

**Girls' Education and Empowerment: Impact of Secondary Level Schooling on
Rural Women's Lives in Bangladesh**

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Declaration

This is to certify that the thesis entitled ‘Girls’ Education and Empowerment: Impact of Secondary Level Schooling on Rural Women’s Lives in Bangladesh’ was carried out by Shahana Bilkis, Registration No. 88, Session: 2005-06 for the fulfilment of the Degree of the Doctor of Philosophy, from the Department of Women and Gender Studies, University of Dhaka, Dhaka. This study was carried out under my supervision and contents of the thesis have been approved and recommended for the award of Ph.D degree.

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Abstract

This study examines the implications of secondary level schooling on young women's lives in the rural areas of Bangladesh. The study is set in the context of a significant expansion of girls' education in the country during the last two decades with an expectation of women's empowerment through education articulated in various national policies. This study uses qualitative methods to explore the assumed way of empowerment of women through education in rural Bangladesh. In order to examine the impact of SSC-level schooling, this study also focuses on the situation of uneducated women to get a comparative view. The field study was conducted in five villages of Moghia union in Kochua upazila in Bagerhat district of Bangladesh.

Under the influence of the British development approach in the sub-continent during the colonial regime women's issues gradually came up, representing middle-class values guided by Victorian ideals with respect to women's position in society. Thus, female education and limited freedom became necessary to produce housewives capable of coping with the rapidly industrializing society in undivided India. Hence, female education began to be included in the British education policy and this legacy continued even after they had left the sub-continent. Similar conceptions guided the earlier policies of girls' education in Bangladesh. Later, a gradual shift in policy was noticed, and from the Fourth Five-Year Plan onwards the issue of bringing women in the mainstream development activities, with the specific objective of reducing gender disparity and ensuring promotion and protection of women's human rights gained. Girls' education was seen as instrumental to realising this. World Declarations and goals like EFA and MDGs also made it obligatory for Bangladesh to promote girls' education with a view to promoting gender equality and empowering women which resulted in a dramatic increase in girls' enrolment rate at the secondary level.

The level of empowerment of educated women has been assessed using Sen's (1987) theorization of gender and co-operative conflict and its three indicators of their relative bargaining power, i.e., breakdown position, perceived interest and perceived contribution. Another theorization of Kabeer (1993) and Rowlands (1997) about empowerment which analysed different forms of power, including, 'power over' (controlling), 'power to' (generative), 'power with' (collective) and 'power from within' (transforming consciousness), has also been used in this study. The findings of the study show that although most women perceived education as something that increased their social dignity and helped them to be self-reliant, an overwhelming number of the educated women considered education only to be a means to raise and educate children properly. Thus, education input did not appear to produce adequate output through the schooling process, which could have enabled women to be aware of their own interest.

In contrast, many uneducated working women who had greater mobility were found to have a clear idea about their rights as human beings. The hard life-struggles of the uneducated working women enabled them to act against social norms and values that distort women's perception about their own interest. This study found that educated women emphasized gendered roles such as better performance as mothers. Many women also echoed some development rhetorics such as national development when they spoke about their perception of education. According to Sen, perceived interest, i.e., how clearly and confidently a person perceives his/her own interest, is one of the main determinants of securing a better bargaining position within the family cooperative. SSC-graduate women were found to be in a dismal position in this regard. Since they sidestepped their own interest and merged it with their families' wellbeing, they received a worse deal in the bargaining outcome. This weak bargaining power resulted in vulnerable breakdown position of women which in turn undermined their self-confidence to challenge oppressive male authority and acquire empowerment.

Men's attitude to girls' education was found to be conflicting and shifting simultaneously. Husbands were found to perceive girls' education as a way to increase social prestige, prepare them to carry out family responsibilities in their absence, and earn some more money for the family in the face of deepening economic crisis. On the other hand, they showed their rigid patriarchal stance regarding the gendered division of labour, women's mobility, decision-making and access to resources. Another important aspect to note is the contrasting views of husbands and fathers regarding girls' education and empowerment. While in some cases fathers were seen to be in favour of women's autonomy and empowerment, hardly any husband seemed to harbour similar notions.

A huge majority, i.e., 87%, of the educated women in the study area were found to be unemployed. Only 13% of them were engaged in wage employment, mostly in primary schools. On the other hand, over 45% of the uneducated women were engaged in wage employment which did not require any education, and unsuitable for women of higher socio-economic position. Social class differentiation is another significant factor that acts upon rural women's work and mobility. Even though in rural areas the level of education was higher in the middle and high income families, they also tended to maintain a more traditional outlook about women than poorer families. Unavailability of jobs suitable for educated middle-class women was another important reason for their low employment rate.

In order to find out a way to survive, poor women had to break cultural norms that failed to provide shelter from hunger and other basic needs. Consequently, uneducated poor women enjoyed more freedom of movement and work in rural areas. Thus, having practical experiences of breaking gendered roles and defying *purdah* for compelling occupational reasons, poor rural women were found to have greater self-confidence and appeared more empowered in terms of

control over own lives than those who were educated. It needs further study to assess the significance of education with regard to empowerment among women of different economic classes.

However, education offered middle-income families' women some sort of social dignity. But due to lack of women's self-confidence, economic dependence, narrow job market and the prevalent social attitude of viewing male persons as breadwinners, this social dignity did not help women gain greater control over their own lives. Thus, educational provisions alone failed to provide women with access to labour market. This in turn limits their self-esteem and confidence --power from within-- the core of the empowerment process. However, education remains a prerequisite for entry into the labour market, apart from the lower segment jobs.

Within the pervasive atmosphere of male dominance in the private and public arenas, women have little chance to take decisions regarding themselves. This study found that educated women had hardly any say in decisions regarding their marriage, reproduction, maternal health, mobility, employment, etc. Due to this severe lack of access to decision-making, the incidence of child-marriage is very high in the rural areas. Women's bodily security and control over the body was found to be severely violated by men. Majority of the women, both educated and uneducated, in Moghia were subjected to physical torture. It was also found that women from poorer households were more assertive and enjoyed greater freedom than those from comparatively well-off households. Thus, it was seen that the educated middle-class families were more rigid in maintaining patriarchal values and ideologies. Educated girls were seen to lack the awareness of self-interest and self-confidence needed to create a stronger bargaining position, which would enable them to take decisions more effectively. Lack of incorporation of the gender perspective in the schooling system put obstacles to women's decision-making power through education and hindered their autonomy.

Lives of Bangladeshi women are deeply affected by numerous adverse socio-cultural norms which include early marriage with low education, patrilocal residential arrangements, economic dependence on men, unequal legal status, limited access to resources, dowry system, purdah, etc. Interestingly, these adverse norms and systems operate within the family relations by making women internalize their own subordination. Girls develop a weak self-identity because girl children learn from a very early age that they are not permanent members of their parental families and will be sent off to their in-laws' home after marriage. Early marriage, coupled with detachment from the parental family has a strong adverse impact on women's self-worth, as it entails insecurity, emotional sufferings and provides a space for the execution of patriarchal subjugation and oppression of women. Most of the incidents of violence against women, including dowry-related violence, are possible due to family support to the perpetrators and

social legitimacy to control and punish wives and viewing it as a private conjugal matter instead of an aspect of social gendered relationship.

Within such adverse familial situation, it seems difficult for women to gain self-confidence through education that is necessary to enter into the psychosocial process of empowerment. Thus relational empowerment to negotiate gender relations could not develop within the adverse conjugal family atmosphere where unequal power relations were strongly active even after receiving SSC level schooling.

Apart from these, lack of women's political participation is another major factor which deters their empowerment through education. The socially and financially disadvantaged women are far behind men to compete in the election races in national and local levels. There prevails a strong social attitude that politics is exclusively a male domain, particularly in rural areas. The provision of three reserved seats for women in Union Parishads does not appear to be capable of bringing substantial change in the social mindset. However, this provision has an impact as it makes people think and debate on the issue of women's political participation and leadership role. The overall disadvantaged position of women again is reflected in their obtaining a very poor number of seats in the national parliament, a fact which results in their sheer lack of power to influence and participate in the process of formulating national policies in favour of them. This vicious cycle deters them from political participation which is an important aspect of women's individual and collective empowerment. Girls' education alone, without attempting to change this negative social attitude, cannot ensure women's participation in politics and thus promote their collective empowerment.

To conclude, it can be said that there is a gap between the planning of women's empowerment through education and realistic implementation strategies. Bridging this gap requires assessing women's practical and strategic needs to achieve gender equality particularly in the rural context through in-depth researches. Within the context of significant expansion of girls' education in Bangladesh, realistic policy design and appropriate strategies to reduce gender inequality and women's subjugation through schooling would be a necessary step to transform women's situations in rural areas. It is even more crucial for a resource -poor country like Bangladesh to make the optimum positive use of schooling by effectively linking the empowerment issues with educational expansion while women's empowerment is being considered as one of the policy goals.

List of Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ASF	Acid Survivors' Foundation
BANBEIS	Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics
BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
BIDS	Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies
CAMPE	Campaign for Popular Education
CEDAW	Convention on Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women
CRC	Child Rights Convention
EFA	Education for All
EW	Educated Women
FSESP	Female Secondary Education Stipend Project
FSSAP	Female Secondary School Assistance Project
FSSP	Female Secondary Stipend Project
FYP	Five-Year Plan
GAD	Gender and Development
GDI	Gender Development Index
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEM	Gender Empowerment Measure
GER	Gross Enrolment Rate
GNP	Gross National Product
GOB	Government of Bangladesh
HIES	Household Income and Expenditure Survey
HSC	Higher Secondary Certificate
HSFSP	Higher Secondary Female Stipend Project
ICDDR,B	International Cholera & Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh
LFS	Labour Force Survey
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MHHDC	Mahbub-ul-Huq Human Development Centre

MOE	Ministry of Education
MOHA	Ministry of Home Affairs
MOLJPA	Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs
MOP	Ministry of Planning
MOSWWA	Ministry of Social Welfare and Women's Affairs
MOWCA	Ministry of Women and Children Affairs
NCTB	National Curriculum and Textbook Board
NEP	National Education Policy
NER	Net Enrolment Rate
NFSP	Nationwide Female Stipend Program
NGO	Non Government Organisation
NPWA	National Plan of Women Advancement
PFA	Platform for Action
SESIP	Secondary Education Sector Improvement Project
SSC	Secondary School Certificate
STD	Steps Towards Development
VAW	Violence Against Women
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Education Social & Cultural Organisation
UNO	United Nations Organisations
UP	Union Parishad
Upazila	Lowest Administrative Unit in Bangladesh
UW	Uneducated Women
WB	The World Bank
WCEFA	World Conference on Education for All
WFW	Women for Women
WID	Women in Development

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Chapter 1

Introduction



There has been a significant expansion of girls' education in many developing countries in the last few decades, including those in which girls have traditionally been denied access to schooling. However, the GDI¹ and GEM² rankings of those countries in UNDP's Human Development Report (2007) do not show commensurate affirmative reflection in terms of women's empowerment. In the development policy planning of the developing world, it is often taken for granted that education will enable women to take part in the labour market and it is through employment that they will be empowered. This assumption is reflected in government policies, NGO strategies, the development planning of international agencies and UN development policy goals. To materialise this assumption, massive girls' education programmes have been initiated over the last few decades. The special efforts that have been made to create women's access to education have resulted in a significant increase in women's literacy rate as well as the primary and secondary education rates in developing countries.

Bangladesh is one such country where the scenario of gender inequality continues to be dismal. This is evident through various national as well as international research and development study reports (UNDP, 2007; MOWCA, 2009; MOP, 2009; World Bank, 2007). On the other hand, Bangladesh has achieved noteworthy progress in girls' education in the last two decades (MOE, 2008, MOWCA, 2008, UNDP, 2007). In fulfilment of the constitutional obligation, the provision of universal primary education since the 1980s has increased girls' education rates. In the 1990s, in order to realise the Jomtien Declaration of Education for All, government, NGOs and international agencies identified girls' education as a priority sector to be improved, and education has since been perceived as a major problem-solving tool for girls and women with the expectation that it would bring gender equity. A nationwide female stipend programme for secondary education, introduced from 1994, made a dramatic increase in the ratio of total enrolment of secondary level girl students, which nearly doubled from 24% to 52.28% within the period of 1992 to 2005 (BANBEIS, 1998, 2006). However, the assumption of women's empowerment through education requires an assessment as the situation of gender inequality

¹ GDI-Gender-related Development Index, a composite index measuring average achievements in three basic dimensions captured in the HDI- a long and healthy life, knowledge and decent standard of living- adjusted to account for inequalities between men and women (UNDP, 2007:366).

² GEM-Gender Empowerment Measure, a composite index measuring gender inequality in three basic dimensions of empowerment- economic participation, decision making, political participation and power over economic resources added together to get the GEM value of any country (UNDP, 2007:366).

indicates some missing links. Therefore, it is now important to examine whether education ensures employment and thus empowers women through a transformation of the structures of subordination. This study aims to examine whether education has got essential linkages with women's empowerment and explores the implications of secondary education in empowering women. The field study has been conducted in five villages of Kochua upazila in Bagerhat district.

In this chapter, I will discuss the aims and objectives of the study.

1.1 Aims of the Study

In order to explore the impact of secondary education on girls' lives in rural Bangladesh, the study looks at the girls' views and experiences of and attitudes towards their schooling, their economic activities and participation in familial decisions. It also examines the encouraging and inhibiting social factors in achieving empowerment.

The aim of the study centres on the qualitative aspects to reveal educational implications. Available reports and studies done on girls' educational achievements in Bangladesh were found to focus on the number of girls who are now under the coverage of secondary schooling (MOE, 2008: BANBEIS, 2007: MOWCA, 2008: WB/IDA, 1997; MOE, 1996) instead of qualitative results such as how schooling influences women's socio-economic position and participation in family decision-making. Thus the result of improved access to education appears to be an unexplored area.

1.2 Research Questions

As the research study aims to explore whether an increase in access to girls' education can make a substantial change in gendered relations in the family, community and society, the research project looks at whether improved access to girls' education can be translated into improved control over a girl's/woman's life. The study also looks at the rural Bangladesh to examine the extent to which schooling is seen as contributing to individual, social, cultural and economic emancipation for girls and women. The main research questions are:

- A) In what ways do educated girls (secondary level) make use of their schooling? Is there anything left to be desired relating to education or employment that could not be done due to familial, social or any other reason?
- B) What is the viewpoint of the father/ mother, the neighbours/friends regarding the utilisation of education through taking jobs outside home?
- C) How do educated women (those who have completed the secondary level schooling) as well as their teachers, parents, friends and village leaders perceive girls' education and gender equality?
- D) To what extent are educated women participating in making decisions relating to their own lives, children and family (such as marriage, reproduction and expenditure of family income, children's education and marriage etc.)?
- E) What socio-cultural factors encourage/inhibit girls' education, employment and participation in household decision-making?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

- A) To acquire in-depth knowledge of how girls' education is perceived by girls/women, their families and other social relations as well as their own views and experiences.
- B) To explore the implications of secondary education in the practical lives of rural women in terms of different empowerment indicators such as earning activities outside home, effective participation in family decisions, greater autonomy etc.
- C) To get wider information on the different dimensions of the familial/social/cultural norms, rituals and factors relating to women's empowerment/disempowerment.
- D) To enhance the capacity to advocate need-based policy and implementation strategies so that an optimum positive use of girls' education can be made in order to achieve women's empowerment, which is one of the major policy goals of Bangladesh

1.4 Overview of the Situation of Women and Girls' Education in Bangladesh

Policy Objectives of Women's Empowerment through Girls' Education

The policy documents which envisaged gender equity by imparting education encouraged me to examine the link between education and empowerment. Different national and international development policies stated women's empowerment as one of the main objectives of girls'/women's education. In collaboration with international agencies and NGOs, the Government of Bangladesh has undertaken a number of initiatives towards integrating the issue of women development into the national policy and planning strategies. These include (i) the Fifth Five-Year Plan (1997-2001) adopting the mainstreaming of women's development approach; (ii) the National Policy for Advancement of Women (NPWA 1997); (iii) the National Action Plan: Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (PFA) (1998). Aiming at promoting and protecting women's human rights as well as sharing of power and participation in decision-making at all levels, these policies stress on girls' education. The National Plan of Action for Women's Advancement (1997) focuses on 'attitudinal changes about roles and responsibilities of males and females' where the primary 'actor' is identified as 'educational institutes' (MOWCA, 1997a:80).

In accordance with the Fifth Five-Year Plan (1997-2002) and National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction 2009-11 (MOP, 2009), the Government of Bangladesh set specific goals and objectives in 'bringing about changes in attitudes, structures, policies, laws and practices in order to remove obstacles to achieve human dignity for girls and women' and 'promoting equality between women and men in the sharing of power and decision making at all levels' whereby education has been seen as the major strategic concern (MOP, 1997:170).

Stipend Programme for Girls' Education

To realise the policy objectives of women's empowerment, the Government launched the Nationwide Female Stipend Programmes at the secondary level under four projects from January 1994 (MOE, 2005). Later, another stipend project, the HSFSP³-II was launched at the higher secondary level in July 2002. These are FSSAP⁴-II, FSSP⁵, SESIP⁶, FSESP⁷-II, and HSFSP-II.

³ Higher Secondary female Stipend Project

⁴ Female Secondary School Assistance Project

As of June 1999, the state provided 78.5 lac girls attending secondary school with a stipend of 482 crore taka (Chowdhury et al, 1999:61). By 2004, the total amount disbursed under the projects reached 4753.78 million taka to educate girls with a view to promoting equality between women and men (BANBEIS, 2008, MOP, 2009).

Nationwide female stipend programme for the secondary education started from 1994. Consequently, the net enrolment rate for girls at the primary level reached 90.10% in 2005 compared to 50.76% in 1990 (BANBAIS, 2006). The enrolment rate at the secondary level has also increased significantly from 41 percent in 1995 to 52 percent in 2005. This study, therefore, assesses the impact of increased girls' schooling on women's empowerment.

Women's Labour Market Trends in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh though gender gaps in education are decreasing, the paid employment situation is not comparable with it. Furthermore, educational attainment seems to have a weak link with the labour market participation as the major sectors in which women work do not require education. The export-oriented garments industries started in 1983-84 with 3.89% of the total export of the country, reaching 75.67% in 1998-99. It was basically the cheap labour force which made this rapid growth possible. Women workers represent 85-90% of the total work force with low educational qualification. 68.6% of them complete primary education while 27% stop studying before finishing the primary level because of poverty.

The 1995/96 Labour Force Survey shows that 78.8 percent of the women within the labour force are involved in agriculture but 70 percent of them work as unpaid family labour (LFS, 1995-96). The Labour Force Survey 2005-06, shows that a maximum of 60.1% of the total women labour force work as unpaid family workers whereas 11.7% work as regular paid employees. The garment manufacturing sub-sector is the largest employer of women.

Women's labour market participation is considered a significant determinant to assess their relative empowered position in a society. Due to its utmost importance, assessing the 'share of

⁵ Female Secondary Stipend Project

⁶ Secondary Education Sector Improvement Project

⁷ Female Secondary Education Stipend Project

women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector' has been set as one of the prime indicators of the MDGs relating to women's empowerment (UNDP, 2007).

Women's Higher Share in Poverty

Amongst the millions of poor in Bangladesh, women are the most deprived. When poverty affects a household, women bear a disproportionately heavier burden of the poverty to manage the household production and consumption (MOWCA, 1997). Various studies indicate that women at large are the hardcore poor. The number of ultra poor (measured by the food intake of 1600 k. cal per person daily) is higher in female-headed households than in male-headed ones. The Household Income Expenditure Survey, BBS, 2005 shows that about 29.6 percent of divorced/widowed women live below the lower poverty line against the national average of 25.1 percent (Planning Commission, 2009). Thus, the number of women among the poor is much higher than men. Another study conducted by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) on Analysis of Poverty Trends shows that of the total poor population, the women's share is 76 percent (MOWCA, 1997). Various studies and data show that despite eye-catching attainments in girls' education for more than one decade, women are still severely afflicted with poverty, social and economic injustices, and widespread discrimination at all spheres of public and private life.

Violence against Women

In addition to pervasive inequalities in the above mentioned sectors, horrific forms of violence against women, which are the most visible and extreme forms of oppression against them by men, clearly indicate that widespread repression and subjugation of women exists in the society. Although the Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees equal rights to all citizens irrespective of race, gender and class, the women of Bangladesh are the most vulnerable segment of the population. Among the forms of VAW, violence for non-fulfilment of dowry demand, murder, rape, gang rape, physical and mental torture for further dowry demand, *talaq* (verbal divorce from the husband's side), physical assault for trivial domestic reasons, and acid throwing are just a few to mention. Besides these other forms of violence include husbands' remarriage for boy children, polygamy, early marriage; deaths due to early motherhood, and *fatwa*⁸ and, *salish*⁹;

⁸ *Fatwa* is a verdict given by Muslim religious leaders to women for allegedly violating the Islamic law and codes of conduct. Most of the *fatwa* victims are poor rural women; an estimated 3000 women are being persecuted annually in Bangladesh (Hashmi, 2000:97).

stalking and intimidating school and college girls by boys and men, and trafficking. Appallingly, despite having secondary levels of schooling, educated girls and women experience such violence openly along with uneducated girls and women.

Table 1.1: Cases of reported violence against women by categories 2002-2007

Year	Women Oppression				
	Rape	Acid throwing	Seriously Injured	Others	Total
Total	19039	1087	5400	56288	81870
2002	3702	214	1079	11346	17153
2003	4118	207	1209	12853	18337
2004	2865	191	663	8023	11643
2005	2556	183	568	7561	10871
2006	2453	145	1205	7421	10622
2007	3345	147	676	9084	13244

Source: Police Head Quarters, Ministry of Home Affairs, 2008

According to a report published by the Ministry of Home Affairs, in 1999 violence against women included as many as 2426 murders, 2029 cases of physical abuse, 3504 rapes, 122 acid throwing and 245 abduction cases, which were officially recorded. After nearly one decade, in 2007, the above table shows that 3345 rapes, 147 acid attacks, 676 cases of serious injuries and 9084 cases of physical tortures occurred (MOHA, 2008). According to newspaper and other Human Rights reports, violence against women has increased alarmingly in recent years. Among these, acid-throwing, dowry-related murder or attempt to murder and incidents of *fatwa* and *salish* are regular items of daily newspapers. A significant number of the acid-throwing victims are schoolgirls and the attack comes after refusing proposals for marriage or love affairs (Huq, 2002:2). UNICEF and Odhiker (a human rights organisation) reported 200 cases of acid violence in 2000, whereas it was 130 in 1997, most of the victims being aged between 12 and 18 (Unicef, 2002; Odhikar, 2001). In 2007, the number of acid attacks remains almost the same as it was 11

⁹ *Salish* is a village arbitration council of conflict resolution through mediation - traditional but not a part of state judicial system. Composed of influential elders who tend to oppose any social change, *salish* gives informal judgements on disputes over family, marriage, divorce, inheritance or property affairs (Hashmi, 2000:98). Women and human rights activists are concerned about its anti-women nature as in most cases judgements are passed against rural helpless women (for detailed case study see Hashmi, 2000).

years ago. This form of violence is so ghastly that it needs extra mental strength to see the horrific deformed faces of innocent acid victims.

In October 2000, the UN Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance reported that the 26 incidents of *fatwa* (religious verdict) in the previous year were an attempt ‘to stifle any efforts to emancipate women’ (Amnesty International, 2002:1). Traditional religious belief and its misappropriation by the ‘semi-literate *Mullas*’ who act as the ‘interpreter-cum-custodian’ of the *Sharia* (Hashmi, 2000:98), play a significant role in keeping women subordinated in society, particularly in rural areas by using the instrument of *fatwa* and *salish*. In many cases, after being condemned to the *fatwa* punishment victims commit suicide to get rid of the emotional scar due to physical torture in front of a public gathering (Rahman, 2002).

Moreover, these overt pictures of women’s oppression irrespective of education or class indicate the probability of many more in a covert form. These patriarchal values and norms are often perpetuated and legitimised by religion (Chowdhury, 2006). Male-biased interpretation of religious norms, laws and practices appear to keep women inferior to men in all respects in the name of divine revelation. Thus, girls’ education does not appear to be a simple equation of women’s empowerment as it is assumed by the policy planners (MOWCA, 1997a: MOE, 2008). Within the social context of a country like Bangladesh, patriarchal attitudes, norms and values appear too strong to be removed only by girls’ education.

Discriminatory Legal Rights

In Bangladesh, 89% of the total population are Muslims, 10% are Hindus and 1% is of other religions (CIA, 2000). The country still follows the Islamic law of inheritance for Muslims, which gives daughters half of what sons get (Kamal, 2009: MOWCA, 1997; Begum, 1985). Though the other sectors of laws are being reformed, lawmakers seem reluctant to amend this discriminatory anti- women law through formulating uniform civil law (Rahman, 2001). CEDAW is the most important international instrument for protecting women’s human rights. But Bangladesh still has reservations on two articles - Article 2 and Article 16.1.c of this extremely important policy document. No government took any initiative to withdraw the reservation from these articles which would have obliged enactment or reform of national laws in order to ensure equal justice for men and women (Hossain, Mohsin, Jahan, 2009). This is in spite of the fact that the country has the distinction of having had two women prime ministers (who

are also the heads of the two major political parties) consecutively since 1991 unlike any other country in the world.

Feminist scholarship analyses it as a strategy of ruling as well as opposition parties so as not to offend religious sensitivity in fear of losing votes and power (Khan, 1988; Nasreen, 2001; Murshid, 2001). However, women rights activists are constantly pressing the issue of reforming of the inheritance law to make it equal, which they think is one of the root causes of women's lower status in the society. Therefore, educating girls without attending to the socio-political context does not appear an effective and fruitful step toward women's empowerment. Education may be a necessary but not a sufficient step.

Asymmetrical Health Situation

Although there has been mentionable progress in the health sector in the country, the situation of women's health continues to be dismal. Women are more disadvantaged than men in terms of access to healthcare and nutritional status. Healthcare for women is basically limited to their reproductive health. Women's health in general is neglected and they are less likely to receive modern medical care while they have to rely on primitive rural methods of healthcare. More worryingly, women are dreadfully exposed to the dangers of childbirth. The maternal mortality rate of 350 per 100,000 live births in Bangladesh is one of the highest in the world (BBS, 2007). According to BBS, trained personnel attend only 20 percent of the deliveries. Only 39.6 percent of the total expectant mothers get antenatal check-up only once during the whole pregnancy period while 20.6 percent have their antenatal check-up four times (2008). 16-25 percent deaths of the total maternal mortality rate are due to septic abortions, 20 percent due to eclampsia, 5-10 percent due to postpartum sepsis, and another 5-10 percent of women die due to tetanus (ADB, 2005). A quarter of maternal deaths are associated with anaemia and haemorrhage and prolonged labour (BBS 1998). Malnourished mothers give birth to low-weight babies who can become stunted and underweight. Due to widespread discrimination against them, girls and women are deprived of minimum nutritional intake. Not surprisingly, around 70 percent of women and children in Bangladesh suffer from nutritional deficiency.

Limited access to health services coupled with early marriage, early pregnancy, a son-preferring attitude in the family and society, and poor nutritional status are factors exacerbating girls' and

women's health which have resulted in women's intergenerational transmission of poor health situation. Although this grim picture was more depressing in earlier years, in 1991 nearly 5 percent expectant mothers embraced death due to maternal complexities. But the sluggish progress in the women's health sector which has decreased maternal mortality by 1.5 percent in more than one-and-half decade (BBS, 2008), does not match with the girls' equitable enrolment rates at the primary and secondary level of schooling.

Therefore, the gap between an increased girls' education rate and women's situation in Bangladesh poses the question whether the assumption of taking education as a major problem-solving tool to address women's disempowerment is sufficient for Bangladesh within the above-mentioned appalling social context relating to girls and women. Thus the issue of women's empowerment appears as a complex area needing to be examined instead of assuming that girls' education will make women empowered. Considering the importance of gaining a deeper knowledge about the impacts and consequences of education on the lives of rural women, this study explores the changes caused by education if there is any.

Part 1- Literature Review, Theoretical Frameworks & Methodology

Chapter 2

Girls' Education and Empowerment: The Global and the South Asian Contexts



This chapter reviews the policy initiatives and implementation strategies and efforts regarding girls' education that have been made so far in countries in South Asia within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals and the Education for All targets. With a view to achieving the MDGs and EFA policy goals with regard to gender equality and women's empowerment, South Asian countries have taken programmes to increase girls' education rate, assuming it will help transform their lives towards empowerment. This chapter analyses this concept of development paradigms with respect to girls' education, within the socio-cultural settings, norms, values and barriers. With a view to having an in-depth analysis of different dimensions of girls' education and their empowerment, it also reviews the available study findings and literature on these issues.

2.1 Status of Girls' Education in South Asia

Various studies show that South Asian countries have made remarkable progress in girls' education (ADB, 2007, Unicef, 2009), although basic education of children in general and girls is still disappointingly low. In 2004, among the total 77 million out-of-school children in the world, mostly from poor rural families, 16 million (one-fifth) were from South Asia. Back in 1999-2001, the total number of out-of-school children was 40 million in South Asia which was sharply reduced to 16 million due to various educational initiatives. Not surprisingly, 70% of them were girls, which indicates that girls are marginalised and necessary steps are required to break the socio-cultural and economic barriers to girls' education in South Asia (UNESCO, 2008; Unicef, 2009).

As a result of increased budgetary allocations and commitments in this sector in the recent past, Bangladesh, Nepal and India have progressed significantly in girls' education while Maldives and Sri Lanka achieved it long before due to prioritized state policies. Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bhutan still lag behind to achieve an acceptable rate in girls' education. From 1999, progress is noticeable in heading towards gender parity in South Asia along with GER and NER in primary education enrolment and transition to secondary education but South Asian countries are still far from attaining full parity (Unicef, 2009). A study by UNESCO observes, as in Sub-Saharan Africa and West Asia, in South Asia very few female teachers are there in schools to attract female students and retain them (2008b).

Another feature of girls' education in South Asia is rural -urban gaps. A study by Unicef shows, in rural provinces of Afghanistan, girls were less than 20 percent of the total primary school enrolment compared to 39% of the national average (2009). The study shows that low educational attainment of girls in rural areas was common in remote hill tract regions in Bangladesh. In India girls' education rates were lower than that of boys in rural areas of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. The situation of girls' education in rural areas in Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Pakistan also demonstrated a lower position than boys. Sri Lanka was found to be the only exception in this regard.

The study finds another form of disparity which derives from social class hierarchy. This problem was evident in multi lingual and ethnic countries like India and Nepal. Social class division on the basis of caste, ethnic origin or language further exacerbate access to education of South Asian girls. The study observes that in South Asia, '...a typical child whose right to education is denied is most likely to be a girl from a rural area coming from an underprivileged social group' (2009:11).

The Unicef study points out that in Afghanistan, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan and India girls are behind boys in terms of access to basic education. This inequality in educational access is influenced by rural or urban origin, where they come from and which social class they belong to. Most importantly, although a few countries such as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Maldives achieved gender parity in enrolment, it 'has not meaningfully contributed to their social and political empowerment (2009:13)'.

2.2 Development Paradigms Relating to Girls' Education

The main paradigms of development – modernisation, particularly human capital theory, and dependency and neo-liberal theories along with other critical theoretical frameworks such as postmodernism and feminism - all have important links with education. However, viewpoints of these frameworks relating to education vary significantly. Stressing the need of making large investments in human beings, human capital theory argues that education is a productive investment to bring faster economic growth (Fagerlind and Saha, 1989; Escobar, 1995).

Although the First Development Decade (1961-1970) did not address women specifically, the

Second Decade took the strategy of ‘the full integration of women in the total development effort’ (Kabeer, 1994:1). Within these development initiatives, girls’/women’s education was seen as a major area in which intervention was needed. With a view to achieving ‘largest returns for economic development’ and in line with human capital theory put forward by the classical liberal economists, the IMF, World Bank and other international development agencies emphasised girls’/women’s education in developing countries (WCEFA, 1990). As a consequence, debates and arguments about gender, education and development discourse emphasize the issue of girls’ education. Academics also argued for girls’ education drive in South Asia as it could bring huge outcome because this region lagged behind in girls’ education and missed its social benefit for long (Herz, 2006). Thus, national governments, UN and aid agencies started to incorporate gender and education in their development policies and set promotion of girls’ education as their top priority policy agenda in the 1990s. As mentioned earlier, the World Conference on Education for All (EFA), and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have particularly focused on girls’ education and fixed specific targets to achieve them within a given time-frame in developing countries.

Some academics argue that girls’/ women’s education has an impact on decreased mortality and fertility rates and increased nutritional and health status (King and Hill, 1993:12). However, this viewpoint has been criticised for instrumentalising women. While others find it as a factor increasing women’s mobility (Stromquist, 2001:46), this notion is not evident in traditional South Asian societies as customs and cultural practices tend to limit women’s basic rights (MUHHDC, 2000:108). Thus education does not always help women promote their position in the family and in the society as it depends on the cultural, economic and political context (Heward, 1999:6).

2.3 Perceptions of Girls’ Education in South Asia

An important aspect of girls’ education is its meaning and impact on society, that is to say, how society perceives education has a great influence on women’s empowerment. The societal perception seems to have a considerable link with whether education will empower through raising consciousness about inequality or reinforce gender roles and relations. Literature review shows that in South Asian societies girls’ education often reinforces gendered roles.

In the social context of South Asia, education is perceived as having a different meaning from empowerment. For example, in the Indian subcontinent girls' education 'is first and foremost used towards family status production' (Kerkhoff, 1998:26) and in some cases as a family strategy to enable girls to earn if the situation arises. Using case histories of 40 Indian women representing two generations, Chanana explores through her study the 'interface between the institutions of family and marriage, and women's participation in formal education and employment', and shows that education is viewed as an 'investment for future utility, not to develop self-worth or as training for independence' (Chanana, 1998:157,170).

