Digging the 'Dirt': Roots and Routes of Stigma

Aditi Sharif[1] & Mahima Ferdousy Mithila[2]

[1,2]*Post Graduate Student, Department of Anthropology, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh.*

Corresponding Author: Mahima Ferdousy Mithila, **Email:** mahimaferdousy7@gmail.com[2]

ABSTRACT

Historically, Dalit identity is associated with different stereotypical notions. In this article, we have attempted to explore the underlying factors behind the stigma associated with them from the micro perspective in a small Muslim-dominated context of Bangladesh based on a series of intensive fieldwork. It reveals that Dalit cleaners are widely considered impure, dirty, strange, chaotic, alcoholic, and inferior. We combined two theoretical perspectives to interpret the matter systematically: Douglas's notion of purity and pollution and Foucauldian discourse. The apparent reasons for the stigma associated with Dalit cleaners at Bhairab are association with 'Dirty jobs, pig rearing, pork consumption, liquor consumption, and business. However, the empirical pieces of evidence show that different historical, religious, and socio-political factors (such as ideological domination of Hindu scriptures, the intervention of British colonialism, and the negative role of media and local influential businessmen) contribute significantly to the stigma.

Keywords: Dalit, Discourse, Stigma, Purity, Pollution

INTRODUCTION

"Why do you people always belittle us? Just because we are doing your work. Ask yourself."

That was the response of one of my Dalit participants when I asked about the reasons behind the disrespectful perceptions of Dalit people. We could sense her immense grief behind her statement.

It was a serene afternoon in the Winter when we met her. We were looking for our key informant, Sharat (pseudonym) in their colony. When we reached their home, we didn't find him. There was no one but an elderly lady in their home. The lady stood in front of the house wearing a green Sharee. We asked her about Sharat (pseudonym), and she replied that he went out and came back the next day, and she was his grandmother. Then we told her that we wanted to know the reasons behind the stigma of Dalits for the study. After hearing this, she reversely asked the question which we didn't have a proper answer to. This article intends to explore the question.

Dalit- this term is generally used to denote people belonging to the lowest ladder of the social hierarchy (outside of the main four 'Varna's in the Indian caste system) in the Indian subcontinent and these people have been historically stigmatized and marginalized due to their identity from the very beginning of the history (Banglapedia, 2021).

We can find both Bengali and non-Bengali Dalits in Bangladesh. It is assumed that the ancestors of non-Dalit cleaners living in Bangladesh largely migrated from India before 1947 when a large number of blue-caller labor forces were required for the newly established townships (Asaduzzaman, 2001). It has been said that British middlemen or agents targeted poverty-stricken and 'outcast' people of Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh (UP), and enticed them with better livelihoods (Banglapedia, 2021). Even they were not aware of the nature of jobs. For this reason, they are found in almost every big city and town working hard to maintain city corporations and municipalities but still, their existence is undignified due to the stigma associated with their identity (Asaduzzaman, 2001).

In this article, we try to investigate the underlying reasons behind the stigmatized perception of Dalits from a micro perspective in the small Muslim-dominated context of Bhairab. The question that guides our investigation is: why do different types of stigmas associated with Dalits perpetuate in a local Muslim-dominated context?

To provide an answer to our research question, we have formulated two sub-questions to understand the research problem:

- What are the dominant patterns of stigma against Dalits, and the causes in the local Muslim context of Bangladesh?
- How do religious and socio-political factors affect the stereotypical notions about Dalits?

Stigma, Types, Causes, and Consequences:

Goffman (1963) identified two types of stigma- discredited (visible) and discreditable(not visible). He also identified three sources of these stigmas. These are physical disabilities, individual characteristics, and tribal or racial identity. Again, he classified the responses of 'Normals' towards stigmatized people. Usually, they treat them inhumanely and practice various discriminative traits against them. However, some people also treat them with sympathy (Goffman, 1963).

Subu et al (2021) explored different types of the stigma associated with mental illness and mental health nurses in Indonesia through qualitative content analysis. Patients with mental illness constantly felt shame and isolated from the community, a lack of social support, facing violence and seclusion from community members and family members, and discrimination in job sectors. (Subu, et al., 2021).

Gerson (2020) reviewed the evolution of disability stigma in the USA., where he showed the transformation of the perception of disabled people has changed over time, with industrialization and evolution. (Gershon, 2020).

