

GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN DIFFERENT SECTORS OF SOCIETY: A STUDY OF WOMEN'S INEQUALITY IN BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT

The main focus of my research is to exhibit the gender inequality of Bangladesh which we know as a developing country. As we know gender requires an understanding of what women and men do and how they relate to each other, but also an understanding of the ideas, conceptions and socio-material contexts that motivate and organize gender roles. Gender issue actually generates forever in the world and all societies. Patriarchy dominates over the female all over the societies for all the times. Gender discrimination to women is a common discussable thing that means factually it appears on female, but actually it appears both on male and female equally. Female always suffering by gender discrimination it is not true, male also suffering by it. It is unavoidable that, genders are discriminated by physical or mental fertility. Gender refers to socially constructed roles and relations between man and women, while sex means; the biological characteristics which define humans as female or male. However to analyse the Gender Discrimination in Bangladesh we need to look some other objectives which can explore the scenario of gender discrimination in Bangladesh and to assess the effects of gender discrimination on our Economy and GDP.

KEYWORDS: Gender, Bangladesh, Inequality, Gender Discrimination, Women, Men.

INTRODUCTION

Both men and women work for the society but women all over the world generally perform multiple roles in productive labour (both paid and unpaid), which is often not reflected in official measures of economic activity, particularly in relation to the home. In many societies, this traditional gender division of labour has treated domestic work as more of a voluntary contribution by women, which has perpetuated income in equity. While gender

inequality became increasingly addressed in many countries from the 1970s, in other countries and societies females still do not have access to equal pay for comparable work, family benefits, financial credit, or equal educational opportunities, while the right to own and inherit property remains on-existent or is limited by laws and traditional patriarchal constraints that continue to undermine female economic life.

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As stated by a UNESCO report (2007: 27), gender discrimination limits 'the ability of many developing countries to grow and reduce poverty' and therefore is a restraint on the overall development of a country. Therefore this paper's main aim is to present Bangladeshi women's inequality in different sectors of society.

BANGLADESH AND THE ISSUE OF GENDER DISPARITY

Bangladesh is located in South Asia and shares land borders with India and Myanmar (Burma). Its population is predominantly Muslim. Bangladesh is the world's eighth most densely populated country. From the 14th to 18th centuries, the Bengal Sultanate and the Mughals transformed the region into a cosmopolitan Islamic imperial power and it became a notable centre of the global muslin trade, particularly silk. It later became part of British India and the Bengali renaissance and played an important role in anti-colonial movements. The Partition of British India led to Bengal becoming part of Pakistan because of religious reasons, where it was renamed East Pakistan. However, the post-partition period saw a rise in Bengali nationalism, which the Pakistan military government attempted to suppress and eliminate. This sparked the Bangladesh Liberation War or Bangladesh War of Independence in 1971 that eventually saw Bangladesh become an independent country.

During its first five years of independence, Bangladesh adopted socialist policies, which largely failed, and the subsequent military regime and BNP and Jatiya Party governments tried to establish a free market economy and promote the country's private sector. The Bangladeshi private sector has rapidly expanded in recent times as a number of conglomerates have begun driving the economy. Major industries include textiles, pharmaceuticals, shipbuilding, steel,

electronics, energy, construction materials, chemicals, ceramics, and food processing and leather goods. Export-oriented industrialization has increased, with fiscal year 2014–15 exports increasing by 3.3% over the previous year to \$30 billion, although Bangladesh's trade deficit ballooned by over 45% in the same time period. Most export earnings are from the garment-manufacturing industry. Bangladesh also has social enterprises, including the Nobel Peace Prize-winning Grameen Bank and BRAC (the world's largest non-governmental organisation).

As a middle power and a developing nation, Bangladesh has been listed as one of the 'Next Eleven' emerging markets and its economy ranks 46th in terms of nominal gross domestic product (GDP) and 29th in terms of purchasing power parity (PPP). Its per-capita income was \$US 1,190 in 2014, with a GDP of \$209 billion. Bangladesh currently has the third-largest South Asian economy (after India and Pakistan) and the second-highest foreign-exchange reserves (after India). Economic problems have led to a Bangladeshi diaspora, has been of particular importance to the country's economy, which 2015 remittances totalling some \$US 15.31 billion.

