help me in the household chores." (Maramma, 30).

In Bangladesh, child marriage was one of the major problems until few years back. But strict enforcement of the law related to child marriage has decreased female child marriage to a significant level. Yet, evidences show that child marriages among they are still high and these girls are deprived from legal protection. Child marriage causes dropout of girl children.

Another important element that excludes girl children from school at her puberty is physical insecurity and face saving in the community. Dalit girls were reported to be harassed both by Dalit and non-Dalit boys on the street. Parent don't want to let anything happen to their girls which may cause defamation in the community. Besides, romantic relationships among Dalit teenagers are commonplace and they elope if their parents disagree to their relationships. Although they live in the colony for generation, they don't like the colony environment and parents don't want their children to marry someone

from this colony. They send their children to their relatives in India for marriage. Raman (46) who himself was married to an Indian woman, sent his daughter to his brother living there. He was describing the situation-

“See the environment here. It is not worth living a decent life. Its not worth living. I don’t like this place and don’t want to marry my daughter off with someone here” (Raman 46).

The third element is the way Dalit parents weigh the value of female education. To them, education does not add any value to their daughters’ lives. Although a good number of Dalit women are working outside, sending women to work is not a common practice among them. These women had to take over the place of another family member in absence of eligible male. Their common norm destines girls to household chores for which education is not required. Besides, they often fall in problem to find appropriate husband for their educated daughter as they are less docile to their husbands than the illiterate one. Economic vulnerability also disproportionately affects girl children’s education. Parents prefer to send their sons to school instead of their daughters.

This chapter shows that Dalits experience a ‘differentiated citizenship’ and enjoy a limited or different pattern of access to public services. Confinement to fixed forms of menial jobs and degraded housing with poor access to basic amenities manifest their differentiated citizenship. Both the government job they do and the government colony they live in are stigmatized and lead them to a life of humiliation. Their differentiated citizenship causes rights violation, multiple deprivations and continue excluding them from wider society. As a result, they internalize all these deprivations as natural and remain silent against their rights violation. Their perceived identity makes them think education ‘not important’ and they continue the life they have been leading for generations.

## **Chapter 4 : Discrimination within the education system: Experience at school**

Key focus of this chapter is the experience of those Dalit children who do go to school and how they are treated in the school by their peers, teachers and school administration. This chapter starts with caste stigma and its effects on peer relationship followed by discrimination by teachers and language constraints that they feel in the school environment. This chapter shows that their language, culture and residence they live in reveals their sweeper identity and creates space for discrimination and humiliation at the school environment.

### **Caste stigma and complex relationship with Peers**

Dalit students experience a mixed peer relation in the educational institutes. Not all peer students from mainstream/non-Dalit society behave in the same way. Some are friendly while others are rude and discriminatory. However, all of the Dalit students interviewed have manifested negative impression about their non-Dalit peers. Students from mainstream society usually tease Dalit students, and often behave rudely by abusing and insulting their family identity, parents' profession and their caste. Because of their negative behaviour, many students leave school. Pinku Das (10) who left government primary school said the reason.

“I changed Narinda primary school as my Bengali classmates used to humiliate me in front of other students as I am from sweeper colony. I did not like to go to that school. So I changed that school and joined the new one (Pinki Das, 10).

Few students who attend government primary schools reported to be maltreated and harassed by their classmates on the ground of their caste identity, parents' occupation and the place [sweeper colony] they live in. ‘Sweeper colony’ itself has been stigmatized over time as it indicates a place where lower caste people live in. It doesn't matter what their parents' current profession/occupations are, they are from sweeper colony so their identity is sweeper's sons/daughters. One of the children expressed his experience in a government primary school,

“Bengali students pass comments when they see or meet us on our identity and our parent's occupation. They tease and humiliate us in different ways” (Rekha, 13).

