

Traditional Profession and Livelihood: A Study on Sweeper Community

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Abstract:

The study aims to find the trend of traditional profession, livelihood situation of sweeper community and causes behind the living in between poverty in Bangladesh. Survey and focus group discussion (FGD) were taken as method. The findings show that all household of the sweeper are being deprived from socio economic advantages, comparatively with general community. Most of the sweeper's households are burden by excess expenditure over income. They are depending on loan from informal sector. Over the generation, they have not been changing their profession radically due to several causes. Government and non- government sector should take more initiative that ensures sweeper communities access to same rights and services enjoyed by mainstream society. Immediate action is necessary to uplift and reform their livelihood and profession

Keywords: Sweeper, Traditional profession, Livelihood

1. Introduction:

Sweeper who has been dedicating their lives for cleaning our community for ever and a day treated as untouchable cast here. *Mahatma Gandhi* honored them with the title "*Harijan*" which means children of God. Unfortunately the sweeper one of the 44 schedule Hindu cast communities is the most neglected part of the society. The people of this community said that their grandparents were bought by British Empire from Hyderabad to do physical work. Their language remains Madraji, Teluga or Hindi, not in Bangla. Still now, their cultures are different from upper caste Hindu and similar family also. Historically, this community has been employed in sweeping and cleaning city garbage. Habitually, they think themselves as sweeper for generation by generation. According to the international convention on the elimination of all forms of the racial discrimination (CEDR) agreement, the government is bound to fulfill the basic needs of the employment, houses, education, healthcare services of lower cast people. The community is isolated in terms of political, economical and mental aspect from the mainstream community. They are not allowed to eat in the hotel, read in the school, or sit in the public place of mainstream society. Their livelihood have not yet been changed a little. Moreover, the traditional job becoming more competitive to them because the government and semi government agency have been recruiting non-professional sweeper from other upper cast community. Being they are not capable for other profession and a part of poor they always have been enduring in the vicious cycle of poverty. Some local and international organization has formed with a view to protect their rights. Donor, international and local NGOs have been working for the sector for couple of years. Most of the country and United Nations are committed to reduce the racial discrimination also.

There are a number of challenges and constraints which affect Dalit communities' rights and equal opportunities to enjoy fundamental human rights. Most notably, this concern the lack of access to education ,poverty issue, health, and housing problem, unequal access to work ,discrimination against women, bonded labor and child labor.(IDSN,2009)

Many studies have been conducted abroad on Dalit community .Even some studies have been conducted on Dalit of Bangladesh (Kamal,Khan and IDSN 2008). A study has been addressed on the nature and extends of untouched ability, decent-based discrimination and social exclusion in contemporary rural Bangladesh (Iftakhar2009). But no sufficient study has found only on livelihood and profession of sweeper. In this study an attempt have been made to focus on sweepers of Chittagong city- their profile, livelihood practices, attitude towards their traditional job, empowerment, education, health – hygiene etc. The study will provide an idea about livelihood of Sweeper in Bangladesh

2. Objectives of the study:

- 2.1. To know the household profile of the sweeper community
- 2.2. To assess the livelihood condition including financial and nonfinancial part
- 2.3. To find out the professional trend and attitudes regarding their profession
- 2.4. Recommendation to attain the expected situation

3. Methods:

3.1 Sample: Chittagong is the second large city of Bangladesh. A part of the sweeper community has been living in the city which represents that cast. The sample consists of 60 household from two sweeper colony (*West Maderbari and Bundle*) of Chittagong City Corporation. Here sweeper refers the families who have been working as cleaner with City Corporation or other institutions and also living at sweeper colony.

3.2 Data collection and analysis: Interview and focus group discussion (FGD) have been used as the way of data collection. In interview session both close and open ended questions were used to find the information. Questions related to profile were open ended including age, sex, profession, family member, education etc. Livelihood status of the sweeper has been segregated into main part as financial and non-financial variable. Few non financial data have been taken by ordinal form. Questionnaire was reviewed before final data collection. Two structured FGD conducted in two communities where total 120 representatives were present. Collected data has been processed by SPSS and Excel software to get the target statistics and interpretation.

4. Results:

4.1 Profile of the sweeper:

4.1.1 Age and sex: The study reveals that the age of the household leaders is not tensed to a particular age. The range of the household leader is 25 years to 75 years .Average age of the leader is 50 years where average age of the household members is 27 years. Sex is almost equally distributed among the household members as table -1

Table- 1

Sex	Member
Male	50.10%

Female	49.90%
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4, 1.2 Educational status:

- Illiterate- 38.31%
- Literate- 61.69%

Among the surveyed household more than 38 percent people cannot read and write at all. Out of 61.69 percent literate people, there are 44 percent are school going children who have been studying in between class one to eight. It is notable that among the surveyed household only two persons were found who studying in polytechnic institute for higher education.

4.1.3 Occupations: The study shows that 90.50 percent people have been working as sweeper in Chittagong city corporation or other private institutions .Rest of the people have been working as garments worker ,laundry man, driver or security personnel at private company. In some cases they had to hide their real address to get the better job. Besides their main occupation (sweeper), only 5 person people have been engaged with other business as their second profession regularly and seasonally.