In Bangladesh, the issue of gender inequality is highly prominent. While there have been improvements in gender inequality over the years, many issues remain, particularly in areas such as health, education, employment, and political freedom. In 2013, Bangladesh was ranked 142 out of 187 countries on the Human Development Index and 115 out of 149 countries surveyed on the Gender Inequality Index. Many of these inequalities are the result of extreme poverty and traditional gender norms centred on a patrilineal and patriarchal kinship system.

From a cultural perspective, both countries appear to have wholly different perceptions in

relation to gender. Therese Blancher notes that in Bengali society:

“The birth of a boy is always greeted with joy. The birth of a girl is welcome when it is a first child (the first fruit which announces the fertility of the plant), or when there are already boys and no girl in a family. Otherwise, it is often received with resentment. Boys represent wealth, but girls are seen as a cumbersome responsibility. They are born to be given in marriage. This will require a dowry and impoverish the family so most prefer a large number of sons. The reverse situation is a source of resentment and anguish (1996: 50).

By contrast, the value of daughters does not appear to have been questioned in Southeast Asia. As an early European observer remarked: “the more daughters a man has, the richer he is” (Reid 1988:146).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The proposed study sets out to explore and identify the factors, extent and underlying reasons for gender discrimination and gender equality in Bangladesh. While my main focus is the post-independence period of the two countries until the present and their development policies during this period, I also examine the importance of historical and cultural factors in relation to gender relations and how they influence the present situation. A further important aim of the study is to assess how policies implemented in relation to gender equality have contributed to the social and economic development of the country and how the neglect, or improper implementation, of such policies, particularly in the case of Bangladesh, have had negative implications and served to hold the country back. I am particularly concerned with these gender issues at the family level in Bangladesh specifically in relation to attitudes concerning equality, education, financial management of

households and participation in decision making processes, and to what extent women are restricted in development activities.

I hope that the insights gained from the in-depth study I plan should assist in developing policy suggestions and strategies, particularly in relation to Bangladesh, for national and local organisations and governments. It is hoped that these suggestions and strategies will help reduce gender discrimination and allow for women to play an enhanced role in education, work, health care, and as well as in the home and society in general, leading to more healthy relationships between women and men.

THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN THE DEVELOPING COUNTRY BANGLADESH

In human society gender is known to be one of the radical organizing concept where cultural production like class, race and ethnicity do remain as a source of inequality. In Bangladesh the issue of gender is centered around the existence, value and position of women compared to men. The society of Bangladesh think that women will never be able to acquire their position with proper privileges like men and this idea about women is still sustaining like the same as past. In poor countries, women provide most of the childcare but produce half of the food. Also they work make up quarter of the work force in industry. On this issue there lots of empirical evidence that indicates, there are significant gender differences in the family lives in developing countries like Bangladesh. This country contains high level of gender disparity especially in the rural areas and from there the process of development is having troubles and obstacles. In Bangladesh the life of women is constructed by the patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal essence of the social structure. This study regarding the situation of Bangladeshi women will review a constructive analysis about the role and development of women and will find out the roots of gender

inequality. To present the gender disparity that actually do concentrate towards women, I want to give the reference of previously discussed issue of gender and women's position through the research paper named, "Dimension and intensity of gender inequality in Bangladesh" written by Sheikh Kabir Uddin Haider Associate Professor Department of Social Work University of Rajshahi. He actually did clearly elucidate and pointed out the situations of women via different and essential segments. In the part about gender issue in Bangladesh Sheikh Kabir Uddin Haider gave a very significant statements which are given below.

"A recent study by the World Bank on the issue of gender dimensions (2002) on some selected low and middle income countries found the following picture in Box 1. Bangladesh lies in the low per-capita range and its gender development is also very low. Table 1 below indicates that there were accompanying safety net or relevant operations in all those evaluating countries, but in general those did not attempt to mitigate adverse impact on women specifically. The severity of gender disparity in Bangladesh is high while the policy formulation to integrate gender issue in social protection measure is moderate. But the most unfortunate thing is that there is no monitoring at all regarding the policy implementation to reduce gender disparities. Some of the most important indicators that show the status of women in Bangladesh are something like the following:

- Women are disproportionately represented amongst the poor
- Have less access to formal employment and earn less
- They continue to face violence and abuse
- Inequality is well reflected in the health indicators
- Maternal mortality rates are amongst the highest in the world

- Mortality and malnutrition rates for girls are higher than for boys.