All the Dalit children interviewed have either faced humiliation or have known from their senior students about humiliation Dalit children usually face

in educational institutes. Discrimination and humiliation by students from mainstream society make them feel insecure and vulnerable and they develop a sense of inferiority. Because of this insecurity and inferiority complex they usually join school in a group. A single child hardly joins a class and leave school when his/her peer students from the colony drop out. Humiliation on the ground of caste-identity in association with the fear of physical insecurity bar them from going school alone. So they usually drop out when they fall alone.

“I stopped going to school as all of my classmates from our colony dropped out. I don’t like to go to school alone. If I go to school alone whom will I talk to or mix with” (Venktesh 17)

This problem is more severe in the primary level as their identity is easily disclosed due to language at this stage. Upper grade students who are attending institutes far from their colony, usually don’t disclose their identity to their peers in fear of humiliation and discrimination. As they have already faced discrimination or they know the narratives of humiliation, they always try to hide their caste identity and the place they live in. These students keep themselves isolated in many cases as friendship may cause disclosure of their identity and they might be victim of humiliation or maltreatment by their peers.

### **(Covert) discrimination by the teachers**

Findings from both individual interviews and key informant interviews show that Dalit children, nowadays, are not discriminated in the admission process as Dalit parents experienced in their childhood. None of the Dalit parents interviewed found to attend mainstream school. None of the Dalit children interviewed felt discrimination during their admission process. However, evidences show that Dalit children are not welcomed and are discouraged indirectly. Findings indicate that many of the teachers are discriminatory. One of the participants of the group interview as describing the situation.

“No teacher wants to come to this school.... Even they don’t want to come near to the gate of this colony. They think they will become dirty if they come here. ... Even they discriminate against us as we work in this colony school. When we meet with our colleagues working in other schools, they view us in a different way as we are teaching sweepers’ children, though we are not from this community (Group Interview with primary school teachers)”

Findings from this interview show how mainstream Muslim teachers were stigmatized as they were working in a primary school located in a sweeper colony. All the students of ‘Mirunjalla sweeper colony primary school’ were from Hindu community. Religious studies for fourth and fifth grade students are compulsory but the school had no Hindu teacher to teach those courses.

“In our school, we have no Hindu teacher so we have to teach Hindu religious studies.... First we ourselves read and try to understand the text and then teach them. It is pretty difficult for us as we have no background knowledge about Hindu religion. Most importantly, we are Muslim and believe in Allah not in gods and goddesses. It is difficult to teach something you don’t believe in. ... Though there are many Hindu teachers in other schools nearby. But no Hindu teachers are coming to this school. We requested the authority to send a Hindu teacher but for unknown reason, it is not happening (Group Interview).

It is important to note that there were many Hindu teachers<sup>14</sup> in the neighbouring school (group interview) where most of the students are from Muslim community. But this school was lacking a Hindu teacher where all students are Hindu. However, Muslim teachers were showing tolerance to untouchability to some extent. Yet, they were not found free from caste-based discrimination and untouchability.

“I don’t like to have food from them. Sometimes they bring some foods specially birthday cakes. I don’t eat it. It is not that I hate them, but still I don’t feel good to have food from them... that they are dirty is entrenched in my mind and difficult to put it aside” (a group interview participant)

This interview shows that though they are teaching Dalit children they also practice untouchability which indicates that Dalit students are not welcomed. This covert discrimination might have negative impact on their education and schooling. One of the main reasons behind overtly non discriminatory behaviour could be government’s inclusive education policy. The Education Policy 2010 emphasises quality primary education for all children and also on training of the teachers to ensure the implementation of the policy (Ahmed et al. 2012:132).

## **Constraints of mother language and language of school**

Language was found a constraint for Dalit students who have their own mother language other than Bengali. Although Telegu Dalits have been living for around two centuries and are surrounded by mainstream people, due to their enclaved life since they have been brought here and lack of social integration, their language and culture have not been changed. They use their own language, Telegu, in their everyday life. Their language and culture are further re-

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<sup>14</sup> No disaggregated statistics available on number of primary teachers by religion.

inforced by the recreational arrangements they have. Their main mode of in-home recreation is watching satellite television and they mainly watch Telegu movies and songs. So children learn Telegu which is different from the language practiced outside their colony. When they start schooling, they study in Bengali language which is almost unknown to them. So they have to start afresh which is very difficult for a child of 5 or 6 years old specially when there is no one in the family to help them overcome it.