Therefore, education tends to reinforce women's reproductive roles and even educated women lack self-confidence and are not likely to be aware of socio-political concerns (Huq, 1992:51; Jawayeera, 1997). Thus the traditional feminine identity and gendered role is reinforced through education where reproductive responsibilities are recognised as the topmost priority.

Some argue that education can change the life situation of girls and women through opening up employment opportunities (World Bank, 1996) and make them able to achieve greater control over their lives and to be involved in the household decision-making process (Watkins, 2000; Amin, 1996:186). In many cases, however, prevailing social attitudes regard girls' education as a way of performing a better role in child and family care (Kerkhoff, 1998:180). The root of this attitude derives from girls' socially expected gender role within their families and societies.

Educational Achievements are Equivalent to Gender Equity?

In addition to the above-mentioned perceptions of girls' education, educational achievements are seen as equivalent to gender equity. In accordance with the WID approaches, development policy planning in the developing world often assumed that education would enable women to enter the labour market. And through employment, women would be empowered. This assumption is found in development planning of government policies, NGO strategies and international agencies.

To realise this assumption, massive girls' education programmes have been initiated over the decades, resulting in a significant quantitative change in the GER of girls' education. However, feminist scholarship has questioned such an assumption, as it does not address fundamental structural problems of gendered power relations.

Analysing the South Asian context, Jayaweera argues that although gender gaps in education have been reduced in developing countries in the last two decades, the two main components of women's empowerment, economic and political participation, have not changed (1997:411). Jayaweera also shows that girls' education does not necessarily mean women's empowerment as it does not ensure their entry into the labour market (1999:188).

2.4 World Conferences and Declarations Relating to Girls' Education

After the Second World War, in its attempt to make a just world based on human rights, dignity, peace and equality between women and men, the United Nations declared the UN Charter (1945), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), The Convention on Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (1979) and the Millennium Declaration. The women agenda has long been considered an important issue for the UN. Through various International Conventions, the UN and other international development institutions have made national leaders agree to take up policies to address gender issues. In so doing, new discourses on gender, education and development have emerged in the 1990s (Heward, 1999).

The World Conferences and Declarations such as the Jomtien Declaration of EFA, Millennium Development Goals and the Beijing Platform of Action added new dimensions to girls'/women's education. The signatory developing countries of these Declarations were obliged to take special initiatives to promote girls' education. However, the integration of gender issues in educational policy planning at the national level can be seen as an international obligation made by the UN conferences that 'legitimised women's concerns in the eyes of the national leaders and required them to address'. Nevertheless, such an obligation in many cases lacks a political and ideological willingness to bring about transformation (Tinker, 1997:13) and women's empowerment.

2.5 Girls' Education: Socio-Cultural Norms, Values and Barriers

As the findings of studies on perceptions of girls' education discussed above reflect the social-cultural context in South Asia, there are a number of factors that inhibit girls' from attending, retaining and completing both the primary and secondary education. Understandably, these barriers are multidimensional in terms of their forms and nature. Different types of barriers that are holding back girls in numerous ways can be seen in denying their rights and access to education, unfavourable teaching-learning process, long distance to school, responsibility of domestic work and sibling care, poverty, male-bias and gender-insensitive curriculum,

insecurity, stalking, sexual harassment, intimidating and in many more social pressure both in overt and covert forms (Unicef, 2009). Beyond this apparent picture of inhibiting factors, critical analyses of socio-cultural norms and practices reveal patriarchal values, male supremacy, gendered division of labour, and gendered power relation playing an influential role in putting barriers to girls' education.

More appallingly, in regions like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Maldives where gender parity in enrolment is achieved, girls' improved access to education could not transform their subordinate position in the family or society. Still girls are being discriminated in terms of access to further education, professional skill developing education and so on. More importantly, besides this vulnerability to education related inequalities, women's empowerment in private and public arenas still a mirage. They are far from achieving control over their own lives. Arguably, this is happening due to the policies that pay little heed to addressing gendered power relations and redistribution of patriarchal power structures. This transformable social construction of gender roles and positions of power remain almost unchallenged in the policy agenda. Instead, it puts emphasis on improving women's access in the development process.

Girls' Education and Violence against Women

In South Asia, almost all the countries face the problem of adverse socio-cultural factors working as a stumbling block to girls' education. In Afghanistan, in 11 rural provinces, girls' primary enrolment rate was 19 percent less than the national average rate of 39 percent. This depressing scenario was worse in the Taliban stronghold provinces such as 3%, 5% and 7% in Zabul, Helmand and Khost provinces respectively (World Bank, 2004). As mentioned above, school and college girls from rural areas are more likely to be subjected to 'eve teasing', sexual harassment and acid-throwing. Such violence against women due to strong bias against girls' education, often takes a deadly turn. In 1996-2001 the Taliban government outlawed women's education as un-Islamic. Although after the toppling of the Taliban in 2001, educational restrictions imposed upon girls have been legally lifted and they have returned to school, due to fundamentalists' orthodox beliefs and a strong anti-women bias, still girls and women are being attacked violently for pursuing education. According to REUTERS, on 17th of April 2012, in Kunduz, 150 Afgan schoolgirls were poisoned through drinking water at a high school by the

conservative radicals- Taliban (The Daily Star, 19.04.2012). In remote rural areas of Pakistan, India, Nepal and Bangladesh, school girls also face different forms of socio- cultural barriers. As a whole, girls and women in the South Asian region to some extent are exposed to insecurity and anti- education attacks.

2.6 Problems of Quantitative Measure of Educational Achievements

Another problem that can be noticed is that studies done on girls' education in South Asia are overly influenced by the quantitative method. The Unicef study observes, quantitatively measured educational attainments in line with the EFA GMR identifying indicator put importance on calculating gender equality (2009).

It cannot be denied that indicator-specific measurement is necessary but to depend only on numbers may obscure the divergent experiences and realities relating to girls' education. It can be argued that qualitative measurement is capable of focussing on matters that are bypassed in quantitative methods. More importantly, to know about the educational outcomes in real-life situation such as personal or relational empowerment qualitative measuring method appears crucial. Worryingly, in South Asia, the paucity of qualitative studies on girls' education can be identified as one of the barriers to bring about positive changes in this sector.

2.7 Education and Entry into Labour Market

Yokiyo Otani (2000), in her study on female Bangladeshi garment workers, demonstrates that for the female garment workers, education is neither a precondition for entry into the garments industry, nor does it appear to be an empowering tool for them in Bangladesh. Thus the study reveals that a large number of girls and women without proper education find a job in the garment factories because these types of jobs do not require any educational qualification as such.

The export-oriented industrial sectors including garments and shrimp processing industries are the biggest paid job markets for women, where they are recruited because their labour is cheaper than that of men. Besides, the type of work which involves long working hours and boring

repetitive working patterns with low payment is considered most appropriate for women. Therefore, it can be easily inferred from Otani's study and the other above-mentioned facts that girls' education has little to do with labour market participation and female workers -- be they unpaid or low paid domestic helps or garment workers or day labourer in agriculture and non-agriculture sectors¹⁰ -- can easily get a job in the lower segments of the labour market well without any such education.

2.8 Interrelation of Education, Employment and Empowerment

The literature also shows that income-generating activities do not necessarily mean women's greater control over their lives, leading to empowerment. In her article 'The Grameen Bank Experiment: Empowerment of Women through Credit', Osmani shows that in rural Bangladesh income generation cannot 'neutralise centuries of cultural conditioning' which 'requires them to lean on their husbands' in making use of the credit they obtain, causing a barrier to their empowerment (1998:82).

Another study done by Ackerly also shows this problem in enhancing poor women's empowerment through income generation programmes by the NGOs in Bangladesh. In many cases, women's income was spent by their husbands or male family members (1997:149). As Ackerly argues, without challenging familial gender hierarchy, credit programmes cannot empower women as long as they are dependent on men within the family (1997:155). Social constraints on rural women's mobility and their market access (Ackerly, 1997:143) also limit their ability to deal with money or market related matters.

Thus, despite participation in income-generation, men's authority on women's income -- due to predominant cultural trends, lower access to the decision-making process and 'low absorptive capacity' (Osmani,1998:83) of monetary management--works as significant barriers to women's empowerment (Mahmud, Razzaque & Nahar, 2001:24; Khan, 1988:18). Furthermore, beyond these micro social contexts where gaps are evident between goals and achievements relating to women's empowerment, mighty supranational institutions like the World Bank tend to view girls' education as a means to higher economic growth and population control (WB, 2001)

¹⁰ These are the sectors in which majority of the women are engaged in the labour market according to the Labour Force Survey.

instead of valuing it as a precondition for women's empowerment (Jeffery, P, and Jeffery, R, 1998:253). Consequently, social transformation for achieving gender equity remains unattended and the majority of educated girls/ women are visibly far from gaining self -respect or a sense of agency to redistribute oppressive power structure (Gibson, 1996).

Thus, they are far from entering into the process of getting control over resources and the ability to create effective demand and negotiation (Afshar, 1998), and control over their own lives. In this way, the multipurpose use of education and emphasis on other achievements such as national economic growth, increased family income and decreased population growth, other than empowerment and the adverse socio economic conditions, appear to inhibit women's 'power from within'.

The ideological preconceptions about gender roles in the society have a disempowering effect upon women even when they are employed after education. The social attitudes about masculinity and femininity- and 'male protectionism' (Kabeer, 1994:169) inhibit the process of relational empowerment in the workplace. One example of this can be the study done by Diana Gibson (1996) on literate female farm workers.

In contrast to the ideas that see illiterates as marginalised and assume that illiteracy leads to exclusion from the job market, this study reveals that farms in South Africa, when the study was conducted, needed people equipped more with 'farm knowledge' (1996:52) than with literacy. One of the farmer's sons said, 'Normal academic education is of little use in a farm' (1996:52). The farmers rather emphasised working skill, which was achieved with apprenticeship where women had no access. At the same time, school curriculum or learning content was not based on job skills.

In addition to this, being male was another important factor as a male overseer observed, 'The women cannot do men's work' (1996:60). Male illiterate farm workers were proud of their practical working ability and skills. This self-esteem had been restored by co-workers and farmers. Furthermore, this brought to them more financial benefits and higher status in the workplace than literate women workers even though the males were unable to read and write.

Thus, self-confidence of illiterate male workers and the supportive role of the employers and fellow workers made them more empowered at personal and relational level in comparison to literate women workers in the workplace. Therefore, besides education, prevailing social

attitudes about women's abilities and gender roles play an important role in women's disempowerment.

Therefore, educational provision alone does not provide women with access to the labour market comparable to men, which can give them a sense of self-confidence- 'power from within'- towards empowerment. There are influential socio- political and ideological factors to prevent women's access to labour market (Unterhalter, 1991). However, education remains a prerequisite for entry into the labour market.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the background, policy position and the present situation of girls' education in Bangladesh. Its achievements and failures will also be analysed in relation to empowerment in light of the reviewed literature and studies done on the issue.

Chapter 3



Girls' Education in Bangladesh: Analysis of Policy, Initiatives and Achievements

This section reviews the policy objectives, initiatives and achievements regarding girls' education in Bangladesh. It focuses on the historical perspective and the national and international policy positions relating to girls' education. The chapter also examines the policy executing strategies and how far policy goals have been achieved. Studies done on girls' schooling, particularly in the rural context, will also be reviewed in this chapter.

3.1 State Policies on Girls' Education: Historical Background

From the earliest period of history, this territorial location (present Bangladesh) possesses a rich cultural legacy where education was considered a source of prestige, high esteem as well as spirituality but which largely remained as a male domain (Jahan, 2001). However, Wood's Education Despatch of 1854, one of the first documents relating to formal education, suggested a need for girls' education¹¹. It argued, 'by this means a far greater proportional impulse is imparted to the educational and moral tone of the people than by the men' (excerpts annexed in Jalaluddin & Chowdhury, 1997:230-237).

But practically, the colonial rulers intended to produce a few male servants for colonial administration and ensure their 'material interests altogether unaffected by the advance of European knowledge in India' (excerpts annexed in Jalaluddin & Chowdhury, 1997:230-237). Thus, support for the promotion of girls' education was confined to the elite class while the majority of poor rural women did not get access to education.

Furthermore, the religious background of Bengal (now Bangladesh) kept Muslim women away from the benefits of education (Engels, 1996; Khan, 1988). The backward position of the Muslim community was a result of preserving strong '*purdah*' or seclusion (Amin, 1996:185) and emphasising Islamic education instead of Western knowledge and language. When the Hindu upper class adopted Western education, language and culture, Muslims took it as a threat to Islamic values and ideologies. As a result, the Muslims lagged far behind the Hindus on the issues of education, employment and social position. Understandably, Muslim women became doubly isolated from the education system due to *purdah* and the political stance of many Muslim men with regard to modernisation and Westernisation (Khan, 1988).

¹¹ Then Bangladesh was part of British India.

During British rule the Hartog Education Commission of 1929 noticed a lack of social willingness to invest in girls' education (Jalaluddin & Chowdhury 1997; Jahan 1998). But this commission's findings went almost unattended. Under the influence of the British development approach in the sub- continent, women's issues gradually came up representing middle-class values of female education and controlled social participation. These Victorian ideals guided the colonial policy with respect to women's position in the society in undivided India (Kishwar, 1999).

Victorian ideals have been brilliantly depicted in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's feminist literature- '*The Yellow Wallpaper*'¹². She lucidly depicted how the society disapproved of a woman's intellectual capabilities and discouraging her desire to write even though she loved it (1892), and how this stifling of flourishing human capabilities made a woman hysteric. The story satirically depicted women's repression within the patriarchal form of love and care, gender stereotyping, ideals of femininity and masculinity and more significantly gender hierarchy. When asked about the background of writing her much acclaimed '*The Yellow Wallpaper*', Gilman shared the story in an article '*Why I wrote the Yellow Wallpaper*' which was published in the October 1913 issue of *The Forerunner*. Gilman says, while suffering from a severe nervous disease, she was advised to live a complete domestic life and never to touch pen, brush or pencil by a noted specialist who was proved wrong¹³. After a century of Gilman's time, domestic life is still viewed by the

¹² The story first came out, in the *New England Magazine* in 1891, and it influenced women's movement of the US.

¹³ Gilman says, "*For many years I suffered from a severe and continuous nervous breakdown tending to melancholia--and beyond. During about the third year of this trouble I went, in devout faith and some faint stir of hope, to a noted specialist in nervous diseases, the best known in the country. This wise man put me to bed and applied the rest cure, to which a still-good physique responded so promptly that he concluded there was nothing much the matter with me, and sent me home with solemn advice to "live as domestic a life as far as possible," to "have but two hours' intellectual life a day," and "never to touch pen, brush, or pencil again" as long as I lived. This was in 1887.*

I went home and obeyed those directions for some three months, and came so near the borderline of utter mental ruin that I could see over. Then, using the remnants of intelligence that remained, and helped by a wise friend, I cast the noted specialist's advice to the winds and went to work again--work, the normal life of every human being; work, in which is joy and growth and service, without which one is a pauper and a parasite--ultimately recovering some measure of power.

*Being naturally moved to rejoicing by this narrow escape, I wrote *The Yellow Wallpaper*, with its embellishments and additions, to carry out the ideal (I never had hallucinations or objections to my mural decorations) and sent a copy to the physician who so nearly drove me mad." (The Forerunner, 1913)*

developing societies¹⁴ as the best option for women. Therefore, to produce housewives capable of adjusting with the industrializing society, female education and limited degrees of freedom became necessary for colonial India (McCarthy,1993). Hence, female education started to be included in the British education policy and their footsteps were followed even after they had left the subcontinent.

After the end of the British colonial regime, except the first Five-Year Plan in the Pakistan period (1947-71), both the Second and Third Five-Year plans mentioned the need for more opportunities for girls and proposed scholarships for girls to provide incentives to them (Unesco, 1987). But the plans were never implemented as mentioned in the policy planning. Instead of mass rural education being promoted, the 1960s showed a concentration of efforts in higher education where a limited number of urban affluent males were the main beneficiaries (Huq, 1983).

3.2 Policy Position of Independent Bangladesh on Girls' Education and Women's Issues

Within the above-mentioned mindset and social context of Bangladesh where education is perceived as having a different meaning from empowerment, evidently, educational provisions for girls in the post-independence period were focused on 'education for enlightened motherhood' (Chanana, 1994)¹⁵, instead of preparing them for paid jobs. Girls were being educated to be efficient mothers with home managing skills. The Qudrat-E-Khuda Education Commission Report (1974)¹⁶ attached importance to girls' domestic skill, saying that 'women's education should be of help to them in their domestic life' and stressed that subjects like 'child-care, the nursing of the sick, preservation of health, food and nutrition must be included'. It recommended that girls' professional development be limited to primary school teaching, nursing and typing (Jalaluddin and Chowdhury, 1997:290). As a whole, this mindset -- viewing girls' education for better performance in gendered roles and responsibilities instead of women's autonomy -- to some extent remained persistent.

However, from the beginning state policies have been formulated to address women's issues. We shall discuss state policies relating to girls' education and women's issues since the

¹⁴ Here it is meant Asia, particularly South Asia, Africa and Latin America

¹⁵ Details of Chanana's study is discussed in Chapter 3, page-4

¹⁶ Despite The Qudrat-E-Khuda education Commission Report was a progressive one in terms of universal education and other issues.

independence. After a brief description of the state's policy position with regard to girls' education and women's issues, initiatives relating to girls' education that have been adopted to achieve the policy goals will be discussed. How far the policy goals have been achieved, through these policy initiatives, will also be discussed in this section.

3.2.1 First Five-Year Plan

Although the First Five-Year Plan of independent Bangladesh (1973-78) took into account women's backward situation and emphasised a welfare-oriented approach and focused on the rehabilitation of war-affected women, the FFYP identified women's education as crucial in order to develop good human resources to contribute to national progress. On the other hand, the objectives of girls' education were basically to ensure the well-being of family and better home management by promoting nutrition, healthcare, education and socialisation of children. Economic participation of women outside the home was seen as a way to contribute to the financial gain of the family. In tune with the WID 'integrationist' approach¹⁷, FFYP noted that the condition of women would be improved if they were educated, and they would be able to perform as equal partners of men in nation-building activities. The plan also predicted that the outcome of education would increase the marriage age and decrease the family size to fulfil the national population control programme. But studies and researches on the achievements of the goals set in the FFYP revealed that in the 1970s, colleges and universities were given more emphasis than mass-oriented basic education, and goals of gender and class equality in education were not achieved (Unesco, 1987). Women's development also was taken as a central focus with a similar logic in the next Two-Year Plan (1978-80).

3.2.2 The Subsequent Five Year Plans

As the policy documents show, only from the 1980s (Second Five-Year Plan 1980-85) there has been a growing recognition of the critical importance of women's participation in development, and simultaneously of the severe discriminations faced by women in all spheres of life. The commencement of the Second Five-Year Plan also coincides with the Second World Conference on Women held in Copenhagen in 1980. Arguably under its influence, the Second Five-Year Plan demonstrated a multi-sector model involving women's participation in the health, education and employment sectors where women were considered as an agent of development rather than

¹⁷ This approach is substantially followed later in the Nationwide Female Stipend Projects in 90s.

passive beneficiaries. The Second Five- Year Plan (1980-85) of the country emphasised that a congenial atmosphere for women's increased participation in credit and entrepreneurship programmes should be created. The plan also placed the issue of promoting girls' education on its policy agenda, but due to the lack of effective initiatives through a strong political will and necessary resources, many of these goals were not achieved.

The Third Five-Year Plan (1985-90) also had specific objectives to reduce the imbalance between the development of men and women. In the Third Five-Year Plan reduction of gender imbalances found a place as a priority objective and more elaborate programmes on women's development were made, emphasising the need for women's participation in the mainstream of socio- economic activities.

Despite the above mentioned specific points¹⁸ with regard to women's development in the highest policy document of the country, the first three five-year plans up to 1990, including a two-year plan practically put emphasis only on infrastructural and institutional development (Hossain & Yousuf, 2001).

3.2.3 Policy Guidelines in the Fourth Five-Year Plan

Seemingly, the Fourth Five-Year Plan (1990-1995) put special emphasis on the overall empowerment of women. As it claimed, with a view to improving the situation, it set out to raise the female literacy rate and ensure enhanced participation of women at all levels of national life especially by employing qualified women as primary and secondary level teachers, health and family planning workers, agricultural extension agents, employees of private organizations and self employed workers.

Aiming at stimulating a significant increase in girls' enrolment in secondary level schools and madrasas some significant measures were articulated in this policy document for developing human resources. It also put emphasis on improving the quality of education and reducing the rates of dropout. It was assumed that the policy goal of men-women equality would be achieved by dint of women's participation in the economic and social development of the country. As it appeared, the fourth Five-Year Plan integrated women's development into the 'macro framework

¹⁸ Such as objectives of girls' education although to ensure the well-being of family, economic participation of women and to perform as equal partners of men in nation-building activities, to increase marriage age and decrease family size as an outcome of education to fulfil the national population control programme etc.

for multi-sectored thrust' (MOP, 1990) to bring women into the mainstream of economic development.

Although from the period of the Fourth Five-Year Plan (1990-1995) a few important steps such as passing the Primary Education (compulsory) Act, obligatory recruitment of 60% female teachers in vacant posts were taken, the practical situation with regard to girls' education and women's development remained far away from the articulated policy goals.

3.2.4 Fifth Five-Year Plan (1997-2002) and National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction 2009-11

As for the policies and objectives of The Fifth Five-Year Plan (1997-2002) relating to women's issues, it stressed the prime aim of the plan, which says 'the main aim of the Plan is to integrate women development into macro framework and to reduce gender disparity in all sectors through integration of women into the mainstream of development efforts' (MOP, 1997:167). In order to make changes in attitudes, policies and institutional structures and remove barriers to achieving human dignity for girls and women, the government of Bangladesh set specific goals and objectives. The central focus of this policy document was promoting equality between women and men in terms of power and decision- making at all levels.

As a follow-up process, in its macro framework the Fifth Five-Year Plan incorporated policy to 'bring women in the mainstream of development activities with a specific objective to reduce gender disparity in the areas of socio-economic developments as well as to ensure promotion and protection of women's human rights through implementation of CEDAW (MOP, 1997:170).' As a result, some important policies have been formulated regarding free and compulsory primary education for all and free girls' education up to grade 8. The Plan recognised the multi-sectored approach to mainstreaming women's development and also emphasised the policy and advocacy role of MOWCA. The National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction 2009-11¹⁹ (MOP, 2009) adopted goal of the mainstreaming women's development.

3.2.5 Sixth Five-Year Plan and Vision 2021

Through Vision 2021 and the associated Perspective Plan 2010-2021, the government set specific development goals which would be implemented by two medium term development

¹⁹ Previously this state policy document was known as PRSP, Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper

plans. With a view to obtaining a higher standard of living, better education, improved social justice and more equitable socio-economic environment, Vision 2021 is targeted to enhance democratic principles emphasizing human rights, freedom of expression, rule of law and equality of citizens.

Although it is obvious that there are wide gaps in policy and its implementation, yet it is clear from the above discussion about the state's policies in relation to girls' educational provisions and the issue of gender equality and women's empowerment that the government was committed to promoting gender justice in all sectors. We shall now focus on policy implementation measures that were taken to realise the policy goals of women development.

3.2.6 Girls' Education: Major Policy Goal-Realising Instrument

To achieve the above-mentioned policy objectives of the country since independence, education has been considered the major instrument (MOP, 1997). As mentioned earlier, the First Five-Year Plan envisaged girls' education as a tool that would increase marriage age and decrease family size to fulfil the national population control programme. In tune with the previous state policy, the Second Five-Year Plan also put the issue of promoting girls' education on its policy agenda.

In addition to that, the Fourth Five-Year Plan categorically stressed significant measures to increase girls' enrolment in secondary level schools and madrasas and gave importance to improving the quality of education and reducing the rates of dropout as well. The Government of Bangladesh, with some short-term and long-term objectives, laid special emphasis on the Fourth Five-Year Plan (FFYP) (1990-95) to raise the female literacy rate from 16% to 25% and thereby ensure enhanced participation of women in all spheres of national life.

Short-term objectives of the Fourth Five-Year Plan relating to girls' education:

- To increase the rate of enrolment of girls in grades 6-10.
- To assist them to pass their SSC examination so that they can become qualified for employment as primary school teachers, agricultural extension agents, health and family planning workers, and NGO field workers etc; and
- To hold them in studies and thereby refrain them from early marriage.

Long-term objectives of the Fourth Five-Year Plan relating to girls' education:

- To increase the number of educated women capable of participating in economic and social development activities of the country;
- To increase the social status of women in the community and thereby reduce the gender gap in every sphere of life;
- To create a positive impact on population growth; and
- To provide occupational skills training to school leaving girls interested in entering the labour market as self-employed workers, semi-skilled and skilled workers.

In conformity with the previous policy objectives, the Fifth Five-Year Plan (1997-2001) again emphasised integrating women's development into the macro framework and reducing gender disparity in all sectors by amalgamating them into mainstream development efforts. The policy identified girls' education as an effective instrument to achieve policy goals.

It is clear from the above discussion about the state policy documents that the issue of women's development and girls' education in particular have been getting considerable importance in the policy agenda for the last four decades. Although it can be argued that due to a lack of effective initiatives through strong political will and necessary resources, many of these goals were not achieved. For instance, using girls' education as a tool that would increase marriage age and decrease family size to fulfil the national population control programme was one policy objectives of the First Five-Year Plan. Notwithstanding, studies and researches on the achievement of the goals set in this plan revealed that in the 1970s, colleges and universities were given more emphasis than mass-oriented basic education, and goals of gender and class equality in education were not achieved (Unesco, 1987). Arguably, the other FYPs, to some extent deviated either from the articulated goals or failed to reach targets due to poor implementation strategies and lack of commitment and in some cases fund constraints.

3.2.7 National Education Policy 2010: Women's Education

Acknowledging that due to socio-cultural and economic reasons a large number of women are deprived of education, which is a cornerstone of human development, the National Education Policy 2010 set five specific objectives to 'change existing trends' (MOE, 2010:39). With a view to achieving the goals of ensuring 'women's comprehensive development and empowerment and women's participation in a balanced social advancement' (MOE, 2010:40), 14 strategies have

also been chalked out. Among the five objectives of women's education mentioned in the NEP, two are about promoting awareness and confidence among women would be supportive of their equal rights, changing their subordinate position and empowering them to resist dowry and violence against women. The other objectives are on the issue of national development, poverty alleviation and socio-economic development through self-employment (MOE, 2010).

It can be argued that clearly a paradigm shift has taken place relating to girls' education. In the 1970s when the First Five-Year Plan viewed girls' education as a way to decrease fertility rate, the National Education Policy took girls' education as an instrument for promoting awareness and confidence among women to motivate them to claim equal rights and overall empowerment. Noticeably, the policy shifted from the instrumentalist approach to rights-based one. Nonetheless, whether the 14 stated strategies would be enough to achieve the set goals remain to be analysed.

3.2.8 The Constitutional Rights

The Constitution of Bangladesh has guaranteed equal rights for women and men. The Constitution has also provisions for adopting special measures in favour of the advancement of women and children. According to Article 10, 'steps shall be taken to ensure participation of women in all spheres of national life.' The Constitution, in its preamble in page 3, further pledges that 'it shall be a fundamental aim of the state to realise through the democratic process a socialist society, free from exploitation – a society in which rule of law, fundamental human rights and freedom, equality and justice -- political, economic and social -- will be secured for all citizens'. With a view to overcoming the subordinate status of women, the Constitution assures of 'making special provision in favour of women or children or for any backward section of citizens (Article 28.4)'.

It may be noted here that the Constitution guarantees equality of men and women. It envisages equal participation of women in 'all spheres of national life'. Despite this, women and girls' are deprived of their constitutional rights in various ways, especially in terms of education. As the personal laws of each community govern personal life of citizens, women are facing numerous discriminatory laws in family relations, marriage, child custody and inheritance. Appallingly, these adversities impact on women's human rights and their right to education in a negative way.

3.2.9 International Conventions: EFA and MDGs

World Conference on Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are the prime international obligations for Bangladesh as a signatory member state of the United Nations. With an estimated 962 million illiterates in the world in 1990, the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, set goals to reduce the number of illiterate people by half. South Asia has the highest number of illiterates, more than 60% of the world's total illiterate adults. In South Asia, Bangladesh occupies the 4th position in terms of having illiterate adult after India, China and Pakistan (UNESCO, 1997)

In 2000, world leaders made the Millennium Declaration and pledged to work together to build a poverty-free, healthy and equitable world. Among the 8 goals of the Millennium Declaration, the second and third goals are: achieving universal primary education and promoting gender equality and empowering women respectively. These two goals are directly linked with girls' education. As for the first one progress has been commendable, although the high drop-out rate remains a big concern. Still there is a wide gap between the enrolment and completion rate. And girls' share of the dropout rate at all levels is quite high. The goal of promoting gender equality and women's empowerment has specific targets to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels of education no later than 2015, and empower women. Although gender parity in primary and secondary level enrolment has been achieved, women constitute only 24% of the total enrolment in tertiary level education (BANBEIS, 2008). Despite having some visible changes towards progress, the empowerment of women remains a huge challenge.

3.3 Nationwide Female Stipend Programme (NFSP) for Secondary Education

To achieve the above-mentioned policy objectives, the government of Bangladesh (GOB) launched a program from January 1990 that aimed at exempting girls living outside the metropolitan areas from paying tuition fees from grades 6-8. In developing human resources, this programme was aimed at stimulating a significant increase in girls' enrolment in secondary level schools. But this program was not sufficient for continuing their education up to 10. As a result it was necessary to launch a larger program for achieving the targets of the FFYP. However, it is to

be noted that, a pilot project for providing financial support to secondary female students of one thana was taken up in the early 1980s with the financial help of USAID. On close monitoring and evaluation of the program, it was found that by providing financial support it was possible to bring and retain the girls at the secondary level.

Table 3.1 Basic Statistics Regarding Female Education-2005

Sl	Type of Educa	No. of Institution			No. of Teachers			No. of Enrolment		
		Total	Female	%	Total	Female	%	Total	Female	%
1.	Primary	80,401	-	-	3,44,789	1,24,990	36.25	1,62,25,658	81,34,437	50.13
2.	Secondary	18,500	3,708	20.04	2,32,929	46,983	20.17	73,98,552	38,68,014	52.28
3.	College	3,160	601	19.02	90,713	17,449	19.26	13,70,278	5,69,632	41.57
4.	Madrassa	9,214	1,138	12.35	1,16,026	9,445	8.14	17,75,578	8,45,311	47.61
5.	University	78	-	-	12,559	1,883	14.99	2,05,066	50,096	24.43
6.	Technical Vocational	2,728	267	9.79	17,185	3,208	18.67	2,41,336	62,562	25.92
7.	Professional	223	47	21.07	4,191	453	10.81	60,285	21,141	35.07
8.	Teacher	188	1	0.53	2,132	525	24.62	36,265	13,525	37.29

Source: Banbeis, 2008

However, in order to achieve the targets of the FYP more effectively, the government decided to undertake the Nation Wide Female Stipend Program (NFSP) for awarding stipend and tuition grant to the female students from grades 6 to 10, and also for providing financial help to purchase books in grade 9 and pay examination fees to SSC candidates. With a view to realising the policy objectives of women's empowerment, the government launched the Nationwide Female Stipend Project at the secondary level under four projects from January 1994 (MOE, 2005). Later, another stipend project, HSFSP-II, was launched at the higher secondary level from July 2002. These are: FSSAP-II, FSSP, SESIP, FESP-II, and HSFSP-I. As of June 1999, the state provided 78.5 lac girls attending secondary school with a stipend of 482 crore taka (Chowdhury et al, 1999:61). By 2004, the total amount disbursed under the projects reached 4753.78 million taka to educate girls with a view to promoting equality between women and men (BANBEIS, 2008, MOP, 2009). There were some specific objectives of NFSPs as follows:

- To increase the rate of girls' enrolment in grades 6-10.

- To assist girls to pass the SSC examination so that they can make themselves qualified for employment as primary school teachers, agriculture extension agents, health and family planning workers, NGO field workers etc.
- To hold girls in studies and help them abstain from early marriage; and
- To make the community aware of sending their daughters to the schools for obtaining education.

The general objectives of NFSPs were as follows:

- To increase the number of educated women capable of participating in the economic and social development of the country.
- To enhance the social status of women in the community and reduce gender disparity.
- To create a positive impact on population growth.

Eligibility Criteria for Getting Stipend

Under NFSP, the female students at the secondary level are getting stipends under the following criteria:

- The girl students must attend at least 75% of the classes in an academic year;
- They must obtain, on an average 45% marks at the half-yearly/annual examination;
- They must be unmarried until passing the SSC examination.

Students violating any one of the above criteria will not be eligible for getting stipends and tuition fees.

The rationale behind this financial incentives and subsidies was social cost-benefit analysis. As it arose from the instrumentalist WID framework, NFSP emphasised women's productive and reproductive roles. The above-mentioned eligibility criterion for getting stipend shows that it gave importance to delayed marriage for controlling the population, not for ensuring girls' right to have protection from child marriage (Raynor, 2006).

