

# MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES IN BANGLADESH

STATE AND MARGINALISATION INDEX 2021

**Abul Barkat**

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*by*

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## *Dedication*

All marginalised people across the world-  
for their sacrifice and struggle to establish their rights

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AD	Anno Domini (refer to years after the birth of Jesus Christ)
ANC	Antenatal Care
ASK	Ain O Salish Kendra
BA	Bachelor of Arts
BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
BC	Before Christ
BDT	Bangladesh Taka
BEPZA	Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority
BIGD	Institute of Governance and Development, BRAC
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
BRDB	Bangladesh Rural Development Board
BTB	Bangladesh Tea Board
BWDB	Bangladesh Water Development Board
CAN-Marg	Canadian Marginalization Index
CBN	Cost of Basic Needs
CCJS	Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics
CDD	Control of Diarrheal Diseases
CEDAW	Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CEGIS	Centre for Environmental and Geographic Information Services
CHT	Chattogram Hill Tracts
CIMD	Canadian Index of Multiple Deprivation
CONEVAL	Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social (National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy)
COVID-19	Corona Virus Diseases-2019
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CS	Case Study
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DC	Deputy Commissioner
DEMO	District Employment and Manpower Office
DIS	Disability Information System
EPZ	Export Processing Zone
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
GUC	Gram Unnayan Committee
HDDS	Household Dietary Diversity Score
HDRC	Human Development Research Centre
HH	Households
HHS	Household Survey
HIES	Household Income and Expenditure Survey
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Viruses

HRDF	Human Resources Development Foundation
IDI	In-Depth Interview
IDNS	International Dalit Solidarity Network
IPS	Instant Power Supply
IYCF	Infant and Young Child Feeding
JMP	Joint Monitoring Programme
KII	Key-Informant Interview
LGI	Local Government Institution
LNOB	Leave No One Behind
MBBS	Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery
MJF	Manusher Jonno Foundation
MP	Member of Parliament
MSW	Master of Social Work
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NID	National Identity Card
NIPORT	National Institute of Population Research and Training
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
PNC	Postnatal Care
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity Dollar
PRA	Participatory Rapid Appraisal
PWD	Persons with Disabilities
RAB	Rapid Action Battalion
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SSC	Secondary School Certificate
SSNP	Social Safety Net Programme
STD	Sexually Transmitted Disease
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
TBA	Traditional Birth Attendant
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
UP	Union Parishad
USD	US Dollar
VDP	Village Defense Party
VGD	Vulnerable Group Development
WAPDA	Water and Power Development Authority
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WHO	World Health Organisation

## PREFACE

Who are the marginalised? Which communities are at the margins of society?

The marginalised are a certain group of people who, for many historical, social and political reasons, fall out of mainstream society and face perpetual discrimination and exclusion. While many countries have been able to address exclusion to some extent by enacting laws and policies, there still exists a vast population in many societies who are denied the right to live lives of dignity and well-being.

Marginalisation can occur due to physical conditions such as persons with disabilities, due to their professions such as sex workers, cleaners, cobblers etc., sexual orientation like transgender and LGBTQ or due to their class, caste and ethnicity. Some of these are social constructs handed down over generations rendering attempts to pull them out of their present situation futile. The vast majority of them are denied basic services or protections as citizens. Often the values of their tradition and culture, such as those of ethnic minorities, are disregarded. The intergenerational effects of marginalisation are catastrophic since the difficulties experienced by these groups are passed down from one generation to the next, resulting in a never-ending cycle of poverty and social exclusion.

The primary focus of Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) interventions is the protection and promotion rights of these marginalised groups of people. In line with its core principles of gender equality, respect for diversity and inclusion. MJF, along with partner organisations, has been working for the last 20 years at various levels to ensure basic public services for these groups and mainstream them in society so they can live lives of dignity and security. MJF's interventions are at two levels: support to partner NGOs for targeted intervention and national-level advocacy for enacting laws and policies to end discrimination against them. While targeted interventions produce desirable outcomes in the near term, MJF believes lasting change occurs by ensuring systematic changes through proactive advocacy and influencing activities at the policy level. To this effect, MJF, along with other human rights organisations, have been pushing for the Anti-Discrimination Act, which is on the verge of enactment soon.

MJF's experience has shown that effective policy influencing needs to be backed by evidence and that too from the grass root to the national level. MJF has therefore commissioned a number of studies and policy briefs, including a study, "State of Marginalised in Bangladesh: Experience of Marginalisation, Exclusion and Rights Violation", in 2016, which documented the situation of 16 marginalised communities. The study revealed the extreme condition of marginalisation in which these communities exist, the innumerable challenges they encounter, the immeasurable loss and suffering they endure, and the generational burden of exclusion they carry. However, there was a critical need for some quantitative scoring or index to prioritise the focus among marginalised communities according to their diverse challenges. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic, international geopolitical conflicts, and numerous socio-economic concerns at the national and local levels have made the situation more difficult for everyone, but especially for the marginalised people.

In light of this, MJF commissioned the Human Development Research Centre (HDRC) to undertake the research with its established track record of expertise and dedication in the field. From the HDRC, Professor Dr Abul Barkat consented to work with MJF to conduct this critical investigation.