“They (Dalit children) don’t understand Bengali clearly. Their day to day learning starts with their own language (Telegu). But in the school they are to study two different languages (Bengali and English) which is difficult for at this early stage of life... They also can not take help from their family members as they are illiterate” (Group interview).

Sanker-2 (30), one of the highest achievers from this colony and is currently working as a Teacher at the community school where all of the students are either Telegu speaking or Kanpuri speaking, thinks language an important factor that discourage children and contribute drop out.

“Teachers don’t understand their accent; Dalit children also fail to understand their teachers’ language clearly at the early stage. At the beginning we have to use signs to make them understand what we want to tell them. They are to learn everything in a new language and it is easily understood how difficult it is. So they become frustrated and frustration leads them to drop out from school. ...” (Sanker-2, 30).

Their mother language not only makes it difficult for them to switch to the language used in school but also reveals their identity to their peers and create another space for discrimination.

“Bengali students can easily know our identity by our language and accent and make fun of us and our language” (Keya Biswas 12).

Findings show that Dalit children’s mother tongue not only makes it difficult for them to switch to the language used in school but also reveals their Dalit identity to their peers and creates another space for discrimination.

Thus this chapter shows that dalit children experience limited access to school, and are discriminated and humiliated on the ground of their caste identity which is gross violation of CRC (Article 28). Findings also indicate insecurity and unhealthy schooling environment, humiliation on the ground of caste identity which is violation of ICERD. Findings show dalit children’s caste, ancestral occupation and their living place construct a ‘different identity’ of the Dalit students’ in the school. This identity create space for maltreatment and humiliation by their peers and discrimination by their teachers and leads them to dropout. Dalit children themselves perceive ‘an inferior’ status that make their stay at school uncomfortable and insecure. As a result, they don’t want to join a class alone. Thus one student’s drop out impact on other students

schooling. This is particularly true for girls.

## **Chapter 5 : Changes and strategies to inclusion**

This chapter is about the changes that have taken place in the Dalit community as well as in Bangladesh and the changing awareness of the Dalit community and the use of their individual and collective agencies against discrimination.

Changes have taken place both in the social interaction and in educational institutions. Discrimination is not overt now as it was before. Chowdhury (2009), Ali (2014) and Islam and Parvez (2013) found that Dalit student face discrimination on the ground of their caste-identity during their admission to school. Findings of this study show that Dalit parents experienced denial of admission to mainstream educational institutions while this generation (children) don't face such denial. Group interview and key informant interviews (with teachers) confirm that at the primary level, teachers have been given the responsibility to trace all children who are not attending to or have not enrolled into school within their respective areas and to take initiatives to bring them school. In the high school level, there are legal obligations to admit students who have passed primary level (Group Interview). By this time, Dalit have also started using their individual and collective agencies to resist discriminations.

### **Changes in the Sweeper colony: Changing self perceptions**

Intergenerational data show that Dalit parents faced considerable denial to mainstream educational institutes, no individual interview, group interview or key informants interview showed current incident of denial. However, findings also show that discrimination existed until few years back.

“Few years ago when I was a student studying at a school. One of our teachers used to show negative attitude to students from our colony and beat us on trivial issues. Then we (group of Dalit people) went to the headmaster and complaint against that teacher. Head sir assured us necessary action (Romeo 17; dropout Dalit children).

This case shows how they used collective agency to resist discrimination against them. A sense of consciousness was found to be started among them and they are becoming conscious about their citizen rights and are using their agency to resist denial of their rights to some extent.

“Two or three years back, one of our students was seeking admission to a nearby high school after completing his fifth grade here. The

school refused to admit the student to that school on the ground of his parental occupation. His father, a sweeper at the secretariat, protested and managed to issue a letter by a high official directing the school administration to admit him. Then that student got admission in that school. But the situation is changed now. We did not hear any such denial in recent days" (Group interview).