Table 3.2 Female Stipend Projects

Name of Project Funded by	No. of & Upazila	Year	No. of Instn.(School & Madrasah)	No. of student stipends	Girls received	Amount disbursed (Million Tk.)
FSSAP-II	119	2003	6110	1026704		640.72
(IDA & GOB)		2004	6383	831016		288.87
FSSP	270+19	2003	14538	1896887		1434.00
(GOB)	(only madrasah)	2004	15065	1190679		795.40
SESIP	53	2003	2525	430746		283.60
(ADB & GOB)		2004	2630	276355		182.60
FESP-II	19 (only school)	2003	846	112786		92.60
(NORAD)		2004	872	58806		36.01
Total All Project	461	2003	23719	3467123		2450.90
		2004	24950	2356856		1302.88

FSSAP : Female Secondary School Assistance Project

FSSP : Female Secondary Stipend Project

SESIP : Secondary Education Sector Improvement Project

FSESP : Female Secondary Education Stipend Project

3.4 Impact of NFSP and other Policies on Girl's Enrolment Rate at the Secondary Level

Unquestionably NFSP has an enormous impact on girls' increased enrolment rate in Bangladesh. There has been remarkable progress in increasing NER in girls' education. The reasons behind this were and continue to be the provision of universal primary education since the 1980s, initiatives towards the World Declaration of Education for All (EFA) from the government, NGOs and international agencies in the 1990s and above all, NFSP for secondary education from 1994. In the starting year of the NFSP where there were 700,000 beneficiaries, the number reached in 2001 was more than 4 million. The number of primary level completed girls has increased significantly and more schools were included in the programme. Consequently more and more girls were connected with the NFSP.

Table: 3.3 Girls' Secondary Enrolment in Bangladesh by School Year -1995-2005

Year	Sex	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Total (Gr.6-10)
1995	Girls	699939	591840	475374	341361	264328	2372842
	% of girls	49.07	48.93	47.10	43.63	41.90	46.91
1997	Girls	861899	728703	585304	420250	325404	2921560
	% of girls	49.90	49.76	47.90	44.37	42.61	47.70
1999	Girls	1003007	891146	744220	597816	522634	3758823
	% of girls	51.92	52.22	52.83	52.45	49.77	51.94
2001	Girls	1064312	950312	876536	736135	568802	4196097
	% of girls	52.99	53.75	56.03	52.35	49.90	53.20
2003	Girls	1052498	974348	899735	765272	630715	4322568
	% of girls	51.30	53.20	55.70	53.10	53.20	53.20
2005	Girls	1030127	881506	779147	675859	501375	3868014
	% of girls	52.11	52.31	52.61	52.23	52.14	52.28

The above table shows the national secondary enrolment figures for girls from 1995 to 2005. Table 5.1 indicates a steady increase of enrolment as well as a decrease in drop-out rate. In 1995 while there were a total of 2,37,2842 girls in secondary grades, after 10 years the number reached 3,86,8014. Although there were gaps between enrolment in grade 6 and reaching grade 10 indicating quite a high dropout rate²⁰, still it clearly shows a significant increase in NER. Girls' participation at the higher secondary level increased from 10 percent in 1972 to 28 percent in 1990 (BBS) and the figure increased to almost double in 2005 with a 42.48% enrolment rate (BANBEIS, 2006). The NER at the tertiary level is also increasing. Consequently, the net enrolment rate for girls at the primary level reached 90.10% in 2005 compared to 50.76% in

²⁰ About 35 percent do not make it up to grade 5. In this regard, a study carried out in rural Bangladesh has established a relationship between girls' delayed marriage and educational attainment. Most of the rural parents prefer to wait at best till puberty for their daughters to get married due to weak enforcement of the minimum legal age of marriage (Unicef, 2006).

1990 (BANBAIS, 2006). The enrolment rate at the secondary level has also increased significantly.

As Table 5.1 shows, 46 percent of the girls in the country completed the secondary level in 1995. This number increased steadily in the following years. Although there was a slight decline in number since 2003 from 43, 22,568 to 38, 68,014 in 2005, it was mainly due to stricter criteria for getting stipend. Interestingly, it can be noticed from the enrolment statistics that girls' share in it has increased first and from 1999 girls' enrolment rate has slightly more increased than that of boys. This can lead to misleading assumptions of boys' deprivation. A study done by Oxfam GB (2006) makes such a conclusion which is not altogether correct. Dropouts and other factors have a negative impact on girls' completion rate. However, it is a very obvious fact that girls are being enrolled in secondary school in much higher numbers than the previous decade. As a whole, it can be said that gender parity in enrolment has been achieved since 2000 (Raynor, 2006).

The NFSP model undoubtedly can be termed as a success case in achieving gender parity in enrolment. Bangladesh has already achieved the MDGs of eliminating gender disparity in education. This success of Bangladesh has been praised widely by the development stakeholders. Now the question is- how far this gender parity in number is able to transform millions of girls' lives towards their empowerment. Appallingly, it seems that emphasis was given on girls' increased number in school to achieve gender parity, neglecting educational quality and its impact on their lives in terms of empowerment.

3.5 Studies Conducted on Girls' Education up to 90s

During the UN Women's Decade, a number of studies on the situation and problems of girls' education were conducted. Most of the studies identified constraints encountered by girls to reach educational institutions. Women for Women, one of the leading feminist research groups in Bangladesh, published a number of studies (Islam, 1979; Islam, 1985; Begum, 1992). In contrast to the quantitative nature of state conducted surveys, these studies focused on the inhibiting factors for the education of the majority of rural girls and women.

Through these studies, different categories of constraints -- socio-cultural, economic and structural -- were identified. The studies found that these inhibiting factors interact and reinforce each other to contribute to the under-representation of girls and women in education, and their

disadvantaged condition as well (Jahan, 1998:43). Among these three major areas of barriers, the socio-cultural constraints derived from patriarchal values, norms and ideologies were seen as powerful ones which influence poverty-related financial and physical facility-related structural problems. However, these studies did not focus on the impact of girls' education to overcome their disadvantaged condition.

Table 3.4 Internal Efficiency Rates at the Secondary Level in School

Year	Sex	Internal Efficiency Rates (%)			
		Completion Rate	Dropout Rate	Survival Rate	Co-efficient of efficiency
2001	Both Sex	17.16	82.84	57.27	25.2
	Male	20.27	79.73	58.65	24.0
	Female	13.98	86.02	55.67	15.8
2002	Both Sex	24.79	75.21	57.89	28.2
	Male	30.87	69.13	61.75	35.4
	Female	19.23	80.77	54.31	21.8
2003	Both Sex	16.57	83.43	49.38	20.2
	Male	19.53	80.47	50.75	23.7
	Female	13.74	86.26	48.30	16.7
2004	Both Sex	16.79	83.21	40.84	21.5
	Male	20.12	79.88	40.71	26.3
	Female	13.79	86.21	40.91	17.3
2005	Both Sex	19.98	80.02	41.45	25.0
	Male	23.46	76.54	42.71	28.9
	Female	16.71	83.29	40.35	21.2
2007	Both Sex	37.55	62.45	60.77	43.7
	Male	41.71	58.29	60.69	48.7
	Female	33.82	66.18	60.87	39.3

Source: Banbeis, 2008

In 1980, the Institute of Education and Research of the University of Dhaka conducted a national survey on education at the basic level. It revealed that among the enrolled children aged between 6 and 10 years, girls were 37 percent and poverty was identified as one of the main reasons for not sending children, particularly girls to schools. Nearly 13 years later, another World Bank study stated that girls represented 43% of all primary level, 41% of secondary and 31% of higher secondary level students (World Bank, 1996).

Another study on girls' education in Bangladesh identified some barriers to girls' education. These include: centralised and top-bottom planning and administration, lack of a clear idea about girls' education and gender issues and improper policy regarding girls' education and empowerment. It recommended that gender equity at all levels from policy planning to implementation should be a central concern (Jahan, 1998:60). But this study also overlooked the area of assessing the consequences of girls' education in their real life-situations in order to achieve gender equity. On the other hand, it focused on how to increase the number of girls in educational institutions through overcoming socio-economic constraints and incorporating gender issues at all levels.

3.6 Studies Conducted on Girls' Education after 90s

Although since independence, all the FYPs of the country --the prime policy document--have chalked out various programmes on girls' education and women development through welfare and instrumentalist approaches. Despite all these official government policies that strongly advocated girls' and women's education, social attitudes appear not capable of coping with the change as it is governed by patriarchal norms, values and customs.

Social Barriers to Girls' Education

A study on 826 households in 47 villages in Bangladesh, in the year 2000, shows that comparatively rich fathers are less likely to send their daughters to school (Quisumbing and Maluccio, 2000, cited in Raynor, 2006). The study explores factors that act on bargaining power within the household. It finds that fathers' wealth has a negative impact on daughters' schooling.

This finding goes against the arguments presented in the policy documents and commonly held belief that poverty is the main factor in early marriage. Arguably, various studies show that girls tend to discontinue school due to early marriage since the law of minimum age of marriage is not

enforced strictly. A study conducted by Save The Children shows 69 per cent girls of rural areas are being married off before 18 (2010)²¹. Social attitude regarding girls' education and its significance has a huge effect on this matter. Hence, social resistance to girls' schooling in overt and covert forms can be seen as a big hindrance to achieving stated goals of girls' education.

Anti-Girls' Education Violence

Studies show that despite gender parity in enrolment being achieved, girls' status in the society is inferior to boys. Boys are predominantly thought to be the future breadwinner of the family and real shelter for aged parents; hence investment in girls for education or else is useless (USAID, 2002). This prevalent attitude towards girls and women make them susceptible to social harassment ranging from teasing, kidnapping to violence like acid throwing as their presence is more common in public places particularly on their way to and from school. In the last 10 years an alarming number of schoolgirls have been killed or seriously injured by stalkers (Odhiker, 2011). In some cases parents, brothers, husbands, grandparents, neighbours and teachers have also been killed as they protested or wanted to save the girl-students from stalkers.

The case of Hawa Akhter Jui explains a lot about the general social attitude towards girls' education and the husbands' master like power over their wives. Hawa Akhter Jui, a nineteen-year old married girl with profound interest in education, had the fingers on her right hand chopped off by her husband for defying his order to stop her studies (The Daily Star, Jan 21, 2010). These occurrences are not restricted to girls and women of any particular socio-economic group of the society. Even university teachers are being subjected to of education-related violence. Rumana Manjur, a teacher of Dhaka University, had her eyes gauged out by her husband as she was pursuing higher education in the University of British Columbia, Canada (The Daily Star, 2011). Hence girls are worryingly susceptible to the psycho-physical danger of sexual harassment, teasing and violence not only on their way to school but also at home. In rural areas, long-distance schools further increase these risks.

Family poverty is one of the main factors that negatively affect school attainment in Bangladesh. In cases of extreme poverty, educational initiatives understandably fail to reach the poverty-stricken children. Even if they are enrolled in school, there is a high probability of drop-out before completing grade 5 (CAMPE, 1999). Children from poor families living in remote areas

²¹ Situation of Mothers' Health in the World, Save the Children, 2010

such as 'chars', river- erosion areas, and hilly areas also tend to drop out from school (Unicef, 2008).

Perception of Education

A study conducted in the initial stage of the NFSP indicates that the most frequently mentioned advantage of educating girls was getting a job (Das Gupta et al, 1993, mentioned in Raynor 2006). 50% of the total women respondents stressed this point compared to 30% of the men, as the latter's responses were varied. The study observes, the second most frequently mentioned benefit was that education would help a girl to get a better husband. Other studies also observe more or less similar findings. In a study Sarker et al (1995) finds that girls' education is generally viewed as a domestic benefit, to get better husbands, to help their husbands or to look after their own children.

Studies on Curriculum

Another important area is the secondary level national curriculum. To be empowered, it is necessary for girls to acquire analytical skills to assess the socio-cultural norms and values relating to girls'/women's life. But unfortunately, in textbooks and supplementary reading materials up to the SSC level, gender equity is hardly discussed (Jahan, 1998). Moreover, the contents of textbooks are male-biased. One workshop organised by the National Curriculum and Text Book Board (NCTB) was held in August 2000 to identify steps for reducing gender discrimination in curriculum and textbooks. Its report says,

"...In all stages of education- learners are being taught and internalising the ideologies of gender discrimination so as to reinforce the existing female subordination and thus a gender bias is working profoundly in all strata of society and family which deter women from being full and equal partners in society."

Thus students, both boys and girls, do not have the opportunity to acquire knowledge on gender equality from their schooling. Teachers' gender training is another crucial sector which also remains almost unattended (NCTB, 2000). However, the National Education Policy (2010) mentions a number of revision measures in the curriculum such as that the primary level curriculum would include contents of equal rights and materials that reflect a 'positive and progressive image of women' leading to a change in the 'social behaviour and mind-set' of

students (2010: 16). As for the secondary level, the policy states that gender studies will be included in education. But substantial steps to implement this policy in the curriculum have not been made yet.

Another study on curriculum observes that women's participation in formulating and editing the national curriculum and textbooks is only 18.87% compared to 81.13% of men (Ferdous, 2012). It can be argued that only a higher number of female students in secondary school cannot be an indicator of progress in this sector. Even though girls have much greater access to primary and secondary level education than before, girls' self-esteem and confidence are hindered by gender stereotyped curricula. In addition to this, very few girls are seen in technical and vocational education (Banbeis, 2008) as traditionally these job-oriented areas are considered suitable for men. Hence policies of a girl-friendly educational environment needs to go beyond what is written in black and white in state documents.

It can be argued that if education means quality education which conscientizes and empowers women and enables students, regardless of gender, to understand and act against structural discrimination against women, a gender-sensitive curriculum is one of the prerequisites to achieve it. To transform gendered power relations, understandably it is necessary to formulate and revise textbooks, addressing gender issues in a precise and thoughtful manner.

Teaching-Learning Process and Methodology

Despite the outstanding attainments of gender parity in terms of enrolment rate towards universal access to primary education, its quality is not upto the mark. According to the Education Watch Survey, the qualitative status of primary education system is dismal (CAMPE, 2003). A recent survey shows that the teacher-student ratio, inadequate number of teachers and classrooms, non-functional school managing committees are among the problems that government primary schools suffer from (Ferdous, 25.08.2012). Teachers' quality is a crucial area that determines largely whether education can become a change-agent towards empowerment (Unicef, 2006). Although School Management Committee (SMC) is thought to take care of a school's overall planning and smooth running towards academic excellence, in practice only 15 percent SMCs are active in the country's primary education sector according to studies. Study findings also reveal that 38 percent of rural school toilet facilities were inadequate while 57 per cent had no system

of potable water for students (CAMPE,1999, Primary School Performance Monitoring Project, 2001).

It can be argued that notwithstanding the achievements in terms of a parity of boys and girls' enrolment in primary and secondary education, crucial areas like the quality of education and assessing its empowering impact are frustratingly unattended. Hence formulating and implementing an effective curriculum, healthy school environment and teaching methodology capable of bringing about desired goals of gender equality still remains a big challenge for the country.

3.7 Rationale and Background of the Study

In Bangladesh, educating girls has been considered the major tool for achieving the policy goals of women's empowerment. Since 1990, a massive girls' education programme has been taken up within the framework of a Nationwide Female Stipend Programme (NFSP) for awarding stipend to the female students from grades 6 to 10. The prime objectives of the nationwide stipend programme were to increase the number of educated women and enable them to participate in the economic and social development of the country and enhance their social status as well as reduce gender disparity. As a result, Bangladesh has recorded mentionable achievements in girls' education in terms of the number of educated women. But to assess the achievements of the objectives of gender equality and women's participation in economic and social development necessitates an in-depth examination of the comparable attainments commensurate with the achieved higher percentage of girls' education. Therefore, examining the correlation between girls' education and empowerment appears necessary in the context of Bangladesh where gender inequality continues to be depressing.

In light of the above discussed literature review in chapters of two and three, which is the background of the study, it can be said that in the context of Bangladesh, the state of women's subordination is deeply rooted in various socio-cultural and religious norms. However, policy planners articulated their concern about women's disadvantaged position and adopted policies to provide girls/ women with education in order to enable them to achieve human dignity. This study examines the implications of secondary level schooling for young women's lives in the rural areas of Bangladesh. The study is set in the context of a significant expansion of girls' education in the country during the last three decades with an articulated expectation of women's

empowerment through education in various national policies that are formulated to achieve the MDGs. The study, therefore explores the connections between education and empowerment and how far girls' education in rural Bangladesh has transformed women's life towards empowerment. The field study has been conducted in 5 villages of Bagerhat district in Bangladesh.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the theoretical framework of the study relating to girls' education and empowerment.

Chapter 4

Theoretical Background of the Study



This chapter at first presents the theoretical framework used in the study. It discusses the reviewed studies and literature in relation to girls' education and empowerment in the global, the South Asian and the Bangladeshi contexts. This chapter also looks at the situation of women in Bangladesh to understand the different dimensions of socio-political and economic factors, which have a powerful causal relation with women's empowerment. It analyses major national policies about girls' education in Bangladesh and gives an account of studies done on it.

4.1 Education: Major Development Perspectives

After the Second World War when most colonial countries became independent, western economists and policy-makers started thinking of development for the third world. This early development thought was largely based on the notion that the underdevelopment of the south could be solved by adopting western technology, ideas and modernising systems (Marchand & Parpart, 1995:11). This is known as the modernisation approach to development. In order to ensure national economic development, education was seen as an important investment to equip people as an efficient workforce (Heward & Bunwaree, 1999:4).

However, the concept was questioned and 'developmentalism' was viewed as an idea imposed by western thinkers and policy-makers to take up 'northern expertise'. Some academics argued that the approach produced little change in the third world and rather benefited western world (Mies, 2005; Rowlands, 1997: 4; Marchand and Parpart, 1995:12)

Since the end of the Second World War, development has become an issue of growing concern, unleashing a wide range of theoretical debates. With a view to making societal change, the concepts of development have played a significant role in influencing policies and activities (Fagerlind & Saha, 1989; Youngman, 2000). In the area of social development policy, education has become an important tool to develop human resources, which in turn contribute greatly to the overall development of a country (Cassara, 1995; Youngman, 2000). The main paradigms of development related to education are modernisation, particularly human capital theory, dependency theory and neo-liberal theory.

Human capital theory argues that education is not a form of individual consumption but a productive investment to bring faster economic growth (Fagerlind and Saha, 1989; Escobar, 1995). It stresses large investments in human beings. It focuses upon individual values and

attitudes and the productive capacity of humans in the development process. As the first priority in developing countries is to develop human resources in order to bring national development, investment in basic education is crucial (Townsend-Coles, 1969). With a view to achieving rapid economic and social growth, education has been envisaged as a tool to produce a skilled and informed population (Lowe, 1970).

4.2 Marxist Theoretical Standpoints

The dependency paradigm arises from the Marxist school of thought. Paulo Freire was the main architect of this conceptual framework (Youngman, 2000; Sachs, 1992). Dependency, the outcome of colonialism and the centre-peripheral feature, was challenged by Freire's Third World rooted pedagogy. This pedagogy takes people from a situation of 'magical consciousness' to 'naïve consciousness' and then to 'critical consciousnesses'. At the 'critical consciousness' stage, people take concrete steps towards acting upon the dominating situation (Tight, 2001; Macedo 1998). Freire argues that the dependent society is by definition a silent society – devoid of authenticity –merely an echo of the metropolis. According to him, this dominating metropolis speaks and the dependent and silent society listens (Freire, 1972).

Although there is a criticism that Freire's concept of conscientisation confuses epistemology with politics as it merges learning and freedom with oppression, undeniably, politics and development (through education) are inextricably related to each other. Human rights, equality and justice are among the key factors of meaningful development. It is needless to say that no rights can be achieved as long as the concerned people are aware about it and press their demands forward. On the other hand, knowledge is not for only knowledge's sake. We cannot deny its prospective applied value in real life. If political consciousness stands as a precondition of human development for a particular society, educational policies and practices without addressing this cannot be a successful one.

Thus, conscientisation theory appears to be a useful one to work out educational achievements. Another influential theorist, Antonio Gramsci also argues that education, both formal and informal, is the key to the creation of 'counter hegemonic' action that he considers essential for subordinate social groups to engage successfully into a 'war of position' (Mayo 1999; Entwistle 1979). As the present study looks into the educational prospects of an under-privileged social

group (the women) and examines whether education is promoting their life situations, the theoretical frameworks discussed above have been found useful to analyse data.

The modernisation paradigm gave little attention to women's development in the first two decades of its career, as women's condition was viewed by the western theorists as a simple problem of backward societies that would be set right through economic development. However, some academics started to think differently. In the 1970s, Boserup's *Women's Role in Economic Development* had a strong influence on development thinkers as this book showed convincingly the negative impact of development projects on women (Kabeer, 1994:6). As liberal feminists argued for women's incorporation in the development process, women in development or WID emerged as a development approach concerned about women's active productive contribution (Heward & Bunwaree, 1999:1).

4.3 WID: An Institutional Concept of Liberal Feminism

Feminist concepts of education and employment started from liberal feminism's institutional concept of WID. According to this concept, development agencies particularly the World Bank adopted policies to integrate women in the development process through different approaches. These approaches include, as Moser describes, welfare, equity, anti-poverty, efficiency and empowerment (1993:56). Another important feature of this approach was the social cost-benefit analysis (SCBA) of girls/women's education. Girls' education has been considered an instrument to reduce birth rate, child mortality and malnutrition (King and Hill, 1993). However, the main problem of SCBA is its valuation process, which is extremely market-biased (Kabeer, 1994:168).

WID policies put an emphasis on women's role in production instead of addressing the causes of subordination. It sees the benefits of educating women in lower birth and child mortality rates and higher family income (World Bank, 2001) and thus the WID approach tends to instrumentalise women, giving importance to women's material needs, reinforcing gender stereotype roles and overlooking social structures of gender relations (Rowlands, 1997:5). Regarding the gender division of labour and responsibilities of women, the liberal feminist view overlooks its implications. Women are not treated as equal to men in the labour market. Thus, the question of empowerment of women remains almost unattended in this theoretical framework.

4.4 GAD: Socialist Feminism's Theory of Redistribution of Power Structure

Trying to overcome these limitations of WID, the Gender and Development or GAD framework addresses gendered power relations and a redistribution of power structures instead of improving women's access to the development process. This concept focuses on a social construction of gender roles and positions of power, which are transformable (Marchand & Parpart, 1995: 14). The approach is shaped by a socialist and to some extent radical feminist idea of transformation of the patriarchal structures of power relations.

This concept addresses the root cause of women's subordinate position but has 'modernist tendencies' which assume that third world's women's problems would be solved by western knowledge, experiences and suggestions (Marchand & Parpart, 1995:16). As a result, this concept also appears inadequate to assess the link between women's education and empowerment in the context of the developing world.

4.5 Southern Feminist's Conceptual Framework of Empowerment

In contrast to the WID and GAD paradigms, another feminist conceptual framework comes from the grassroots experience of those working for women's development at the local level in various parts of the world. The core notion of this concept is that southern women scholars and activists' theorizing of specific southern women's problems would be much more useful in solving the problems as their ideas come out of direct practical knowledge (Kabeer, 1994: 224). This conceptual approach is called the framework of empowerment.

Empowerment theory's emphasis is on grassroots level programme planning and action, and unlike WID or GAD's top- bottom approach, it follows a bottom-up approach to make positive changes in women's situation through agency. Nonetheless, this concept gives importance to the sharing of understanding about inequalities among feminists from all over the world (Marchand & Parpart, 1995:14).

According to this concept, gender is seen as a constructed form of disempowerment, which can be improved through the process of redistributing power, and education is considered a means to facilitate this re-distribution of power. Different forms of power are identified as 'power over'

(controlling), 'power to' (generative), 'power with' (collective) and 'power from within' (transforming consciousness) (Kabeer, 1994:245; Rowlands, 1997:13).

Empowerment involves the 'power over' form to bring people into the decision-making process through participation in political and economic spheres. This 'power over', in the broader sense, entails an understanding of the dynamics of oppression and internalised oppression (Rowlands, 1997:14). For the generative and collective 'power to' and 'power with' forms, empowerment deals with the process of making people aware of their interests in order to take part in decisions individually as well as collectively. The interpretation of 'power from within', the empowerment process, through its understanding of socially structured forms of oppression and a sense of being able to act against it, gives people a new consciousness of self-respect as well as respect from others (Kabeer, 1994:245; Rowlands, 1997:14).

According to Rowlands, empowerment operates in three dimensions-- personal, relational and collective. Personal empowerment is developing self-esteem, confidence, and ability to act against internalised oppression. This is a psychosocial process and 'the core' of the empowerment process, which is discussed earlier as 'power from within'. Relational empowerment means the ability to negotiate and influence relationships. Collective empowerment takes place when personally empowered people gather in a group to achieve a more extensive socio-political impact than their individual ability (1997:15,111).

The conceptual framework of Kabeer and Rowlands views empowerment as a process of flourishing human abilities through removing constraints and exclusions, becoming an active part of decision-making and increasing self-confidence. These processes, in order to empower women by eliminating their subordination, will thus achieve a transformation of power structures.

4.6 The Concept of Masculine Hegemony

In societies like Bangladesh, as a basic unit of social control the family maintains gender differences in terms of behaviour, norms, roles, mobility, resource allocation as well as control and household leadership rigidly in favour of men. This social system of patriarchy can be identified as the key reason of violence against women in Bangladesh as patriarchy plays a very important role in domestic conflict dynamics through specific systems, institutions and ideologies.

The functioning system of patriarchy creates an ideology suitable to maintain men's powerful position. This ideology makes women internalised to men's superior position and their differences are interpreted as inferiority which is unchangeable or God's will and thus deny the question of power struggles. Patriarchy creates and thrives on a condition of hegemony, which in nature is absolutely Gramscian (Mayo, 1999) and involves both force and consent. It presupposes the internalisation of hegemonic values and principles by the oppressed and dominated groups.

This condition of hegemony within patriarchy is essentially in favour of male dominance. Patriarchy employs and saturates this condition of masculine hegemony. Masculine hegemony refers to a whole range of structures and activities as well as values, attitudes, beliefs, and morality that in various ways support the established order and male interests.

Through this process, patriarchy creates a definition of manhood (what it means to be a real man) in relation to women and others --that is manifest in language, actions and sexuality, and in various arenas of familial and social life. This ideological standpoint is regarded as masculinity. The hierarchy of masculinity over femininity that is apparent in the structural division of men and women's lives, their education, their dresses, their morality and their behaviour, is constructed through the concept of gender differences and within the gendered power relations.

The recent scholarly discourse of conceptualising masculinity focuses on the diverse contexts and beliefs in which this social construction of gender differences and power relations emerges. Thus, the current scholarly discourse puts an emphasis on the deconstruction of masculinity into multiple masculinities. These diversified forms of masculinities work and continue through

individuals and institutions. Masculinity varies through cultures; nevertheless it also can take multiple forms within any single cultural landscape (Lindisferne, 1994).

Connell (1995) has introduced the concept of hegemonic and subordinate (as opposed to the hegemonic forms) masculinities. He gives importance to understanding the relationships between different kinds of masculinities. Hegemonic forms of masculinity refer to a general condition of dominance that sanctions the hegemonic power of men essentially over women, but also over other oppressed men.

4.7 South Asian Masculinity

As Lindisferne observes, masculinity varies from one culture to another. The way South Asian masculinities form and operate in various arenas of social life in which a man may become a patriarch, is different from other parts of the world. In her study of Indian colonial elite, Luhrmann observes, ‘...to defend themselves against their desire and their pain, the British...constructed themselves as dyadic opposites, particularly around the category of gender, age and race. The British were hyper masculinised, scientific and progressive, a high step on the evolutionary ladder; the Indians were effeminate, childlike, primitive, and superstitious.’ She concludes, ‘the coloniser is insecure, seeks to dominate to reassure himself, conceptualises the colonised as feminine’ (1996).

Caroline and Filippo Osella and Radhika Chopra’s theorising of the masculine in their ethnographical studies on South Asian masculinities (2004) would be useful to understand how masculinity takes an explicit shape in South Asian perspectives. They point out that ‘space, identity, performance and communities’ (2004:30) work jointly towards the formation of masculinity on the basis of reciprocity and exchange. Hyper-masculine performances of young men in South Asia are seemingly motivated by the iconic, hierarchically superior figures that represent personification of a desired masculinity. An ethnographic study in India shows, movie fans’ bodily gestures are motivated by movie ‘stars’ who symbolise versions of ideal adult men. South Asian young men are, hence, greatly influenced by the personhood and physical appearance of movie stars (‘dark glasses, flashy shirts, speech and walking style’) and iconic figures since they are tremendously desirable to young men (2004). These imitating tendencies

suggest the power of a few men to be ‘more man’ than others. Another key paradigm, within the South Asian context is the father- son relation that determines forms of hierarchy between men.

In her ethnography on masculinity in rural Bangladesh, Nayanika Mookherjee shows that the hegemonic idiom of masculinity is based on men’s sole sexual access to their wives. After intensively studying the cases of three ‘Biranganas’ who had gone to ‘Gono Adalat’ in the early 1990’s for demanding trial of the war criminals, she finds the trend of exercising masculine authority synonymous with sexual power and absolute sexual control by men in rural Bangladesh. In the view of the male villagers, the husbands’ masculinity is taken over by the military rapist, who is imagined as ultra masculine. Another important feature is the contradictory position of the husbands in reconciling themselves to a demasculinisation and retrieving their masculinity. When the husbands encountered dirty bullying and taunting (due to having relationship with a rape victim, or being less of a man) in public places, particularly at the time of any argument about such routine matters as the household boundary or about other issues with the neighbors, they felt that their manhood was severely damaged and found themselves in an identity crisis which in turn made them harbour a violent attitude towards their already tortured wives.

4.8 Deniz Kandiyoti’s Concept of Classic Patriarchy

Classic patriarchy refers to an operation system of patrilocally extended households, where girls are married off at a very young age into households headed by their husband’s fathers. In patrilocally extended households, girls are subordinate not only to all the men but also to the senior women, especially their mothers-in-law. In such households a woman’s lifecycle revolves around the cycle of deprivation and hardship she experiences as a young bride, superseded in the end by the control and authority she will have over her own subservient daughters-in-law. This cyclical rise and fall of their position of power results in women’s active involvement in the reproduction of their own subordination (Kandiyoti, 1997).

4.9 Amartya Sen's Theoretical Framework of Gender and Co-Operative Conflict

This model provides a useful framework to understand the way women's perceptions form in traditional societies relating to their well-being and contribution to the household and how their false perception legitimates their deprivation and perpetuates systematic inequalities. The model is described as 'co-operative conflict' – the simultaneous existence of co-operation and conflict (Sen, 1987). Household members face two opposing problems at the same time as they add to the total availabilities involving co-operation on the other engage in conflict by dividing the total availabilities among the members of the household.

Stressing the importance of seeing social arrangements (sexual division of labour is a part of it) within its entire context, Sen argues, 'social arrangements regarding who does what, who gets to consume what, and who takes what decisions, can be seen as responses to this combined problem of co-operation and conflict'(1987;13). Considering social arrangements in terms of a wider view of technology and production is crucial because it points out the necessity of examining the productive aspects which tend to be treated as cultural. This broader view also focuses on the 'stability and survival of unequal patterns of social arrangements', particularly on 'deeply asymmetric sexual division of labour' (1987; 13). In his view, 'the division between paid and unpaid work in the context of general productive arrangements' brings in 'systematic biases in the perception of who is 'producing' what and 'earning' what -- biases that are the central to understanding the inferior economic position of women in traditional (and even in modern) societies'(1987;14). Viewing the division of labour as bargaining problems, Sen thinks that this division forms a class of co-operative conflicts.

Although various benefits are received by the members of the family in the course of co-operation with each other, conflicts exist due to the members' diversified interests. For example, a husband's greater share in family resources obtained through co-operation, will curtail his wife's share. In this manner, conflicts may well exist in the environment of co-operative performances within the family. In this condition, sharing the family institution's benefits depends enormously on the process of bargaining. Practically, members of a family with greater bargaining power have the benefit of larger share of resources. By custom, men have been exercising control over family resources and enjoying a greater share as a result of their stronger bargaining position in comparison to women.

The determining factors of the bargaining power depend on three characteristics of the bargaining parties. These are: a) their well-being levels at breakdown position b) perceived interest and c) perceived contribution to household prosperity.

4.9.1 Breakdown Position

The breakdown position refers to the extent of capability of each person to do without any co-operation. It shows the relative strength or vulnerability of a person in the bargaining process when co-operation breaks down. If the breakdown position of a person is comparatively poor, then the outcome of the bargaining process will be less supportive for that person. Perceived interest has an important role in determining one's bargaining ability because 'a person may get a worse deal in the collusive solution if his or her perceived interest takes little note of his or her own well-being' (Sen, 1987; 24).

If the family co-operation has to come to an end, women's vulnerable breakdown position compared to men can be seen as the by-product of a number of socio-economic and cultural factors in Bangladesh. In such a case, women's reproductive responsibilities i.e., frequent pregnancy, childcare, etc, hold them back and negatively affect their bargaining position. Land and resource ownership laws and social practices, threats of sexual violence and harassments for not having a male guardian, threats of being socially outcast for not complying with the social code of feminine modesty and challenging male authority further weaken their fragile breakdown position. In Bangladesh, particularly in rural areas divorce is considered a forbidden term. Divorced women experience a humiliatingly lower status in terms of social dignity everywhere. Even their own parents and siblings blame them too for not being more patient and considerate in keeping the family intact. Consequently, women in rural Bangladesh face all sorts of odds and try not to break up but to co-operate in keeping the conflicting co-operation (family) together.

