

# Shifting Livelihoods: Occupational Changes and Socio-Economic Impact on Dalit Communities in Dhaka

Mahima Ferdousy Mithila, University of Dhaka. Email: [mahimaferdousy7@gmail.com](mailto:mahimaferdousy7@gmail.com).

Md. Mutarradid Rahman Khan, University of Dhaka. Email: [shaanrahman936@gmail.com](mailto:shaanrahman936@gmail.com).

Zannatul Ferdosi, University of Dhaka. Email: [zannatulferdosi055@gmail.com](mailto:zannatulferdosi055@gmail.com).

Md. Suhail Islam, University of Dhaka. Email: [suhailndc27@gmail.com](mailto:suhailndc27@gmail.com).

## Abstract

*This study investigates the changing occupations of the Dalit community and the socio-economic impacts of this shifting in their lives with the help of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital, Erving Goffman's stigma theory, and Louis Dumont's purity and impurity theory. Dalit is a term used to refer to any member of a wide range of social groups that were historically marginalized. The Dalit community in Bangladesh is living in poverty, faces a lack of education, healthcare, safe housing, and employment opportunities. They are exposed to unsafe environments, insecurity, and violence, which severely hinder their socio-economic progress. Their marginalization extends to cultural practices and social interactions, leading to further isolation. Key statistics reveal the dire conditions of Dalits in Bangladesh. Only about 10% of Dalit children enroll in school, and of these, 95% drop out, leaving just 5% literate. The shift in occupational patterns among Dalit communities, particularly in urban areas like Dhaka, is driven by a complex interplay of social, economic, and structural factors. Reasons like inadequate housing and infrastructure, settlements being frequently overcrowded and lack essential services such as clean water, electricity, and sanitation, as well as constant threats of eviction make their living conditions are unstable and insecure, healthcare inequality like lacking access to affordable and adequate medical care, pushing many to seek alternative livelihoods that may offer slightly better financial or social security all contribute to the economic problems they face. Additionally, structural poverty and generational social exclusion continue to affect Dalit communities, influencing their occupational decisions and shifting livelihoods. The persistence of caste-based labour stigmatization, especially in jobs like sanitation work, has led many younger Dalits to reject these roles in pursuit of dignified and socially respected alternatives. Despite their essential contributions to urban maintenance and public health, Dalits remain economically marginalized and politically underrepresented. In response to these challenges, many are seeking new employment opportunities in the informal sector, skilled labour, or small businesses, often facilitated by NGO initiatives, community mobilization, and increasing awareness of rights and entitlements. These occupational changes reflect not only a rejection of caste-based roles but also a strategic adaptation to urban socio-economic pressures, signaling a shift in identity, aspirations, and survival strategies. Their traditional jobs like pork farming, sweeping, Bede, cleaning sewerage are no longer the only jobs they are doing, due to reasons like stigmatization of their identity, social and cultural exclusion.*

**Keywords:** *Bede, Dalits, marginalization, stigma, social exclusion, traditional jobs,*

## 1. Introduction

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the evolving occupational patterns among the Dalit community, exploring the underlying factors contributing to these transformations and the resultant socio-economic impacts. Dalits, often marginalized across social, political, economic, and cultural spheres, have been historically classified as 'outsiders' within the broader social fabric. They are frequently described using pejorative terms such as "dirty," "untrustworthy," "aggressive," and "uncivilized" (Chowdhury, 2009). Globally, approximately 260 million individuals are classified as "untouchable" or Dalits (IDSN, 2025), with an estimated five million Dalits residing in Bangladesh.

Dalit social isolation is further cemented by the historical association of a substantial portion of Dalit identity with stigmatized labour jobs, especially those related to sanitation. The "spoiled identity" hypothesis developed by Erving Goffman provides a useful framework for comprehending this phenomenon. According to Goffman (1963), certain characteristics or actions might exclude a person from complete social acceptance, resulting in a "spoiled" identity. The social identities of Dalits are based on roles that are considered "impure" by prevailing social norms, which further contributes to their marginalization. Owing to these prejudices' enduring effects, Dalits have come up with innovative ways to renegotiate their oppressed identities, such as changing careers.