One of the key informants, assistant teacher in a high school, also confirmed it. She informed that even five years back her school used to refuge children from Dalit community to admit but now they allow. She pointed out 'legal obligations' and 'consciousness among teachers about the right of the Dalit' as reasons behind this change.

Positive changes also found in their life style. Interview data suggest that previously all most all of the male adult Dalit used to drink liquor, they knew their job and liquor. But a good number of male Dalit parents don't touch liquor today. Liquor addition among young Dalit is even less than the past. They are conscious about the consequence of liquor addiction.

"Our ancestors did nothing for them nor did they do anything for us. This is why we are suffering now. If you follow the same life style, if we drink liquor, our future generation will also suffer." (James, 27).

Although most of the Dalit people are still ignorant of the importance of education, few have a different view about education and about life. They don't want to do the same thing their ancestors did.

"I want to live a decent life, do a decent job after completing my education. I am studying so that I can get a desk job. I don't want to take the broom for my whole life" (Karni Lal 16).

Many other Dalit youths like Karni Lal are evolving who don't want to take the broom. They want a life of dignity and respect and to get rid of the stigma that they have been bearing historically

## **Individual and Collective initiatives for change**

Traditionally the Dalit community maintains a panchayat committee, now known as 'Telegu Sweeper Colony Welfare Committee', to resolve their own problems. The committee is normally elected democratically for two years. Previously, the panchayat committee used to resolve conflicting issues among them. Panchayat committee now focuses more on development and welfare of the community. The committee has a secretary for education. The current secretary was found very enthusiastic and up and doing. In 2015, he sent, along with his own son, 4 Dalit students to a private, expensive and well known col-

lege. He motivated parents of these students to spend on their education and also managed the institute to get discount on tuition fees of these students.

To motivate children for education, the welfare committee started to arrange a reception to celebrate the result of those students who are doing well in public examinations. The committee was well aware of the liquor addiction and was trying to sell liquor in the colony.

Few educated Dalits are also contributing to educational development of the community and have been source of inspiration for others. Bijoy (27) and Sanker-2 (30), two graduates working as teachers in the community school, were found to help fellow Dalit students in their study. In fact, they [Bijoy & Sanker] have been role model for younger Dalit students. Some of them started thinking that they can also get decent jobs once they complete their education.

## **NGO interventions**

It was surprising that no NGO other than QF was found working for Telegu sweeper community while there are thousands of local, national, transnational and international NGOs working both in rural and urban areas in Bangladesh. QF is not a conventional NGO; it is rather involved in different social activities. However, 'Rajdhani Adorsho Bidyapith' has played a very important role in increasing education rate in this colony. FH started the school in 1982 and at the beginning the school was known as FH school. When it initiated the school, the educational development was extremely poor among these Telegu sweepers and neither parents nor children of the colony were interested. FH not only arranged free school for them but also provided free school uniform, books, all other educational materials required and free meals to attract them to school. As a result, school enrolment rate started to increase in slow pace.

FH wanted to build capacity of the community to run the school of their own once it stopped funding (Quantum Bulletin 2015). So it wanted the community to pay tuition fees to initiate a culture of payment. The community failed to ensure required amount of tuition fee for the survival of the school without the financial support from outside. As a result, in 2012, when FH handed over the school to the community and stopped funding, the school was about to stop functioning (Islam et al. 2015: 41). Later on, the community leaders contacted QF and explained the situation of the school. The Foundation agreed to undertake a major financial responsibility and started funding from November 2015 (Quantum Bulletin 2015). One very important strategy that FH took was to develop human resources from the colony to join the school as teachers and run it according to their need and at the same time to create hope in them that they can also do decent jobs once they are educated. FH succeeded to achieve that goal. At present, three (03) out of eight (08)

teaching staffs of that school are from this community and have been a source of inspiration to other students. Having teachers from their own community and of their own language has also been proved to be advantageous for the students as they can easily communicate with these teachers and share their problems. They also feel more comfortable now.