4.9.2 Perceived Interest

As quoted from Sen above, the outcome of the bargaining process depends on how clearly a person perceives her/his own interests. If a person is uncertain and indecisive about her/his own well-being, they may receive a worse deal in the bargaining outcome. Perception of self-interest matters hugely in achieving a stronger bargaining position. Within a society where classic patriarchy prevails in its fullest form, the family identity may have such a strong influence on a woman's perceptions that it becomes very difficult for her to formulate any clear idea of the

individual well-being. According to Sen , ‘ It has been observed that if a typical Indian rural woman were asked about her personal ‘welfare’, she would find the question unintelligible, and if she is able to reply, she may answer the question in terms of her reading of the welfare of her family’(1987;07). This lack of awareness on the subject of individual interest is a regular phenomenon among women in Bangladesh. They tend to merge their own interest (favourable breakdown position) with the family’s interest (co-operation). Consequently, women end up in a vulnerable fall-back position when the family breaks down due to divorce or being deserted by the husband with small children. This tendency has a huge impact on the overall subordinate position of women. Sen observes,

“[I]nsofar as intra-family divisions involve significant inequalities in the division of food, medical attention, health care, etc. (often unfavourable to the well-being – even survival – of women), the lack of perception of personal interest combined with a great concern for family welfare is, of course, just the kind of attitude that helps to sustain the traditional inequalities. There is much evidence in history that acute inequalities often survive precisely by making allies out of the deprived. The underdog comes to accept the legitimacy of the unequal order and becomes an implicit accomplice (1987:07).”

Evidently, similar to the operating system of classic patriarchy, lack of personal interest and accepting inequalities for granted further pave the way of legitimisation and reproduction of women’s subjugation.

4.9.3 Perceived Contribution

According to Sen, given other things, bargaining outcomes are more favourable to that person who perceives to be making a larger contribution to the overall wealth of the group (household). Perceived contribution is different from the actual contribution. The prosperity of the household depends on the combination of a range of activities such as income earnings, purchasing or producing food materials and other goods, producing eatable food out of food materials etc. Unfortunately, so-called productive/ non-productive and paid/ unpaid division of such activities only obscures the real picture even in the eyes of women. Consequently, women’s perception of their contribution to the household is lesser than actual.

Generally ‘productive’ activities depend enormously on a chain of other activities being done. Housework, food preparation from raw food, carrying food to the crop-field, childcare etc. are

essential for workers' survival, reproduction and being capable for outside work. But, the activities within the walls of the household that support workers to produce are considered 'unproductive'. Hence women's activities are usually not regarded as contributing to production and their labour is categorised as 'unproductive'. As co-operative outcome goes in favour of those whose perceived contribution is greater, women lag behind in the bargaining process.

The three responses of the co-operative conflict -- breakdown position, perceived interest and perceived contribution, which are discussed above are related in a linear manner. Anything that builds up one or more of these responses would finally resulted in a greater bargaining power. Hence, by strengthening the breakdown position, perceived wellbeing and perceived contribution women can have an improved position in the family. Sen suggests, education and employment can contribute to a better breakdown position.

Supposedly, education and economic activities outside home would make women's breakdown position stronger by enabling them to earn and as a result of this automatically their bargaining outcome will be increased. In turn, a stronger breakdown position will ensure better understanding about their own well-being. And the knowledge of their own interest would enable them to identify their contribution to the household prosperity and thus empower them to claim a fair share in the bargaining deal.

Since this study examines whether there are necessary relation between girls' education and women's empowerment, this theoretical framework would be used as the main analysing tool of the field data.

In light of the above discussion, it appears that employing a set of multidisciplinary conceptual frameworks relating to education and empowerment-- ranging from Freire's concept of conscientisation to Connell's theorisation of masculine hegemony and its South Asian perspectives and Kandiyoti's concept of classic patriarchy -- would be supportive for analysing the multidimensional issue of assessing the level of empowerment. Due to its better suitability, special emphasis would be given on Amartya Sen's theory of co-operative conflicts and the empowerment approach by Kabeer and Rowlands in interpreting and analysing data to examine the assumed link between girl's education and women's empowerment in Bangladesh.

Chapter 5

Methodology



Rationale of Methodology and Methods

This chapter describes the methodology of data collection of the study. The details include the rationale for selected approaches and methods, questionnaires, location, selection of interviewees and conducting interviews. The chapter also describes the researcher's position in the field survey, limitations, confidentiality and ethical dilemmas.

5.1 Research Design and Universe of the Study

The following section presents a complete research design of the research problems formulated in chapter 1. The design of the research comprises the of identification of the universe of the study, procedures of sampling, sample size, techniques of data collection, data processing, interpreting and analysis, anticipated barriers, likely outcomes and ethical dilemma. Each of these study-steps articulates a methodological rationale.

Universe of the Study

In order to delimit the boundary of the research, the 'universe' of this study is the rural women who completed SSC at least 5 years ago and non-educated rural women of a similar age group. These two groups are referred to in the study as 'core group 1' and 'core group 2' respectively. With a view to knowing about the socio-familial environment of the core groups, 12 sub-respondents' categories were also included within the universe. Keeping in mind that a statistical sample ideally implies a miniature model of the universe constituting of all the items that the study should encompass, the sampling plan, strategy and technique have been designed accordingly.

5.2 Sampling Procedure

The sampling plan of the study tries to ensure that the drawn sample is adequately representative of the population. Based on the 'representative sampling plan' (Wilkinson & Vanderkar, 1992:268), the sample includes as much diversified respondents as possible to get multiple dimensions of views which Miles and Huberman mention as the 'maximum variation' (1994:28) sampling strategy. Though small samples are more manageable in terms of accuracy checking and analysis, a substantial sample size appears important in order to increase the probability of the sample findings to be a 'reliable indicator' (Wilkinson & Vanderkar, 1992:268) of the entire

population. As a solution, the ‘Optimum Sample’ method is used in sampling for the proposed study -- ‘optimum sample’ offers efficiency, representativeness, reliability and flexibility (Wilkinson & Vanderkar, 1992:29).

This sampling method suggests the avoidance of too small or too large samples to extract the highest possible benefit for statistically reliable information about the population. Researching a population that is composed of different social groups including housewives, husbands, fathers, mothers, village leaders etc. requires flexibility to improve the reliability of the findings by expanding or squeezing the sample size or any element to meet unforeseen complexities.

Using the combination of ‘representative’, ‘maximum variation’ and ‘optimum’ sample methods, the sample of the study consists of two core groups of respondents to get comparative data.

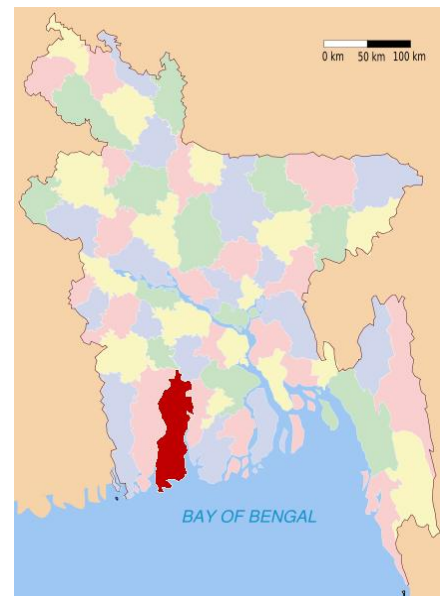
One of the core groups consist of women who completed secondary level education and the other core group is uneducated. Here the term ‘uneducated’ means having significantly below SSC-level education. As mentioned earlier, there were different sub-groups of respondents centring around these core groups.

5.3 Combination of Qualitative and Quantitative Methods

The study involves a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods in gathering data. Nevertheless, the qualitative approach has been prioritised in this study. As the study wishes to discover the level of empowerment of women through personal views and social attitudes surrounding girls’ education, a qualitative approach is seen as an appropriate one as a research method. Oakley categorised the qualitative paradigm as a bottom-up approach which discovers something

through the method of observing (including participant observation, in-depth interviewing, case studies etc.) where

the researcher’s stance is like an insider having a close and interactive relationship with the subject (2000:26). To obtain knowledge about the personal account of women’s living condition, especially how they use education for gaining economic independence and access to familial decision-making, this qualitative approach proves to be almost inevitable.



Map of Bangladesh. The field location (Bagerhat district) is shown in red

The quantitative approach has also been used in the study. Miles and Huberman show the qualitative-quantitative argument as ‘essentially unproductive’ and argue that ‘numbers and words are both needed if we are to understand the world’ (1994:40-41). Since strict division between them is ‘unhelpful as a technical guide to research methods’ (Oakley, 2000:303), both the methods have been used to explore and examine the research questions profoundly. Echoing these views, Griffiths argues that qualitative research is not susceptible to numerical analysis (1998:14). Moreover, from the perspective of the population of this study, a combination of approaches is preferred as research debates on qualitative/ quantitative methods are often unhelpful for a developing country (Crossley & Vulliamy, 1997:4) like Bangladesh.

In addition, this combination gives a researcher more chance to look at the population from different perspectives offered by both the approaches. This can be seen as complementary to each other. On one hand, the quantitative methods such as questionnaire, statistical records and content analysis is helpful to draw generalisable and statistically measurable data. On the other hand, the qualitative approach, which includes in-depth interviews, observations and focus group discussion is conducive to a close, deep, credible understanding of complex real-world contexts (Miles & Huberman, 1994:43). Therefore, data collection methods and techniques of both the approaches (qualitative and quantitative) have been adopted in the study as a powerful mix (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Feminist research emphasises the representation of human diversity. It recognises diversity as ‘a new criterion for feminist research’ (Reinharz, 1992:253). As a feminist research, this study uses multiple methods in order to extract as much diversified life experiences, attitudes and social realities relating to girls’ education as possible. The methods used in this study are face-to-face, in-depth, multiple interviews, observations, document analysis of both research site related materials²² and materials describing girls’/women’s education and empowerment. Collaboration with people who are working in the field of girls/women’s empowerment has also been adopted to share their views and knowledge at different stages of the field study. All these methods have produced a synergic effect, as information could be reconfirmed and strengthened from diversified sources of gathering data on the research subject.

²²Provided by the local administration and other organisations

In addition, in some cases multiple interviews were taken with a view to getting more information on important issues and filling the information gaps from the previous interviews. These multiple meetings and conversations helped develop a relationship with the respondents as in many cases they seemed more at ease to give private information in the next conversation, which they had not given in the first meeting. The following methods of gathering data are used in this study.

5.3.1 In-depth Interviewing

Qualitative in-depth interviews, in a semi-structured form, have been conducted among different respondent categories of the research population. Among the methods taken, greater emphasis was put on interviewing because it ‘offers researchers access to people’s ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researchers’ (Rainharz, 1992:19). To explore rural women’s life stories, who are too scared and shy to be open to a stranger about their personal information and feelings, the informal ‘self-disclosing’ (Rainharz, 1992:33) technique of interview was found useful. Davies prefers to term this informal technique ‘structured conversation’ (1997:135) in a sense of mutual interaction. As it provides the interviewer with opportunities to make ‘a friendly, secure relationship with the subject, certain types of confidential information may be obtained, which an individual would otherwise be reluctant to put in writing’ (Best & Kahn, 1989:201).

Considering it even truer for secluded rural women in Bangladesh, semi-structured interviews have been identified in this study as a major data gathering method. A congenial and informal atmosphere was a prerequisite to obtaining authentic data from the perspective of the rural women of the study. Consequently, a semi-structured conversational mode to extract data also allowed space for the flexibility necessary to accommodate unforeseen, new issues addressed by the respondents. Interviewing also cleared up inaccurate or irrelevant answers on the spot by explaining. In addition, this method offered supplementary information about the respondents’ personal characteristics, facial expressions and gesture, which is often of great value in interpreting results.

5.3.2 Observation

This technique of gathering data adopted in the study to collect supplementary information helped and worked as added layers in the interpretation of findings acquired by other methods

used. The observational technique made it possible to record behaviour as it occurred in real-life settings (Wilkinson & Vanderkar, 1992:185), independent of the observer's wish. Observation method appeared as another way to grasp an interviewee's untold views, attitudes and information about issues relating to the research objective. Hence, meaningful events, comments, expressions and attitudes relating to the study noted during the conversations in the research diary have been found immensely useful. Analysis and interpretation of those observed, real, day-to-day happenings was used for added information in narrating the findings, which researchers suggest sometimes as 'vital' (Ribbens & Edward, 1998:76). This vital method was employed in the study to yield data from typical behavioural patterns with its natural stresses and actions-reactions in the ordinary routine of life. This provided adequate comparable data and paved the way for reliable generalizations.

5.3.3 Focus Group Discussion

The method of interviewing respondents in focus groups has been used in the study. It was intended to use this method to obtain data through 'expressions of differing opinions and point of view' in a way which is 'more relaxed than the exposure of a one-to-one interview' (Marshall & Rossman, 1999:114). In order to encourage discussions among groups of girls/women and men (separately) and understand the general trends of perceptions in relation to research questions as well as to explore unforeseen issues as they arose through the discussion, focused questions were asked in group discussions which included general, educational achievement and its impacts on daily life; social views, attitudes, and opinion related issues which do not require any privacy or do not cause embarrassment to others.

5.3.4 Questionnaire

In order to obtain objective, quantitative data from large as well as diverse groups of people, the questionnaire method was adopted in the study. This 'impersonal technique' (Wilkinson & Vanderkar, 1992:214) ensured a uniformity of questions, comparable answers and statistically measurable data which helped to draw clear-cut general conclusions.

The advantages of the questionnaire method, such as availability of time to think carefully before answering, and anonymity were used as an added layer to the data from other sources in interpreting findings. Primarily the questionnaire included the task of identifying information,

social background and questions on educational impact and empowerment using both closed and open-ended types.

5.3.5 Content Analysis

With a view to identifying specific characteristics of communication media regarding girls' education and empowerment, contents have been analysed to gather relevant data. This 'unobtrusive and non-reactive' (Marshall & Rossman, 1999:117) quantitative method helped to understand the significant aspects of the social climate in relation to the population. Communication media included newspapers, magazines, radio & TV programmes, books etc. A representative sample of contents was chosen to get the social views about the population. It appeared important to get a clear picture of the way in which women's needs have been dealt with historically.

5.3.6 Statistical Records

The census and statistical reports of BBS, educational statistics of BANBEIS and annual reports of various government and UN organisations have been used in the study as secondary data sources. In doing so, cautionary measures have been taken because these official statistics may sometimes present a favourable picture for respective institutions. Therefore, validation of the statistics has been carried out as much as possible.

5.3.7 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is another aspect of this study. As a way of acting on knowledge, this aspect put the study within a process of constant reviewing and amending strategies taken up through 'collaborating as far as possible' (Griffiths,1998:140). Ideas on issues regarding the study at different stages were shared with feminist scholars and researchers, women rights activists, gender trainers and policy planners to get their comments and feedback. Their views and suggestions were used in this study. Nonetheless, while using the applications of reflexivity in this study, care was taken to keep the researcher's reflexive responsibilities within a limit to avoid the risk of 'muting the voices of our participants' (Ribbens & Edwards, 2000:204). Most of these view-sharing meetings had taken place before the field visit while some after returning from the research field. Collaborators' views and suggestions helped a lot in redesigning the

questionnaire as well as in analysing data since most of them had in-depth grassroots knowledge and experiences regarding women's empowerment and girls' education particularly in the context of rural Bangladesh.

5.4 Analysis and Interpretation of Data

With a view to summarising the collected data and get answers to the research questions of this study, the first step of the data analysing process was organisation of data through examining transcriptions of the recorded interviews, filled-in questionnaires, field notes and observational data. After a broad categorising of data and necessary scrutiny, repetitive and irrelevant information was dropped. Then the edited data was grouped into a limited number of categories. This classification of data was done according to the selected, appropriate principles of classification and themes that derived from the research questions.

The analysing process involved a focus on the collected data, their thematic recurrence and the social climate in which they were produced. Thus, categories were defined clearly in terms of indicators. Then a coding scheme was applied to the well-defined categories and themes in order to tabulate the information.

Interview data was validated against other sources of information and crosschecked with the data obtained from questionnaires, observations, content analysis and statistical reports. Thus, data collected through multiple methods were used to strengthen understanding by adding layers of information that validate other findings.

To analyse the closed questions *MS Excel* spreadsheet was used in interpreting data. Raw data for the response categories (such as strongly agree, agree or disagree) was converted to percentages and groups of respondents. Open-ended questions were analysed through accumulation of similar points made in the interviews and presented in a table form. Quotations from texts were also used to understand contextual realities when they appeared significant and representative for a particular respondent group.

Having analysed the collected data, in a form of 'empirical generalization' (Wilkinson & Vanderkar, 1992:392), interpretation and analysis of the gathered data with theoretical underpinning has been presented. This process of interpreting was done by means of linking up and assimilating the whole study materials, observations and knowledge to explain why the findings were taking place and below the surface what their deeper meanings were.

5.4.1 Researcher's Stance

The research team, which included five research associates and I, were strangers to the villages. Thus there was no reason for the respondents to trust us in sharing private matters. However, as a community, the Bengalis are traditionally well-known for their hospitality towards strangers and rural people can maintain this tradition even more cordially as village life is not bound by any strict time schedule.

Thus we became relative outsiders to the researched community. However, we tried to overcome the shortcomings of both stances and not to be 'sold out' (Griffiths, 1998:139) to a particular form. We tried our best to make a congenial and trustworthy relationship with the respondents during the interview. Women respondents were interviewed by female research associates as far as possible with a view to capitalising on the privilege of being a woman²³. We shared our relevant experiences with them and it was found fruitful in reducing the distance, and creating mutual trust. Consequently, they (respondents) behaved with us in a friendly manner; they shared their personal stories, relational problems and emotional events relating to their lives. Justifiably, feminist researchers argue in favour of women to women interviews (Reinharz, 1992; Oakley, 1999). This study undoubtedly gained a lot from adopting this method. But still breaking the class barrier sometimes appeared to be difficult.

5.4.2 Anticipated Barriers and Challenges

Barriers and challenges that came forward can be broadly divided into two types: in-built challenges of carrying out a research in a precise and objective manner, and challenges that arose from the specific social environment or groups in which the study population exists. In-built challenges were adverse influences of personal beliefs and ideas, and bias towards a set idea and the social identity of the researcher. Although at every stage of this research work, a conscious effort was made to be free from such influences by means of receiving constant feedback and criticism from other researchers and experts. This 'intellectual open-mindedness' (Wilkinson & Vanderkar, 1992:51) helped a lot for an objective, unbiased and critical appraisal of the research problem.

Researchers' stance in the research created some barriers as we could not be considered either insiders or outsiders straightaway. Although Griffiths argues that it is impossible for a researcher

²³ Female research associates interviewed most of the women respondents while the male associates interviewed men respondents.

to be completely insider or outsider (1998:137) our relative insider stance was characterised by holding the same nationality as the respondents, having no language barrier, familiarity with the cultural norms and their possible meanings.

Differences, such as social background created an invisible line between the respondents of the rural context and us. So there remains a fair possibility to become an outsider to the community which can mark an information concealing distance. However, capitalising on the privilege of

recruiting research associates from nearby areas was a way out of this barrier as much as possible.



5.4.3 Confidentiality

The participants of this study were assured before the interview that all the information, views, feelings and ideas they gave would not be disclosed anywhere in their names. It was very important as the research required them to be open and free to speak up about their personal affairs, relationships with husbands etc. However, it was explained to them how the respondents' views are used in research under pseudonyms. In this study, thus, the participants would be referred to in

different given names. (The respondent in the picture waiting behind the tree had something to share with us in private which she could not express in public during the focussed group discussion)

5.4.4 Limitations of the Study

The main limitation of this study as it was felt is the time spent in field research. A study like this, which dealt with different aspects of human lives, particularly women's lives within rural communities, requires much more acquaintances with the social climate of the place. It would have been more fact-revealing if we could manage to conduct an ethnographic study through a substantially long and continuous stay in the villages of the respondents. At times, it appeared really difficult, and in a sense, imperfect to draw a general conclusion on a complex matter like the society's views and attitudes by examining respondents' interviews in one or two sittings. To

know precisely about the psycho-social process of human understandings, perceptions and beliefs one has to go beyond the surface levels of lived lives, social norms and rituals, verbal opinions and agreeing or disagreeing of specific social practices. In doing so, qualitative social research requires the researcher to be merged with the community as an insider, whom respondents can confide in without hesitation. But for a number of reasons we²⁴ had to do the whole field research in a fly in -fly out mode. I failed to manage to stay with the villagers for a long time at a stretch which for obvious reasons would have created more trustworthy relationships with the women of those villages and would have provided me with numerous observational aspects which in turn might have produced more authentic and multi-dimensional data. However recruiting research associates from the nearby locality reduced the problem slightly. Furthermore, the study represents 10 villages located side by side. Thus probable diversified views—which usually derive from different socio-economic and geographic locations – are absent in this study.

5.4.5 Ethical Dilemma

Some ethical issues came forward when I went to remote villages for data collection for this study. Some of the interviewees and most of the other women who gathered there asked me whether this interview would bring about any positive gains for them. It was hard for me to dishearten them as in this study I had to draw on village women's experiences, their pains and frustrations, and their life stories for my own purpose, not for their direct benefit. As Ribbens & Edward raise the issue, 'Is our research for ourselves, as we pursue topics to which we have a personal attachment or to gain academic credibility?' (2000:204) However, one may argue about the indirect effect of research on the respondents' lives through acquired knowledge or the greater well-being of the world's women as a whole. Still there is little chance for these research findings to be used in favour of the women of particular villages with immediate effects where the field research was conducted. Thus this dilemma remains unresolved.

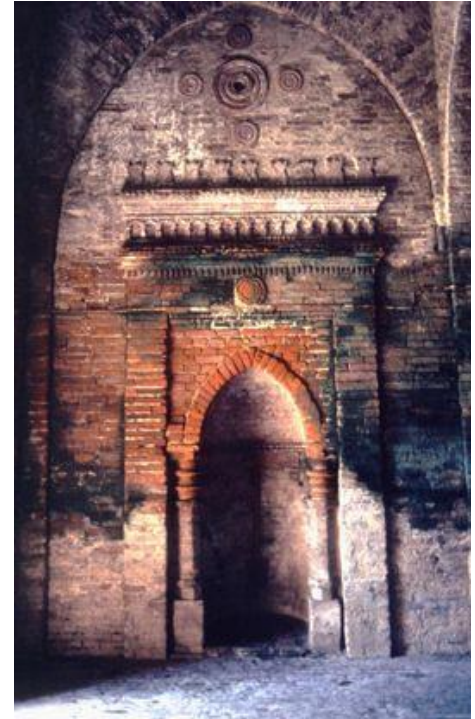
5.5 Location and Duration of the Study

From January 2007 to February 2010, the field research of this study was carried out in 5 villages in Kochua upazila of Bagerhat district. The villages were: Kathalia, Char Kathalia, Raghunathpur, Kholishahali and Bemorta.

²⁴ We meant the whole field research team.

Basic Information of the district²⁵

The Bagerhat district is about 400 kilometres away from Dhaka. With a total land mass of 3959.11 square kilometres this southern coastal district is bounded by Gopalganj and Narail districts on the north, the Bay of Bengal on the south; Gopalganj, Pirojpur and Barguna districts on the east, and Khulna on the west. Bhoirab, Panguchi, Daratana, Madhumati, Pasur, Haringhata, Mongla and Baleswar are the main rivers that flow through the district. Bagerhat is divided into 9 upazilas, 77 union parishads, 1031 villages, 687 mouzas, 3 municipalities, 27 wards and 56 mahallas. The upazilas are Bagerhat Sadar, Chitalmari, Fakirhat, Kachua, Mollahat,



The interior of the historical Sat-Gombuj Mosque

Mongla, Morrelganj, Rampal and Sarankhola.

The upazila that was selected randomly for field research appeared to some extent similar to other upazilas of the district. There was no significant difference in lifestyle and livelihood with other places in the coastal belt. The socio-cultural practices and education scenario were found comparable to other places within the district. However, the number of inhabitants from the Hindu community was higher than the other regions of Bangladesh. This variation from other places offered some important dimensions and comparison about religious norms, values and culture relating to women's education and autonomy.

²⁵ The Muslim saint Khan Jahan Ali, aided and accompanied by his soldiers who came and settled here in 1429, was the founder of many of the settlements in the district. He is credited to have built the Shat-Gombuj Mosque, one of the most prominent archaeological sites in the area, which is now under UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Khan Jahan Ali was the founder of the Khalifabad Pargana which included the areas of Bagerhat, Khulna, Satkhira, Jessore and Barisal. Ali was the ruler of the Pargana from 1429 till his death in 1449. Following his death, the region came under the rule of Maharaja Pratapaditya. Population Census Wing, BBS, 2005

5.5.1 Location, Demographic and Administrative Details of Kachua Upazila

Kachua upazila is a place surrounded by and covered in a lush layer of green, criss-crossed with



rivers and waterways. The villages of Kachua resemble any other village in southern Bangladesh, in terms of natural beauty and locals' belief-system. However, the upazila appears to have a bit more fertile crop fields where almost 50 percent land provides crops twice a year.

With a total land mass of 131.62 square kilometres, Kachua has 7 unions/wards, 78 mauzas/mahallas, and 96 villages and 18553

units of households. It is bounded by Chitalmari upazila on the north, Nazirpur and Pirojpur sadar upazilas on the east, Bagerhat Sadar upazila on the west and Morrelganj upazila on the south. Baleshwar, Bhairab and Bishkhali are the main rivers that flow through the upazila.

As of the 1991 Bangladesh census, Kachua has a population of 93,249. Males constitute 50.36% of the population, and females 49.64%. Population aged above 18 is 49,921 with an average literacy rate of 42.5%. Among the total population, Muslims constitute 76.39%, Hindus 23.58% and others 0.03%. There are 155 mosques, 37 temples and 2 sacred places situated in the upazila, most noted of which are Kachua Jam-e Mosque and Shivbari Mandir (1300 AD).

Education

As per official information, the literacy rate of the upazila is 42.5%, of which males represent 47.5% and females 37.3%. It has two colleges, 16 high schools, eight madrasas, 48 government primary schools and 42 non-government primary schools.



The Occupational Livelihood

Among the occupations in the area, agriculture is almost 40% and 3% fish farming - locally known

as 'gher'. Agricultural labourers are 22% of the total population while wage labourers represent 6%. 14 percent of the total employment is business whereas 3 percent are engaged as transport labourers, 6% as service-holders, and 9% belong to other categories.

Data on Land control, Main Crops and Occupation Pattern

Official record says, among the peasants 10% are landless (share cropper or agri. labourer) while 2% are owners of small plots of land. 70% of the total peasants' situation is little better than the previous group whereas 18% are rich landowners. Main crops produced in the area are paddy, sugarcane, pulse and vegetables. Coconut, betel nut and palm molasses are being exported to the other places of the country.



Communication Systems

To get to Kachua from Bagerhat, one has to board a local bus or tempo, crossing the Bhairab Bridge after approximately a one-hour bus ride. From there, one has to catch a rickshaw or van to reach the Kochua upazila complex and the villages in it. There is 57 km pucca road in the upazila, 21 km semi pucca and 257.88 km dirt road. At the time of the field survey, the overall communication system was in a good shape to move from one village to another. However in some places, particularly in remote areas, the mud roads were in bad shape which made

communication difficult.

Development Activities

A daily newspaper 'Prabartan' was being published from Kochua and the upazila had a press club as well. Brac, Asa, Grameen Bank, CODEC and CARE activities were found in the upazila. Besides, a few local NGO were working in the area. These were Evergreen, Anwasha, and Prodeepan. These organisations were involved in small-scale development initiatives in the locality.

5.6 Sampling Frame: Respondents' Details

191 persons from 14 different core and sub-respondent groups were selected as the sample of the study. The study was conducted in Kochua upazila (administrative unit) of Bagerhat district. Adequate care was taken in selecting the upazila to ensure that socio-cultural atmosphere and occupational livelihood appear similar to other upazilas of the district.

A total of 191 people were selected as respondents of the study. 40 women who had completed their secondary education at least 5 years ago were selected from these villages. It was assumed that at least five years of time after completion of the degree was necessary to assess their level of empowerment obtained through education. Another 40 uneducated women respondents were selected for comparative data. In order to do the field study in a precise manner, it was imperative to stay in close proximity of the villages for quite a long time.

Table 5.1: Sampling frame: number and groups of respondents

Category of respondent groups	No. of respondents
<i>SSC completed women (got degree at least 5 years before)</i>	40
<i>Non-educated girls</i>	40
<i>SSC completed girls' mother</i>	15
<i>SSC completed girls' father</i>	15
<i>SSC completed girls' husband</i>	10
<i>SSC completed girls' neighbours</i>	15
<i>Village leaders</i>	05
<i>Union Parishad Chairman/members</i>	05
<i>Non-educated girls' mother</i>	15
<i>Non-educated girls' father</i>	15
<i>NGOworkers/Volunteers involved in the development</i>	03
<i>Shopkeepers of the locality</i>	03
<i>School teachers</i>	05
<i>Local Thana Officer in Charge and others</i>	05
A total of 14 group including core and sub- respondents	=191

This made it possible to interview almost 200 people and in some cases to hold multiple meetings with the same respondents and get a comprehensive picture of lives in the villages. Five research associates were appointed for collection of data. Audio taping of the interviews was avoided in fear of losing spontaneity of the conversation of rural women. Shorthand notes taking system was found effective and used in this study. But it required us to write down a detailed version of each point made in the interview immediately after the conversation had taken place and particularly before moving to another. Subsequent meetings were useful to fill the gaps in the required information.

In Bangladesh rural male members have a tendency to interrupt any interview with women and make women talk in a given direction. Sometimes women themselves seek advice from men within an interview environment from their internalised position of male-dependency. This conceals the real position of the respondent. With a view to avoiding this problem, the researchers tried to set a comparatively safe place so that the interview could be conducted in an uninterrupted or unguided manner. As a result, women's views, experiences and information on their lives could be gathered largely without any interference from men inside the family.

Chapter 6

Status of Women in Bangladesh: Socio-cultural and Economic Context Analysis



6.1 Socio-cultural Norms and Practices Relating to Women

The status of women by and large is related with the socio-cultural context of the society. In Bangladesh, women's subordination is rooted in family relations which aggravate their low status through different social norms such as the premature age of marriage and patrilocal residential arrangement (McCarthy, 1993). Society is classic patriarchal by nature as per the theorization of Kandiyoti.²⁶ Traditionally, patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal forms of social system prevail in Bangladesh. As a basic unit of social control, family maintains the gender difference in terms of behavioral norms, roles, mobility, resource allocation as well as food allocation and household leadership rigidly in favour of men (Haider, 1995; Khan, 1988). As a patrilineal social unit, Bangladeshi family gives high value to sons as potential providers to the parents and the family (Jahan, 1998).

In this way, sons start to receive preferential treatment from the family in terms of education, better nutrition, health care and superior status since the time of birth. On the contrary, daughters are viewed as temporary members of her natal family, investment in whom is thus seen useless as they will be married off. As a girl's reproductive role is emphasised by social, cultural and religious norms, it is seen as an obligation for her family to marry her off as soon as she reaches puberty (World Bank, 1990). Thus their little access to education, nutrition or health care is seen as justified particularly for poor families.

Through patrilocal family patterns, girls are transferred to the husband's family with lower education, ill health, little or no access and control over resources and decision-making. Their economic status is dependent and non-productive (Khan, 1988). As a whole, the family establishes and advocates sexual inequality through socio economic inequality and distribution system of power, position, authority and resources between the sexes.

This structural discrimination against women through the family organisation gives rise to women's disadvantaged and subordinated position in Bangladeshi society. The traditional culture of patriarchal social systems and patrilineal kinship patterns keeps women completely dependent on men. To the majority women in Bangladesh still the world means their family, close relatives

²⁶ See Chapter 2, Theoretical Framework section for detailed discussion.

and neighbours. Moreover in a predominantly Muslim society, 'purdah' or seclusion denies them access to many opportunities (MOSWWA, 1985; WB, 1990). Due to the reasons of purdah 83% of total rural women still cannot enjoy the right of free movement (STD, 2000). In a vicious circle of lack of opportunity, they are unable to take up many jobs and this inefficiency²⁷ reinforces their inferiority.

The Fourth Five-Year Plan of Bangladesh (1990-1995) acknowledged this reality that for traditional and cultural norms women enjoy much lower status compared to men and an overwhelming majority of women are 'illiterate, malnourished, poor and deprived' (1990:278). The discrepancy in the treatment of men and women starts at birth and continues throughout life (Islam, 1985; Begum, 1992), which has a profoundly negative impact on women's health, economic and political participation, legal rights and education, and ultimately thus on women's disempowerment.

6.2 Health Status of Women

"Meyer naam feli -- pore niley'o geli- jom'e niley'o geli..." Bangla proverb (Sarkar, 2008)

As the above proverb expresses the social attitude towards daughters that they are of less worth ('feli' means something which should be dumped), it is useless to invest anything in them. Since they are temporary members of the natal family who are supposed to disappear (married off) in their in-laws' home (porer bari), it should not be a matter of concern if they fall sick and die. This pervasive attitude towards women's health deprives them from their fundamental rights of health.

Consequently, in terms of health and nutrition, girls and women are more vulnerable and disadvantaged than men in Bangladesh. In the household preferential allocation of food and medical care for men can be found responsible for girl children's higher mortality and malnutrition rate (ADB, 2001). The daily per capita calorie intake for women is 1599 K.Cal compared to 1927 K.Cal for men resulting in chronic, long-term malnutrition among women. Referring to a study, a report of the Women and Children Affairs Ministry stated that adult men made up the largest single group to be admitted in hospitals, followed by boys (MOWCA, 1997).

²⁷ due to malnutrition, ill health, reproductive duties, lack of knowledge and information

Women were found to be the smallest group to receive medical treatment in hospitals. This study showed clearly the social attitude of widespread negligence about girls and women's health care.

Furthermore, a dominant tendency has been found in most government and non-government health services, which considers only reproductive health ignoring other lifelong health related needs of women (Steps, 2000). As a result only 5% of the total life-threatening diseases affecting women received the required health services in 1994 (Steps, 2000). Thus, in contrast to the global trend, women live shorter lives in Bangladesh. According to the 1991 Population Census, life expectancy at birth for women is 58 years and 58.9 for men. The sex ratio of men and women is 106:100 indicating 'missing numbers'. As Kynch and Sibbons show quoting a study, the highest proportions of the 'missing' are in the Indian sub-continent: 8.7 percent in Bangladesh, 9.5 percent in India and 12.9 percent in Pakistan (1998:167).