Rohweder (2018) identified key drivers of the stigma associated with disabilities in developing countries. He acknowledged the fact that attitudes towards disability can vary in terms of areas, types of impairments, rate of participation in the community, gender identity, and socio-economic status (Rohwerder, 2018).

Stigma and Dalit Identity:

Dalits have been historically stigmatized in the Indian subcontinent for their identities. They were considered untouchable and deprived of almost all civic amenities essential for making a decent living (Roy, 2014). Their position outside the caste system can be considered the root cause of this

unfortunate condition. The caste system created a graded inequality which ultimately resulted in stigma and marginalization (Ambedkar D. B., 2014).

Dalits faced problems like- being forced to do "blue collar (dirty jobs), in case of using public roads and transport as they were considered "polluted" in terms of others. It's not likely that Untouchability was only practiced by Hindus. People of other religions also practiced discriminatory attitudes against them (Roy, 2014). Ambedkar (1993) described how untouchability crossed its specific religious boundary in his autobiographical narrative. Muslims and Parsis also misbehaved with him after knowing his untouchable identity (Ambedkar B. R., 1993). Untouchability has been banished from the subcontinent, but people's perception of Dalits and the stigmas associated with these didn't (Roy, 2014).

Kumar (2020) explained the stigma of Dalits in terms of their occupation and caste identity in the Indian context. Where he showed, that improving economic conditions is still not helping the Dalits to reduce this discrimination against them. (Kumar A. , 2020).

Roy (2014) has shown that caste-based stigma and discrimination are still prevalent in Present India. Dalits have to face brutal forms of violence due to their identity. Though a few Dalits can change their situation, many of them are still subject to different types of discrimination. Even they are stuck in their conventional jobs due to the lack of other opportunities. On the other hand, the higher caste-dominated media also misrepresents Dalit people and 'validates' caste-based violence and atrocity (Roy, 2014).

Academic discrimination, humiliation by classmates, and anti-quota movements are also hampering the empowerment of Dalits. (Rathod, 2021).

Dalit women are the victims of the cruel patriarchal system, they are in a worse position than their counterparts. Moreover, patriarchal customs like the 'Devdasi system' have appeared as an undignified crisis for many Dalit women in some Indian provinces. Even nowadays, they are treated as dirty, polluted, and sexual objects. The media reinforces these distorted perceptions of Dalit women (Kumar V. , 2009).

Even in Muslim-dominated countries like Bangladesh, Dalits are severely suffering from untouchable stigma. Rahman (2016) shows that Dalits can't easily buy or sell their lands despite

4

having abilities due to their identity, getting white-collar jobs too. Even they don't have much access to public spaces such as shops, restaurants, barbershops, playgrounds, social gatherings, or temples (Rahman, 2016).

Anthropology and Studies on Dalits:

Many anthropologists have conducted their studies on the caste system, untouchability, and everyday lives of people (who are considered lower castes). Despite being understood caste system as social stratification, Dumont (1970) described the caste system as a form of hierarchy. He identified it as the unique characteristic of Indian society that distinguishes it from Western society. This caste-based hierarchy is non-political and religious. The idea of purity and pollution plays a vital role in the formation of this hierarchy (Dumont, 1970). Moffat (1979) claimed that the inherent social stratification among people considered untouchables works like a microcosm of the larger caste system (Moffat, 1979). On the other hand, Cohn (1959) proposed a completely different hypothesis from this proposition. He suggested that people of lower strata of the caste system have a distinctive sub-culture or ways of life (Cohen, 1959).

Anthropologists have significantly contributed to Dalit studies (a new interdisciplinary arena) since the 1990s (Jodhka & Ponniah, 2017).

Dirks (1992) investigated how colonialism reconstructed the caste system and made it the most important characteristic of the Indian subcontinent (Dirks, 1992). Asaduzzaman (2001) attempted to interpret how Dalit cleaners perceive and explain their data differentiations in terms of their values. Moreover, he described the reasons behind the religious conversion of the Dalit community from the point of view of both converts and non-converts (Asaduzzaman, 2001). Sultana and Subedi (2015) showed how Dalit cleaners resisted their marginalization. They created a counter-discourse that resisted the authority of the caste system (Sultana & Subedi, 2015).

 Though many studies have been conducted on the nature and consequences of the stigma associated with Dalits, these studies rarely investigate the underlying factors behind the stigma associated with Dalit identity. In this anthropological study, We attempt to explore the roots and routes of the stigma associated with Dalit identity from a micro perspective based on a series of intensive fieldwork in a small town in Bangladesh.

Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this study is to explore the reasons behind the stigmatized perceptions about Dalit cleaners in a small context of Bangladesh adopting a micro perspective. The objectives of the study are:

- to identify the predominant stereotypical perceptions, and to know the reasons associated with these stigmas about Dalits in a Muslim-dominated area.
- to explore how socio-political factors contribute to the stigma.

METHODOLOGY

We went for several fieldwork and relied on both qualitative and quantitative methods to investigate the issue. Though we mainly focused on empirical pieces of evidence, we also reviewed some secondary sources (such as journal articles, and research paper books) for useful insights. We did the empirical study between January 2022 to September 2022. We conducted a household survey among 195 inhabitants of two Dalit cleaners' colonies to get socio-demographic information about the Dalit community. We collected 17 case studies from Muslim and Dalit cleaner community members. Moreover, we talked with four key respondents to have a clear understanding of the stigma regarding Dalits including educated Dalit youth, Dalit leaders, and Muslim local social activists working for Dalit people's rights. We also used the snowball sampling method to include more respondents in the study. During the interview, we asked respondents about the person who could provide well-articulated perceptions about Dalit people. However, we mostly relied on observation in my fieldwork as it entailed people's actual behavior and perception. We focused both on the underlying factors behind the stigma of Dalits, and other aspects of their life and forms of marginalization for collecting required data.

Field Dilemma:

At the primary stage of the research, the stereotypical perceptions of them hindered our holistic understanding of the research issue. While building a strong rapport with the community people, which was quite hard because of our socio-economic background and presumptions about them, we began to challenge our assumptions which was very helpful to overcome our inherent biases.

Study Area

We selected Bhairab, a Muslim-dominated small town in Bangladesh as the study area of this study because we conducted this study primarily based on in-depth data about the social interaction among Dalit people and wider society. Moreover, we had some prior connections with members of both the Dalit community and the Muslim community which made our work more comfortable.

Data Collection and Key Variables

We used two types of questionnaires, for the household survey questionnaire, we prepared close-ended questions whereas both open-ended and close-ended questions are used for key respondent interviews. On the other hand, checklists were useful for collecting case studies. All the interviews and case studies were collected in the local language (Bangla). Before the final data collection, we undertook a pilot survey to check the questionnaire. The average time for each interview was 25-30 min. For the four key respondents, interviews were conducted through audio tape after getting permission from them. The whole data collection involves several fieldworks. We had to do two or three follow-up fieldwork to get a comprehensive view. After every fieldwork, we noted the topics which were needed to be addressed later in the checklist.

DATA ANALYSIS

We analyzed our acquired data and found the gaps for the next day. We also employed mixed methods to analyze the data in this study. We classified and organized all our data per our research questions and objectives. We used percentages to illustrate the socio-demographic information about the Dalit community. On the other hand, we chose narrative analysis for qualitative data analysis where participants' points of view were explicitly presented. In light of these quotes, we tried to situate our own analysis. We tried to take care of all the ethical boundaries and during translation from Bangla to English we tried to be more careful.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The article largely relies on two broad theoretical perspectives: the structural symbolic approach of Mary Douglas and the Foucauldian notion of discourse.

In her view, things that can be classified in a highly sophisticated order are always related to cleanliness, control, and cultural ideals whereas things that can not be classified are related to dirt, pollution, and chaos (Erikson & Neilson, 2001) .In her words, "Dirt is essentially disorder. There is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eyes of the beholder…….dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organize the environment (Douglas, 1966)."

The same argument goes for pollution. But it is culturally specific while dirt is universal.

This theory helps me to understand the ways by which the notion of pollution in Bangladesh reinforces the stigma associated with Dalits.

Again, Michel Foucault's notion of Discourse can be a useful tool for interpreting the underlying factors of the stigma of Dalits.

"A discourse can be thought of as a way of describing, defining, classifying, and thinking about people, things and even knowledge and abstract system of thought (Smith, 2001)." An interrelationship between power, knowledge, and discourse can also be identified. Though discourses are produced by the power-knowledge relationship, they work to reinforce the relationship (Smith, 2001).