## **Dalit activism in Bangladesh**

There is no reliable evidence about when and how Dalit activism started in Bangladesh. However, from websites of the major NGOs working in this field, it could be known that most of the Dalit right-based NGOs and CSOs started working at the beginning of 90s soon after democracy was reinstated in 1991. The most important contribution of these NGOs is to help Dalits appreciate their inherent dignity as human being and also to frame, claim and realize their rights (Hossain 2016). NGOs also helped Dalits to develop community-based organizations (CBO) at grassroots level and connect them to national level. As a result, organizations like- Bangladesh Harijans Oikya Parishad, Bangladesh Dalit Parishad, Antyaja Parishad, and etc. (Islam et al. 2015) were developed and continue to contribute to Dalit activism in different ways like- bringing consciousness and developing confidence, cohesion and unity among Dalits (Hossain 2016). Being socially excluded, economically deprived, educationally disadvantaged and living out outside the power structure, Dalits hardly had a voice to raise (BDERM n.d.). A collaboration between NGOs and CBOs helped Dalits to carry on their movement. However, the role and activities of many NGOs working in this field are not unquestionable rather there are widespread allegations against them. When I was visiting Mirunjula Sweeper Colony, I came to know that some NGOs were working there. I asked Rakesh, a 27 years old Economics graduate living in that colony, about the types of programmes and activities of NGOs working in that colony. He expressed his wrath against NGOs and said,

“You see they talk about cleanliness; they make toilets but don’t initiate activities that will help us get rid of this situation. This is all business. They receive huge amount of money from donors and spent very less amount for us. All their activities are no the paper not in the field (Rakesh 27).

Despite these allegations, evidences show that NGOs continue to play important role in Dalit activism. By this time Dalit activism has gained remarkable achievement and has been succeeded to draw attention of both political leaders and academics on the issue. As a result, five public universities have already introduced quota for Dalit students at undergraduate and masters level while some other public universities are on the way to introduce same quota (*The Daily Star* 2015). An anti-discriminatory law has also been drafted (Islam et al. 2015: vii). The government also introduced a policy for them in 2013. But

the definition that the policy adopted for 'Dalit' doesn't correspond to the definition of Dalit in the literature. Besides it doesn't provide any clear idea about who Dalits are. Most importantly few people know about the term Dalit. Telugu Sweepers don't introduce them as *harijan* neither do they introduce them as Dalit. The question that arise is 'who are they?' According to them, they are '*jaat* sweeper'. But the policy has no provision for *jaat* sweeper. This ambiguity of definition could exclude some Dalit communities and may also create room for misuse of the definition.

This chapter shows that change in self-perception about education and the way of life has begun. NGO interventions and Dalit activism have played a crucial role in bringing such changes. As a result, Dalits have started to use their individual and collective agencies to some extent. Findings also show that a significant change has taken place by this time. Some parents are trying to educate their children and good number of young dalit don't want to assume their ancestral job. They want decent job and a life with dignity. Educated dalits are contributing to the change. Some role models are emerging who showing others the way to be followed.

## Chapter 6 : Conclusion

This final chapter answers all questions of this research briefly. It also suggests policies required to ensure Dalit children's access to education and scope for further research. The chapter ends with a brief over all conclusion.

### Brief answers to the specific questions

In this study, I have tried to answer four questions- What are the reasons Dalit children do not go to the school or dropout from school? What is the experience of Dalit children who do go to school? What are the challenges Dalits face in relation to livelihoods? What is the experience and perception of Dalit parents of these children about the education and the exclusion of their children from school? While analysing findings, I have used social exclusion framework linking it with the concept of human right based approach, multiple deprivations and social citizenship rights. The key findings of the study are income poverty in association with social exclusion and multiple deprivations on the ground of work and caste-based identity exclude Dalit children from education while lack of education in association with caste and occupation based discrimination exclude them from labour market. However, this is not a simple process rather a complex interaction of different factors is involved in the process.