Consequently, due to a wide range of discriminations, the poor health condition of girls and women severely detracts from their physical ability to take part equally in education, employment and other activities related to their empowerment in addition to the deprivation of their human rights to get proper health support.

6.3 Patrilocal Residential System

*'astey chalan gari rey garial- dhirey chalan gari,
ar ekbar mui dekhobar chao rey doyal baper bari'* (Bhawaia song of North Bengal)²⁸

There are numerous songs and sayings like the above one that depict the plight of women relating to their persistent detachments from their own parental home after marriage. Most of the girls are married off in their adolescence²⁹, in most cases to unknown persons³⁰ and from then on the girls have to stay in their in-laws' household which is presumably not a congenial or a safe

²⁸ Thousands of folk songs are there which describe women's immense pain for being uprooted from the parental home. Most of the marriage songs in rural areas have a very melancholy tune and lyrics which mainly highlight the upcoming separation.

²⁹ Mean age of marriage is 16.20 years

³⁰ different studies on rural Bangladesh find that generally family, particularly male guardians, decide on daughters' marriage and in most cases they are unknown to girls (Adnan, 1993, Hartmann & Boyce, 1983, McCarthy, 1993)

place for a minor girl³¹. This social reality also prevails in other parts of the subcontinent. Bina Agarwal shows it in her 'A Field of One's Own', referring to an Uttar Pradesh village song-

'O my friend! My in-law's house is a wretched place.
My mother-in-law is a very bad woman.
She always struts about full of anger.'

Women in Bangladesh are required to stay behind the protective guardianship of successive male kinsmen at different stages of their lives. Before marriage a girl's father or in his absence her brother and after marriage her father-in-law/husband enforces control over her entire life in terms of physical mobility, reproductive role, access to resources and social relations. Reasonably, McCarthy (1993) identifies patrilocal residential arrangements as one of the main factors which exacerbate women's low status in the society in Bangladesh. Being treated as less worthy temporary members of parental home throughout girls' socialisation period make them already less confident and things take a worse turn for girls when they have to leave parental home for an unknown or little known household where they are expected to merge with the atmosphere of in-laws' household forgetting their own families. A study findings show that young married women's mobility particularly to their natal home was restricted and controlled by the male authority and they were expected not to keep regular contacts with their parents' home as it implied less dedication to their husband's family. Economic dependence, adverse atmosphere in the in-laws house and detachment from blood relations inhibit women's self-confidence considerably which make them blame their ill-luck for being women. It can be argued that the alienation from the parental family has considerable impact on women's disempowerment particularly in rural areas.

6.4 The Problem of Dowry

'chheler baper hatey chhori, meyer baper golae dori'- Rural saying

Dowry has been an enormous problem posing serious threat to women's lives in Bangladesh. Undoubtedly, dowry is one of the crucial factors in women's disempowerment that has a huge

³¹ Statistics show a high percentage of violence against women occurred in the in-law's places, with in-law's support and direct or indirect participation.

impact on women's overall inferior status in the society. In the backdrop of a capitalist market economy and ever-growing unemployment problem, prospective grooms capitalise on the male-biased patriarchal social system and exploit women to overcome their financial crisis or to gain a more comfortable economic position. Another aspect of dowry appears to be a manifestation of the position of power and worthiness of men compared to women. However, the dowry system became illegal under The Dowry Prohibition Act 1980 (MOWCA, 1997:17). But the law is not effectively enforced (WB, 1990). The legal systems have been grossly violated because of strong social custom and in some cases ignorance of this law particularly in rural areas (Hashmi, 2000).

6.5 Violence against Women

'purhbe meye, urhbe chhai- tobey meyer goon gai..' Bengali proverb (Akhter, 2007)

Bangladesh is one of those countries where the incidence of violence against women is very high. Patriarchal values and norms, strong beliefs and practices of male supremacy in public and private spheres of life and the discriminatory nature of men-women relationships contribute to this negative status of the country in terms of repression on women. According to the police headquarters report, 8,886 cases of violence against women were reported only in the first six months of 2011. According to the human rights organisation Ain O Shalish Kendra, 1378 incidents of violence against women were reported in 12 daily newspapers within first six months of 2011. Understandably, this scenario relating to oppression on women is only the tip of the iceberg in a society where male dominance and women's subordination are common phenomena. The real picture of VAW is much dreadful in terms of the number of reported cases and intensity. An alarming number of women and girls are frequently being killed or brutally tortured for not fulfilling dowry demand, administered poison, beaten to death, strangled, burnt or burnt to death, thrown acid etc. Apart from such violence against women in private spheres by intimate relations, women and girls are being raped, gang-raped, killed after rape, intimidated, humiliated and physically tortured, in some cases by law enforcers, in public spheres on a regular basis.

6.6 Legal Position of Women

'A woman's heaven lies under her husband's feet', 'A wife's part of the body that is hit by her husband will go to heaven directly' - village proverb derived from the Islamic code

In general, women's inferior position in the society and dependence on men within the family is reinforced in the legal system. The legal status of the Muslim women in Bangladesh, who are the majority amongst the total female population, is basically guided by the principles of Sharia. Muslim personal law, along with the secular general law defines the legal position of women. Crucial issues like marriage, divorce, maintenance, guardianship of children and inheritance are within the area of the Muslim personal law.

Besides this, matters concerning the rights under the Constitution, penal codes, the civil and criminal procedure codes, evidence act etc pertain to the general law (Kamal, 2010). Women face a twofold obstacle in terms of their legal rights. Firstly, the Muslim personal law, which defines the most important issues of their lives, and access to resources, are discriminatory and male-biased in itself. Secondly, non-application of the existing legal rights of women due to a patriarchal mindset and socio-cultural traditions that uphold male supremacy is an entrenched reality.

6.6.1 Discriminatory Nature of Laws Relating to Women's Issues

Gender asymmetry through family organisations within a patriarchal social system very clearly affects women's poor access to resources, inheritance and legal rights. Women's dependence on men within the family and extended kin-group is exacerbated by their unequal legal position. Though the constitution of the country ensures equal rights of men and women, in practice women receive much lower legal rights in matters of law of inheritance.

As mentioned in chapter one, under Muslim inheritance law (Muslims have to comply with it) when there is a son, a daughter inherits half the share of that son. In the absence of a son a daughter receives half the share. If there is more than one daughter, they get two-thirds of the property of their father equally and the rest goes to the paternal relations (if a son is absent). According to this law, a wife receives one-eighth of a deceased husband's property if there is a child and one-fourth if there is no child. On the other hand, a husband receives exactly the

double share from the property of his wife under similar situations. In practice, most Muslim women do not claim inherited land property in fear of losing their brothers' support in case of being widowed or divorced. Hindu Law does not provide any inheritance for daughter. Only Christians provide equal inheritance to their sons and daughters (MOWCA, 1997; Begum, 1985).

Thus, the Muslim inheritance laws which apply to nearly 90 percent of the total population, and along with these laws, social traditions are structured in a way where women cannot acquire a 'material base and access to the means of production' (Khan 1988:3).

6.6.2 Non-application of Existing Laws: Detering Social Attitude

The dowry system became illegal under The Dowry Prohibition Act 1980 (MOWCA, 1997:17) in black and white. But the reality is that the dowry system is functioning in full swing. Everyday newspapers report incessantly of grievous dowry-related violence against women. It is as clear as broad daylight that law is not effectively enforced (WB, 1990). Adverse social attitude to women seeking legal support can be found in the cases of inheritance and different types of domestic violence. The social attitude to keep the system functioning appears to be too strong to removed by only law on paper.

6.6.3 Problems of Laws in Curbing Violence against Women

Besides the discriminatory nature of laws relating to women's access to resources, the tendency of formulating new laws for every type of violence against women and sometimes multiple laws for a single form of violence i.e. acid violence tend to jeopardise women's legal position. Noticeably, there are too many laws in Bangladesh while the amendments of a few would have worked adequately. There is a tendency to demand new laws to counteract every new aspect of violence against women. In most cases, these laws are drafted and passed in a hurried manner leaving some serious flaws in them that lead to mischief and confusion (Khan, 2010). In her article Khan (2010) showed convincingly that Bangladesh has several criminal laws specifically aimed at restraining violence against women. Most of the problems that such laws deal with already exist in the penal code of 1860, which have been amended from time to time. She explains that the penal code of 1860 addresses a wide range of VAW related issues such as causing miscarriage, hurt and grievous hurt; assault, kidnapping, wrongful confinement, murder,

throwing of corrosive substance, and rape; and false marriage, insult and annoyance which are a few to mention. However, laws such as the Nari o Shishu Nirjaton Domon Ain 2000 (Amended in 2003) and the Acid Crime Control Act of 2002 have included several of these crimes and added more stringent punishments including capital punishment. There are two laws in relation to acid throwing -- Acid Crime Control Act of 2002 and Acid Control Act of 2002.

The Acid Crime Control Act of 2002 provides separate sentences depending on which body part has been affected, which is demeaning for the affected women since such violence causes devastating destruction both on her body and mind regardless of which body part is affected. Therefore, separate punishments depending on whether the acid has burnt the face or arm or legs or genital area appears unreasonable. In addition to this problem, 'Acid' is not clearly defined in the penal code of 1860 or in the Act of 2000, but is defined in the Acid Control Act of 2002. If it is a 'corrosive or burning substance' it will be tried under the Act of 2000 and the penal code will be bypassed. To add to the confusion, there are also two separate Tribunals under the two Acts and even the two Acid laws of 2002 have different interpretations of Acid (Khan, 2010).

Khan observes, section 9 of the Nari O Shishu Nirjaton Domon Ain (as amended in 2003) provides that if death is caused due to rape or acts committed after rape, the punishment is death or life imprisonment. The prosecution has to prove two crimes here: rape and murder; and that the latter is a consequence of the former, making the charges more difficult to prove. As a whole, the legal position of women in Bangladesh is quite vulnerable. It can be argued that the tendency to formulate laws hurriedly about each problem relating to women without thoughtful analysis, mass awareness and mechanisms for implementation of laws only exacerbates the legal vulnerability of women.

6.7 Women's Activities and Gendered Division of Labour

Barir shobha bag-bagicha, gharer shobha nari (Bangla proverb)

Socio-cultural norms and values in society preserve male superiority and female subordination and impose gendered division of labour. As a result, women become entirely responsible for duties related to reproduction, child rearing and domestic chores such as cleaning, cooking, washing and fuel gathering. Salma Khan refers to a study on 'Time Use of Rural Women' by

Abdullah Faruq, which reveals that rural women have to spend most of their time ‘in the collection of input (fuel, water, vegetables etc.) for the household work, cooking, personal services to elderly members and agricultural activities’ (1988:2). Women’s jobs such as agricultural crop processing, poultry and fishery are taken as unpaid family labour within the boundary of domestic responsibilities. Thus, despite long hours of work and a substantial contribution to the national economy, women are considered dependent on the family with no apparent earning capability (Khan, 1988).

Until 1989, women's contribution to the national economy was excluded from the national statistics. From this time on, an extended definition of labour force that included a number of expenditure saving activities³² of women (post-harvest agricultural activities like husking, boiling and storing of rice, and seed preservation; processing other seasonal crops and assisting male members in other agriculture job, raising poultry and vegetables and tending animals etc.) was used in surveys. Due to this, women's participation in the labour force drastically increased to 61.6% in 1989 from 9.4% in 1985-86 (BBS, 1996- LFS). But this only gives women a recognition of their labour on paper, not any material benefit in practical life.

6.8 Women’s Economic Status

In Bangladesh women’s economic status is largely dependent on men and they are perceived as an economic liability due to the fact that most of their work is unpaid and does not have any immediate economic gain; and they also have little access to resources (Rahman, 2001; WB, 1990; Islam, 1985). Furthermore, lack of education and training on one hand, and reproductive and gender stereotyped duties on the other hand, keep women away from income-earning opportunities through entering into the formal labour market. In Bangladesh 60 million people, who constitute nearly half of the population, live below the poverty line. This widespread poverty derives from various causes such as high population density, poor resource management, recurrent natural disasters and frequent political turmoil etc. Although girls and women have hardly any chance to control or influence these reasons, the burden of poverty disproportionately falls on their encumbered shoulders. As a result, 76% of the total poor population are women

³² Activities that have economic value but are not payable as wives or other women of the family do them. Expenditure saving means the amount would have been paid to recruited workers for the same jobs.

(BIDS, 1997) and girls' share is much higher among the total unpaid child labourers in Bangladesh (BBS, 1996).

Although child labour is seen as a violation of human rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), doing different kinds of job has been a harsh reality for a large majority of children in the country. Situations of extreme poverty and lack of options compel a large number of Bangladeshi parents to engage their children in work. According to the 1995-1996 National Sample Survey of Child Labour, 6.6 million children (5-15 years) are engaged in the labour force. Among these working children, 64% do not get any payment. Indicating clear gender discrimination, 58% of the total unpaid child workers are boys, whereas 71% are girls. Thus women constitute 76% of the total poor in the country and bear a disproportionately high burden of poverty that derives from the country's underdevelopment (MOWCA, 1997).

6.9 Girls' Education and Labour Market Participation

In Bangladesh, though gender gaps in education are decreasing, the paid employment situation is not comparable with it. Furthermore, educational attainment seems to have a weak link with labour market participation as the major sectors where women work do not require education. Yokiyo Otani (2000) in her study on female Bangladeshi garment workers demonstrates that for the female garment workers, education is neither a precondition for entry into the garments industry, nor does it appear to be an empowering tool for them in Bangladesh. The cheap labour force provided by poor women made the rapid growth of the export-oriented garment industries possible. 68.6% of these garments workers had completed primary education while 27% stopped their schooling long before completing primary level because of poverty. Thus the study reveals that a large number of girls and women without proper education find jobs in the garment factories because these jobs do not require any educational qualification as such. The export-oriented industrial sector, including garments and shrimp processing industries, are the biggest paid job markets for women, where they are recruited because their labour is cheaper than that of men. Therefore, it can be easily inferred from Otani's study and the other facts mentioned above that girls' education has little to do with labour market participation; and female workers -- be they unpaid or low paid domestic helps or garment workers or day labourers in agriculture and

non- agricultural sectors³³-- can easily get a job in the lower segments of the labour market without any education.

Women's Empowerment and Entry into the Labour Market

The literature also shows that income-earning activities do not necessarily mean women's greater control over their lives leading to empowerment. In her article 'The Grameen Bank Experiment: Empowerment of Women Through Credit', Osmani shows in her study that micro-credit does not necessarily empower women in rural Bangladesh because income earning could not counteract the cultural conditioning which make them depend on their husbands in using the credit they obtained (1998:82). Social constraints to rural women's mobility and their market access (Ackerly, 1997:143) also limit their ability to deal with money or market-related matters. The predominant social attitudes view men as superior and natural breadwinner. Women, on the other hand, are deemed as mothers and family caregivers. Such ideological constructions serve as serious obstacles for women to work outside home.

6.10 Political Participation

Political participation of women can be seen as crucial in increasing women's bargaining power, influencing state policies and pursuing necessary steps in favour of women. By putting 'proportion of seats held by women in national parliament' as one of the quantifiable indicators of MDGs' goal No.3, that is to 'promote gender equality and empower women', UNDP appropriately recognises the significance of women's political participation (UNDP, 2007). However, in spite of the decreasing trends of gender gap in education during the last decade in South Asia, political participation has not changed (Jayaweera, 1997). In Bangladesh, despite women being heads of the two main political parties, who have also been performing consecutively as prime ministers since 1991, women's participation in politics is still remarkably poor.

³³ These are the sectors where majority of women are engaged in the labour market according to the Labour Force Survey.

Electoral Participation

Electoral participation of women refers to participation in the public offices through election. Participation of women and men-women ratio in the national assembly, which is the highest policymaking body in the country, is presented in the table below. The number of women elected in the general assembly from 1973 and onward is presented in the Table 5.2. In 1979 there was only one directly elected female member in the parliament. After seven years, in 1986, reflecting women's disempowered socio-economic position, the number reached five whereas the number decreased in the next parliament election by one seat. However, there was a considerable increase in women's seat in 1996, taking the number to 11, which again dropped in 2001 to six members. A positive change was noticeable in 2008, which saw the highest ever 20 seats held by women in the national parliament through direct election.

Table 6.1: Participation of Women in National Parliament Elections, 1973-2008

Years	No. of candidates			Elected members		
	Male	Female		Male	Female	
		No.	%*		No.	%*
1973	1083	2	0.67	300	-	
1979	2111	14	4.67	299	1	0.3
1986	1508	19	6.33	295	5	1.69
1991	2741	39	13	296	4	1.35
1996	2526	36	12	289	11	3.80
2001	1894	41	13.66	294	6	2.04
2008	1494	60	20	280	20	7.14

Source: BBS, 2008

NB: Reserved female seats were 15 in 1973, 30 for the following years and 45 since 2001

* Percentage of female candidates and elected members in a total of 300 constituencies

The country's first parliament made provision of 15 reserved seats for women to be nominated as MPs by the political party that holds the majority seats in the parliament. This number of reserved seats was increased to 30 in 1979 and 45 in 2001, which remained the same in the next parliamentary election. The justification for the provision of reservation of seats was to gradually integrate women into politics so as to enable them to get actively involved in politics and directly elected in the parliament. This was because women's financial, social and cultural status was not adequate for them to be able to contest directly with their male counterparts. However, the current political scenario, which sees women heading the two main political parties and governing the country as premiers consecutively, has not transformed the situation for women's political participation. Since both of them came into politics through lateral entry as successors of their male relatives, women's weak representation in the political arena remains unchanged. Political parties were seen as capitalising on the reserved seats system, in favour of the party's interests, and distracting from the actual objectives of the reserved seats for women. Thus the women MPs are made to remain marginalised and voiceless about women's interests (WFW, 1996; Chowdhury, 1985).

Table 6.2 Participation and Ratio of Women and Men in Union Parishad, 2008

Sex	Chairman		Member	
	Number	%	Number	%
Women	21	0.47	13,637	25.26
Men	4477	99.53	40,339	74.74
Both sex	4494	100.00	53,976	100.00

Source: Local Government Division, Bangladesh Secretariat

Women's participation in the Union Parishad (UP) has been presented in table 5.3. The table reveals that among the total number of chairmen in the UP, the percentage of women is only 0.47%. Reflecting the impact of the provision of 3 reserved seats in union parishad membership out of 12 (MOP, 2000), a remarkable increase of women members' ratio in the UP was evident as the table shows the percentage of women members is 25.26. But reports and studies observe that female UP members are treated by their male colleagues in a hierarchical manner. In various

rights-based forums and seminars, women UP members have revealed that the social attitude towards them is not very positive as they are doing a ‘manly’ job. They are also marginalised in official matters especially in financial affairs on the pretext that they are incapable of dealing with it. It can be said on the basis of this observation that female participation in rural UPs is more ornamental than effective in terms of women’s empowerment. But more research would be needed to know about the overall picture. Thus, the whole grim picture of political participation of women in Bangladesh can be seen as an inevitable consequence of their subordinate position and disempowerment in society.

As a whole, the situation of women in Bangladesh is extremely unfavourable. In terms of the combined education rate, employment ratio and political participation women are far behind their male counterparts. In spite of these stark realities girls’ education rate is increasing. Development initiatives from the international donors, agencies, and commitments made in world conferences and active pressure from national/international women’s movements can be identified as causes of the changing trends in girls’ education. It is clear from the above discussion in light of the reviewed literature that women in Bangladesh are in a disempowered as well as inferior position within the family and society in terms of health, education, legal rights, political participation and economic independence. These factors appear to have a strong negative impact on gaining greater control over their lives through schooling.

Chapter 7

Girls' Education: How It Is Perceived



The study explores the impact of girls' education in rural Bangladesh and to what extent they are realizing their right to education through improved access. More importantly, it examines their learning outcomes in terms of improved autonomy over their own lives. In doing so, this study focuses on a critical social perspective following GAD discourse for getting insights into the deep-rooted gender roles and hierarchy, which are, on one hand, the basis of social construction of women's subjugation and determinants of achieving empowering educational outcome on the other. Hence, identifying and analyzing gendered power relations within rural social contexts and their psychological aspects appeared pivotal in interpreting data and information relating to assessing learning outcomes in the following chapters which contain the study findings.

As discussed elaborately in chapter 3, in studying the impact of schooling and the factors which tend to inhibit women's greater control over their own lives, Sen's theoretical framework 'co-operative conflict'¹ has been used. It has been useful in analyzing the operation of the family as an institution, since it is the basic unit of social control and has gendered power relations within it. Kabeer and Rowlands' theorization of empowerment processes and the analysis of South Asian masculinities made by a group of ethnographers have also been used to get a critical perspective in interpreting the gathered data and information.

In the following chapters, the findings of the field research² will be presented in line with the research questions posed in chapter one. The research questions targeted four areas of investigation. These are: i) the perception of girls' education amongst the educated women (who completed the secondary level) and uneducated women, their parents, neighbours and village leaders; ii) the employment status of young women who completed SSC and their views relating to this, and the ways educated girls (secondary level) are utilising their schooling, and barriers in achieving the desired goal relating to education or employment; iii) the level of empowerment within the household, i.e., to what extent educated women are participating in decisions relating to their own lives, children and family; and iv) understanding the socio-cultural factors that inhibit girls' education, employment and participation in household decision-making. The data gathered on each of the investigation areas mentioned above will be put forward in separate chapters.

¹ Detailed discussion of this framework is presented in chapter 4.

² Location of field research was in 5 villages in Kochua upazila in Bagerhat district.

In this chapter, the findings on how the core respondent group 1 and 2³ perceived girls' education will be presented. The data on the perception of their parents, neighbours and village leaders will also be presented. In order to evaluate the interrelation between education and empowerment, we will focus on the societal ideologies to see how society perceives the subject of girls' education from different perspectives and it will be followed by a critical analysis of views, assumptions, opinions and observed realities. A comparative analysis of the core and sub groups will also be presented in order to sketch the forms and characteristics of gendered power relations. This has been done to get the necessary evidence for drawing conclusions whether or not the SSC level education empowers women by raising awareness of their rights and motivate them to work to realise those and bring them greater autonomy.

7.1 Perceptions of Girls' Education in Rural Community

Bangladesh has achieved remarkable increase in the girls' enrolment rate at the secondary level due to special provisions, like NFSP, which aimed to expand girls' education. In the study, it appeared that the women in the villages of Moghia union were optimistic about girls' education. Nevertheless, structured domination and subordination characterise women's lives in Bangladesh. As a result, it was common in the rural areas that the overall awareness of women regarding their conditions and rights was remarkably weak.

There are many structural factors within the Bangladesh society which obstruct women's clear perception of their self-interest. They attach less value to their own wellbeing than that of their families, which in turn perpetuate their subordinate position in the family and society. To what extent women have absorbed the ideologies favouring male interest, and whether this internalisation of male supremacy was differentiated by women's social class, employment status and age appeared important to explore.

Girls' education was diversely viewed by the different core and sub-groups of the respondents. Women perceived it as a way to raise and educate their children properly, to be self-reliant, to get a job, to realise their rights, to get rid of social humiliation. The essence of education to them was to secure a better future for them and their children in terms of self-reliance and dignity. But how to reach this goal with the help of SSC level education was not quite clear to them.

³ Core respondents groups refer to educated and uneducated women.

Nonetheless, women viewed education as a way to escape oppressive tradition. Uneducated working women and mothers, in particular, were found to be the strongest advocates of girls' education, whereas men viewed it in a confused way. In addition, enhancement of the social dignity of fathers and husbands through their daughters and wives' education was an important thing to consider. The data indicated that although men were becoming at ease with the idea of girls' education, men's attitudes to women working outside the home were found to be complex. Nevertheless, a number of men allowed their daughters and wives to do paid jobs outside the home with a view to lessening the financial hardship of the family or increasing the family's income to cope with the incremental economic needs, provided that the women did not neglect their primary duties of household maintenance and childcare.

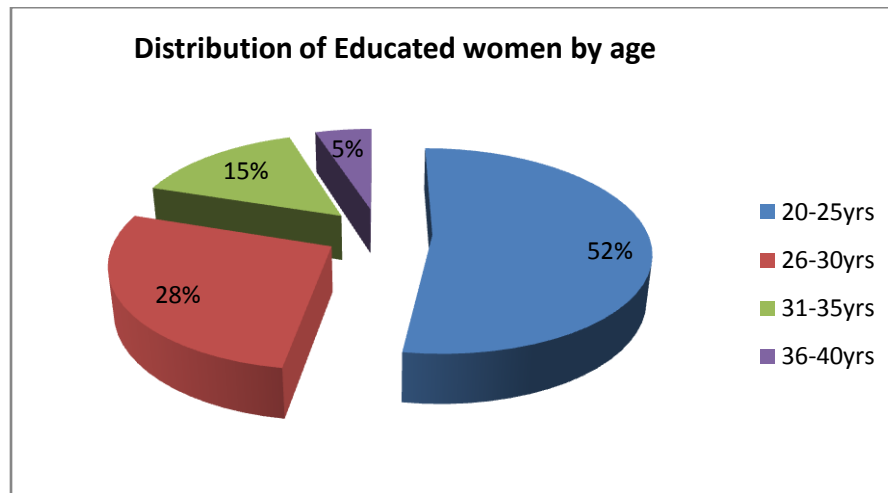
Within the contexts of changing social realities, men's views with regard to girls' education were found to have connections with relational type, age, education level and their socio-economic background. It can be argued that alongside men's ideology of male supremacy, these factors were found to influence their complex attitudes to the issue of girls' education and autonomy. The field data will be analysed in a number of categories of perceptions in detail in the following sections along with their interpretations.

Prior to presenting the field data on perceptions of the two core groups, it would be necessary to look at the age ranges of SSC graduated and non- educated women since the age group to which one belongs had a great deal to do with the outlook one held.

7. 2 Age of the Core Respondents' Group-1

Chart 7.1 shows that among the educated women (core group-1) the largest 53% were within the age group of 20-25. It was intended to examine the level of empowerment of women at least 5 years after their completion of secondary education. It was assumed that this time was required to assess their socio-economic as well as psychological state in relation to empowerment as they were likely to be married within this timeframe. This provides opportunities to assess the important indicators of empowerment, such as, relational⁴ aspects of empowerment.

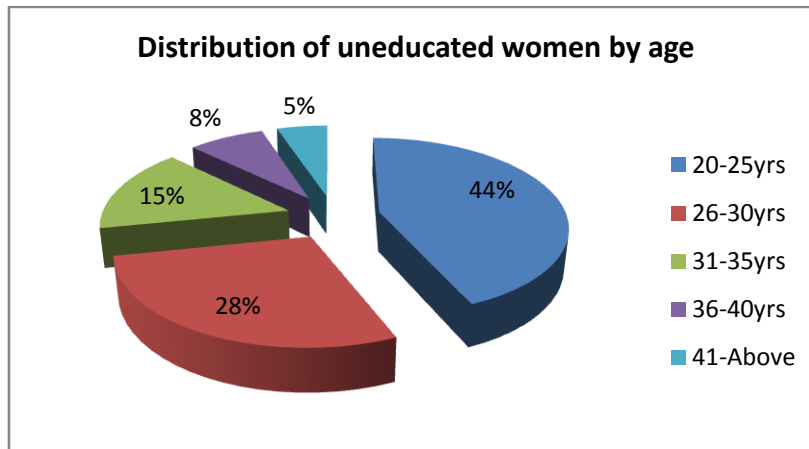
⁴ As Rowlands describes, relational empowerment is important because how a person's close ones (husband, partner, father, brother) treat them matters hugely. For details, please see Theoretical Framework Chapter.

Figure 7.1: Distribution of age of educated women, Core-1 respondent group

The unavailability of older SSC graduate women can be accounted for by the fact that the SSC level education is a relatively new phenomenon in rural Bangladesh (BANBEIS, 1997). The second largest 28% of total educated women were 26-30 years old. 15% were 35-35years, and only 5% were 36-40 years old.

7.3 Age of the Core Respondents' Group-2

The chart 7.2 shows 44% of uneducated women (core group-2) were 20-25 years old. This indicates that a comparatively larger portion of older women were uneducated before than now. This is a clear evidence of the impact of country-wide stipend program for girls' education. 28% of the core group-2 respondents were within the age of 26-30 years, 15% were 31-35years, 8% were 36-40 years and 5% were above 40. Attempts were made to keep these two core-groups within the same age range so that data and information gathered from

Figure 7.2: Distribution of age of uneducated women, Core-2 respondent group

both the groups do not vary significantly due to variations of age. It can also be mentioned, that the lower percentage of older women in both groups can also be accounted for by the fact that the percentage of older people is much lower than that of young people within the entire population. As seen in other developing countries, high birth rate, high death rate, and lower life expectancy, compared to developed countries, are the main causes for this phenomenon.

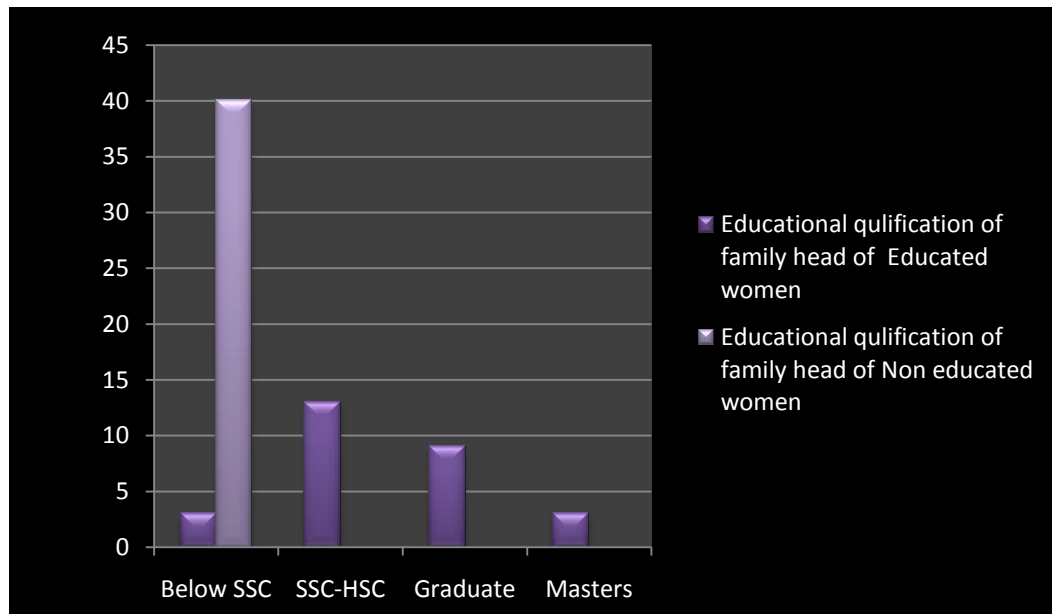
7.4 Educational Qualification of the Family-heads⁵ of the Core Respondents

All the heads of the uneducated girls' families were found to have below-SSC level education. There was a strong correlation between educational qualification of family heads and the educational qualification of their daughters/wives. On the other hand, 32.5% of the heads of educated women's families were educated from SSC to HSC level. 22.5% family heads of this group had passed BA, while 7.5% were Masters Degree holders⁶.

⁵ In most cases it was father of core respondents groups

⁶ They were from Hindu community, who are traditionally far ahead of Muslims in terms of education.

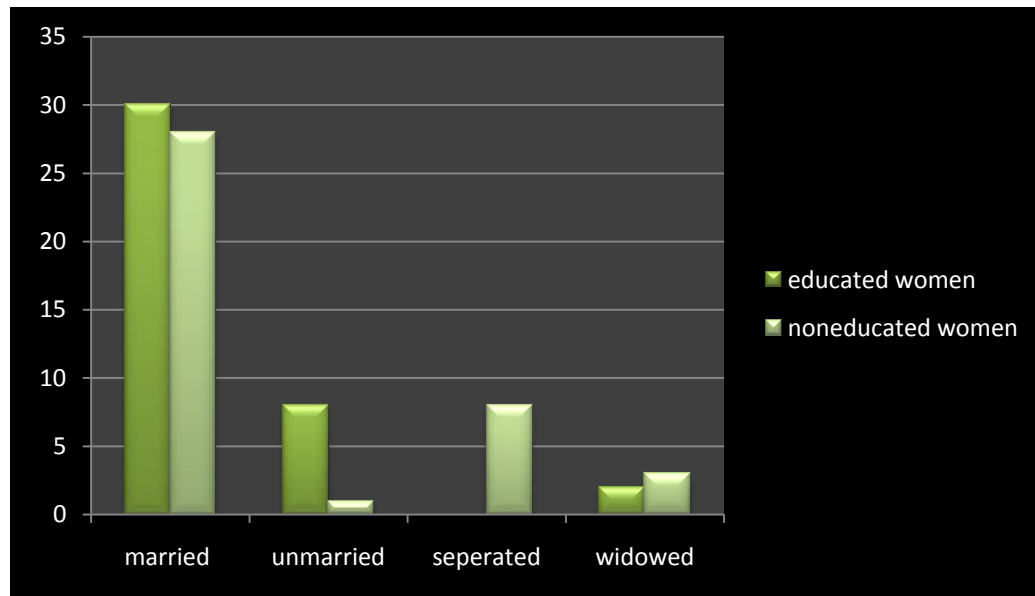
Figure 7.3: Distribution of core respondent group 1 & 2 by educational qualification of the head of the family



7.5 Marital Status of the Core Respondents' Group 1 and 2

Majority of the core respondents were married. This was similar to the findings of Unicef's State of World Children Report, 2011. It showed that Bangladesh was ranked 3rd in the world in regard to early marriage. The report reveals that out of every three girl children in the country, two are married off before 18 years. Appallingly, three out of ten girls become victims of early marriage before they reach the age of 15 (Unicef, 2011). As the general age of secondary completion is 16-18, the largest group of respondents' turned out to be in their mid 20s since 5 years were needed after completion of the SSC level to have an idea about their position in both private and public life. Commensurate with Unicef's data stated above, majority of the respondents were married.