4.1.4 Gender and child labor: Incase of gender issue, there are 85 percent illegible female have been working and have strong role in respective family that is different from other upper caste. 25 percent children below 18 years have been found engaged with labor.

4.1.5 Size of the household: 67 percent household consists of 4 to 6 member and maximum and minimum are shown in table -2

Table -2

Particulars	Person
Minimum	2
Maximum	12
Average	5.35

4.2 Livelihood status:

4.2.1 Income and expenditure: Average expenditure of the household is higher than the average income in each month (Table-3). Excess expenditure is covered by loan from informal sector like relatives and so called *Mahajan* (money lender). The loan cycle kept them in vicious cycle of poverty.

Table -3

Particular	Monthly in Taka (I USD\$=70 Taka)	
	Income	Expenditure
Minimum(Household)	3 000	3 000
Maximum(Household)	37 500	35 000

Average(Household)	11 233	11 575
Average(individual)	2 099	2 163

Correlation among income, expenditure and size of the household are found as below-

	Income	Expenditure	Size of the Household
Income	1	0.979	0.592
Expenditure	0.979	1	0.59
Size of the Household	0.592	0.59	1

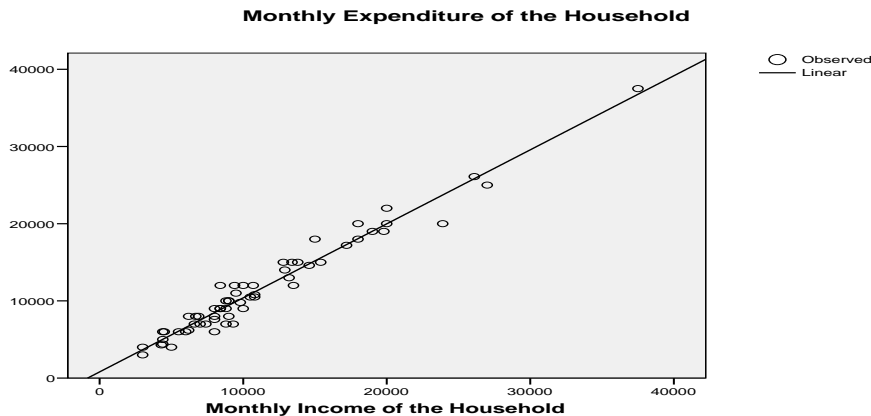
Correlation matrix shows that there exist almost perfect correlation between income and expenditure of the household and moderate relationship between income and size of the household. So, variation of the expenses can be more explained by variation of income.

4.2.2 Liner relationship between income and expenditure:

Expenditure depends on income. So taking expenditure as dependent variable and income as independent variable following regression equation can be found

$$\text{Expenditure} = 804.019 + .959 * \text{income} \quad \text{-----} \quad [y = \alpha + \beta x + e]$$

Here $\alpha=804.019$ which explain that without any income minimum expenditure of the household is 804.019 taka. $\beta=.959$ explain that if income increase by 1 taka than expenditure will be increase by .959 taka. Expenditure is higher than income for low earning people.



4.2.3 Savings, loan and investment:

Table-4

Item	Yes	No
Savings	16.70%	83.30%
Investment	5%	95%
Current loan	85%	15%

Maximum household have loan burden and a few have savings and investment which shows their vulnerability (Table-4).

4.2.4 House size, rent and member living in the same house: Average size of the house is 153 square feet where more than 5 people have been living. On an average, they are paying 1505 taka rent for each house. 11.55 percent household need not to pay any rent being they are living in own made houses.

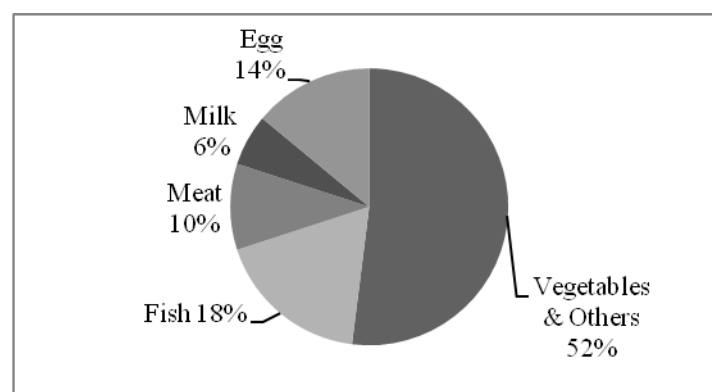
4.2.5 Land ownership and other assets: All respondent asked about their ownership of land either in urban or rural area. No household have land in urban or rural area though they are living in the city for many years.

In case of other visible assets, almost every household have Cot, 90 percent have small Almeria, 95 percent have television, 50 percent have refrigerator and 44 percent household have VCD and DVD player for amusement.

4.2.6 Water, sanitation and hygiene condition: The have been using common toilet. No separate toilet is found for female. Water Supply Authority is the only source of water and no pure drinking water is available in the community and even they do not refine or boiled the water.