Income poverty due to confinements of Dalits to menial jobs limits Dalit parents' capacity to spend on their children's education. Parental low education and job status adversely affect children's education as both of these factors have effect on income and on consciousness level. Parents' low education level also makes their children's education costlier as children get no help from parents for their homework which requires costly private tuition. Unfitting home environment leaves very little or no scope for their study in the home while cultural elements further degrade the situation. Girl children's education is further affected by poor access to basic amenities, child marriage, insecurity, fear of defamation, gender bias and traditional perception about girls' future.

Language, culture and the living place (sweeper colony) unveil their sweeper identity and cause discrimination in the school environment. Humiliation and maltreatment by their peers on the ground of caste, ancestral occupation and the living place create a ground for humiliation and maltreatment by the peers which make them feel insecure and inferior while discrimination by teachers make them uncomfortable in the school environment. Language constraint makes their education difficult.

Dalits have limited or no livelihood choice to make. Their caste identity forced them to undesirable menial jobs. These jobs further stigmatize them. Involvement in stigmatized jobs and confinement to enclaved life bar their social integration. Hence, they lack social relations and networks. Caste and occupation-based discriminations in association with lack of social relations and networks with wider society exclude them from labour market. Labour market exclusion forces them again to menial jobs. As a result, their educational credentials fail to get their access to labour market. Labour market exclusion makes parents unwilling to invest in their children's education amidst their economic hardship. It also makes Dalit children reluctant to educational achievement. Access to their traditional occupation has also been difficult as number of Dalit has increased over time and poor section from mainstream Bengali people are also competing for these jobs.

Dalit parents experienced denial of access to mainstream educational institutes in their childhood. Social stigmatization and practice of untouchability were severe many times in their childhood. They did not have access to places like restaurants, parks, common playgrounds etc. Now they feel less restriction in accessing these public places. However, internalization of deprivations as natural, their own belief in caste-system and their perceived self-identity as '*jaat* sweeper' encourage them to continue their traditional occupation inter-generationally. Besides, lack of land entitlement leaves no choice other than working with city corporation. So, to ensure accommodation, most of them don't bother to send their children to school or if they dropout. Most importantly labour market exclusion makes them feel investment in education is wastage and don't want to educate their children.

These factors are often interconnected and mutually reinforcing. As mentioned earlier Dalits are mainly identified by the menial occupations they are involved in. Their occupations reinforce stigmatization and cause discrimination in the school and also exclude them from labour market. Exclusion from labour market forces them to these stigmatized (traditional) occupations, cause income poverty and bars their integration to wider society. Traditional occupation with poor income leads to economic vulnerability which limit their capacity to invest on education. Poor income that comes from their menial jobs and social exclusion compel them to live in an unfitting environment limiting their children's scope for education. Thus they remain uneducated. Their lack of education keeps them unconscious about their rights to use their agency as citizenship and internalize their deprivations as normal. It is like a vicious cycle which goes on barring them from breaking the barrier of poverty and social exclusion.

## Ensuring social citizenship for Dalits: Policy implications

Dalits have been victims of different citizenship rights violations which combinedly bar dalit children's access to education. Lack of education played importantly role in excluding them from labour market while both education and access to labour market are human rights and citizenship rights. HRBA hold government responsible for any types of rights violation (Shelton 2014). A HRBA requires the state to take effective measures to ensure that rights are respected and protected. To ensure Dalit children's access to education, the following initiatives could be taken into account.

Caste needs to be incorporated in census data so that disaggregated information could be obtained and appropriate measures could be initiated.

Real income for Dalit families is required to be increased through extending social safety net programme in the forms of cash or kind (food) incentives for enrolment, regular attendance and educational outcome. Special attention should be given for girls' education.

Establishing government primary schools in their mother tongue for every Dalit community is not feasible as there has been resource constraint and there are many small Dalit communities with different languages. Instead, community schools, in partnership with reputable NGOs working in this field, could be initiated. In those schools, teachers should be appointed from the respective community. It will help students to overcome language barrier and create an aspiration among them.