As the table below shows, 75% of educated women were married. On the other hand, 70% of the total uneducated women were married. 20% of educated women were unmarried, whereas only 2.5% of uneducated women were unmarried, indicating a sharp contrast in marriage age between educated and

Figure 7.4: Marital status of core respondent groups- educated & uneducated women

uneducated women. This data also supports the policy agenda of education's marriage delaying role. Another interesting feature relating to the marital status of core-group one and two is that the third category, the 'separated' column, was nil for educated women, whereas this group was quite large, almost 20% of the total uneducated women, indicating their higher vulnerability to desertion by their husbands. They were from a lower economic group and the male members of this class paid little heed to their social obligations or familial responsibilities, unlike those from the educated middle income group.

Therefore, most of the separated women had to take the responsibility of raising their children amidst severe financial hardship. On the other hand, none of the educated women were separated, which is a clear reflection of their middle-class values combined with traditional patriarchal norms seeking to keep the marriage union intact and its privacy unhurt even in the face of any serious marital problem (Osmani, 1998, Adnan, 1993, White, 1992, Boyce & Hartmann, 1983). 5% of the educated women and 7.5% of the uneducated women were widowed. This slightly higher ratio of widowhood amongst the uneducated group was due to their higher age range than the educated women. However, there is also a possibility of a connection between mortality rates and the economic class.

7.6 Perceptions of Girls' Education among Core Respondents' Groups

This section presents and analyses data on the perception of education by educated and uneducated women. The perception of education has a great deal to do with how women make use of it in terms of empowerment. Here, the term empowerment refers to the sense of control over one's own life, the ability to take decisions, and the agency and autonomy needed to act upon these decisions (Sudarshan & Bisht, 2010). According to the Beijing Platform of Action (1995), it means women's active participation in all spheres of public and private life through a full and equal share in economic, social, cultural and political decision-making.

It may be mentioned here that in accordance with the theoretical considerations of this study, empowerment has been viewed as a process of flourishing human abilities by removing constraints and exclusions, and becoming an active part of decision-making and increasing self-confidence. Therefore, the respondents' perceived interest and the level of understanding about their own well-being has a strong link with their state of empowerment (Kabeer, 1994, Rowlands, 1997). As explained in the theoretical framework section, Sen shows in his model of co-operative conflict, that perceived interest is one of the main determinants of one's bargaining power (1990). The outcome of the bargaining process depends on how clearly and confidently a person perceives his/her own interests.

Therefore, it is very important to assess the perceptions of education and gender-related issues among the two core respondent groups- SSC graduate women and uneducated women to understand the role of education in bringing about transformation. A comparative analysis between the two core groups' perceptions is also required to explore whether other factors and dimensions than education are active in determining these views.

7.6.1 Widespread Optimism about Girls' Education

Throughout the field study, it was found that both SSC graduate and non- educated women were very enthusiastic about girls' education. Due to the introduction of Nationwide Female Stipend Programmes from the early 90s and other educational initiatives⁷, the percentage of women who completed the primary level education increased significantly. This resulted in the inclusion of

⁷ Provision of universal primary education since 1980s, initiatives towards World Declaration of Education for All (EFA) from the government, NGOs and international agencies in 1990s.

more and more schools in the NFSP, and effectively created a huge change in the field of girls' education⁸.

The NFSP model undoubtedly can be termed as a success case in achieving gender parity in school enrolment. Bangladesh has already achieved the MDGs regarding elimination of gender disparity in education. This success of Bangladesh has been praised widely by the development stakeholders. It can be argued that the expansion of girls' education all over the country through the NFSP and other educational provisions created an overwhelmingly positive view about girls' education among the SSC graduates and uneducated girls who were the core respondents of the study.

Table 7.1 Percentage of broad categories of perceived meaning of girls' education among educated and uneducated women and their parents

<i>Categories</i>	<i>EW*</i>	<i>UW*</i>	<i>MEW*</i>	<i>MUW*</i>	<i>FEW*</i>	<i>FUW*</i>
<i>1. To raise and educate children properly*</i>	36.6	25.6	-	-	30.4	25.4
<i>2. To be self reliant</i>	19.5	19.3	16.6	23.2	7.7	25.3
<i>3. To live with dignity</i>	7.3	4.6	8.3	24.6	15.4	-
<i>4. To get a job</i>	9.8	9.3	15.3	-	8.4	-
<i>5. To be free to move</i>	7.3	2.3	-	-	-	-
<i>6. To realize their own rights</i>	12.2	6.9	-	-	-	-
<i>7. To help husband and develop the family**</i>	7.3	2.3	-	-	-	-
<i>8. To develop the country</i>	-	2.3	8.3	-	9.3	-
<i>9. To be free from torture</i>	-	6.9	16.6	-	-	-
<i>10. To have better future</i>	-	2.3	-	8.3	7.7	-
<i>11. To be equally educated like boys</i>	-	2.3	-	26.2	-	-
<i>12. Not to be cheated</i>	-	6.9	-	-	-	-
<i>13 For own cause</i>	-	9.3	17.2	27.4	-	-
<i>14. It is a necessity</i>	-	-	-	-	7.7	50.1

EW-educated women UW- Uneducated women MEW-mothers of educated women, MUW-mothers of uneducated women, FEW-fathers of educated women FUW-fathers of uneducated women

⁸ In the starting year of the NFSP where there were 700,000 beneficiaries, the number reached in 2001 at more than 4 million.

As the Table 7.1 shows, the second largest group of both the core group respondents, almost 20% of the total respondents, view girls' education optimistically, as a way to be self-reliant, while others see it as a means to live with dignity, or to be free to move. Most importantly, both the groups find it as a gateway to have a job, although this aspiration of getting a job was more common among younger women and uneducated women. Perhaps older educated women had already stumbled upon the unfavourable realities when trying to get a job outside home.

It is important to note that although field study findings show that both the core respondent groups were upbeat about the government's policy of supporting girls' education, the different economic classes which determine particular social positions have played a significant role in forming views about girls' education. This indicated that within one core group there were many sub-groups from different economic and social levels whose perceptions were different regarding the issue. Sabita Kundu, a school teacher, defines the outcomes of girls' education in terms of familial and social wellbeing in general,

The more educated girls will be, the more freedom they get. Educated girls have the capability to do something for the family and the society. In this way (using that capability), social attitudes towards girls and women will change into positive.

Equally upbeat about girls' education, uneducated Sarifa Banu was unhesitant in describing her personal feelings as she was repenting her mistake of not attending school; now she strongly recommends other girls not to miss this opportunity,

Now I am learning the lesson for not studying at a high price. I can't read or write. I feel so bad. I could have studied if I wanted to. I did not do so out of negligence. Every girl should educate herself before everything else. (shikkhar je koto proyojon ekhon ta harey harey ter pachhi. Porte parina, likhte parina. Mone koshto lage. Iccha korle partam, gaphilotir karone parini. Protyekta meyeloker aage porashuna kora uchit, tarpor onyo kaj.⁹)

The above examples clearly show that uneducated and low-income group women were more candid about sharing their personal experiences than educated women in rural areas. But undeniably almost all of them were found hopeful about girls' education. It can be argued that this positive attitude to and widespread optimism about girls' education created a sense of worth among the majority of girls and women in the villages where the field study was conducted. Their bright eyes, glowing faces and high spirits while talking about girls' education expressed their happiness about countrywide girls' education expansion program.

⁹ Here, women's statements, observations and comments are presented in Bengali to capture the original essence of their words.

Obviously, this phenomenal change in girls' education in the last two decades made women feel a sense of worth and confidence about their ability. This in turn made them courageous to dream of a better future for themselves. This sense of ability, as discussed in chapter 4 (theoretical framework chapter), according to Rowlands, is a part of one form of the three-dimensional empowerment process called 'personal empowerment'.

However, we have to be cautious in terming this sense of ability as 'personal empowerment', which is the core of the empowerment process, because this psychosocial process requires a person to be able to act against internalised oppression, which they were not seen to do earlier. Here, it can be argued that women have only started to be confident about their ability to get educated. Women appeared to see education as a ray of hope to get rid of the numerous hurdles coming out of the traditional patriarchal system which they had to face every day. Nevertheless, they were not found to be able to act against the socially structured oppression and injustice.

However, it can be said that women are mustering the awareness and courage needed to question the age-old subjugations foisted on them. Interestingly, this ground preparation of personal empowerment was not seen equally among the two core groups. Contradictory to the articulated state policies which say education provides better awareness, uneducated rural women, particularly those who were engaged in paid jobs, showed a clearer indication of self-confidence (than educated rural women), which Kabeer termed as 'power from within' (Kabeer, 1994: 245).

7.6.2 Reflection of Practical Needs and Life Experiences in Women's Perceptions

A multi-dimensional set of perceptions of education presented in table 7.1 clearly reflects the respondents' respective life experiences. It is obvious from the table that the respondents' perception of education was greatly influenced by the troubles they faced in their practical life. 7.3% of the educated women perceived education as a way to be free to move whereas only 2.3 % uneducated women mentioned it because majority of them do not face this trouble like educated women. In rural contexts educated women who belong to a better socio-economic group of the social hierarchy enjoy less freedom of mobility which is a major step towards women's autonomy. The honour of middle and upper-class rural families depends largely on their women's behaviours and mobility. Therefore, it can be argued that education does not ensure their rights of free movement.

Discernibly, although the core group 2 enjoyed more freedom to go outside home than the core group 1, almost all of them regretted not being educated as they thought it would ensure social prestige. Uneducated Hasina Begum shared her pain as she faced social humiliation-

Everyone, older or younger, calls me by my name. If I were educated, people would address me with more respect, saying 'Apa'. Nobody respects uneducated persons. I've experienced it in my own life. (Amare chhoto-boro shabai naam dhore dake, porashuna janle shobai amare apa-apa korto. Shomman uchu hoto. Ashikhitoder keu patta dyae na. Nijer jibone ei dekhlam.)

Majority of the uneducated women expressed their deep sadness as they received hardly any respect from the family and the community. This was because they compared their position with that of educated women, who enjoyed more respect from their family and the society. In practical life, these uneducated women, particularly those who were from vulnerable economic backgrounds, become the worst victims of the patriarchal structure, norms, values and attitudes of the rural society¹⁰. Another aspect of social humiliation and dishonour was rooted in the class factor. When a poor person was a woman, her social dignity and respect become more vulnerable than that of a man.

Besides this persistent social disgrace, they were cheated frequently. Perhaps that is why Julekha Khatun's perception of girls' education was mixed. She stresses the importance of girls' education as a safeguard against cheats, while enhanced social dignity was her next concern. She finds it as a way to simultaneously acquire knowledge and develop children-raising skills,

I've made a great mistake in my life by not getting educated. Now I realize that. Education is necessary for raising children and also for one's own knowledge. No one can cheat an educated person. They receive extra social dignity in the society/village. Nobody talks to the uneducated people (Oshikkhito murkhoder shathe keu aalap korena)'.

Amongst uneducated rural women incidents of being cheated were very common. Economic hardship made women get involved in different income-generating activities like 'Samity', investing small amounts of money in others' businesses, small household poultry, sewing and in some cases, knitting fishing nets¹¹. They fell victim to deception in monetary exchanges very often as they lacked the numerical knowledge of accounting. Such incidents of fraud, coupled with poverty and social disrespect experienced by rural uneducated women created widespread

¹⁰ This in nature is largely feudal.

¹¹ Since the villages in Moghia union in Kochua upazila is located in the coastal belt of Bangladesh

frustration amongst them for not having education. Afroja Banu was one of them. Echoing Julakha she too perceives education as a safety measure against cheats,

'Education is essential. People neglect an uneducated person. Education is necessary at least to know and understand things. I deposited a lot of money to Samitis (NGO groups), but I was cheated. If I were educated I would understand that. I've been cheated at every step of life for being uneducated (murkho theke jiboner protti pode thoktechhi).'

On the other hand, educated women were more concerned about raising children in a precise manner and getting a job while expressing their educational perceptions. They also identified greater social dignity and national development as outcomes of education. But it is interesting to notice that educated women's views were more homogeneous and harmonised than the uneducated women. Perhaps this is because educated women in the villages were more formal¹² and alert during interviews whereas uneducated women shared diversified life experiences more freely. This formal attitude¹³ was also noticed in responses to category 9 in the table 7.1. In this category of perception, only non- educated women responded. Although other data on violence against women shows physical and psychological torture such as verbal abuse, wife beating, threats to give 'talaq' was quite common in the villages and the practice was not limited to the lower economic class only, educated women kept their mouth shut in this regard. We shall analyse this class culture in the succeeding chapters. Understandably, the life experiences of the rural educated and uneducated women were reflected hugely in their perceptions of girls' education.

7.6.3 Education and Reinforced Gendered Role

Social attitudes and how society perceives girls' education influence women's views about it, and socially acceptable feminine roles largely shape up people's perceptions. This study finds that education tends to reinforce women's reproductive roles and even educated women lack self-confidence and are not likely to be aware of their own rights and interests. As discussed in chapter 2, studies show that in the social context of South Asia, education is perceived as having a meaning different from empowerment. Girls' education is seen as a way to enhance family status (Kerkhoff, 1998:26), and in some cases, as a family strategy to enable girls to earn if need be. Chanana also shows that education is viewed as an 'investment for future utility, not to develop self-worth or as

¹² This appears as a class character.

¹³ Here the term formal refers to information regarding personal affair concealing attitude in fear of losing social dignity.

training for independence' (Chanana, 1998:157,170). Such study findings have been confirmed by the present study. Table 7.1 clearly shows that most of the perceptions of education from both the core groups were related to socially-defined gendered roles and responsibilities. Thus, the traditional feminine identity and gendered role is reinforced through education in a society where reproductive responsibilities are recognised as women's topmost priority.

7.6.4 Education and Better Performance as a Mother

As discussed in the literature review chapter, prevailing social attitudes regard girls' education as a way of performing a better role in child and family care (Kerkhoff, 1998:181; Engels, 1996:176). The field data of this study shows that a similar attitude was prevalent in the rural areas in Bangladesh. The largest segment of the educated women (36.6%) perceived education as a way to be equipped for an informed motherhood - category no.1 (raising and educating children properly).

Table 7.1 shows that the highest 36.6 percent of the total educated women perceived education first and foremost as an instrument to raise and educate their children properly. A SSC graduate, unmarried Rhehana Khatun thinks,

Girls' education is necessary because if mothers are not educated then the nation will not be educated. In order to raise children properly, girls' education is very important. (Meyeder shikkhar dorkar, karon maa shikkhito na hole jati shikkhito hobe na, shantan lalon paloner jonno meyeder sikkhar proyojon anek beshi)

Shoma Halder, a BA examinee who lives with her father-in-law's joint family, includes the issue of national development along in her main perception of girls' education, which is a better childcare role,

Of course girls' education is necessary. If women are not educated then the future generation will not be educated, and the country will not develop. That is why educating girls is very important. (Nari shikkha oboshyoi dorkar, shomaje nari ra jodi shikkhito na hoy tahole poroborti projonmo shikkhito hobe na, desher o unnoti hobena, tai nari shikkha khub joruri)

Although she emphasised gendered role of women and sees girls' education as a means to develop the nation rather their own rights, when she was asked whether educated women should engage in paid jobs outside home she promptly replied that they should. The reasons for her were firstly, to utilise the education acquired; secondly, to be self-reliant; and thirdly, to contribute to the family.

She, and many other women like her, were found at the crossroads as they did not know exactly what to do with the acquired education and its purpose.

Uneducated women also largely perceived education as a way to play a better role as a mother. Table 7.1 shows that 25 percent of the total uneducated women stressed this purpose of girls' education. Uneducated Aleya Begum gave her logic in the following way,

Girls' education is important because men usually remain outside home and the children stay with their mother all the time. The mother has to take care of everything regarding the household. That is why if a mother is educated then she can teach her children something good, it helps to attain dignity in the society. (Meyeder lekhopora joruri karon purush manush ra sobsomoy baire thakey ar sontan maaer kache thakey. Songsarer bhalo mondo maa kei dekhtey hoy, tai lekhopora jana thakley bachchader porano jae, bhalo kichhu shekhano jae. Somaje shomman niye bacha jae.)

The reasons behind this prevalent view can be found in their life experiences. For both of the core groups, the primary demand from the family and the society is to take care of the children and family. Hence, the core respondents internalised the gendered role which is reinforced by social practices and men's inactivity regarding childcare and domestic work. Furthermore, education appears to have hardly any changing effect on the social mindset of gendered role.

7.6.5 'Deshar Unnatir Jonye Shikkha': Women's Own Voice or Hegemony of 'Development' Rhetoric?

Most of the core respondents mentioned raising and educating children as their first perception of education. But, after that a significant number of respondents opted for the subject of 'development of the country'. Since from a number of perceptions they shared during the interviews, the first one was taken for categorization, this perception of development of the country remained hidden in the category table. Although a few of the core respondents and almost 9 and 10 percent of the total educated women's mother and father respectively mentioned this, it is not the first perception for the majority of respondents. Still this opinion was prevalent among rural women and men. A 40 year-old educated woman Jahanara Begum observed, '*deshar Unnatir Jonye nari shikkhar bikalpani*. The comment clearly indicated that both the ethos and language were not likely to be her own.

However, her second view was to reduce the violence against women. Apparently, the ultimate goal of the married BA examinee, Shoma Haldar (above mentioned) was '*deshar unnati*', and she found girls' education crucial in order to educate the '*poroborti prajanmo*'.

Nowadays, television and radio are accessible to almost all over the country. Through these media broadcast, development rhetoric can be heard from all the corners. Discernibly, it was interesting to notice that some the responses of the respondents¹⁴ echoed these political and government-propagated development agenda and goals. The language the respondents used in everyday rural life, the way they communicate and interact with other members of the family and neighbours, their level of understanding about rights, justice, relational dimensions of power, and economic factors in determining familial and social positions etc. were not commensurate with their opinions concerning national development.

It can be argued that if their concern about national development had come from within, they would have been concerned about their own rights and deprivations in the first place. Hence, it appeared that since women were made to understand that the purpose of their education is for national development, population control, to be a good mother who can teach her children etc., but not for her own cause or rights, women themselves learned to ignore their own betterment. As a result of this instrumentalising approach to women's development, even rural uneducated women were found echoing the slogans of the government and different development agencies' instead of building awareness about their own well-being.

7.6.6 Educated Women's Perception of their own Wellbeing

Educated women in the villages of Moghia union were found to attach more value to their families' well-being than their own. Table 7.1 shows the percentage of broad categories of perceived meanings of girls' education among the two core groups and their parents. Among the 13 categories of perception¹⁵, perception type-1, 7 and 8 do not indicate women's own cause directly while the remaining 11 types of perception categories are directly related to women's own cause. Most of the respondents expressed their strong approval of girls' education. But within this homogeneous thought, divergent perceptions of education were found. Strikingly, among the total educated

¹⁴ Although in most cases it was not their first perception, yet it carries significance as these views came repeatedly.

¹⁵ As the question regarding perception was an open ended one, respondents' first answer was marked to be taken along with analyzing the emphasis area given by them in tabulations of broad categories as in many cases they mentioned more than one perceptions.

women (who completed the SSC level), the largest 36.6 percent mentioned the reason of category no.1 (raising and educating children properly) that does not fall in the type that says anything about women's own wellbeing. Although a lower percentage, but still the largest group of 25.6% uneducated women perceived education as a means to promote their children's cause. As Sen shows, the poor and subjugated respond to oppressive social systems and practices and the oppressed have a false perception of their real interests and well being. As a result they acquire and internalise the ideology of the oppressor.

This data on majority of the SSC graduate women's attitudes towards their education clearly shows a lack of consciousness about individual self-interest. Women were seen to instrumentalise themselves as a means instead of considering themselves as an end. Within the structure of domination and subjugation that characterize women's lives in rural areas, it was seen that both SSC graduated and uneducated women - both the core groups- -lack awareness about their own interest and wellbeing. Although the extent of unawareness varied significantly, it disapproved the dominant view that education provides a better understanding about women's rights.

Sen makes it clear in the model of co-operative conflict that perceived interest is one of the main determinants of one's bargaining power (1990). As mentioned earlier, the result of the bargaining process depends on how clearly and confidently a person perceives his/her own interest. SSC graduated women who were interviewed in the study show a dismal picture in this regard. The largest number, as many as 36% of the total core respondent-1 group (educated women) took education as a means of performing the childcare role better. Another 7% were found enthusiastic to help their husbands and families with their education. A person whose perceived interest sidesteps his/her own well-being may receive a worse deal in the bargaining outcome. This attitude was very much evident among the educated women in the field survey. Most of the core group-1 respondents were found to have little awareness about their own interest. Only 12% saw it as a way to realise their rights. In societies like Bangladesh, internalisation of women's subjugation is so deeply engrained that they can hardly identify their welfare and real interest.

7.7 Girls' Education and Formation of Perception in Favour of Women

It is interesting to know that in rural areas where the study was conducted, the social psychological realities are different from the assumption that imparting education would make women more aware of their rights and interests. Educated women were found to be less conscious of their rights in terms of educational perception. In contrast to the uneducated working women, they (educated women) were found to be nurturing the existing social norms and values in a more sophisticated and polite manner, perhaps as an impact of education. As table 7.1 shows, 25% of the uneducated women perceived girls' education primarily as a way to raise children properly. Unexpectedly, this ratio increased by 11% for the educated group. Ignoring their own cause, i.e., self-reliance or basic rights, more than 36 percent of the total educated women recognised performing childcare in a proper manner as the foremost reason of education. However, comparatively younger educated women showed a greater awareness than older respondents. On the other hand, among the older women educated girls' mothers were more progressive in attitudinal aspects.

Even though uneducated, employed women were found to have a clearer idea about their rights as a human being, almost the same percentage (19.5 and 19.3) of both the core groups¹⁶ perceived education as a way to be self-reliant. Thus education was found to have little positive correlation with perceiving girls' education in a right-oriented way.

7.8 Education for Women's Own Cause: Uneducated Women and the Mothers are Prime Advocates

Uneducated working women were found to be more vocal about women's rights in terms of educational perceptions. Among the total uneducated women, nearly half of them were engaged in paid jobs. As discussed above, they belonged to lower economic groups and in some cases, affected by hardcore poverty due to divorce, separation or desertion by husbands for the latter's multiple marriages. They challenged the socio cultural norms about women's code of conduct more than educated women. To them, the perceived meanings of education were more rights-oriented than that of educated women belonging to comparatively upper economic groups. As Table 7.1 shows, 9.3% uneducated women had a positive understanding about education as a means to advance women's own cause, not for anyone else. On the other hand none of the educated women were found to have

¹⁶ Core group-1 educated women, core group-2 non educated women

this necessary understanding of self-worth which is very important to acquire personal empowerment. Another thing to note is the views of the mothers of both the core groups, particularly those of uneducated women. The highest number in this category, 27 percent of the total mothers of uneducated women perceived education for women's own cause. Seventeen percent of the total mothers of core group 1 viewed girls' education for their own cause. Mainly mothers and uneducated women were found to view it in this positive and empowering manner.

7.9 Perception of Parents: Mothers were the Strongest Advocates of Girls' Interests

About parents' views of girls' education, the majority of the respondents opined that although parents enabled them to continue studying up to the SSC level, they were confused at times about the necessity of girls' education. This particularly happened when neighbours made negative comments. Mothers played a significant role in opposing neighbours' anti-education attitudes as well as fathers' confusion about girls' education. According to many respondents' experiences, neighbours' views had considerable influence on their education as it created an environment where the schooling issue became questionable at the family level.

Amongst all the respondent groups, mothers were found to be the strongest supporters of girls' education. Nasima Begum, a 45 year-old mother of an educated woman and the wife of a farmer expressed her views as follows,

...to be self reliant, to raise children- education is crucial , we did not understand it earlier, Government has given huge opportunities to girls. To stand on one's own feet, to be free from torture - girls need education. Since my daughter is educated our neighbours and villagers speak highly of her. They praise her. If she was not educated they would not speak of her so highly. Earlier, society would not appreciate girls' education, now it wants girls to be educated. Government wants this - how can the society want otherwise!

She appreciated government's NFSP and found it as a shield against social attitudes which generally oppose women's self reliance and autonomy. About the parents' stance relating to their education, most of the core group respondents¹⁷ mentioned they received encouragement from parents. In most cases mothers were more positive than fathers. In fact, mothers seemed to be even more right-conscious than their daughters. But the respondents also noted that this encouragement

¹⁷ As some of the uneducated group also attended to some extent primary level education with a few exceptions.

from parents was not equal to their brothers as they (the girls) were expected to take responsibilities of different types of domestic work. While brothers' education was seen unquestionably necessary as long as resources were there, their education was not seen in the same way.

Notwithstanding, it can be argued that compared to fathers' views, mothers' positions were amazingly supportive. As Table 7.1 shows, an astonishing 26 percent of the total mothers of non educated women perceived that girls should be educated equally like boys. 16 percent of the total mothers of core group 1 put emphasis on violence against women and perceived education as a safeguard against this. Another important aspect is that no mother viewed girls' education to raising children properly in the first place whereas 30.4 percent and 25.4 percent of the total fathers of core groups 1 and 2 respectively mentioned it. Arguably mothers' life experience about the matter gave them a wider outlook in terms of their own interest than their male counterparts.

Furthermore, real-life experiences of deprivation, stories of oppression from friends, relatives and neighbours may have influenced mothers to expect their daughters to be in a better position than them. Another important aspect noticed in the study was the mothers' dual role in dealing with their educational perceptions. When they talked about their daughters' education and self-dependant life free from oppression (which is 16.6 % mothers perception regarding girls' education), they were found very assertive about women's own rights. Ironically, they themselves (apart from a few exceptions) took an opposite stance concerning their daughters-in-laws. This may be explained by the nature of society where 'classic patriarchy' (Kandiyoti, 1997) prevails. The term 'classic patriarchy' refers to a patrilocally extended family that operates in a way that the deprivation experienced by a mother-in-law as a young bride ultimately devolves on a young daughter-in-law because of the control and power she attains through the patriarchal system and internalisation of its norms and values.

It was obvious that financial support for girls' education by the government, made the parents agree to let their daughters have schooling up to SSC. The nationwide girls' stipend programme may be seen as one such influential factor. In a country like Bangladesh where 70% of the total population falls in the category of the poor, the girls' stipend programme appeared to have contributed considerably to girls' education.

7.10 Men's Views towards Girls' Education: Conflicting Thoughts and Shifting Positions

Men's attitudes towards girls' education and empowerment have a huge significance in a society which is predominantly patriarchal in nature. Since women's empowerment requires a structural transformation of age-old patriarchal norms, values, power relations and a change in people's mindset, exploring men's views appeared very important as they are the prime actors in this regard.

'shikkhito i bhalo, jagater alo?'

26 year-old Maruf Molla was the husband of an educated woman. He was a farmer by profession with education up to grade eight and his wife was earning 1300 tk. per month through private tuition. He perceived girls' education thus-

Educated girls are like a beacon of light. She (the wife) can good, informed decisions if anything important comes up in my absence. If she is not educated, she would not understand many things and make mistakes. Education is necessary to raise children properly and mix people. Educating girls is even more important as they have more responsibilities. People talk carefully and respectfully with educated girls. They face less intimidation by the in-laws. (shikkhito i bhalo, jagater alo. Ami bari thaklam na -kono darkari kaj porlo- takhon siddhanto meye lok key nite hobe- shikkhito na hole bhalo kore bujhbe na, golmal kore felbe. chhele-pele manush korar jonne, manusher shathe meshar jonne lekhapora korte hobe, meyeder aro beshi kore lekhapora kora dokar- karon oder upor dayitwa beshi- Sikkhito hole lokjon hishab kore kotha bole-morjada dyae- swasur swasurir chokh rangani kom hoy)

Nonetheless Maruf Molla could not approve women's paid jobs outside home. His views represented the common attitudes of men in the villages where the field study had been conducted. He perceived girls' education as a way to prepare them to carry out family responsibilities. (*meyeder aro beshi kore lekhapora kora dokar- karon oder upor dayitwa beshi*). Unfortunately, how women would manage to take these extra 'dayitwa' on their already encumbered shoulders- was not found to be a matter of concern. Or sharing the responsibilities of household chores and childcare by men did not come to his mind as a solution to this. Although he thought that educated women should do something (income) instead of sitting idle - as it helped the family, it should be within the household. He honestly admitted his uneasiness regarding women's income-earning role-

Women's income-earning feels strange. But nowadays it is impossible to do everything alone. No matter what other people say, women can earn by working at home. They can do private tutoring, sewing etc. (...meyeder aye-rojgar jodio kemon kemon lage. Kintu ekhon ekar pokkhey sobkichhu kora sombhob na. Je jai boluk na keno, ghore boseo taka rojgar kora jae, baire jete hobe emon kono kotha nei. Private porate pare, selai ba ei dhoroner kaj korte pare...)

Regarding the adverse socio-familial attitudes towards women's income-earning role, he comments, *People will say what they have to say. Girls have to bear some humiliation. (Lokey ja bolar tato bolbei, meyeder ektu apoman sojjho korte hoy.)* Interpretations and analyses of this kind of views of the male respondents' will be presented in the 'Employment Status and Views about Women's Economic Participation' chapter. Here we want to draw attention only to men's conflicting views regarding the use of girls' education in practical life. It can be argued that analysis of these conflicting thoughts and shifting beliefs carried immense significance in identifying how the real perceptions of men were formed and whether there were any indicators of accepting girls' education together with its empowering aspects. For instance, Maruf Molla, started from an apparently positive perception '*shikkhito i bhalo, jagater alo*' and concluded with a number of empowerment prohibiting attitudes of men.

However, fathers' points of views were different from that of the husbands' in this regard. Village grocery shop owner and 55 year-old father of an uneducated woman, Sohrab Ali's thoughts relating to girls' education were more progressive than the much younger Maruf Molla. Unlike Maruf Molla, Sohrab Ali wanted girls' education mainly for themselves, for their social dignity and jobs which would enable them to stand independently on their own feet, not for a better performance of the 'extra responsibilities' given by the husband within the household. He was not hesitant in expressing his approval of women's income-earning role.

In this time, education is very important, especially girls' education. Now girls are ahead in education. If girls are educated they can teach their children, do a job, attain a special dignity and respect in the village. The government is giving this opportunity to the girls. The society cannot put any barrier even if it wants to. (Ekhon je somoy tate lekha pora khub i joruri, bishesh kore meyeder, meyera ekhon lekha porae egiye achhe... meyera shikkhito hole sontander shekhate parbe... chakri korte parbe, grame alada somman pabe..sorker sujog dichhe- somaj ekhon chaile o badha dite parbena)

This father seemed ready to fight back social barriers to girls' education. His last sentence is significant. *...sorker sujog dichhe- somaj ekhon chaile o badha dite parbena*'. It proves that there are still many social obstacles regarding girl's education, which may be removed through positive government interventions. But deep inside the social life, women's education and empowerment is still questioned. On the other hand, their growing economic hardships give them a justification for women's education for a job. However, regarding the use of girls' education in practical life, Sohrab Ali spoke supportively of women's jobs outside home for their greater autonomy. Moreover, he pointed out another crucial issue of lack of job opportunities in rural areas which he viewed as a cause of early marriage,

If they have a job, girls can do many things. They would not have to depend on anyone. What is the use of education if you sit at home? Nowadays even a clerk needs to be a SSC graduate. As they (the girls) cannot find any job, we have to marry them off. (Chakri thakle meyera anek kichhu korte pare...karo dhar dharte hoyna...ghore bose thakle lekhopora kiser jonye? Ajkal pion hote geleo SSC lage...kaaj payena bole amra biye diye dei...)

Hence, there was a sharp difference in the views of fathers and husbands on girls' education, women's paid job outside home and their autonomy between fathers and husbands. The majority of fathers were found to be supporters of girls' education and employment whereas husbands were cautious in preserving the traditional patriarchal culture, yet allowing limited change which would help them to manage various economic and social needs.

'Biye hole shob shesh-Swamir sansare lekhopora hoyna'

Another important aspect of girls' education is the interruption that education encounters when a girl gets married. Not only does education stop for most girls once they tie the knot, but also their lives undergo an epochal change as they leave behind their parental homes and go to their in-laws' place. Any desire to continue education or any other intellectual endeavours is nipped in the bud by the adverse atmosphere in the in-laws' household and the reproductive burden foisted on them. As the SSC graduate, married Rita Rani Haldar puts it-'Swasurbari mane ekta karagar'. It is a ubiquitous truth for the rural Bengali women. Their freedom in every aspect of their lives is appallingly restricted in their in-laws' house. The reality regarding this is so pervasive that despite being a male, HSC graduate, unmarried Liton Hawlader also observes the ultimate fate of the majority women in Bangladesh- 'Biye hole shob shesh'.

He also shared a different point of view,

Education is essential for everyone. You have to have at least some education to understand human life. Girls had many problems before. Now they are the ones who get more opportunities. But they cannot utilise those opportunities. Everything ends when they get married. They cannot continue pursuing education in their in-laws household. (Sikkha sobar proyojon. Manuser jibonke jante hole porasuna ektu holeo korte hobe. meyeder age anek somosya chhilo ekhon sujog to tara beshi pae- kintu kaje lagate parrena. Biye hole shob shesh. Swamir songsare lekhapora hoyna...)

Therefore, it can be argued from the above fact and data that socio-cultural factors are playing a very important role in rural women's lives and they determine the extent to which education will be empowering.