We have used the synthesis of two theories to explore the roots and routes of Dalit stigma. Douglas's structural symbolic approach has been used to interpret how the association with substances (which are considered dirty and polluted in Bangladeshi cultures such as bodily defilement, pigs, and liquor) creates disgust among other people towards Dalits whereas we have utilized the notion of discourse for exploring the historical and socio-political factors behind their stigma.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

I)Result:

Dalit Cleaners at Bhairab:

The socio-demographic information is presented in the following table:

Table: Socio-demographic Information of Dalit Community at Bhairab

Variables (Demographic)	Options	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	51
	Female	49
Subcastes within Dalit cleaners	Bashphor	87
	Balmiki	7
	Domar	6
Academic Attainment / Highest Education	None/ Non-Formal	47
	Primary	19
	8th Grade	15
	SSC/ Secondary	10
	HSC/ Higher Secondary	5
	Above Higher Secondary	4
Number of Voters	Voters	47.69
	Non-voters	52.31
Gross Monthly Income	BDT 1000-5000	20
	BDT 5001-10000	28.57
	BDT 10001-15000	25.71
	BDT 15001-20000	2
	BDT 20001-25000	5.71
Number of the earner	Formal wage earners	78
	Other members	22
Main Sources of Income	Government cleaning jobs	19.05
	Municipality cleaning jobs	11.90
	Private cleaning jobs/ Manual scavenging	55
	Business	2.38
	Other jobs	11.90

1. Types of stigma existing at Bhairab:

At Bhairab, Dalit people are generally considered dirty, uneducated, chaotic, intoxicated, and different from 'normal people'. They are popularly known as 'Methors' (a derogatory term used for Dalit cleaners). Even people at Bhairab largely call their colonies 'Chamarhola' (another derogatory term).

> *'Untouchability doesn't formally exist in Bhairabpur. But it still perpetuates in other forms. Even Muslims followed these types of practices. Talk to the Muslims while obscuring your objectives of the study. Then you will see that many of them*

> *will say, ' Oh Allah did you go to them? Go and take your ablution'. We make*
> *big promises but the real condition remains the same*

Sometimes people in the wider society tend to normalize the deprivation of Dalit cleaners in terms of these stereotypical notions. Shirin Begum's (pseudonym) statement is a testimony of these types of attitudes.

> *She said, 'Actually we see the Methars [a derogatory word used for Dalit cleaners]. But you know, the bad matter is their parents taught them to drink liquor from a very early age. They made it somehow by decomposing rice. Then they became intoxicated after drinking it. For this reason, people keep them isolated'*

The statement of Shirin Begum (pseudonym) helps to stigmatize everyone in the Dalit cleaner's community as addicted.

Even when We decided to study in their community, some people advised us not to go there. We also imagined them as dirty, and chaotic. But when I went to the field, we saw that the situation had changed. Now they are receiving education, not uneducated and alcoholic like before. And the rate of liquor business and consumption has decreased drastically, but many Muslims think otherwise.

According to Mofizur Rahman, *'Almost 95% of people of our community are illiterate and engaged with the drug business.'*

Moreover, this community people are largely considered uneducated and illiterate, which is not all true, Mala Rani (pseudonym) told me about this positive trend in detail.

> *"My son is reading at the higher secondary level. My niece's grandson appeared in B.A. One of my nieces is reading in her—third year. A daughter of my brother-in-law is reading at the higher secondary level. My daughter shall appear in S.S.C. We are in distress if they would ever do their jobs on their qualification due to this identity. All people including TNO madam, Chairman sir tell us that we should educate our children. My thinking is I wanted to continue my study. In the past, I was forced to get married. By the way, what I couldn't do, I want to fulfill these through my children. But is the future of my children ever going to be like my dreams? I am in despair"*

However, this narrative equally represents the fact that getting educated is not sufficient enough to eradicate the stigma associated with them among the Muslim community. The perception of a Muslim teacher proves this tendency.

> *"Whatever you say these 'Methors'- even education can not change their culture. Other poor people are far better than them. These 'Methors' have many problems. Indeed, differentiating among human beings should not be good. But it is also true that their habits are not good. See this differentiation was not made by us. This was made by the British. They thoughtfully took this step."*

In this statement, the Dalit cleaner's community is considered inferior to most other poor people. Their nature is reckoned to be too deviant to mend it through education.