The present study underscores the challenges that Dalits continue to face, including widespread discriminatory practices and socio-cultural exclusion. These challenges have led to a significant shift in the occupational trajectories of Dalit individuals, as they increasingly seek alternatives to the traditional tasks of sweeping, sanitation, and pork farming. This transformation is partly driven by governmental and non-governmental interventions, which have sought to address the socio-economic conditions of Dalit communities. Notably, the transition to alternative occupations is also influenced by the desire to escape the impure status historically associated with their traditional labour, as framed within Louis Dumont's purity-impurity theory (1970). According to Dumont, social divisions based on purity and impurity necessitate the separation of "pure" and "impure" categories, which has perpetuated Dalits' exclusion from mainstream society.

One significant factor contributing to these occupational shifts is the increasing educational engagement among Dalit populations. This shift aligns with Pierre Bourdieu's capital theory (1986), which suggests that various forms of capital - economic, social, cultural, and symbolic - play a crucial role in shaping individuals' social positions and their ability to navigate societal structures. In the context of Dalits, education serves as a form of cultural and symbolic capital that facilitates access to new economic opportunities, thereby altering their occupational landscapes.

Data from the present research highlights that Dalits, traditionally associated with occupations such as sanitation work, are diversifying into alternative employment sectors. This shift is attributed not only to changing societal attitudes but also to the growing political awareness, higher literacy rates, and greater participation in social and religious activities among the Dalit community. As a result, Dalits have witnessed a rise in income and a transformation in their living standards. Nevertheless, while these changes are noteworthy, they remain insufficient in overcoming the deep-seated inequalities faced by Dalits.

Despite the emergence of new economic opportunities, the Dalit community continues to encounter various forms of discrimination, both overt and subtle. The persistence of social stigmas and the systemic exclusion of Dalits indicate that the existing socio-political structures are insufficient to fully integrate them into the mainstream societal framework. This underscores the need for concerted efforts from both governmental and non-governmental sectors to address the socio-economic challenges faced by Dalits.

In conclusion, the evolving occupational patterns of Dalits in Bangladesh reflect the broader dynamics of social marginalization, poverty, and institutionalized discrimination that continue to shape their lives. While the shift in occupations has contributed to improving their socio-economic conditions, significant structural reforms are necessary to ensure that Dalits are not only included in the workforce but also afforded equal opportunities for advancement. Further, development initiatives should prioritize the voices of Dalits in the design and implementation of policies aimed at improving their socio-economic position. Only through such inclusive approaches can the long-standing social inequities faced by Dalits be meaningfully addressed, ensuring their full participation in society.

## 1.1 Research Questions

1. To what extent have the types of occupation have changed among the Dalits?
2. What are the traditional ideas/stigmas associated with Dalit communities' occupations?

3. How has the Dalit community changed because of the transformation in the nature of previous occupations?

## 2. Theoretical Context and Literature Review

In the research, we used Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital, Erving Goffman's stigma theory, and Louis Dumont's idea of purity and impurity. We performed both structured and unstructured interviews with the participants. This description is based on theoretical grounds. So, before starting to describe something, it is important to think about the points of view of different theorists who have looked into descriptive methodologies. Consequently, the description encompasses several types, methodologies, and applications, which are rigorously examined to formulate a literary perspective.

Naher and Hasan (2017) conducted a study on the Dalit community in urban areas of Bangladesh. It highlights their social, economic, and political conditions. The study analyzes the demographic representation of Dalits, appropriate census procedures for their enumeration, and proposals for their recognition. Members of the Dalit community primarily inhabit urban areas under state jurisdiction, often in impoverished conditions. Notwithstanding the increase in population, the condition of their dwellings remains inadequate. Their living conditions are unsanitary, and systematic attempts to improve these situations are minimal. The study reveals that Dalits predominantly participate in manual cleaning and sanitation professions. They are spotted operating in hospitals, educational institutions, and various other organizations. Despite their qualifications, individuals have challenges in securing advanced employment opportunities in both public and private sectors. As a result, their economic contributions are limited. Dalits encounter barriers in accessing healthcare services owing to stigma and marginalization. They often rely on specific medical practitioners, indicating limited choices. This particular writing helped to understand the traditional jobs of the Dalits.

Islam and Parvez, in their 2013 work *Dalit Initiatives in Bangladesh*, analyze the various forms of injustice faced by the Dalit community and the repercussions for their social, political, and economic conditions. Their inquiry analyzes the impact of caste-based identification on Dalits' access to education, employment, healthcare, justice, housing, and religious practices. The book highlights systematic exclusion that perpetuates their marginalization.