7.11 Gaps between Education and Empowerment- Transformation in Thought Process

It is undeniable that the different approaches dealing with women's issues are embedded in the Indian social reform and nationalist movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries which were focused on apparently progressive issues but did not address the basic structure of male dominance and control (McCarthy, 1993). These approaches also reflected the legacy of British influence which views Victorian representation as ideals that upheld middle class values of female education and limited social participation commensurate with their husband's status. Women's education, thus, was largely seen as a way to make wives capable of supporting the social position of their husbands and performing the childcare and home management roles better.

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, new ideas and approaches of women development have been introduced in the country which are mainly advocated by different foreign donor agencies and as an influence of various international women's/ development conferences¹⁸. These new approaches originated from and exercise WID's top-down form of development initiatives. As WID policies put emphasis on women's role in production rather than addressing the causes of women's subordination it sidesteps the huge issue of the rights of women to be viewed as equal partners of their male counterparts in terms of all human rights.

Consequently, these programmes instrumentalise women and consider them as vehicles by which national development priorities, such as population control, economic growth, literacy movement etc. can be achieved. For obvious reasons, women's empowerment, which requires a change in

¹⁸ Such as Jomtien Conference on Education For All, Baijing Conference on Women, Millenium Development Goals etc.

patriarchal structure of power relations for a transformation of women's subordinate position, is largely unaddressed in these programmes. In societies like Bangladesh internalisation of women's subjugation echoes with precision the above theorisation of women's subordinate position in an age-old patriarchal system. Women in Bangladesh, particularly rural women, can hardly identify their welfare and real interest. As a result, women were found to suffer from a false consciousness in that they did not have a clear perception of their individual self-interest. The oppressed (women) internalises the ideology of the oppressor and become complicit in their own oppression. Consequently, they sidestepped their own and real interests and emphasize the family's wellbeing.

Chapter 8

Women's Employment Status and Views about Economic Participation



Women's labour market participation is considered to be a significant determinant to assess their level of empowerment in a society. Due to its importance, assessing 'share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector has been set as one of the prime indicators of MDGs relating to women's empowerment (UNDP, 2007). Hence women's economic participation in paid work is considered as one of the most important factors leading to autonomy and empowerment. Various studies show that greater economic participation promotes women's status within the family (Sen, 1987, Adnan, 1993, Kibria, 2002, Sultan, 2010).

Nonetheless, the meagre rates of women's participation in wage employment in Bangladesh reflect the unfavourable socio-cultural factors prevailing in the society. Although gender gaps in education are decreasing, the situation of paid employment is not commensurate with it. In the development policy planning and strategies of GOs, NGOs and UNOs in Bangladesh, it is often assumed that education will enable women to enter the labour market and thus help them achieve empowerment. This section presents the study findings relating to the employment of rural women who completed their SSC level education at least half of a decade ago. Prior to presenting the study findings relating to the employment status of rural women, women's overall economic status, trends in women labour force will be discussed to get a clear idea about the employment situation of women in the country. Study findings will include wage discrimination, socio-cultural barriers and impact of women's employment status on them and the analysis of education-employment correlation.

8.1 Women's Economic Status in Bangladesh

Women's economic status in Bangladesh is mostly as that of their economic dependence on men. Women are perceived as economic liabilities since most of their work is unpaid and does not have any immediate economic gain (Rahman, 2001; WB, 1990; Islam, 1985). Within the social contexts of Bangladesh, women are held entirely responsible for tasks related to reproduction, child rearing and domestic chores such as cleaning, cooking, washing and gathering firewood. A number of studies revealed that rural women spend most of their time performing domestic duties such as collecting input (firewood, water, vegetables etc.) for the household work, cooking, cleaning, and providing personal services to elderly members of the family and helping agricultural activities (Khan, 1988; Hartmann & Boyce, 1983). Women's jobs, such as processing agricultural crops, working in poultry and fishery, are taken as unpaid family labour within the boundaries of domestic responsibilities. Sen's comments on the problematic definition of 'productive' and 'unproductive' labour force are particularly useful to assess women's employment status:

The so-called 'productive' activities may be parasitic on other work being done, e.g. housework and food preparation, the looking after of children, bringing food to the field where cultivators are working. Technology is not about equipment and its operational characteristics, but also about social arrangements that permit the equipment to be used and the so called productive processes to be carried on.

Household activities have been viewed in many contradictory ways in assessing production and technology. On the one hand, it is not denied that the sustenance, survival and reproduction of workers are obviously essential for the workers being available for outside work. On the other, the activities that produce or support that sustenance, survival or reproduction are typically not regarded as contributing to output, and are often classified as 'unproductive' labour (1987:11).

Thus, despite long hours of work at the family level and a substantial contribution to the national economy, women are considered economically 'unproductive' and dependent on the family with no apparent earning capability due to the male supremacist mindset and traditional definition of 'productive' labour force (Sen, 1987; Khan, 1988; Adnan, 1993).

8.2 Women's Labour Market Trends in Bangladesh

Since the last two decades of the previous century, the economy of the country has shifted from its earlier characteristics. A number of influential factors such as worldwide economic recessions, directives from the World Bank, IMF¹⁹ and similar multilateral development agencies, in line with the human capital theory put forward by the classical liberal economists, caused a paradigm shift towards privatization and trade liberalization policies. As a result, the macro-level structural adjustments (Adnan, 1993) became an economic reality at the family level. As it took place in almost every sphere of public and private life, women have been badly affected by structural adjustment (Mahmud and Mahmud, 1989). At the macro-economic level, women's work pattern is largely shaped by the effects of structural change.

8.2.1 Definition of the Productive Labour Force

Another important aspect of women's labour market trend is the traditional definition of the productive labour force. Before 1989, women's contribution to the national economy was not included in the national statistics. From 90s, an extended definition of labour force that included a number of expenditure saving activities²⁰, such as post-harvest agricultural responsibilities which

¹⁹ International Monetary Fund

²⁰ Activities that have economic value but are not payable as wives or other women of the family do them. Expenditure saving means the amount would have been paid to recruited workers for the same jobs.

include husking, boiling and storing of rice, and seed preservation, processing other seasonal crops and assisting male members in other agriculture jobs, raising poultry and vegetables, tending animals etc. was used in surveys. As mentioned earlier, women's participation rate in the labour force drastically increased to 61.6% in 1989 from 9.4% in 1985-86 (BBS, 1996- LFS).

But this only gives women recognition of their labour on paper, not any material benefit in practical life. Hence, inclusion of women's labour, which Sen observes as non-market domestic labour which is necessary to make male labour productive (1987), can change the whole scenario of the male female ratio of the total labour force and misconception of women's 'unproductive' image.

8.2.2 Capitalist Market Economy and Increase in Women's Formal Labour Force

As mentioned earlier, as a result of the factors derived from structural adjustments there has been a sharp increase in women's formal labour force participation. If we look at the past trends, in 80s the total number of employed women increased from 0.9 million in 1974 to 2.4 million in 1983-84. In 90s this trend of increasing women's participation in the employed population continued (Adnan, 1993).

According to Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2005, the overall labour force had increased steadily at the start of the 2000s. During this five-year time, women's wage employment increased considerably, growing at 4.3 percent each year during the first half decade of the 2000s. The female labour force increased at an overwhelming rate from 2.54 million in the 80s to 10.02 million in the 90s.

The Labour Force Survey in 1995/96 showed that 78.8% of the women within the labour force were involved in agriculture but 70% of them worked as unpaid family labour (LFS, 1995-96). As the table of the Labour force survey 2005-06 (below) shows, the highest 60.1% of total women labour force worked as unpaid family workers. On the other hand, only 11.7% are regularly paid employees. Of them, the garment manufacturing sub-sector is the largest employer of women.

Table 8.1 Employed Population of Bangladesh**Employed population of Bangladesh by Employment Status, 2005-06**

s	Bangladesh			Urban			Rural		
	BS*	M*	F*	BS	M	F	BS	M	F
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Regular paid employee	13.9	14.5	11.7	31.2	30.5	45.6	8.5	9.6	5.0
Employer	0.3	0.3	0.1	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.1
Self -employed	41.9	50.0	15.9	41.6	45.3	4.1	42.0	51.5	11.6
Unpaid family worker	21.7	9.7	60.1	9.5	5.6	30.6	25.5	10.9	71.8
Irregular paid worker	2.0	2.2	1.5	2.3	2.6	1.8	1.9	2.0	1.5
Day labourer (agri)	10.7	13.3	2.5	2.2	2.7	0.9	13.4	16.6	3.0
Day labourer (non-agri)	7.5	8.6	4.0	10.1	11.3	8.3	6.7	7.7	3.3
Domestic worker	0.7	0.2	2.3	0.9	0.1	4.9	0.6	0.2	2.0
Paid/unpaid apprentice	0.5	0.6	0.3	0.7	0.8	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.3
Others	0.9	0.6	1.7	1.1	0.7	3.3	0.8	0.6	1.4

BS=Both sex, M=male, F=female

Source: Labour Force Survey, 2005- 06 (MOWCA, 2008)

The increasing trend of women's paid employment- 'feminisation of the workforce' (Mahmud, 2003) - in the economy of the country can be explained by certain patterns of the sectors where women constitute a higher proportion in wage employment. The capitalist development process and the influence of a liberal market economy started to create employment opportunities in the market-based industrial sectors during and after the second decade after independence. The industrial sectors, including garments and shrimp processing industries are the prime employers of women workforce. The export-oriented manufacturing sectors needed cheap labour force and in response to this demand, women from the poorest economic class have been supplying labour even more cheaply than the men from the same economic class they belong to.

8.2.3 Export-oriented Garments Industry and Women's Labour Force

Export-oriented garment industries started in 1983-84 with 3.89% of total exports of the country, reaching 75.67% in 1998-99. It was the cheap labour force which made this rapid growth possible. Women workers with low educational qualifications represented 85-90% of the total work force in the garments industries. As mentioned before, women are recruited in this sector primarily because of cheap and available supply of labour. Also, this type of work, which involves long working hours and boring repetitive working patterns with low payment is considered most appropriate for women (Paul-Majumder & Begum, 2000; Sultan, 2010). Therefore it can be argued that the employers of the export-oriented garment industries recruit women instead of men with a view to minimize the production cost.

8.2.4 Lower Segment Jobs in Urban Areas

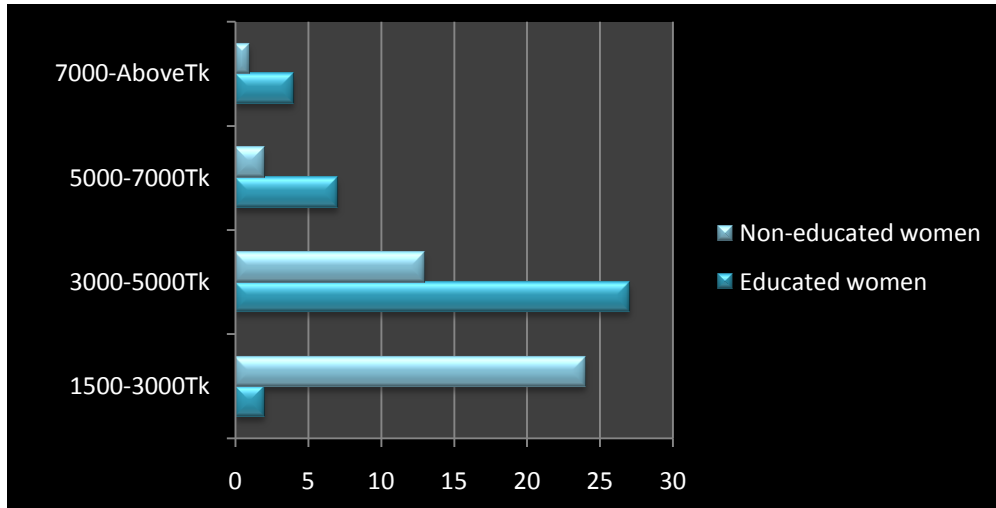
Another important aspect of women's labor market trends in Bangladesh is that women have higher rates of waged employment in urban areas than in rural areas (Sultan, 2010). This is because most of the industries which provide waged employment are located in the metropolitan cities. This is why the urban population growth rate, particularly among women, is very high. According to BBS the population growth rate in urban areas was 14% for women and 10% for men in the period of 83/84 to 95/96 (Paul-Majumder & Begum, 2000). Regarding the trends in lower segment jobs, various studies show low-skilled women labor force with no or little education were more likely to be employed in the urban industrial sector, compared to medium-skilled women. Needless to say, all this low-skilled women labor force is being employed in the lower segment jobs in urban areas. Another very important employment sector for low-skilled women is unpaid family work, one of the lowest segments of employment. A study shows in 1999/2000, 33.33% of all the women were employed as unpaid family work which increased to 48% in 2003 (Mahmud, 2003; Amin, 2006).

8.3 Economic Background of the Respondents

Economic background of the respondents and the occupational livelihood of the family heads of the core groups appeared important in determining the respondents' financial conditions and family lineage. Analysis of the economic backgrounds of core group-1 and core group-2 (educated women and uneducated women) indicates that the financial condition of respective families matters hugely in determining the extent to which girls would be allowed to go to school, or whether they could go

to school at all. As table 8.1 shows, 60% of the total uneducated women's families earned 1500-3000 taka per month, whereas only 5% of educated women fell into this category.

Figure 8.1: Economic background of Educated and uneducated women in terms of family income

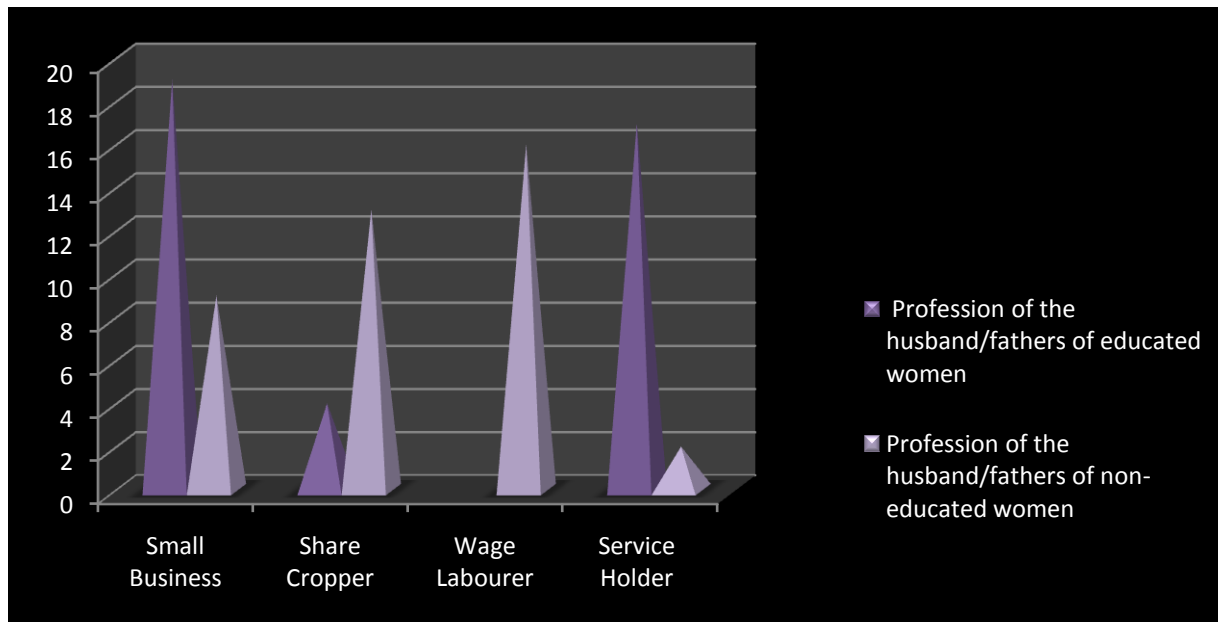


The largest 67.5% families of the total educated group earned 3000-5000 taka per month whereas half of this number, 32.5% families of uneducated women fall into this category. Only 5% of the uneducated women fell in the 5000-7000 taka per month group. On the other hand educated women's percentage in this income group was higher and this tendency remained the same for the above 7000 taka per month category. This clearly shows that family income has a strong correlation with the level of education of their girls. There is a tendency of imparting girls' education in comparatively well-off households.

8.4 Occupational Livelihood of the Family Heads

As the table shows, highest number of husband/father's profession of educated women is small business, which is 47.5% of the total; whereas the highest percentage of husband/ father's profession of uneducated women is wage-labourer (40%). In the area, profession of wage-labourer falls in the lowest segment of occupational livelihood, both in terms of income and social prestige.

Figure 8.2: Occupational livelihood of the family head of educated and uneducated women's families



Despite attempts, it was impossible to make sure that both these core groups came from similar socio-economic backgrounds. This is because those who were uneducated mostly came from poor families whose family-heads were either day labourers (40%) or share croppers (32.5%), although 22.5% of them were engaged in small business and only 5% were service holders in lower ranks. As for the profession of the educated girls' family heads, the scenario is completely opposite. 42.5% of the total family heads were service holders. Although 10% of them were engaged in share cropping but no one fell into the category of wage-labourer.

8.5 Employment Status of Educated Women in the Villages

8.5.1 Employment in Primary Schools

As the table 8.4 shows only 13.3 percent of the total educated women were employed in the field area. Educated women were mostly employed in primary schools. A few of them were found working in the NGOs. The government's policy of recruiting 60% female teachers at primary schools was the main reason for employment of educated women's in the villages. This policy had a major impact on the overall scenario of women's employment in rural areas. In villages, it was found that the most desirable job of women was teaching in the school. No other jobs suitable for educated women were available in those areas. Many uneducated women said that if they were

fortunate enough to be educated, they could have taken the honorable job of a schoolteacher. Hence, this study finds that teaching was regarded as the ideal job in rural areas. Therefore, the government policy of recruiting 60% female teachers for primary schools can be seen as an influential factor of women's employment scenario in rural areas, in terms of expected jobs and practical employment opportunity.

8.5.2 Low Employment Rate

As the above table 8.3 shows, 13% of the total educated women were employed, whereas a startling 45.8% of the total non educated women found engaged in wage employment. A huge majority of the educated women (87%) were found unemployed in the villages. These women were mostly from the rural middle income group, conscious about their social status. These women appeared comparatively well-off, thus eliminating the necessity of breaking the social barriers and taking up low segment jobs. Unavailability of jobs suitable for educated middle-class women appeared to be another reason for their low-employment rate. Most of them were found leading submissive, taken-for-granted married lives within the household with little or no confidence about their capability.

8.5.3 The Position of Hindu Women

It is important to note that majority of working educated women were from the Hindu community. Historically, Hindus have been ahead in girls' education and employment. In the Moghia union, where the Hindu-Muslim ratio in the population was almost equal, women from Hindu community comprised the majority of the total employed women. It can be noted here that in the villages, ratio of Hindu population was higher than the country's overall ratio. Traditionally, Hindus have less prejudice about seclusion of women compared to Muslims, although both religions share similar patriarchal values. The above factors resulted in higher percentage of Hindu women among the total employed educated women in the villages in Moghia union in Kochua upazilla.

Table 8.2: Comparison of Employment Status of Educated and Uneducated Women

Employment status & its perceived inhibiting factors	Educated women	Uneducated women
1. Have a job ²¹	13.3%	45.83%
2. Don't have a job	80%	45.17%
3. Previously had a job	6.67%	8.62%

8.6 Employment Status of Uneducated Women

Employment status of uneducated women in the field area was characterised by a higher ratio of involvement in the paid job outside home than that of educated women. As mentioned earlier,



Figure 8.3: Women working in the field area

majority of the uneducated women belonged to the low income group and were exposed to vulnerable situations very often. In response to harsh poverty particularly when poor women become widowed or deserted by husbands with minor aged children, they were compelled to break the codes of purdah and other social norms and values related to women's gendered role within the family and society. As a result, 46 percent of the total uneducated women in the field area were found engaged in paid job, whereas only 13 percent of educated women were employed in paid job.

8.6.1 Women's Employment in the Lower Segments of the Job Market

Uneducated women in the villages in Moghia union in Kochua upazilla, mostly worked as wage-labourers. Some were found to be self-employed, engaged in sewing, weaving fishing nets, poultry

²¹ Jobs include, teaching, working in NGO, sewing, weaving net, small business (shop owner) poultry farming and day labourer

farming and in rare cases, owning small grocery business. Almost 50% of the total employed women were found working in the lower segments of rural labour market. This occupation pattern reveals two facts. Firstly, it reveals the unavailability of jobs other than wage-labourers, such as earth-cutting, construction and repairing roads etc. Secondly, the higher number of employed women in the uneducated group signifies that their necessity was strong enough to break traditional norms. However, almost half of them mentioned that they had to regularly encounter humiliating social attitudes towards their 'manlike' job. It can be argued that the assumption that education ensures employment requires further thought as this study shows otherwise. Local job market needs women in lower segments, such as earth cutting, building and repairing roads etc.

8.6.2 Concentration of Divorced or Separated Women in Paid Jobs

Analyses of women's entry into wage employment in the villages in Moghia union show that extreme poverty and desertion play a significant role in driving women in the wage labour market. Since 1970s, a growing numbers of rural women have sought wage employment in agriculture, earth cutting, brick breaking, construction and road maintenance. Study reveals that two groups of women particularly likely to engage in these jobs: women in low-income male headed households and women heads of households. Thus, grinding poverty and absence of male breadwinners are two characteristics of wage-seeking women who break the cultural barriers against their involvement in wage employment (Kibria, 2002). A uneducated working woman replied thus when asked to express her views about women's wage employment-

...barir baire kaj korti hobena? Kaj ki bari aishe die jabe naki? Rojgar na korli khabo ki? My husband abandoned me, but I could not stay at home doing nothing. If you want to earn money you have to go to different places outside home. If I were educated I could be service holder.

Thus, it can be argued that majority of employed women were compelled to take up lower segment jobs after their husbands deserted them, leaving them in a very vulnerable situation with small children.

Table 8.3: Reasons of employment mentioned by the core groups

Categories	EW	UW
1.Self- reliance	50%	41.93%
2.Financial support to the family	46.15	54.83
3.Support to husband	3.22	3.22

EW-Educated women, UW-Uneducated women

The above table also shows that uneducated women were employed in paid jobs to overcome financial hardship. However, for educated women the reason is slightly different, as they added the issue of self reliance.

8.6.3 Narrow Job Market and its Weak Link with Girls' Education

It is usually assumed that education can change the life situation of girls and women by opening up employment opportunities (World Bank, 1996) and thus make them able to achieve greater control over their lives and be involved in the household decision-making process (Watkins, 2000; Amin, 1996:186). However, this study found that in rural areas job opportunities for educated women is extremely limited. Most of the employed women were found engaged in jobs that do not require educational qualification. This finding is similar to another study which observes that low-skilled women and relatively high- skilled women were more likely to be employed compared to medium-skilled women (Mahmud, 2003:11)

Even if a girl is allowed to work outside home, paid employment opportunities are very limited in rural areas. A few attempts to promote income-generating activities for women have met with limited success, partly because of women's restricted access to the market. A significant number of uneducated women identified lack of education as the cause of their employment in the lower segments of the job market which exposes them to social humiliation. In most cases they commented- *If I were educated, I could be a service holder*. But in reality, hardly any job was available in the villages apart from a limited number of posts as teachers in government primary schools.

8.7 Barriers to Women Employment

When asked about women's paid job outside home Sharifa Akhter, 30 years old school teacher echoed a general view,

...responsibilities of domestic work are the main barriers to women's work outside home. When they have young babies it is impossible for them to do job. Husbands' unwillingness is another big problem. Husbands are afraid of getting less service from their working wives.

Sharifa Akhter's views found to be realistic when Bimal Krishna, a primary school-teacher and husband of educated Kushum Rani disapproved her wish to take a job in fear of incomplete children-raising task. Her husband, despite being a friendly and considerate person²², compelled his wife to sacrifice her dreams and ambitions for the sake of their kids. When asked about girls' education, Bimal Krishna's views were very positive. His account is similar to many studies done on girls' education that finds girls' education reinforce gendered role in South Asian societies-

I think girls' education is essential. I always wanted an educated wife to raise my kids properly. I didn't allow her to work, as that could be a barrier for my children's education. If I allowed her to work, my children would not have been educated. Now, I'm happy as my children are well-educated.

On the surface, this couple seemed happier and more contented than many other families in their immediate society. They had two children, a daughter and a son, both highly educated. The couple gave their interviews together, showing that a friendly relationship prevailed between them. But discontent revealed itself when Kushum Rani shared her deep pain for her unfulfilled wish to do a job,

I studied up to HSC, and always wanted to work. But my husband didn't give his consent. I needed his permission to do a job, as I can't do anything without that. Now, I feel very bad when I see others working. It's painful for me. My kids are grown up now and well-educated. They have their own life, but I couldn't do anything else. It hurts me all the time. In a sense, my life has become meaningless. Because of my husband's disapproval of taking a job outside home, I could not achieve what I deserved.

The study also reveals husbands' and in-laws' reservations about women's entry into job market are more in the higher economic group. The contrasting realities between parents' positive attitudes to education as a gateway to secure better future and husband/in-law's negative attitude to utilizing education were significant in this study. Manju Halder from Raghunathpur village, who completed her HSC in 1978, shared a similar experience. In her case, it was her father-in-law, not husband,

²² It appeared so when the interview was taking place at the couple's home in a congenial atmosphere.

who reacted vehemently when she expressed her desire to take a job. Arguably, this attitudinal conflict of natal and conjugal families signifies women's disempowered social position. The conjugal family, as one respondent described, where '*everybody (in-laws) seems ready to find my faults*', appeared to be a difficult place for developing one's self-dignity. Thus girls' aspiration to be self-reliant, parents' hope for a better life, all appeared to be shattered by the patrilocal patterns of family structure²³ in a society that is characterized by classic patriarchy.

Table 8.4: Women's Perceived Inhibiting Factors for Employment

Reasons	EW ²⁴	UW ²⁵
1. Objection from parents in law	10.52%	11.53%
2. Objection from husband	15.78%	19.23%
3. Reasons of childcare/maintaining family	42.10%	15.38%
4. Negative social attitude/abuse	15.78%	42.30%
5. Lack of employment opportunities	15.78%	11.53%

Furthermore, lack of education and training on one hand, and reproductive and gender stereotyped duties on the other, keep women away from income-earning opportunities through entering into formal labour market.

Paradoxically, although women in Bangladesh are viewed as economically dependent on men,

they are '*not expected to become independent persons in the social sense*' (Adnan,1993:289). Instead of being independent '*they are required to remain under the protective guardianship of successive male kinsmen at different stages of their lives; father or brother, husband, and eventually, son*' (Adnan, 1993:289).

²³ According to this women are meant to live and be unified with her husbands' family maintaining a distance from her own parental family

²⁴ Educated Women

²⁵ Uneducated Women

There are rigid family reservations on women's paid job alongside negative social attitudes. One respondent comments-

...some families, meaning husbands, don't want them to work. They think it is bad for a girl to work. The society bears a negative impression towards them. I weave fish nets..(keur keur poribar, mane, swami chaina.. Meye manush kaj korli dosh. Somaj meyeder bhalo chokhe dakhena. Ami jal buni).

Another respondent stressed husbands' unwillingness. However she also mentioned that women's importance increase when they earn,

...They should do work. Many girls' husbands don't want it. Maybe if the wife was educated, he wouldn't have minded, and even if he didn't want, it wouldn't have mattered, she could have lived by her choice. If you earn, your family's care towards you increases. If you do a job, you have to go outside home. Who will give you a job if you sit at home? (meyeder kaj kora uchit--oneker swami chaena-lekhapora janle hoito chaito. Ar na chaileo kichu jai ashena. tokhon nijer moto chola jaito, Rojegar korle poribare jotno bere jae. Chakri korle to barir baire jaite hobe. Ghore boshe thakli ki keu chakri debe?)

In a study, Ackerly shows in a study on women's empowerment in Bangladesh that in 1993, BRAC and Grameen Bank had 5,514 and 10,296 of total number of staff respectively. But the total number of women staff was 570 for BRAC and 973 for Grameen bank, representing only 10% of the total (1997:154). But surprisingly, respondents did not mention limited job scope as a barrier to their economic activity. This study also finds that, as table 8.5 shows, while talking about barriers to women's employment, majority respondents mentioned husbands/in-laws' unwillingness and childcare as the main obstacles to employment. They also mentioned negative social attitudes, but the lack of job opportunity went largely unnoticed because first of all respondents had to seek husbands' and in-law's permission regarding doing a job. When they failed to get a go-ahead signal, they were compelled to stop it. As Ackerly commented, rural women of Bangladesh are not accepted outside the home, particularly in the market place (1997:144). Thus further accessibility or inaccessibility remained unexplored. However, most of the respondents were found to take side against anti-women social norms. But the familial situation did not appear to support them regarding economic participation outside the home even if there were jobs.

8.8 Impact of Employment on Patriarchal Socio-Cultural Mindset

Various study findings also show that income-earning activities do not necessarily ensure women's greater control over their lives. In her article, 'The Grameen Bank Experiment: Empowerment of women through Credit', Osmani shows that microcredit does not necessarily empower women in rural Bangladesh because income-earning could not counteract the cultural conditioning which necessitates their dependence on their husbands (1998:82). Social constraints on rural women's mobility and their market access (Ackerly, 1997:143) also limit their ability to deal with money or market-related matters. The predominant social attitudes view men as superior and the natural breadwinner. Women, on the other hand, are deemed as mothers and family caregivers. Such ideological constructions serve as serious obstacles for women to work outside home.

Another study done by Ackerly also showed the problem trying to enhance poor women's empowerment through income-generation programmes run by the NGOs in Bangladesh. In many cases, women's income was spent by their husbands or male family members (1997:149). As Ackerly argued, without challenging familial gender hierarchy, credit programmes cannot empower women as long as they are dependent on men within the family (1997:155). Social constraints on rural women's mobility and their market access (Ackerly, 1997:143) also limit their ability to deal with money or market related matters. Thus, men's authority on women's income due to predominant cultural trends, lower access to decision-making process and 'low absorptive capacity' (Osmani, 1998:83) of monetary management deriving from tradition impede women's empowerment despite participation in income generation (Mahmud, Razzaque & Nahar, 2001:24; Khan, 1988:18). The predominant social attitudes view men as superior and natural breadwinner. Women, on the other hand, are deemed as mothers and family caregivers. Such ideological constructions serve as serious obstacles for women to work outside home. It can be argued that the capability to earn a living does not necessarily indicate empowerment as one respondent, who was a schoolteacher, said, '*Educated girls can work, but their salaries are taken by their husbands.*' If employed women have to give up their hard-earned money to their husbands, and remain subordinate to men, their employment alone cannot ensure autonomy.

8.9 State of Perceived Interest and Empowerment among Employed Women



In this study, uneducated employed women's views about their own interest were surprisingly better than that of educated women. As discussed in the next chapter, employment status of respondents has a strong link in developing awareness about own interest. Through the harsh realities of life, the women from the low-income group learned the lessons of struggling for their existence at a very high price. As a result, majority of uneducated women showed better understanding about their own interest; Parul Begum was one of them. Different empowering aspects of her perceived interest can be analysed as a good example to compare the

Figure 8.4: A moment's break from work

impact of education. She was a day labourer in her late twenties, earning a sum of as small as 1500 per month.

Her polygamist husband had left her with a minor daughter. When she was asked to speak about her perception of girls' education, she promptly replied that it was for a good job like teaching at a school but not for a humiliating day labourer's job. Unlike the middle-class educated women in her village, she had a clear idea of a self-reliant life. When she was asked whether women should take jobs outside home she appeared a bit annoyed at the absurdity of the question and replied,

Of course we have to work outside home. Will work come on our doorstep? What will we eat if we do not earn? I didn't sit at home doing nothing because my husband left me. If we want to earn some money, we have to go outside home. (barir baire kaj korti hobena? Kaj ki bari aishe die jabe naki?Rojgar na korli khabo ki? Swami felaia gechhe tai bole chup kore ghore boshe thakini- rojgar korte hole barir baire jaite hobe.)

About the society's views on women's paid job outside home she observes,

Time has changed now. There are some rich people whose daughters do not work thinking that it might blemish their respect in society. Again, there are some who wants to work.

Parul Begam perceived her interest in not abiding by social norms. She seemed to have enough courage and reasoning to work against socially prescribed patriarchal code of conduct to preserve her own interest that is to earn her living ,

Purdah won't set me free from hunger. I work as a 'Jogali'(day-labourer), and spade the earth, will I be able to do that wearing 'Bourka'? (Purdah mene pete bhat jutbe na- ami jogalir kaj kori, maati kati, ami ki borka pore mati katbo naki?)

She showed an explicit awareness of the attitudinal aspects of the male chauvinistic society. Her freedom of movement, her readiness to counteract and fight to keep her rights were noteworthy,

It's a free country! I can go anywhere whenever I want. If anybody says anything negative, then and then I retaliate accordingly. Educated girls are too afraid to say something in return.

(Ichchha shwadhin Bangladesh! Jakhon khushi, jekhane khushi jaite pari. keu kichhu bolley palta jobab diye dei. Shikkhito meyera anek bhitu hoy-palta jobab ditey pare na...)

Realising her own betterment and interest Parul Begam vowed to go ahead against all the odds of the society,

My husband married three times. I am relieved that he left me. My daughter is growing up. She is in class seven now. I will make her pass her matriculation and then put her in the police force. I will give no dowry when she gets married. (Maiyar Bape tinda biya korche-chhaira gechhe bhalo hoichhe- bachchi. Amar maiya ekhon boro hoitase, seven e pore- ore metric pash koramu- tarpore police'e dhukaiya dimu. ar ore joutuk chhara biya dimu...)