From the discussion stated above, it is evident that Dalit cleaners are largely considered dirty, and strange. alcoholic, and deviant. Moreover, these characteristics are too constant to rectify. These stereotypical notions about Dalit cleaners, eventually lead to justify the segregation of Dalits.
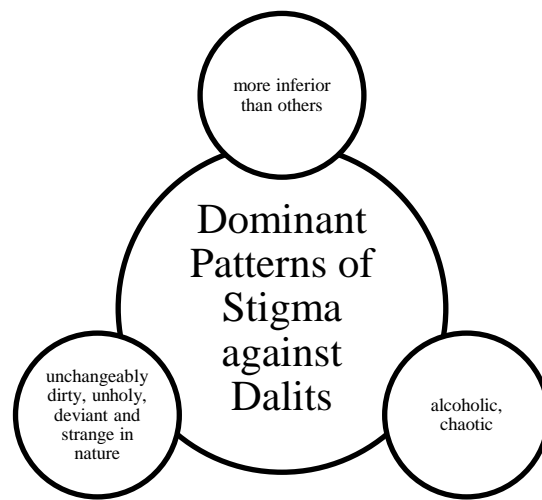

Figure 1: Dominant Patterns of Stigma against Dalits

2. Roots and Routes of Stigma:

It is quite clear that people of the Dalit cleaner community are victims of different kinds of stigma. One wonders why these patterns of stigma perpetuate in a local Muslim-dominated context.

In this regard, we will try to illustrate some crucial factors that contribute to the stigma associated with Dalit cleaners.

3. Purity and Pollution Paradox

11

Historically the jobs of Dalits (especially cleaners) have been associated with human excrement and bodily defilement. For their jobs, many people in Bhairabpur disgrace them. Pig rearing, liquor consumption, and business further increase this disgrace. From the statement of my key informant Sabuj Ahmed (pseudonym), we can know about the disgrace of people regarding their jobs.

> *At first, Sabuj Ahmed said with excitement, 'How can people come close to them? There is no scope of inclusion for their jobs.' After hearing this, we were quite shocked. Then he interpreted the matter in detail. He said, 'Look, what their jobs are ……..jobs of cleaners…..if people see them doing that kind of jobs then they will certainly feel kind of hatred against them.*

Mariam Begum's (pseudonym) statement expresses the same resonance about the fact.

> *'They are quite different (in a bad manner). Apart from being different, can they do these types of work? Bengali Muslims never do this kind of work. Why would they do the jobs? Even if they (Bengali) get these types of jobs in foreign countries they won't do it. Instead of doing the job, they come back to the country.'*

The narrative expressed the deep disgust against the nature of Dalit cleaners. Besides, it also relates to the derogatory nature of their job and their strange nature.

However, from the narrative of Salma Begum (member of the Muslim community, pseudonym), it can also be clear that pig cultivation, liquor business, and consumption have made major contributions to this disgust.

> *Salma Begum (Dhaka) is a confident middle-aged woman. But she occasionally visits her parents in Bhairab. Luckily, I could meet her during her visit. She told us- that one day in her childhood they got stuck beside a dalit colony due to extreme rain and were terrified just because of the existing notion of the alcoholic nature of the Dalits (the alcohol seller- especially Bangla mod) and the smell and the approaching pigs. She added, "Who wants chaos in their lives, alcoholics can make that chaos".*

From the statements, it has been indicated that pig cultivation, liquor consumption, and business play a vital role in their stigma. Moreover, they also eat pork which seems to disturb many Muslims.

One Dalit respondent provided a hint about how the business of liquor negatively influenced people's perceptions of them.

> *Azadlal (pseudonym) said, 'Suppose, we, 4/5 people, sit here together. Now if I sell liquor…….if people come to me and say that give them 1 seer liquor or 5 sika gaja [unit of measurement] your mind will normally start to think negatively'*

4. Religious Discourses Beyond Its Boundary:

Beyond this purity-pollution matrix, there exist other factors which should be considered as important in the analysis of their stigma. Sabuj Ahmed (pseudonym) gave me a hint about it.

> *When he interpreted the association between their jobs and people's perceptions, He said, 'Actually pigs are taboo for Muslims. Also, they can't rear the pigs neatly and cleanly like the farms of foreign. So, a foul smell came from them. But one of the main reasons for hatred (besides being lower caste) is people of the Harijan community rear them. Hatred for their providers has been turned into hatred for them.*

From the statement of Sabuj Ahmed (pseudonym), we know that other factors (such as their caste identity) also play a very important role in building people's notions about them. We can know another important thing. That is: it is true that association with pigs does raise hatred against them in people's minds. But the opposite also happens.