Student-friendly learning environment is to be ensured in mainstream institutes through anti-discriminatory rule, appointment of qualified and dedicated teaching staff and proper training of school staff. A non discriminatory values is to be developed among non-Dalit children through ethical teaching.

Affirmation actions is required to ensure Dalits students access to higher educational institutions so that they can prepare themselves for labour market. Emphasis on technical education can also help to a great extent as Bangladesh lacks technical personnel (BANBEIS 2015).

To ensure labour market inclusion three-fold initiatives could be taken quota system in the government jobs, entrepreneurship development among Dalits and training and logistic support for self-employment. Both parents and students would be interested to education when it will bring tangible benefits for them.

Activities of NGOs should be regulated on the priority basis. Government should initiate policies about NGOs and CSOs activities so that their in-

tervention could be more fruitful for the improvement of the Dalit people in Bangladesh. At the same time accountability and transparency are also to be ensured.

Accommodation with minimum standard is to be ensured. Their accommodations are needed to be merged with wider society for social integration. Modernization of sewerage and cleaning system may also help to remove untouchability stigma to some extent.

Rather than mass awareness programmes, activities like workshops, group discussions, audio-visual display would be more effective to bring awareness among dalits.

## **Scope for further research**

Main focus of the study was on access to education of the Dalit children. I also tried to shed light on labour market exclusion and housing issues. For the future research, I would recommend to focus on the wider aspects of labour market exclusion, housing and health issues of dalit community.

## **Concluding remarks**

Findings of the study shows that the lack of access to education of dalit children is a result of a group of interconnected factors that produce a situation where if even dalit children go to school, dropout. A right based approach, therefore, requires all these factors to be taken into account to effectively redress the lack of access to education of dalit children in Bangladesh. Merely, free education will not produce any good result. Because there are many more issues that will continue excluding them from education. For example, subsidized education will not improve housing condition that leave no space for them to study while education system requires even a student of first grade to study in the home. Similarly, quota for higher education may also not be useful unless their entry to labour market is ensured through an affirmative action.

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## Appendix I

### **Guideline for Individual Interview**

**Study Title: *Multiple Deprivations: Schooling Experience of Dalit Children in Bangladesh***

**Thematic question 1:**

***What are the reasons Dalit children do not go to the school or dropout from school?***

**Dynamic questions:**

How old are you?  
How many years had/have you been in school?  
What types of problems have you faced in getting admission into school?  
What are the reasons for going/not going/dropping out from school?  
How did/do you feel in the school?  
How do you perceive schooling and education?  
What are your parents' levels of education?  
Tell me about your home environment.  
What kind of problem do you feel studying in your home?  
Are/were your parents inspiring and helpful?  
Do/did your parents keep you busy in other activities during your schooling time?  
What types of economic activities are you involved in (part time/full time)? How do you contribute to your family earning?

**Thematic question 2:**

***What is the experience of children from Dalit community who do go to school?***

**Dynamic Questions:**

What kind of difficulty do/did you face in attending school (Language etc.)?  
Do you participate in co-curricular activities?  
What types of discriminatory behaviour were/are you experiencing in the school?  
Do/did you attend school timely and regularly?  
How is your relationship with your peers?  
What kind of relation do you maintain with your teachers?  
What types of difficulty do you face in going to your school?

**Thematic question 3:**

***What are the challenges young Dalits face in relation to livelihoods?***

**Dynamic Questions:**

What changes have taken place in your traditional occupation and why?  
What types of qualification do a person need to join this occupation?  
What are the reasons of losing your ancestral jobs to other people?  
What are the alternative livelihoods options?  
To what extent are these alternative livelihoods sustainable?  
How accessible are these alternative livelihoods to sweeper people?  
Are these alternative livelihoods better than the traditional occupation?  
Why are the people of sweeper community adopting alternative livelihood?

#### **Thematic Quation-4**

***What is the experience and perception of Dalit parents of these children about the education and the exclusion of their children from school?***

#### **Dynamic questions:**

How old are you?

Would you tell me your education and professional life.