4.2.7 Diseses and treatment: During last six month one or more person from 25 percent household were suffered from different types of disease. Average treatment cost of suffered household is 7.95 percent of their total income. Only 4 percent patient taken treatment from private sector and rest of the patient received treatment from government hospital and other places.

Figure:1 Food habit and nutrition



4.2.8 Food habit and nutrition: Their food receiving history and records are shown in pie chart as ratio of whole meal. (Figure-1)

38 percent house hold response that they usually don't eat milk due to their poverty. Most of the time, their meals bear the vegetable.

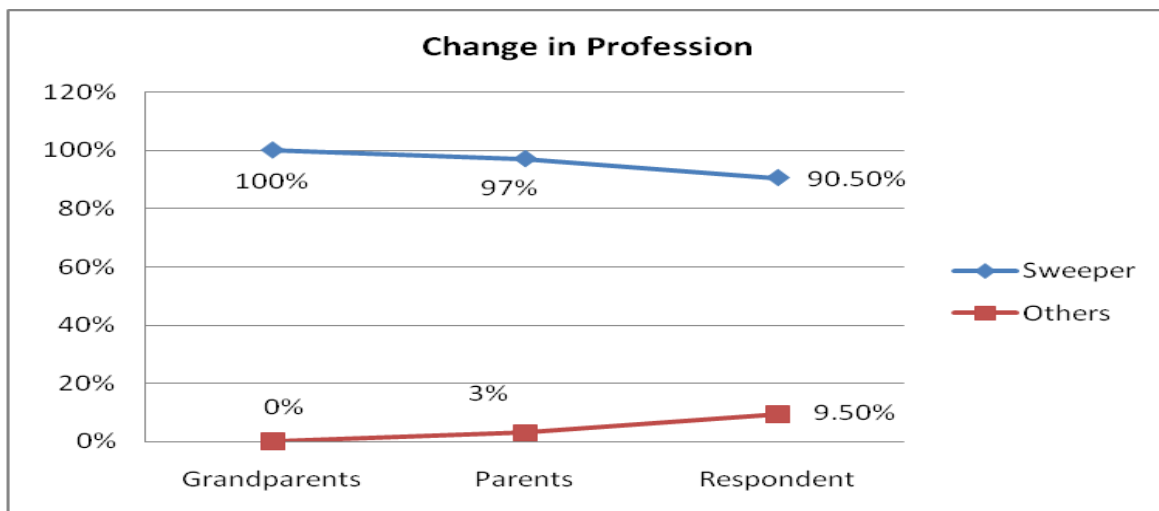
4.2.9 Dowry, early marriage, social festival and its effects on livelihood: 65 percent household has the record to pay dowry in the marriage of their member. To give dowry, they are undyingly engaging with loan and repayment with high rate of interest (300%).Consequently their expenditure always remaining over the income.

4.3. Professional trend:

Over three generation, the sweeper community has not been changing their profession significantly due to different causes. Study found that the respondent have been changing the traditional profession to other job at the rate of 9.5 percent where their grandparents and parents were occupied as sweeper. (Figure-2)

But the rate of change is lower than other dalit caste in Bangladesh which is similar to another study (Mesbah Kamal, ,Shreen Khan 2008)

Figure-2



4.4. Attitudes towards their own profession: Respondents were asked about the expectation of their profession to be continued by their children. They responded as flowing degree of choice. Maximum of the respondent do not expect that their present profession will be continued by their children. Even 8.3 percent never expect for their children to be a sweeper in future. (Table-5) Reason behind the expectation, they hope their children to be educated and will do a better job.

Table-5

Degree of expectation	Percentage
Highly expect	1.7
Moderately expect	1.7
Not expect	88.3
Never expect	8.3

4.5. Community attitude towards their job and discrimination as they think: 75 percent respondent said their profession is criticized by the other people and they do not have acceptance to them. In some cases they have no access to public place, religious institution and good hotel. 9 percent informed that their children had discrimination to get admission in to general school

Sweeper can raise their Voice: Now Sweepers are aware about their rights and vulnerability. From the surveyed area, it is noticed that, a committee named “*Bangladesh Harijan Aykko Parishad-Chattagram Mahanagar Committee*”.has been formed in order to establish their rights.

5. Conclusion and policy implications:

The study reveals that sweeper community has been living in a dark and vulnerable situation. In addition, they have been suffering discrimination by different form. Though the Constitution prohibits discrimination by the state on the ground of religion, race, sex or place of birth in article 28(1) and in 28(4) “special measure’ by the state for advancement of any backward section of the citizen, in fact scenario is too far from the declaration. Moreover the government is bound to fulfill the basic needs of the lower caste people. So, government and non government sector should development strategy on policy that ensures sweeper communities access to same rights and services enjoyed by mainstream society. As sweeper community continuing their traditional profession generation by generation due to illiteracy and skill, government should arrange some technical education to overcome the hindrance. Development players that are already working for sweeper can build up their capacity for better job in home and abroad. Regarding the case, quota system should be introduced in education and employment for sweeper. One of the major problems set with the sweeper are landless and living in very congested houses. They should rehabilitate and leased the government land with loan facility for building houses.

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