We know that one of the main roots of Dalit's exploitation lies in Hindu religious scriptures. Some dominant scriptures such as Manu Samhita regarded Dalits as untouchable (even unseeable and unapproachable, impure). All they had to do in their life was perform their obligations (doing 'dirty' jobs) towards upper caste people. These ideas controlled the social practices, customs, and behavior in the past for which Dalits faced many forms of discrimination. They were deprived of basic amenities of life. They also control people's perception of them. These forms of ideas dehumanized Dalits and protected the interests of upper castes (Roy, 2014).

 These ideas do work beyond their religious boundary too. That's why even in Muslim countries like Bangladesh and Pakistan, Dalit people face different forms of discrimination. Even people of other religions persist in these kinds of caste inequality (Roy, 2014) . People of wider society at Bhairab are no exception. They continuously work to classify people of the Dalit cleaner community as filthy, impure, and different from others. These types of classification have a sole basis-that is their caste identity.

We can get a hint about this from the statement of Salma Begum (pseudonym)-

13

> *When I asked the reasons for avoiding Dalit people she said, 'It is quite normal. They are lower caste. Why would people get along with them? They were called in to do jobs. And you know how lower caste people are. They are quite inferior to us. They don't receive any education. All they can do is create chaos after drinking alcohol'*

Salma Begum (pseudonym) came from a respected Muslim family. She has no reason to hold these types of perceptions against them. However, many of the Muslims in Bhairab are influenced by these types of ideas.

That's why a lady of the Dalit cleaner's community said to me with immense grief *'Sister, many people consider us as lower caste. If we want to go for speaking people will come for beating. we cannot tell anything out of fear'*

5. Colonial Hangover and Local Power Dynamics:

A predominant stereotype about Dalit cleaners is: that almost all people in this community are associated with liquor consumption and business.

Their connection with the liquor business has a colonial history, when they were brought to clean people's excrement, they were supplied free liquor so that they could avoid foul smells and continue those "dirty jobs"(Sattar, 2020).

Some political facts are also involved in this liquor business. Now we go back to the description of the historical roots of their liquor consumption. My key informant Azad Lal (pseudonym) told me his opinion about it.

> *Azad Lal (pseudonym) said, Actually the history is quite interesting…..While performing dirty jobs, intoxicated people couldn't find the foul smell of their drugs. At first, we called it vatti…..then choli was very rare. The culture of liquor consumption was developed …..development is not the right word, destruction, destruction of the Harijan community….British somehow did this. Such as in tea gardens what they did….. they taught the laborers of tea gardens the process of making liquors. They taught them to consume liquor.*

Though he did not know the specific history he could trace the influence of colonial power behind this.

> *Mahfuj Rahman, Muslim (pseudonym) said, 'When they arrived at the region, pit toilets existed. At that time they had to clean these with their own hands. These works couldn't be done in a conscious condition. So, they did it after*

> *drinking alcohol. Government ordinance gave them the right to use drugs. They can produce a limited amount of liquors for their usage. But what they do: they produce the larger amount and do liquor business.'*

In this statement, he interpreted the historical reason for their liquor consumption. However, he conveyed some misperceptions regarding the engagement of Dalit cleaners with the liquor business.

Many people in the Dalit cleaner community were indeed addicted to drinking in earlier days. But the situation has significantly changed. Mainly some people of the powerhouse colony sold it to the people outside the colony. Our other informant Tara Akter (pseudonym) also asserted that they didn't drink liquor, rather they sold it to others. Even the rate of liquor consumption and business is really low. My key informant Sagor Rahman (pseudonym) also told me about the low rate of the liquor business.

> *He said that 'in the 96-97's the rate of drug business in Dalit colonies was very high. But it is under control now.'*

Still, the misperception reigns among the wider society.

My key respondent.   Azad Lal (pseudonym) also told me about it.

> *Azad Lal (pseudonym) said to me with excitement, 'Suppose, in 95-97's only 1% of Bengali drink 'cholai'[Bangla liquor]. They can be bought at a lower price. 99% of our people drink liquor. But now what is happening…….1% people of our community drink liquor and 99% of Bengalis drink liquor. Bengali is getting addicted to Cholai, Ganja, or other types of drugs. But in our community now except two or four people who are younger than me- people don't drink. At present, these businesses have also been significantly decreased. Thanks to RAB for raiding after three months intervals. It will decrease more if we can manage jobs in 8/10 households….Now what will I say ?......it is tough for poor people to stay honest. If they don't sell liquor people will be starved'. He also criticized the role of media in influencing people's perceptions. He said, 'Police find 20 litres, 50 liters by raiding here. But journalists write 5000 liters, 10000 litres, 100000 liters. Police have found 200-250 liter or 100 liter but journalists have written 5000 or 100000 litres. What an astounding fact!'*

In his statement, it seems like he exaggerated some facts. This statement reveals that the business of liquor has a connection with poverty. It also reveals another significant factor. That is local media and journalists sometimes negatively reinforce their stigmas regarding the liquor business.