Bangladesh has had a policy for the advancement of women since 1976. The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs serves as the focal point in the national machinery for the advancement of women's issues. Its role is to facilitate government-wide mainstreaming of a gender equality perspective in all policy areas. It advocates, coordinates, communicates and monitors implementation of the National Action Plan (NAP). The principal goals of the NAP are: to remove legal, economic, political or cultural barriers, to raise public awareness about women's differential needs, to improve women's development and to provide full equality of opportunity. Nevertheless, gender disparity is still one of the main causes for the economic under development of Bangladesh. Government effort seems neither adequate nor appropriate to solve this problem". (Haider, 205)

Since we know in Bangladesh the gender issue is all about women, therefore some social organization do work to establish the right for them. There are various types of inequalities in the life of Bangladeshi women such as inequality in Family, inequality in the custom of marriage, fertility of women, in the section of religion, in the area of education, in the sector of health and nutrition, inequality to get the property from family, inequality in decision making, politics and administration, disparity in economic activities, and also the section where women get violently assaulted. So now I would like to discuss these following sections briefly that influence women's lives and are interrelated with their status through prevailing culture, traditions and customs of the country.

DISPARITY IN FAMILY

According to the constitution and CEDAW it's obvious that every man and woman will get

equal rights in their family but it is a matter of regret that, mostly female race is facing gender discrimination within the family. To relate this issue here i want to add the statements of Sheikh Kabir Uddin Haider regarding gender inequality within the sphere of family. He mentioned in this article called Dimension and intensity of gender inequality in Bangladesh, "Women get a smaller share of household expenditures on education and health care relative to men. Women's have less opportunity to visit health center, go to a movie, visit outside the village, and visit friends and relatives. Most of the women are discriminated by their parents at first and then by their husband in the family. Usually parents expose different attitude between their boys and girls after birth. Women in our family have always been considered subservient to men" (Haider 207). In Bangladesh it is very common to give family lands to men but in this case women get deprived. The main job of women in family is to do the domestic chores, and the work of taking care of their children and husbands. So here we can see the clear discrimination between men and women in family affairs.

INEQUALITY IN THE CUSTOM OF MARRIAGE

According to Muslim marriage law, there is a rule of giving mahr such as money, property, jewelry, clothing etc to the bride. And if there is any great mismatch like divorce happen, then the wife is entitled to get those mahr from her husband. Since this Muslim marriage is a contract between two parties (bride and groom's sides). Through this Muslim law which is to give mahr to the bride, actually its a system of protecting women. This mahr is generally written in the kabin nama(marriage contract). Now a days the significance of mahr is decreasing. On this issue Kabeer and Smock gave their statements. "The significance of

mahr has been gradually reduce more to a ritualistic custom than to actual practice". (Kabeer, 1985; Smock, 1977).

FERTILITY NAME OF INEQUALITY FOR WOMEN

After marriage to give birth of children is another significant duty for a woman. And if there is any obstacle of giving birth then the society call her as a fertile woman. The husband and his family members give blame to the wife because of her fertility. Miah gave statements about this issue. He said, "A woman becomes well integrated into her husband's family only with the birth of children, but barrenness may become grounds for polygyny and divorce". (Miah, 1992). For a man this is another kind of reason to marry multiple times. They consider this fertility as deformity and leave that particular woman because of fertility. In Bangladesh the total fertility rate was 4.8 in 2010 (population Development and Evaluation unit, 2010).

INEQUALITY IN THE ISSUE OF RELIGION

Religion makes a man accurate to lead his/her life, and according to Islam women got more dignity and rights as human being. But in Bangladesh the patriarchal Society doesn't allow women to acquire those rights. Here in this matter Miah gave statements, and said, "Local religious practices in Bangladesh have a significant influence on a woman's status, especially among Muslims". (Miah, 1992). As Feldman and McCarhy (1983) pointed out that, the Islamic dictum for women to the elders by being quiet and keeping one's head covered in their presence. To keep silent or cover a woman's head means she has the responsibility to maintain her husband and his family's prestige. Here in this matter i would like to add Hartman and Boyce's words. They have given their statements about the local belief of Bangladeshi patriarchal society. The local belief

indicates 'haven lies at the feet of the husband' (Hartman and Boyce, 1983). And this type of rootless belief got wide acceptance among most of the Muslim rural women gained wide acceptance among most Muslim rural women that produce negative result and create totally man centered opinion for women.