A survey reported on by Chowdhury (2009) indicated that 43% of Dalits are engaged in sanitation and cleaning occupations. Among this category, 22% are involved in agriculture, whereas 14% of Dalits are employed in tea plantations. The survey revealed that 42% of Dalit households own an average annual income of approximately 36,000 Bangladeshi Taka, 18% earn around 30,000 Taka, 17% earn between 60,000 and 90,000 Taka, and 12% have a yearly income between 90,000 and 120,000 Taka. Only 11% of Dalit households reported an income exceeding 120,000 Taka.<sup>1</sup> Dalits face significant barriers to education, housing, and cultural engagement due to widespread societal discrimination and economic inequality. Despite their efforts, Dalits are often relegated to traditional occupations, hence perpetuating their impoverished conditions.

Sultana and Subedi (2015) delineate the conditions of Hindu Dalit households in Bangladesh as characterized by historical marginalization and exploitation. Caste-based discrimination deprives Hindu Dalits of educational, housing, and employment prospects. The presence of religious bias leads to systemic marginalization, affecting both Hindu and Muslim Dalits in Bangladesh. This article provided the understanding of religious seclusion of the Dalit Community in Dhaka.

---

<sup>1</sup> US\$1 = 122 Bangladeshi taka, approximately.

Islam (2012) analyzed the economic conditions of the Santal and Oraon communities in the Barind region of Bangladesh. His studies reveal that these indigenous populations often experience exploitation and discrimination by dominant Muslim societies. This encompasses issues such as forced migration, fear of violence, and limited access to resources. The Santals and Oraons, traditionally engaged in agriculture, have diversified into various vocations such as manual labor, small-scale enterprises, and temporary employment, leading to incremental improvements in their economic conditions. However, these changes also impact their social and cultural lives, illustrating how economic revolutions touch broader aspects of human existence. This particular literature helped to understand the transition of livelihoods of the Dalits in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Chowdhury (2009) analyzed the socio-economic conditions and caste-based discrimination experienced by Hindu and Muslim Dalits in Bangladesh. His findings indicate that Dalits have restricted access to institutional support and opportunities. The insufficient educational attainment of Dalits, coupled with poor living conditions, underscores the widespread injustice they face. Hindu and Muslim Dalits are consigned to low-wage, manual labour, often lacking in essential needs such as education and sanitation.

Daize (2018) wrote about the challenges and efforts in Dalit identity formation and the modification of various social, economic and political realities. Despite constitutional safeguards against caste-based discrimination, Dalits persistently face social ostracism and systemic marginalization, leading to intricate issues in their social interactions. The study analyzes the diverse factors that contribute to these issues, encompassing culture, structure, politics, education, and economic conditions. Presently, Dalit's experience transformations in their traditional structures due to factors including access to higher education, economic progress, employment challenges, and mental health issues. It stresses how important it is for the world to recognize Dalit cultural history and supports development projects that give them modern amenities, better living conditions, better communication systems, and other improvements in their social and cultural lives in general. The younger generation is increasingly outspoken in promoting reforms and pursuing swift improvements. They seek education, employment, and healthcare services. If individuals have opportunities across many sectors, they will be able to work and improve their lives. This literature helped to understand the discriminations against Dalits and the reasons behind the change in the occupations.

### **3. Methodology of the Study**

The study uses qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection, analysis and presentation to address the research questions effectively.

#### **3.1. Selection of Research Area**

This study focuses on Dalit students at Dhaka University. The primary participants of this research are Dalit students who are actively engaged in education or employment. We conducted fieldwork at the dormitories of Dhaka University, where many individuals from the Dalit community are employed, primarily in sanitation positions. We additionally performed fieldwork in the Dalit communities of Bangshal and Hazaribagh. Dhaka University was chosen because it houses a significant number of Dalit students, facilitating access to diverse perspectives.

#### **3.2. Sampling**

In this research, purposive sampling has been used, where the researcher intentionally selects participants or sources directly relevant to the study's objectives (Robinson, 2023). This approach ensured that only individuals knowledgeable about or experienced in the topic were chosen. For this study, 120 participants were selected who had direct involvement or understanding of the research subject, ensuring comprehensive insights into the topic.

#### **3.3. Sources of Data**

This research employed both primary and secondary data sources:

Primary data were collected through interviews and observations conducted with students from various departments at Dhaka University who belonged to the Dalit community.