However, Mustafiz Amin (pseudonym) gave me the most Shocking information about the liquor business.

> *Mustafiz said, 'Influential local businessmen have a deep relationship with this liquor business, they invest in it. They get the profit. But liquors are produced in the Harijan colony by Harijans. And police also caught them. That's why they are getting defamed'*

From his statement, we can know an important internal factor underlying the liquor business of the Dalit cleaner community. Even in the liquor business, they worked as mere blue-collar laborers in the enterprise of local businessmen but still, defamation is only reserved for them.

DISCUSSION

Based on a reflexive stance, we intend to explore the reasons behind the existence of social stigmas against Dalit cleaners in a Muslim-dominated local setting. The empirical pieces of evidence reveal that Dalit cleaners are largely considered impure, dirty, uneducated, chaotic, strange, and inferior. Based on these stereotypes, some Muslims justify their isolation and marginalization. It is evident that the apparent reasons for the stigmas associated with Dalits are; the nature of their jobs, pig rearing and consumption, liquor consumption, and business.

Pork consumption is also considered taboo in Islam, Judaism, and Brahmanism. According to Douglas's theory, these things are not considered polluted just because of hygiene and 'pathogenic organisms. These things are considered polluted because they don't fit the order. Even referring to the Old Testament, she also proves that pork is considered taboo because pigs can't fit into any certain categories. These things create ambiguity and uncertainty in an ideal social order. It is also true of liquor consumption in many societies (especially in Muslim-dominant communities) (Douglas, 1966).

On the other hand, We can sort out other considerable factors contributing to the stigmas associated with them in light of the Foucauldian notion of Discourse. Some dominant discourses about them belong to two interlinked domains: the Hindu religious domain and the social domain. In the Hindu religious sphere, some discourses (which identified them as dirty, polluted, and chaotic) were created and sustained by dominant higher caste groups. Eventually, these discourses crossed their religious boundary and people of other religions also adopted these (Roy, 2014). In the same way,

16

some people of the dominant Muslim community at Bhairab accept these discourses and help to sustain them.

Moreover, two significant reasons behind their stigma are the discourses regarding their habit of liquor consumption and their association with the liquor business. These discourses have colonial roots. Also, local influential businessmen and the media sometimes play a negative role in reinforcing their stigma.

LIMITATIONS

As we both belonged to the urban middle class, it was quite challenging for us to enter the Dalit community and gain their trust. However, being enthusiastic about social justice movements, helped us a lot to build a strong rapport with the community people.

But the most challenging task was to identify the local power dynamics behind the stigma against Dalits as the local people didn't intend to disclose these at first. Moreover, the outbreak of COVID-19 and our gender identities create some barriers to doing our research in a peri-urban area.

Our research can be a useful source for Critical South Asian Studies as it explores the underlying reasons for the stigma of Dalits, who are the victims of historical marginalization, eventually sheds light on the historical and political influence on identity construction in South Asia.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we have tried to interpret the underlying factors of the stigma regarding the Dalit community by combining two different theoretical frameworks from the micro perspective in a local Muslim-dominated context of Bangladesh. At first, we identified the predominant types of stigma against Dalit cleaners. Dalit cleaners are widely considered dirty, inferior, deviant, strange, and intoxicated. They are popularly known as 'Methors' (a derogatory term) and their colony is popularly reckoned as 'Chamarhola' (another derogatory term).

Based on a series of intensive fieldworks, we have observed that people of the wider society tend to feel disgusted towards Dalit cleaners due to the nature of their jobs, pig rearing, and liquor consumption and business.

However, careful observation reveals that the stereotypical notions of Dalit cleaners in the Hindu scripture appear to be the discourses and work beyond its religious boundary. On the other hand, discourses about liquor consumption and business have a strong influence on the stigma associated with Dalits. These discourses have colonial history and local powerful groups as well as media work to sustain these.

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