The findings of the study about the country's marginalised groups are both informative and alarming. It pinpoints the staggering levels of inequality faced by these groups in Bangladesh. It also sheds light on the various forms of discrimination and violence these communities face, which range from denial of fundamental rights to inability to access basic services. The study provides a window into the multidimensional nature of marginalisation through a detailed analysis of data and information gathered from the members of marginalised communities. It also gives a comprehensive understanding of the nature and extent of marginalisation. We believe that this information is essential for developing effective policies and programmes to address these groups' sufferings.

Most importantly, the study has developed a unique *Marginalisation Index* to measure the extent of marginalisation by assigning an index value to different clusters of marginalised groups. In so doing, the study provides a clear and measurable way to identify areas where intervention and support are needed most. This is particularly important where many marginalised groups do not have a strong presence or representation in so-called "mainstream society". The *Marginalisation Index* for Bangladesh will be a valuable baseline for understanding and quantifying the extent of marginalisation.

The research team behind this study should be commended for their committed efforts. Assessing the current state of the marginalised communities in Bangladesh and developing a comprehensive *Marginalisation Index* required a deep understanding of the complexities of marginalisation. Aside from that, I appreciate how quickly and effectively the team prepared a book manuscript based on the study's findings. The team's ability to successfully navigate these challenges and produce a valuable and informative tool is a testament to their commitment. I also thank the MuktoBuddhi Publishers for publishing the book within the deadline while maintaining high standards.

Sincere appreciation goes out to all of my colleagues at MJF, without whose unrelenting dedication, MJF would not have gained the reputation it has today. I deeply appreciate the generous and consistent support of MJF's development partners, especially UKaid, to make this publication possible. Most importantly, I want to thank our local partners and members of the marginalised communities who gave information so openly and generously.

I hope the findings of the study, inferences, and evidence-based information will not only be a reference book but will be used extensively by human rights organisations, policymakers and all those who are committed to building a society free of discrimination based on social justice and equality. It is crucial to remember that transformation takes time and requires continuous collaboration and effort from multiple stakeholders. On this occasion, I would like to declare that MJF will always stand beside the most vulnerable and marginalised people, firmly committing ourselves to the overall SDG of "Leave No One Behind."

**Shaheen Anam**

*Executive Director, Manusher Jonno Foundation*

16 February 2023

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The Marginalised face the cruellest forms of challenges and difficulties. These unfortunate people are discriminated against and denied access to social and economic opportunities, making them susceptible to deprivation, exclusion and inequality. Marginalised communities do not have access to many essential human or civil rights. In addition, they face violence, displacement, and other breaches of human rights. The underlying societal and cultural attitudes that contribute to feelings of isolation, alienation, and exclusion exacerbate these problems. The cumulative effect of these problems is catastrophic for marginalised communities, resulting in limited life and livelihood opportunities to build a better life.

Assessing the marginalisation in Bangladesh requires an in-depth investigation because it is a complicated subject affecting people from different classes, sects, religions, and ethnicities. It is crucial to comprehend the extent to which it affects the population. A study would give evidential understanding and insights that could be utilised to guide policy decisions, lead pertinent advocacy efforts, and inform interventions. A study backed by a marginalisation index could judicially assist in identifying which marginalised communities in Bangladesh face significant levels of exclusion and disadvantage and how this varies across different communities. The index would help determine which communities need what attention and reinforcement. The index could also provide a basis for better-tailored new policies and refined existing policies to address the needs of Bangladesh's most disadvantaged and marginalised communities. This dynamic and realistic data-driven approach would provide policymakers with the information and evidence they need to design architecturally robust and credible policies that reduce inequality and prevent exclusion and deprivation by enhancing greater and better access to resources, services, and opportunities for all.

Against this backdrop, we are humbled that we had to opportunity to work on the subject and privileged to present the marginalisation state and pertinent index across various clusters of marginalised communities of Bangladesh in this book.

Our sincere appreciation goes to Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF), which felt the need and accordingly entrusted us with all possible support in the whole

endeavour—from the research to writing and publishing the book. We are grateful to MJF for assigning the Human Development Research Centre (HDRC) to conduct the research work and MuktoBuddhi Publishers to publish the study as a book. We are particularly indebted to Ms Shaheen Anam, Executive Director, MJF, for her profound support and encouragement. We thank Mr Shaikh Giasuddin Ahmed, Senior Programme Manager, Research, MJF, for his unstinted support. We highly appreciate the interest of Ms Nazrana Yeasmin Hira, Programme Coordinator, MJF, for her keen interest in it. We remain grateful to Mr Shoeib Shazzad Khan, Senior Programme Coordinator, MJF, for his thought-provoking ideas. We are thankful to Ms Shahana Huda, Senior Coordinator, Media and Communication, MJF, for her contribution during the publication phase. Also, we thank all the MJF officials of different programmes who joined in the study findings sharing session held at the MJF Office on 18 July 2022 and provided their valuable inputs through discussion.

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Last but not least, we must express our gratitude to the book's readers, critics, and users. We want to believe that the information in this book will be helpful

for them in paving a pathway that will support constructing a decent society by eliminating all forms of marginalisation.

Abul Barkat  
*Study team leader and principal author*

16 February 2023