Additional (secondary) information was gathered from existing literature, including reports, books, journals, newspaper articles, online resources, and statistical documents. This provided a broader context for analysing the primary data.

### **3.4. Data Collection Techniques**

The data collection process is a critical aspect of this research, employing several techniques, including personal interviews, semi-structured questionnaires and ethnographic observation.

A significant portion of the data was gathered through interviews. Semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility, where open-ended questions encouraged participants to share detailed insights. These interviews covered topics such as family background, employment history, individual experiences, and perceptions of societal conditions.

Semi-structured questionnaires helped collect qualitative data by providing predetermined questions while allowing space for additional responses based on participants' answers.

Field visits facilitated direct observation of the participants' behaviour and living conditions, allowing them to analyse their real-life situations comprehensively. Digital and physical tools. Various tools like field notes, audio recorders, and digital logs were used to ensure all data were documented accurately.

### **3.5. Language of the Research**

We conducted our interviews in Bengali, later we translated all the transcripts into English. To avoid difficulties, we followed the language glossary used in Dalit community and rechecked our translations after completion of the process. In this case we kept out original hand written and digital transcripts in front of us.

### **3.6. Data Analysis Methods**

The fieldwork for this research was completed on 24th July 2022. Before leaving the research site, we collected respondents' contact numbers for further clarification if necessary. This ensured the resolution of any ambiguities or unanswered questions. After completing the fieldwork, the we organized a collective discussion to finalize their collected data. Following this, the data underwent verification and analysis through various qualitative methods which includes case study analysis and life history and oral history analysis. Eight case studies were included to provide an in-depth analysis of specific scenarios, ensuring a robust understanding of the subject matter.

We have incorporated different case studies and with the help of the theories we explained the particular case. In case of life history analysis, we rearrange different topics thematically and explained that with the help of theories. Furthermore, data enriched through academic sources like books, articles, and online materials was incorporated for a more comprehensive analysis. The analysis applied both qualitative and quantitative methods. However, the primary focus was on qualitative analysis, with quantitative analysis employed where necessary to support insights.

### **3.7. Ethics Maintained in the Field**

We have not hampered the time of the participants and did not harm a single living and non- living things while conducting the fieldwork.

Given practical limitations, some participants hesitated to answer sensitive questions fully or declined to engage in the survey due to their reservations. To mitigate this, we used pseudonyms to maintain anonymity, which proved effective in encouraging candid responses.

To avoid non-response bias in the field we spent time in the community before starting formal research. We were involved in informal conversations, attend local events, and communicated with community leaders already trusted by the community. In our case we built rapport to avoid biasness and in our study we took the help from the Dalit students to enter to the community. This helped participants feel safe and respected, making them more likely to respond and we did follow up interviews frequently therefore we got the responses we needed to conduct our research.

### **3.8. Research Validity**

Ensuring the validity of the research was a key priority. To this end, necessary measures were taken to ensure that all collected data was authentic and relevant to the research objectives. Before conducting interviews, the research objective was clearly explained to participants to build trust and transparency. Additionally, participant consent was documented to avoid issues related to recording interviews or other privacy concerns. Challenges, such as reluctance or lack of comfort during interviews, were addressed by maintaining flexibility in the approach and providing participants with a safe environment for expression. To ensure the reliability of data, utmost attention was given to maintaining accuracy during collection and avoiding personal biases or misinterpretations during analysis.

### **3.9. Research Limitations**

Despite efforts to maintain rigour, the researchers encountered certain limitations. Some participants were hesitant to fully engage in discussions due to the sensitive nature of the research topic. The findings also reflect contextual and economic constraints that shaped the participants' responses. Additionally, fieldwork opportunities were limited in scope, and variations in participant responses affected data consistency. While the research aimed to be comprehensive, these factors occasionally restricted its breadth and depth. Thus, opportunities for broader investigations and future refinements remain open.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1. Changes in Occupation**

It is evident from the research that because of various factors the professions of the Dalit community have been changed (Fieldwork, 2022).

#### *Previous occupations*

The majority of Dalit community members used to work as day labourers and still do that. Further analysis reveals that 80% of Dalits are engaged in manual labour, illustrating the persistence of economic marginalization. The other traditional occupation for them were 'sweeper', 'barber', 'bede (water gypsy)', 'medicine seller', 'hawker,' which were more or less stigmatized and people see these kinds of jobs as dirty jobs (Fieldwork 2022).