Why didn't you go to school in your childhood? Or, why were you dropped out?

What types of barriers did you face in the way to your education?

Tell me about your housing facilities and access to basic amenities.

Had you faced any discrimination in the school environment due to your lower caste?

What is the mean of your livelihood and reasons for adopting this livelihood?

What is your level of income and is it sufficient to run your family?

How many members are there in your family?

How do you think education could make thing different in your life?

How many school age children do you have?

What are their educational statuses- attending/not attending school/their level of education?

Why don't you send your children to school?

What is your perception about your children's education and their future?

Why are your children dropping out from school?

What changes have been taken place in terms of caste-based discrimination between your time and this time?

What are the reasons for such changes?

#### **Appendix II**

## **Guideline for KII**

### **Guideline for KII with teachers**

How would you explain the low enrolment rate and high dropout rate of Dalit children?

What kind of adverse environment do they face in the school environment?

What kind of discriminatory behaviour do they experience from teacher, school administration and peers?

Is there any member in the school managing committee from Dalit community or other lower caste Hindu communities? If no, could you tell the reason?

Could you tell me how many Dalit children are getting scholarship given by the government?

Do you have any teacher from Dalit community or other lower caste Hindu communities?

How would you evaluate overall performance of students from Dalit community?

### **Guideline for KII with local Dalit leaders**

How would you explain the low enrolment rate and high dropout rate from your community?

What kind of adverse environment do they face in the school environment?

What kind of discriminatory behaviour do they experience from teacher, school administration and peers?

Is there any member in the school managing committee from your community? If no, could you tell the reason?

Could you tell me how many children from your community get scholarship given by the government?

Do you have any teacher from your community in the local primary or high school?

What types of initiatives have you taken to increase the rate of education of your community children?

### **Appendix III:**

### Profile of the respondents

#### *Profiles of the respondents (parents)*

| Sex    | Age   | Level of Education             | Occupation and Working place         | Household Income | Household size |
|--------|-------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------|----------------|
|        |       |                                |                                      | 7-8              | 5-6            |
| Male   | 2     | 3                              | 1                                    | 14000-16000      | 4              |
| Female | 4     | 3                              | 1                                    | 9000-11000       | 3              |
|        |       |                                | Working with government organization | 7000-9000        | 2              |
|        |       |                                | Sweeper at private organization      | 5                | 4              |
|        |       |                                | Sweeper at other govt. organizations | 1                | 1              |
|        |       |                                | Sweeper at DCC                       | 2                |                |
|        |       |                                | House wife                           | 4                | 3              |
|        |       | 6 and above years of schooling |                                      | 5                |                |
|        |       | 4 to 5 years of schooling      |                                      | 0                | 0              |
|        |       | 1 to 3 years of schooling      |                                      | 2                | 4              |
|        |       | No institutional education     |                                      | 6                | 2              |
|        | 50-55 |                                |                                      |                  |                |
|        | 45-50 |                                |                                      |                  |                |
|        | 40-45 |                                |                                      |                  |                |
|        | 35-40 |                                |                                      |                  |                |
|        | 30-35 |                                |                                      |                  |                |

#### *Profile of the respondents (Children)*

|       | Age Group | Level of Education                                    | Types of school | Current Status                                      |   |   |   |   |   |
|-------|-----------|---|-----------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|       |           |   |                 | College (11 <sup>th</sup> & 12 <sup>th</sup> grade) |   |   |   |   |   |
| Boys  | 1         | 4   | 3               | 2   | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Girls | 2         | 5   | 1               | 2   | 2 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
|       |           | Secondary (5 <sup>th</sup> to 10 <sup>th</sup> grade) |                 |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|       |           | Primary (1 <sup>st</sup> to 5 <sup>th</sup> grade)    |                 |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|       |           | No education  |                 |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|       | 50-55     |   |                 |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|       | 45-50     |   |                 |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|       | 40-45     |   |                 |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|       | 35-40     |   |                 |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|       | 30-35     |   |                 |   |   |   |   |   |   |