INEQUALITY IN THE ISSUE OF PROPERTY RIGHTS

In Bangladesh most of the women are engaged in doing household works such as take care of their children, husband and other family members. And a very small percentage of women are engaged in paid work to accumulate property or money. Though this work of accumulating women's capital is terribly limited for them. "The civil and personal laws of Bangladesh guarantee a woman's right to income and property. However, having the right to ownership and having the source of income with property is bought are two different things" (Alamgir, 1977). According to the Hanafi Muslim Laws (one of the four major groups that interprets Islamic jurisprudence) determine the policy of property inheritance in Bangladesh. In Islam there is a rule that in a family if there is a girl then she is entitled to some portion of her parent's property. If both parents die the daughter will receive one-half of total estate if there is no male child. And the other half will go to the father's brothers or their living children. If she residuary, then she will receive half of the brother's amount. For widow the law is to give one-fourth of the estate to a woman in the absence of any children. Otherwise she will only get one-eighth. In contrast, a widow will receive one-half when there are no children and will get one-fourth if she have children. Women will get estate from her son's property which is one-sixth and she can share this amount with her grand children. But ignorance, poverty, illiteracy and local practices restrict women from enjoying and

getting whatever legal inheritance they can have in their life. Therefore this situations is the reflection of lower status of women in the society such as the society of Bangladesh.

SEVERE INEQUALITY IN THE CASE OF EDUCATION

As a social phenomenon it is to be said that the strong influence of education on women is to control their own future. But in Bangladesh female education is rated as low level according to the statistics of education program. Since we know that lack of education make the women deprived from accessing equal participations in socioeconomic activities with make counterparts.

Therefore women is lagging behind to help and perpetuate the inequality between sexes. In village there are the common belief that if a girl is educated then she will be rude, not cooperative in family and disloyal. "The common belief among many villagers that educated girls are rude, less affectionate and disobedient also acts a contributory factor against female education". (Salam, 1998). According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights- 1948, CEDAW and Constitution, everybody has equal rights of education. Whereas the rates of literacy among the females are not increasing in proportion to that of the men in Bangladesh during different interregal periods. The discrimination of having education starts from the family itself where parents are to be seen more concerned about the safety of their daughters than the sons. For this reason girls are often discriminated against in getting access to school and support to continue in to secondary school. As well as daughters are restricted to their houses and given marriage at early age. In Bangladesh the general rule of society lies to let women perform only household works and do not let them to get education.

WOMEN GET LESS BENEFITS IN THE SECTOR OF HEALTH AND NUTRITION

In Bangladesh, generally the life of women goes by observing with malnutrition, ill health and therefore early age death. Women are deprived of getting proper medical check up and care from their family. The family members do ignore their special health issues such as anemia, inadequate nutrition, multiple pregnancies, abortion etc. Instead taking care of women, in family all the members are busy to take proper service from them. And hardly anyone takes responsibility to care for their female members. According to scientific explanation, having calorie for women is very essential. Ara described this important issue and said, "The daily per capita calorie intake of women (91599k.cal) is lower than that of a man (1927k.cal). The life expectancy of females (60.5) is lower than that of males (60.7 years) (Ara, 2002). But because of low social status and poverty that lead women to have poor health, high fertility and lack of access to their essential health care. Therefore the outcome of high maternal mortality rate has been categorized in three parts. The ultimate outcome of these latter three factors is a high maternal mortality rate. The average weight of a Bangladeshi woman which is about 40.9 kg, and is less than the mean weight of women in most third world countries. The low weight is a reflection of food deprivation. Also the poor environmental sanitation and lower food intake of females give them lower resistance capacity, thereby rendering them more vulnerable to diarrhea and communicable diseases, which cause the highest mortality and morbidity in this country. Though we know, there is a saying which says that women are biologically more resistant to adverse health situations than men. The maternal mortality rate of 444 per 100,000 live births is one of the highest in the world (BBS, 1997). From the statistics of ADB we can get to know about the matter of pervasive gender

differential in entitlement of food nutrition and care leads to a higher death rate of girl children than boy children (ADB, 2001). According to the research paper of GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN HEALTHCARE SPENDING IN THE HOUSEHOLD AND WOMEN'S ACCESS TO RESOURCES: PERSPECTIVE OF BANGLADESH" by Khandaker, Mu. Mizanur Rahman, he told the common picture of women's health situation in Bangladesh. "The common picture of women's health situation in Bangladesh, is high maternal mortality, high fertility rate, malnutrition and ill health. According to the sample vital registration system, BBS, 2010, the maternal mortality rate is 2.16 per 1000 live births and the fertility rate is 2.12 (average fertility of per women during reproductive age 15-49) which is still the highest in the world". (Rahman, 29-30)