#### *Current occupations*

Now their occupation has been changed drastically and it is seen that different member of the same family are pursuing different career. For example, within the same family, members might pursue different occupations, such as business, agriculture, or salaried employment, depending on their skills and opportunities. They are now involved in public and private sectors.

### **4.1. Impact of the Transformation in Occupations**

### *Increased Income Level:*

Changes in occupation have led to an increase in income levels. In different regions, many day labourers have transitioned to other types of jobs, including salaried positions. For example, certain Dalit individuals are now employed in public and private sectors, which has significantly contributed to their financial growth. Field data reveals that families with an income between 40,000–49,000 BDT often have multiple income earners. This diversification in occupations has resulted in varying income levels within the same household.

### *Changes in Annual Expenses*

In case of annual expenses, it is observed that the expenses have also increased as the income level increases. Most Dalits are now spending more than the previous time. The increased spending among Dalit communities is a multifaceted development that signals economic advancement. As income levels rise, so too does the potential for dignity, and participation in the broader societal mainstream. Ensuring this growth is equitable and sustainable remains a key objective for scholars, policymakers, and civil society.

### *Changes in Savings*

It was found that now the saving capability among Dalits has increased. It is evident from the data that the previous annual savings were 5000-7000 BDT, which is now 20,000-30,000 BDT, only because of the changing occupations among Dalits.

Here are the changes found in the Dalit communities in terms of occupation and economic status. But there are many underlying factors behind these changing occupations which have to be acknowledged.

### *Changes in Life-style*

The improvement in economic conditions has had a profound impact on various aspects of the Dalit community's lifestyle. Changes in their occupational patterns have directly influenced their overall social and political lives.

### *Changes in Education*

The transformation of occupations within the Dalit community has led to significant changes in their approach to education. They now place greater importance on education and encourage their children to pursue it. For example, as a result of improved income, Dalit families can now enroll their children in reputable schools and colleges, fostering better opportunities for their future. This marks a notable positive shift in the community's outlook toward education.

## **4.2 Reasons Behind the Transformation of Occupation and Economic Status in the Dalit Community**

This section analyzes the reasons for changes in occupation and economic status within the Dalit community, based on field observations and evidence. The impact of modernization, urbanization, and education has played a significant role in these changes. Owing to these factors, members of the Dalit community have gradually moved away from traditional manual labour and have diversified into various occupations, resulting in economic transformation.

### **4.2.1 Role of Education**

Education has emerged as a key factor driving this transformation. Compared to the past, there is a noticeable increase in the emphasis on education within the Dalit community. Government and private initiatives have facilitated greater access to education for this group. As a result, many Dalit families

are now prioritizing the education of their children. This focus on education has opened doors for better employment opportunities in diverse sectors, significantly improving their economic condition. The awareness and motivation to pursue education are reshaping the socioeconomic status of the Dalit community, enabling them to break free from traditional occupational limitations.

#### 4.2.2. Housing Transformation

Over time, there has been significant improvement in transportation infrastructure. As a result, many members of the Dalit community have migrated to various regions for better housing opportunities and have started engaging in different occupations. Consequently, their income levels have increased, leading to improvements in their economic condition and overall quality of family life.

#### 4.2.3. Developmental Activities

Governmental and non-governmental organizations have undertaken various initiatives for the development of the Dalit community. For example, approximately 58 crore<sup>2</sup> BDT has been allocated to address housing issues for this community. This has led to noticeable progress in improving the housing conditions of the Dalit population.

#### 4.2.4. Political Awareness

Over time, the Dalit community has experienced a rise in political awareness. They are increasingly conscious of their rights, actively engaging in various movements to secure them. For instance, community members participate in protests and hold awareness programs to educate others about their rights. This growing awareness has enabled them to challenge discrimination and demand their entitlements. Consequently, political consciousness within the Dalit community is playing a pivotal role in shaping their social and economic progress.

Their living conditions are unstable and risky due to a lack of basic utilities like clean water, power, and sanitary facilities, congested settlements with inadequate housing and infrastructure, and constant threats of eviction. Many are compelled to look for alternative sources of income that may offer slightly greater social or financial security due to healthcare disparities, such as restricted access to affordable and high-quality medical treatment. Additionally, generational social exclusion and structural poverty continue to affect Dalit people, influencing their evolving professional paths and means of subsistence. Because caste-based labor is still stigmatized, especially in sectors like sanitation, many younger Dalits have turned down these positions in favor of more respectable and dignified alternatives (Fieldwork, 2022).

### 5. Discussion

“Education brings back the stability in our (Dalits) lives”

Ranthu Chandra Das (pseudonym), a 38-year-old, represents this transformation well. His family has benefitted greatly from education. One of his relatives is employed as a master's officer at Dhaka University, having passed a general recruitment exam. Ranthu himself is pursuing higher education through an open university program. He states, “Even while working this job, I continue to study because education provides opportunities to find other jobs and improve earnings.” Ranthu's family reflects this upward mobility. His younger brother works at a private hospital, another is studying biotechnology at Dhaka University, and another sibling supports the family financially through skilled labor. Ranthu proudly notes, “Because my brothers have been able to study, they have stable jobs now. I hope my younger brother completes his education and secures a government position. Although we struggle to cover school costs, it's worth the effort.” This progress is evident in the aspirations of

---

<sup>2</sup> 1 crore is 10,000,000.

Ranthu's youngest sibling, currently in high school, who dreams of passing the SSC exams and pursuing higher education for a better future.

This case highlights how changes in economic status and a focus on education are collectively driving substantial improvement in the lives of the Dalit community members. According to Pierre Bourdieu's Capital theory here "Education" worked as the capital and thus worked behind the reason of the transformation of occupation.

"Now society see us as human not Dalits"

Owing to their historical association with sanitation work, members of the Dalit community have made attempts to break away from their traditional roles (Ambedkar, 1948). However, they often face societal resistance and cultural barriers that hinder their integration into broader social structures. In rural areas, Dalits frequently find themselves marginalized from community resources and facilities, exacerbating their social isolation. Prejudices and superstitions persist within the community, impeding broader social development. These societal barriers often stem from entrenched discriminatory practices, limiting the community's access to opportunities in employment and business. For instance, Dalits are often subject to stigma and segregation, which further marginalizes them (Goffman, 1963). Despite these challenges, improved economic conditions have begun to dismantle some of these barriers. Superstition is gradually being replaced by more progressive ideas, and discriminatory practices like untouchability are diminishing in some areas. Increased literacy among the Dalit community has positively influenced their social standing, enabling younger generations to pursue education and participate in economic activities.

Durga Das (60), a resident of Mymensingh, has been engaged in cleaning work for over 37 years, earning a monthly salary of BDT 45,000. His four children are receiving education and are free from the burden of continuing their father's occupation. Two of his children are employed in respected positions at public institutions, and Das aspires for his remaining children to achieve similar success. He believes that access to education has allowed his family to move away from traditional stigmatized jobs, reducing societal discrimination.

This case can be explained by Goffman's stigma theory (1963) where he described that individuals are often excluded from full social acceptance due to perceived "spoiled" identities or attributes. Societal norms shape the ideas of "normal" (Goffman, 1963) and according to the case stated above being a cleaning worker is not a normal job. Because of the changing occupations among Dalits, gradually progressive ideas took the place of previous superstitions.

"My job makes me feel included"

Cultural practices among the Dalit community are often shaped by their historical exclusion and marginalization. Despite this, they actively participate in Hindu religious festivals like Durga Puja, Kali Puja, and Saraswati Puja. Additionally, they observe unique rituals related to birth, marriage, and death within their community. However, modern economic advancements have begun influencing these traditions.

Radhika Das (26) mentioned, "We celebrate all Hindu festivals just like any other Bengali Hindu family, but because of my Dalit identity it was difficult to take part in the cultural and religious activities, but since when I have started my job as a banker it has become very easy for me to take part in in activities like these.

Improved economic conditions because of changing occupations have also allowed Dalits to expand their participation in cultural activities. They can now afford to host and attend grander festivals, enhancing their cultural and social lives. However, some traditional rituals have either disappeared or undergone significant transformation due to socio-economic pressures. According to Louis Dumont's

Purity and Impurity theory now because of the contribution of the Dalits in religious and cultural celebration has blurred the boundary between Purity and impurity of the identities.

“Politics is still far away from us.”

Members of the Dalit community are generally not very active or visible in mainstream politics. They are often excluded from political participation, which leaves them unable to benefit from the opportunities that political engagement can provide. The stigma associated with their caste often prevents them from being involved in political or business leadership roles, as they are not widely accepted in these spheres (Goffman,1963). In many cases, Dalits have reported that business people from higher castes dominate local leadership and marginalize them. However, recent developments have brought some improvements. Dalits are now beginning to participate in different types of professions and leadership activities.