WOMEN ARE DEPRIVED IN DECISION MAKING, POLITICS, AND ADMINISTRATION

The status of women in a developing society is the culminating effect of her place in the family, in the various social and administrative institutions and at the political decision-making level. In the case of Bangladeshi women all these have acted as contributing factors to divest her from the mainstream of political and administrative hierarchy. Women's participation in the political and national movement has been very negligible. Although in recent years two women have emerged as important political leaders in the country through their personal connections with deceased male political leaders of their respective parties. Women usually do not participate in the political process. Political participation of women is low because of illiteracy and little involvement of women in public life and politics. The female members of the Union Parishad (lowest part of local unit), the lowest tier of the Local Government, though elected in direct election, literally they

have fewer powers, lots of women votes at villages and women in the hill tracts are deprived of their voting rights also. Patriarchy still controls all institutions of the society, the parliament, military establishments, judiciary, education and benevolent organizations etc (Ahmed, 2001). In the legislature to have a fair representation of women, out of 345 seats, 45 seats are reserved for women. However this does not able to preclude women from contesting any of the 300 general seats – which is, of course, more a matter of theory than practice.

LESS SCOPE FOR DOING ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES FOR WOMEN

To participate in any kinds of economic activities Bangladeshi women get less scope than males. According to Salma, “She is little more than a free servant and a child bearing machine.” The “good” women stayed at home and looked after her husband and her children. Whereas the working woman portrayed as morally lax and the cause of disintegration of the family, of social values and of society in general. Women’s participation in economic activities remains unvalued at the national level because of patriarchal social structure, tradition and norms. In Bangladesh, women’s participation in economic activities shows great variation by gender, nature of activity and place of residence. Women’s household work remains unrecognized, uncounted and invisible”. (salma, 1998). Economically, women have always been involved in production although their share in consumption as well as control over capital and cash has always been nominal and neglected. In the sector of agriculture, women are known as unpaid workers. For the section of a self-employed or own account workers women are always negligible whereas men’s involvement is predominant. Besides those, there is one term called economic exploitation of girls includes

many of the same issues. For examples, women inherited rights, social security, unequal wages and job opportunities. As a result they also exploited by unvalued, often unpaid and harmful labour. In Bangladesh for getting labour is cheap, and the female labour is cheaper. That is why we can see that in garments industries the number of women workers is greater. In a garment industry one unit is having capacity to produce 200 pieces of garments require 185 to 225 workers. A garments factory can run with 50 percent unskilled labour. So a large number of rural and urban destitute women can get jobs in these factories. But their wages are not same like male workers. Among the helpers women do the unskilled work. There are males in most of the senior positions including manager, cutting master, cutting assistant. In addition to cheaper wages, one of the major causes behind the acceptance whatever is doled out to them. They are expected to work from more than eight hours and often they are not entitled for overtime payments and bonus.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ARE GETTING HIGHER

Violence against women is universal regardless of age, class, location, ethnicity and religion. This violence against women appear via many forms. First and foremost form of violence happen at home at the hands of male. After seeing violence at home, children get seriously affected. In another form violence appear to the adolescent girls. There are different kinds of violence done against the adolescent girls and women in Bangladesh constitute a serious threat of their physical and mental health, personal development and sometimes even their survival. When girls go school and women go to their office and factory, then they get easily caught by males teasing and harassment.” They have similar experience in the public transport stands, railway stations or

at other common places. Besides, they undergo sexual harassment even into their work-stations. As a woman in Bangladesh they feel insecure even at the disposal of the police". (Haider, 211)

CONCLUSION

As a whole, it is almost vivid that the rate of gender discrimination in Bangladesh is getting higher day by day. Women are unable to acquire their proper basic rights, they are truly deprived from equality and the rights to work with men in society. The social taboo is the main reason behind this inequality and thus creating incredible problems for women. In other words we can say the society is snatching their rights from them therefore putting them into great difficulty. But it's the high time to show the society that women are the most important part of a family, society and overall to the whole world. We have to value them and give them their inherited rights like men.

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