Parvati Das (43) remarked, We are rarely involved in politics. Unity among us is limited, and as a result, collective actions for our rights often falter. However, whenever someone faces a serious issue, like illness or other crises, we come together as a community.

Recently, government initiatives have focused on the development of the Dalit community, but the benefits of these efforts are yet to reach the grassroots level. The community remains concerned about the inadequate distribution and management of resources allocated for their welfare.

The structure of society and the economic capital of the elite encompass wealth, assets, trade, and commerce. According to Bourdieu’s theory (1986), this economic capital plays a critical role in shaping the way of life for the elite.

Owing to changing occupations, the Dalit community has shown significant progress in education, access to employment, and participation in social and cultural events, all of which have contributed positively to their economic and social status. The improvement in their economic condition due to the changes happening in their occupations which has brought about noticeable changes in their way of life. As a result, there has been an increase in educational attainment, greater participation in social and cultural celebrations, and enhanced political awareness within the Dalit community.

## **6. Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study has critically examined the changes in the socio-economic conditions due to the transformation in the occupations of the Dalit community, focusing on their evolving identities and livelihoods. The narrative combines anthropological analysis and literary discussions to explore the culture, history, and transformations within the Dalit community. Using diverse sources of data, this research provides a comprehensive depiction of the subject. The study highlights that traditionally, Dalits have been associated with sanitation-related work, day labour work and many other occupations which are not considered as normal in the society but through various governmental and non-governmental initiatives, global influences, and increased awareness, members of the community are diversifying into other such as occupations like, business, entrepreneurship and government and private-sector employment.

There are some limitations as well, this research only explores the changes in the occupations and the socio-economic impact of these changes which is not adequate to understand the life-style of Dalit communities. This research includes only the Dalit people from urban areas, therefore the changes in rural areas in the communities of Dalits are not present and lastly it is a small-scale analysis which only focus on the particular aspect, but the macro-level analysis is absent from this study.

While the current study provides valuable insights into changing occupations among Dalits, future research could expand the sample size and diversity to enhance the generalizability of the findings across different populations or contexts. Moreover, exploring Dalit communities from different aspects

in more depth could provide a richer understanding and it will help the policy makers to understand the Dalit community well and implement the necessary policies that will help the Dalits to have a better life.

## 7. References

Ambedkar, B. R. (1948). *The untouchables: Who are they? And why they became untouchables*. Delhi: Amrit Books.

Bourdieu, P. (1986). *Outline of a theory of practice*. London: Sage.

Chowdhury, I.U. (2009). *Caste-based discrimination in South Asia: A study of Bangladesh*. New Delhi: Indian Institute of Dalit Studies.

Daize, A.S. (2018). Dalits struggle to change livelihood strategies against caste-based discrimination: A study in urban Bangladesh, *Social change: A Journal for Social Change*, 8(1), 1–21.

Dumont, L. (1970). *Homo hierarchicus: The caste system and its implications*. London: Paladin.

Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) (2025), Recommendations for the 58<sup>th</sup> regular session of the human rights council (24<sup>th</sup> February-4<sup>th</sup> April, 2025), available at: <https://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/IDSN-Recommendations-for-the-58th-Regular-Session-of-the-Human-Rights-Council-24th-February—4th-April-2025.pdf>.

Islam, M. & Parvez, A. (2013). *Dalit initiatives in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: Nagorik Uddyog & Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement.

Islam, M.R. (2012). *Santals and Oraons of Bangladesh: A study of changing economic life in the Barind region*, London: Lambert Academic Publishing.

Naher, A. & Hasan, A. A. M. (2017). *Dalit communities living in railway colonies/lands in northern part of Bangladesh*. Dhaka: NNMC Bangladesh & HEKS, available at: <https://bdplatform4sdgs.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Dalit-Communities-Living-in-Railway-Colonies-or-Lands-in-Northern-part-of-Bangladesh.pdf>.

Robinson, R.S. (2023). Purposive sampling. In Maggino, F. (ed), *Encyclopedia of quality of life and well-being research*. Princeton, NJ: Springer. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-17299-1\\_2337](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-17299-1_2337).

Sultana, H., & Subedi, D. B. (2015). *Caste system and resistance: The case of untouchable Hindu sweepers in Bangladesh*. Princeton, NJ: Springer Science+Business Media.