Hence, uneducated women showed a better understanding of their own interest than educated middle-class women. From the above case study it is obvious that necessary steps to empowerment, such as self-confidence (*If anybody says anything negative, then and then I retaliate accordingly*), and freedom of movement (*I can go anywhere whenever I want*), decision-making (*meye re metric pash koramu- tarpore police'e dhukaiya dimu. ar ore joutuk chhara biya dimu*), employment (*I work as a 'Jogali'(day labourer)*), ability to question social injustice (*Purdah won't set me free from hunger...will I be able to do that (working as a day labourer) wearing 'Bourka'?*) were taken mostly by uneducated women.

8.10 Girls' Education and Economic Emancipation through Employment

It is obvious from the above analyses of the field data that there is no necessary relationship between education and employment of women as multidimensional socio-cultural factors are active in rural areas of Bangladesh. A pertinent comparison, in this regard, can be made with Bunwaree's (1999) study, who showed that despite equal rates of male–female education in Mauritius, there are remarkable disparities between them in matters of gaining access to the labour market, a scenario that has been caused by reasons like social attitudes, male-biased labour policies of the state and lack of vocational technological training. Consequently, woman labourers accumulate mostly in the lower segments of the labour market in Mauritius.

Echoing the previous findings, increased girls' education rate has not ensured jobs for women because of patriarchal social values, unequal and non-implementation of labour policies and lack of job-oriented education. This segmentation process is produced by the gendered division of labour which denies the comparability of male-female work. As Kabeer observed, '*...such an association has served to devalue women's labour effort because it is seen as a natural extension of their familial role rather than purposive or demanding work (1994:169)*'. So it appears that exclusion of women from the job market is caused not by lack of necessary competencies or education, rather by other powerful patriarchal institutions rooted in our ideologies. Conversely, economic participation of female workers has proved to be more fruitful to gain personal empowerment. It not only fosters a sense of self-confidence in them, but also gives them an opportunity for political participation.

Therefore, it can be easily inferred from the facts mentioned above that girls' education has little to do with labour market participation; and female workers - be they unpaid or low paid domestic helps or garment workers or day labourer in agriculture and non- agricultural sectors²⁶-- can easily get a job in the lower segments of the labour market without any education. Furthermore, educational attainment seems to have a weak link with the labour market participation. Yokiyo Otani (2000) in her study on female Bangladeshi garment workers demonstrates that for the female garment workers, education is neither a precondition for entry into the garments industry, nor does it appear to be an empowering tool for them in Bangladesh. 68.6% of them completed primary education while 27% stopped studying well before completing primary level because of poverty. Thus the study reveals that a large number of girls and women without proper education find a job in the garment factories because these jobs do not require any educational qualification as such.

Therefore, educational provisions alone do not provide women with access to the labour market comparable to men, which can give them a sense of self confidence-'power from within'- towards empowerment as influential socio-political and ideological factors are there to prevent women's access to labour market (Unterhalter, 1991). However, education remains a prerequisite to entry into the labour market.

²⁶ These are the sectors majority of the women are engaged in the labour market according to the Labour Force Survey.

Chapter 9

Women's Participation in Family Decision-Making and Control over the Body



Family Decision Making: Context of Bangladesh

Still now, most of the rural women in Bangladesh pass their lives within the boundaries of their homes. Their worlds encompass their immediate and extended families, near kinfolks and neighbours. Although a very small percentage of middle-class women are involved in activities in the social and public arena and a larger percentage of women from the lower economic group are involved in lower-segment jobs, for women, household and reproductive responsibilities are considered the foremost priority in the society. In Bangladesh, through the patriarchal social structure and values, women's subordination is so profoundly rooted in the familial-social norms that women themselves have internalized this ideology and act accordingly.

As members of the society, women also believe they are inferior to their male counterparts in many ways, entirely responsible for household chores and reproductive duties and unable to do what is 'men's work'. The women of the villages where the study was conducted were no exceptions in this regard. In this situation, it was very important to understand the decision-making power women have within the family and its connection with the level of education. Therefore, to understand the family power relations which have a great impact on women's overall empowerment level within the household, the findings of the assessment of the participation rate and the effectiveness of the decision making process will be presented in this chapter.

In Bangladesh women are considered mostly as dependants who need to be taken care of throughout their lives and are not expected to be able to take decisions relating to their lives or the family. Conversely, it is a widespread social perception that they are required to remain under the safe shelter of male guardianship. Within such a reality, women are viewed as incapable of taking decisions on their own, especially regarding matters outside the household. So, decision-making remains largely a male domain. However, in accordance with the changing family patterns, these views are also evolving as more families are becoming nuclear within the prevailing capitalist economy. A study shows that the type of family has a significant impact on women's autonomy, particularly in the early stages of marriage (Amin, 1996).

In a patriarchal society like Bangladesh, women's subjugation starts from the beginning of women's life as this is a rigidly son-preferring society. This subjugation continues throughout their lives. Before marriage, father and after marriage, husband and in-laws take every decision in

matters relating to women's lives. Generally, they hardly ever get the chance to decide anything for themselves, much less about other matters.

9.1 Decision-Making Role of Women in the Villages in Moghia union

In the villages where the field research work was carried out, it was seen that women's participation in the household decision-making process was meagre. It may be mentioned here that many women regarded being informed about any decision by the male head of the family was same as participating in the decision-making process. A widespread view prevailing in the village was that the 'korta' of the family is the right person to take all sorts of decisions. When he shares it with his wife, he is considered a kind and good person. This view is expressed when Afroza Begum's observes,

The man of the family takes all the decisions. I give him advice. You need to share many things for the betterment of the family. If I were educated then I would understand everything. I would not have been cheated at every stage. (Poriberer kortai siddhanto naye. Amio poramorsho dei. Shongsharer unnotir jonno bhagabhagir dorkar ache. Shikkhito hole shob kichu bhalo bujhtam. Pode pode thokte hoto na.)

Afroza Begum clearly approves of the tradition that the male head of the family takes all decisions in the family. She is quite happy with her 'poramorsho'-giving, supporting role and focuses on her inferiority in taking decisions because of lack of education.

As for the facts presented in the table below, it should be kept in mind when women claim to have greater participation in family decisions it basically means 'poramorsho', not the full authority of taking decisions. In assessing the participation rate, the decision-making areas are divided into two broad categories: i) control over own body. This includes mobility, marriage, reproduction, health and motherhood etc. and ii) matters relating to children, household finances, resources and various kinds of other responsibilities. As a whole, it can be argued that women play very limited roles in the decision-making process within the household.

Approximately 46% of the total uneducated women were found engaged in paid jobs. Among them, a high percentage was found either deserted by husbands or widowed. Eventually these women became the head of the family, and so, take all the decisions by their own. Therefore, the table below shows that a staggering 51.4% uneducated women claims to have equal participation in family decision. Although uneducated poor women, particularly those who were engaged in paid

job, were found to have a greater say than middle-class educated women. Similar findings can be found in Hartmann and Boyce's ethnographic study,

Even within marriage, poor women are frequently more assertive and enjoy greater equality with their husbands than women of more prosperous households (Hartmann & Boyce, 1983:96).

Hence, it can be argued that there are factors other than education that determine the level of participation of women in the household decision-making.

Table 9.1: Comparison of level of participation in family decision²⁷ making among educated and non educated women

Variables	Educated Girls	Uneducated Girls
Claims to have equal participation in family decision	22.8%	51.4% ²⁸
Claims to have little participation in family decision	31.4%	5.7%
Claims to have fractional participation in family decision	28.5%	31.4%
Claims to have no participation in family decision	14.2%	11.5%

9.2 Control over the Body

Within the widespread social and familial practices of male chauvinism, women in Bangladesh have little control over their bodies, which restrict them from fully flourishing their human capabilities. This deprivation of women of their fundamental rights has now become an important issue to address and different socio-economic situations of the society necessitate the transformation of male domination over matters regarding a woman's own body. Areas such as women's freedom of mobility, marriage, reproduction and motherhood, choosing a job, bodily security are still mostly controlled by men. Therefore, how far women are being able to take control of their own bodies with the tool of education is an important area to be explored in this study.

²⁷ Family decision includes those relating to marriage, reproduction, mobility, employment, children's health and education, household expenditure and resources etc.

²⁸ This higher percentage is correlated with the higher number of female headed household besides other factors.

Table 9.2: State of individual freedom among educated and uneducated women

Level of Freedom	EW	UW
Have some individual freedom	42.8%	74.2%
Have no individual freedom	17.4%	8.5%
Have very little individual freedom	40%	17.1%

EW-Educated women, UW-Uneducated women

9.2.1 Decision-making Role in own Marriage

Irrespective of their educational background, an overwhelming majority of the respondents were found to have no decision-making role in their own marriage in the villages in Moghia union in Kochua upazila. However, there was a norm to let the girl know about the family decision through mother, grandmother or elderly female relative - which, in most cases, was taken by the male family head. A Unicef study shows that Bangladesh's position in early marriage is 3rd in the world. It shows that one-third of all girl children are married off before they are 18 years old, and 3 out of 10 girls are married before they are 15 years old. It is obvious from the child marriage data that women and adolescent girls, particularly in rural areas, are nothing but helpless preys of anti-women social practices. Thus, their poor decision-making role, primarily because of their minor age, is clearly discernible. However, nowadays countrywide girls' education expansion programme has an impact on this issue of child marriage since only unmarried girls are eligible for this stipend programme. Another impact of this programme is a greater awareness about the necessity of girls' education and hence some awareness about the bad effects of early marriage.

The findings of this research show that most of the educated girls were asked for their consent to marriage, in name only. The male heads of the families chose the husbands of these girls, and the girls were expected to agree to their decisions. This expectation has a strong link with the socially constructed forms of ideal femininity in line with the ideology of male supremacy. On the other hand, uneducated women were found to have almost no option to express their opinion regarding their own marriage. Another study conducted at Maharajpur, in Jhainaidaha district on 120 married women also shows similar findings as 78.2% of the women who had completed the secondary level schooling had the chance to give consent about marriage. On the other hand, almost 85% of women who only completed primary level schooling had no chance to give any opinion about their

marriage. As for the illiterate women, none had the chance to give consent to their own marriage (Chanda, Howlader and Nahar, 2012). Therefore, it can be argued that education has a positive link with participation in decision-making regarding marriage, although, in most cases, it is in name only.

9.2.2 Decision-Making in Reproduction and Maternal Health

Although all over the world various initiatives have been taken by the UN and other international development organizations to ensure reproductive health service for safe motherhood and cut down the maternal mortality rate, the situation in Bangladesh continues to be dismal. Indicating a very frustrating scenario in the area of reproductive and maternal health, over 7,000 mothers die every year from pregnancy related complications. Gender subordination is so deeply rooted that majority women in Bangladesh hardly have any decision-making power relating to reproduction. Control over the body is a fundamental right, but women are being deprived of this vital right and treated in a subhuman way as still a significant number of adolescent girls are exposed to early marriage and running a life risk due to early pregnancies (Mahmud, 2010). Appallingly, 76% of the total expectant mothers do not even have a trained birth attendant at delivery time (BBS, 2009) and having a doctor at that critical time is still a far dream. At present the maternal mortality rate is as high as 35 women per thousand. Women largely perceive this as an unchangeable fate for being a woman.

The above facts and data reveal that there is a correlation between this grim picture and the meager decision-making power of rural women regarding their reproductive health that derives from structural factors of the society which prevent the voices of women from being heard about matters relating to their own body. In the villages in Moghia union, majority women were found to have a fatalistic attitude to their overall reproductive health. In the villages, acceptance of male subordination relating to women's reproductive duty is seen to be widespread.

9.2.3 Decisions about Employment

As discussed in the previous chapter, the middle-class, educated women in the villages in Moghia union in Kochua upazila were found to have very little say in decision-making relating to their paid jobs outside home. Table 8.4 shows that almost 26% of the educated women mentioned direct objection from husbands and parents-in-laws as the main reason for not being involved in any paid

job. Despite being educated, they had no scope or capability to take any decisions regarding this matter. Among educated women, the older ones showed more frustration as they were barred from deciding to do a job outside home. Perhaps this is because they had finished their childcare responsibilities and leading a comparatively free life in terms of domestic work than before which gave them space to think about themselves. At this stage of life when they saw any other woman's social and economic improvement for being engaged in paid job they felt frustrated. On the other hand, 30% of the uneducated women mentioned the reasons of objections from husband and in-laws as a barrier. However, almost half of the uneducated women, who came from the lower economic class, were compelled to work in the lower segment jobs due to grinding poverty.

9.2.4 Freedom of Mobility

In a society where women are regarded as inferior to men in terms of all aspects of familial, social, economic and political life, it is not surprising that women's mobility is strictly restricted in rural areas. It is undeniable that women's decision-making power has a strong link with their freedom of mobility. But in the field study, it was found that women's freedom of mobility is a highly class-based notion and is a taboo for the rural upper class women. For women, particularly in the middle-class, going anywhere outside home alone and without the prior consent of husband or the male head of the family is considered bad behaviour and against the social code of women's conduct. Thus, preserving 'family prestige', achieved through mainstream patriarchal socialization process, was seen as one of the main reasons for their limited and controlled movement.

Among the lowest-income group, many women are compelled to come out of the household into the public places for seeking a means of livelihood. But they too face social humiliation and abuse for coming out of the household, which the society regards as the proper place for women. Although many uneducated women who were engaged in paid jobs faced social degradation, some of them were found to have gained a sense of agency through freedom of mobility. Parul Begum's (whose reference was given in the previous chapter) freedom of mobility expressed in such terms '*I can go anywhere whenever I want*' undoubtedly has given her some self-confidence. This sense of ability gave her the power to fight back adverse situations. Nargis Akhter, another uneducated woman says-

Sometimes I go to the neighbouring villages. I go by my own choice; I don't need anyone's permission. If I was educated I would have to go outside for work.

Conversely, educated middle class women who enjoy less freedom of mobility were 'too afraid to say something in return' in situations where responding back is crucial to preserve one's dignity. Therefore, it can be argued that freedom of mobility is a vital step towards empowerment.

9.2.5 Women's Bodily Security

Women's physical security is an important area that has a strong link with her overall decision-making power. Millions of rural women suffer from physical and psychological violence within their own home which is supposed to be the safest place for them. Majority of the rural women in the village area where field research was conducted admitted that they were beaten by their husbands on a regular basis, although there were differences in the percentages of beaten women between educated middle-class and uneducated lower economic class women. The context and consequences of this bodily insecurity of women both in private and public arenas will be discussed and analysed with the field data in the next chapter titled Socio-cultural Barriers of Women's Empowerment. But it is obvious from the field data that gender violence substantially destroyed women's potential and self-confidence which was necessary to acquire some decision-making power in the villages.

It is interesting to note that the same patriarchal values which give men the power to commit violence against women at home also guide them to protect women outside home. Perhaps this happens because women are largely considered as 'property' of men rather than independent human beings. So it is also men's duty to protect the honour of their 'property'. That is why Maruf Molla, a husband of an educated woman, expressed his cautious decision regarding his wife's mobility,

Among places outside home, she can visit the neighbours whenever she wants without any restraint. For places far away from home, I let her go alone if I think it is safe enough. If I have my doubts then a male person accompanies her. Women- educated or uneducated- should not go everywhere alone. (Barir baire bolte pashe protibeshider barite jatayat korte pare. Dure jete hole jodi mone kori eka parbe to jabe, na parole sathe purush lok jabe. Sikkhito hok ar murkho hok meyeder sob jaigae eka jete deya thik na)

Internalising patriarchal values, some village women were found to take pride in being taken care of at public places by the male family members. However, this protective attitude curtailed their mobility and made them less aware about the world around them.

Nevertheless, the question of women's physical safety remains as a stumbling block to their free movement. The 29-year old, married Aleya Begum observes,

I am a woman, so I am always fearful. I am not as strong as a man, so I have to be very careful and consider many things. Among places outside home, I can go to the neighbours' house. I talk to my husband before going anywhere far. (Meye manush, tai bhoye bhoye thaki. Purusher moto gaye oto sakti nai. Tai onek kichhu toakka kora lage. Barir baire bolte protibeshider bari te jataiat korte pari. Dure kothao gele swamir motamot nite hoye.)

This fear of sexual harassment was widespread among the inhabitants of Moghia union. All the core-respondent groups, irrespective of economic class and ideology, were very concerned about the safety of women in public place. This became apparent when greater numbers of older women were seen in public places than younger ones. Needless to say, older women are comparatively safer with regard to sexual harassment and violence. Thus, not only the male permission, but also concern for women's security curtailed women's mobility. Many economically independent women could not enjoy the full freedom of mobility for fear of being prey to sexual harassment and violence even in big cities.

9.3 Decisions Relating to Children and Household

Women in Bangladesh, particularly in rural areas, pass their days taking care of their children, cooking and performing countless household chores. The society holds them completely responsible for all the household tasks and child-rearing. However, as a result of this, women have to take many decisions relating to childcare and household, although they are also blamed for any mistake or mishap that may occur. While men take most of the decisions regarding finances, resources and other matters relating to the outside world, women, almost exclusively, take decisions about domestic matters with the underlying notion that finally they are reportable to men.

9.3.1 Children's Care, Education and Health

Although the majority of rural women in Bangladesh have no decision-making power about when to have their children or how many, women are held completely responsible for numerous duties and tasks relating to childcare including health and education. This is one of the vital areas where women are expected to perform their best irrespective of their background. Urban or rural, rich or poor, educated or uneducated, employed or unemployed, all women's first and foremost duty is considered to take care of their children. Since fathers' duty towards childcare is almost an absurd

idea from the socio- cultural point of view, women are bound to take all responsibilities with regard to childcare.

Hence the highest chance to participate in decision-making among the village women came through the issues related to child care, because they were the persons who practically did it. Understandably, fathers and other influential male family members usually seemed liberal in this matter. However, when decisions regarding childcare include bigger issues like taking sick babies to the hospital, men came forward. As a whole, childcare decisions can be analyzed as a gendered division of labour that men impose on women to keep them inside home and make them inferior in terms of everything. Nonetheless, women in the villages were found to have a say in this regard.

Within the above-mentioned social reality, another important aspect of decision making regarding childcare in the villages was imparting education as per their economic capabilities. Literate mothers' burdens of childcare in the rural areas went one step further; they had to play the role of children's first teacher at home, no matter how educated the fathers were. Furthermore, in tune with a gendered division of labor, decisions and activities relating to children's education keep women within the household. In addition, many women mentioned that educating children was their main perception about girls' education²⁹ which ensures children's good education with a minimum cost.

Thus, internalization of the gendered division of labour made women happily agree with the patriarchal values and norms which act against women empowerment. Therefore, authority in matters regarding childcare, children's health and education does not necessarily mean women's empowered position in the family. Rather, women's task of educating children can be seen as extra unpaid family work besides numerous domestic responsibilities for being educated which would not have fallen on an uneducated woman's shoulders. However, the responsibility as well as authority of children's teaching was possible because the children were primary school-age. There is less possibility for mothers to hold such authority in the matter when they will go to secondary school, as it needs greater decision-making power within the family which is taken by the family head and in most cases a man.

9.3.2 Matters related to the Household

Like women's childcare responsibility, different matters relating to the household such as cooking, cleaning, nursing sick and elderly family members, entertaining guests and post-harvest crop

²⁹ See Chapter 7, Girls' Education: How it is perceived

processing, are generally considered as the women's area. Women in the villages in Moghia union in Kochua upazila were found to have some decision-making power in these areas. There were other areas too where women had a say, like husbands' going abroad, or starting a new business. But uneducated women were found to be more involved in the decision-making process regarding households. However, it also may be due to the fact that uneducated women were more open to share the details of their personal lives than educated women. Jui Begum, 25-year old married women shares:

My husband asks me before doing anything. I give my consent for anything good. If I were educated then he would come to me for advice before going to anyone else. I would have given good decisions. My husband wants to go abroad, but I didn't let him. Being uneducated, he would lose everything there. It is better being poor than ending up like that.

It is interesting to note that despite having greater involvement in decisions regarding the household, uneducated women harboured deep discontent for their lack of education.

For obvious reasons the situations in the female-headed households in the villages were different from those of male headed families. Uneducated, 28-year old Koru begum who was deserted by her husband and worked as a day labourer confidently stated,

Now, as far as the family is concerned, whatever I say is final. There is no one above me in the family. There is only my mother besides my children, she is an old woman, she cannot even talk properly- what opinion will she give?

Thus, becoming the breadwinner of the family can make women confident, personally empowered and fearless to take decisions. On the other hand, the absence of husband also brings an end to their subordination in the family. Thus, it can be argued that single women can become freer from the relational disempowerment process by their husbands. Therefore, gradually it gives women a sense of ability, power from within, the core of the empowerment process.

9.4 Internalisation of Inferiority

Rural women in Bangladesh generally regard freedom as something to be cautious about, not something to value. This largely explains why women rarely contradict the words of their male guardians. Within such socio-cultural realities, women are not socialized to grow up with confidence about her capability and take decisions. This in turn acts against their 'power from within', i.e., personal empowerment, the core of the empowerment process. Within traditional rural extended families, respondents were found to be voiceless in the decision-making process. Sometimes it was seen that respondents themselves were convinced that men were better at dealing

with financial matters. Aleya Begum, mother of a non educated girl, who herself was uneducated echoed this view.

It is the men of the families who think about what to do. All women can do is listen. If we were educated then maybe we could have given our opinions on any issue. But even now we can give our opinions about certain things.

Hence, decision making power amongst women in the rural areas is basically as Aleya Begum observed, 'All women can do is listen'. Practically, the men of the family take decisions about what to do. Women in the villages did not seem to question their role of 'listening'. Another respondent, regretted for not being educated, identified lack of education as the root cause of little participation in family decisions,

If I were educated, then he'd do anything I'd say. You have to face a lot of problems if you are not educated. We take every decision together for the well-being of the family. You can't give him suggestions in every aspect, rather in some special cases.

Like this respondent, many women were found to have internalised inferiority that women are not capable of giving 'suggestions in every aspect, rather in some special cases'. However, discontent and unhappiness wells up within them, expression of which depends on the personality of the woman as well as her socio-economic circumstances.

9.5 Correlation between Education and Family Decision-making

Although gender gaps in education have been reduced significantly in the last two decades in the country, women's voice both in public and private arenas is not commensurate with it. The two main components of women's empowerment, economic and political participation is appallingly low. Girls' education that does not ensure women's entry into the job market is less likely to be an enabling factor for women's stronger voice. Moreover, educational methodologies do not challenge age-old familial gender hierarchy and patriarchal ideologies. Hence, girls' improved access to education could not transform women's feeble voice into a strong and effective one.

Conversely, women from the lower economic group were more vocal about their rights and more willing to break the traditions, as they had far less to lose than women from middle and upper classes. Abject poverty forces many poor, single women to move in search of work and fend for themselves, which eventually confers on them strength that most other women lack (Hartmann & Boyce, 1983). Hence, uneducated women who are usually from the relatively poorer segments of the rural society break traditional norms and raise their voices to ensure their survival. This is why

uneducated Paru Begum's voice was so powerful, 'whenever someone says anything bad, I retaliate accordingly. Educated girls are very timid- they don't know how to reply back.' (*keu kichhu bolley palta jobab diye dei. Shikkhito meyera anek bhitu hoy-palta jobab ditey pare na.*) She represents her community who are ready to fight back when adverse situations arise on their way to earning a living or movement in the public place. The quotation also depicts the educated middle class women's class character. Due to the educated women's class sophistication, this women's movement outside home is very limited in the rural areas. Consequently, they remain less confident, timid and conscious about family honour that prevents girls and women from being vocal in and outside home.

Thus educated women could not show significant difference from uneducated women in viewing matters which affect their own lives. Furthermore, as in the villages visited, uneducated poor girls and women were found to be comparatively free to move, as they needed to work for their livelihood, enjoying greater autonomy and wider participation in the family decision-making process. Within these realities, expectation of women's greater decision making power in the family through of girls' education requires more thought.

Education did not appear to give a sense of agency or analytical power to uncover socially constructed male preferential norms. Thus 'power from within' - entering into the process of empowerment through understanding of socially structured forms of disempowerment - was not found among the respondents. Besides internalised inferiority, rural women's lack of confidence regarding decision-making relating to different familial issues also comes from social constraints on their mobility and access in the market. This restriction limits their ability to deal with money-related matters. Thus rural women tend to rely on men to conduct market transactions (Ackerly, 1997:144; Osmani, 1998:82). As a result, educated women were also compelled to engage in dominant socio-cultural practices, which can be seen as a deterrent to increase self-confidence among the respondents. Lack of gender sensitivity in the curriculum and linked social awareness programmes supported by other organisations can be identified as some of the main obstacles to raise consciousness among girls and women (Jahan, 1998; Islam, 1985).

However, for being educated, women often receive some honour and are often invited to give advice in family decisions. 68-year old farmer Abdul Molla, father of a uneducated woman, stressed girls' education and recognised educated women's capability in making decisions,

It is quite natural. My daughter-in-law is an educated girl. She has passed matriculation level. We love her a lot. We take her advice whenever anything is to be done. If she were uneducated then we would not have taken any advice. Thus, education is necessary for all aspects of life.

On the other hand, when husband and wife are both uneducated, there is a chance of more equality in the process of family decision-making. Having very little resources, they share every details of it with each other to run the family. Rehana Begum is one of them,

Whenever any family decision is to be taken, we discuss everything together. These all are not any big issues. I have a say in anything that goes on. If I were educated, I would have more importance. Being uneducated demeans one's value. My husband and I are both uneducated. That's why we don't face much problem.

Thus, an egalitarian system can prevail within the family when the husband and the wife have the same status. Women in such families are more likely to take part in the family decision-making process effectively, like Rehana Begum. However, as she observed, '*Being uneducated demeans one's value*' education remains a prerequisite to achieving human dignity in the family and society and obtaining a position to make informed decisions.

In the villages in Moghia union, women's educational input did not seem to produce any significant transforming output through schooling process, which can make them able to think or act against social norms and values that limit women's right as a human being. More importantly, before doing anything in order to gain control over their own lives, women have to be conscious about what is happening surrounding them and what is the deeper meaning of these 'apparently individual' (Kabeer, 1994:244) events. This lack of incorporation of the gender perspective in the whole schooling system can be seen as one of the main obstacles to women's decision-making power through education. However, it appears to be a difficult task for schooling alone as there are other powerful social factors actively working to hinder women's autonomy.

Another aspect is the learning contents and teaching methodology that is acquired from school by the respondents' husbands/fathers/other male relatives. Among the majority of the educated husbands and fathers, gender-awareness was found to be low. Little positive impact of education was found in terms of sharing of power. Hence, it can be argued that to achieve a gender-balanced

family decision-making process, redistribution of power within the family is crucial besides education. This structural change of power relations needs progression from controlling 'power over' to generative 'power to' which makes people aware of their interests in taking part in decisions, requiring a willingness to delegate the power of those who are in a position of power (Rowlands, 1997:13). This is to say, the process of women's empowerment necessarily includes men's involvement as power is relational and exists in a 'network of social relationships' (Rowlands, 1997:14). Thus boys/men need to be aware of socially constructed forms of gender relations and have analytical skills to explain all their dimensions as much as girls/women in order to empower women. But such awareness-raising measures are absent in the social process and the schooling system in Bangladesh.

Chapter 10

Impact of Socio-cultural factors on Girls' Education and Empowerment



Every aspect of Bangladeshi women's lives is affected by the socio-cultural factors that inhibit women's overall empowerment. From familial hierarchy to political participation; from economic activities to religious verdicts; from legal rights to wage discrimination; from domestic violence to communal violence -- everywhere, women are exposed to numerous forms of subjugations. In Bangladesh, women's inferior position in the family and society is characterized by numerous social norms such as early marriage with low education, patrilocal residential arrangements, poor health and nutritional status, economic dependence, unequal legal status, etc. Appallingly, all these women empowerment-detering norms and systems work well within the umbrella of family relations (McCarthy, 1993) and put women in the medieval darkness of gender violence. Therefore, it is necessary to focus on these deterring factors while assessing women's empowerment through education.

In this chapter, we will focus on these socio-cultural factors which have an impact on girls' education and empowerment. In this study socio-cultural factors have been examined to identify elements that inhibit girls' education and empowerment. However, the previous chapters such as perception of education, employment status and participation in decision-making also reflected social cultural views and values. But this chapter exclusively explores factors which respondents found important for their education and empowerment.

10.1 Patriarchal Mindset

...society thinks that women are like shoes, irrespective of their quality and value, finally their place is under the feet (shomaje meyeder nie ekta kotha chalu achhey: meyera holo jutar moto, juta joto dami ar sundor hok na keno er jaega payer nichei)

The above quotation of Debdas Halder, a respondent from Kathalia village gives a complete picture of women's position in a misogynistic society like Bangladesh. The manifestation of this culture is widespread, producing social and economic injustices in all aspects of public and private life. More importantly, women's empowerment-hindering factors exist in the mindset of the people in a patriarchal society. If we analyze the above quotation, the phrase- 'irrespective of their quality and value'- signifies the harsh truth that no matter how educated or intelligent a woman is, she is always subordinate to men. This patriarchal attitude was also observed in the other villages in Moghia union. 50-year old Hamida Banu's statement reveals this,

Nowadays girls walk shamelessly through the middle of the roads. This is created by the government. And the men walk by the side of the road. These are signs of hell. These girls are bringing the hell closer. (meyera aajkaal nirlojjer moto rastar majkhan diye haate. Eisob sorkar kortase. Ar purush haate rastar ek-pash diye. Eishob shesh zamanar lokkhon. Meyera jahannam agaia antase)

Perhaps she was referring to the effects of expanded girls' education in the rural areas, as she blamed the government for this. As she was always accustomed to seeing girls and women within the boundaries of the household, she found it difficult to accept the change. However, this view was held more by comparatively older people than the younger ones.

A study on acid violence, conducted by ASF, shows that this patriarchal mindset is so strong that a man who was convicted for acid violence was concerned about male oppression in the name of law and justice. He stated-

I do not think that the Acid Law- Women Repression Law is correct. For this, men are being oppressed. A husband can punish his wife if necessary. The police file a case for 10,000/20,000 Taka. This law is incorrect.

This man did not even hesitate to challenge the authority and legitimacy of the legal procedure against men. This kind of blind male chauvinistic attitude is not uncommon in the society, particularly in rural areas. Therefore, it is clear from the above views of the respondents, that socio-cultural norms and practices which represent male supremacist attitudes have a huge impact on education and empowerment.

Women's Internalized Inferiority

'Men and women are never equal. What a man can do a woman cannot. Can a woman climb a coconut tree?' SSC graduate Mafia Akhter

Women's subordination is profoundly rooted in the patriarchal familial-social norms and values that incept women's internalised inferiority (Osmany, 1998). As a member of the society which believes in male authority, women also believe they are not able to do what is 'men's work'. Education did not appear to give a sense of agency or analytical power to uncover socially constructed male preferential norms. Shankar Shikdar, a service-holder from Moghia points out,

In many cases, treating boys and girls differently creates discriminatory attitudes. Since mothers and society are teaching them discrimination, liberal mentality is not flourishing. And as the sister or girl of the family is treated with less importance, she considers herself

inferior, and cannot develop a courageous attitude. If these issues can be portrayed through dramas in school, students can learn from them, as they can accept these teachings easily. But in the villages these discussions never happen.

It can be argued that the process of women's inferiority, as described by Shankar Shikdar, is not applicable for only Moghia union- it is equally applicable for the rest of the country. However, it is interesting to note that despite being such an analytical person, he too held only the mothers responsible for discriminatory teachings without assigning any responsibility to the fathers.

10.2 Early Marriage

The United Nations has been observing a day³⁰ for the girl child highlighting their special challenges including the constant threat to be married off at a very young age. Unfortunately, majority of the young girls in rural and urban slum areas in Bangladesh face this threat as a harsh reality of their lives. However, this practice is not limited within the slums and rural areas only. A study shows that in Bangladesh, 58% of urban girls and 69% of those in village areas are married off before the age of 18 which is the legal age of marriage in the country (UNFPA, 2013). Another Unicef study shows that Bangladesh's position in early marriage is 3rd in the world. It shows that two-thirds of all girl children are married off before they are 18 years old, and 3 out of 10 girls are married off before 15 years. Frustratingly, among girls the mean age of marriage is 16.6 years.

The reason for the continued and widespread occurrence of child marriage is the deep-rooted belief that girls are temporary members of their natal family, and their right place is their in-laws' home and their prime duties are cooking and raising children. Thus, economic investment in daughters is viewed as useless. The idea is that they should be transferred to the in-laws' place through marriage as soon as they reach puberty. Generally, parents believe this system ensures their safe passage to adulthood. Security of the girl-child is another important factor responsible for this social tradition. The Executive Director of UNFPA Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin rightly says, 'Child marriage is an appalling violation of human rights and robs girls of their education, health and long-term prospects.'

With regard to the state of child marriage, the villages of Moghia union had a similar condition to that of the national scenario. Majority of the respondents of both the core groups were married off

³⁰ 11th October is observed worldwide as World Girl Child Day.

within 15-18 years of age. However, uneducated women were married off earlier than educated women. Child marriage was found to be the prime cause of girls' dropping out of school. Nonetheless, countrywide girls' education expansion programme has had an impact on the issue of child marriage, since only unmarried girls are eligible for this stipend program. Also, this programme has resulted in a greater awareness about the necessity of girls' education and the ill-effects of early marriage.

10.3 Poor Reproductive and Maternal Health

Over 7,000 mothers die every year from pregnancy related complications in Bangladesh. Of these deaths, 31% occurred due to excessive bleeding, 21% from eclampsia, 7% due to prolonged delivery, 1% from miscarriage, and 40% due to other complications (ICDDR, 2012). Maternal Mortality Survey 2010 shows that 68.4% of the pregnant women did not receive ante-natal care because they did not feel its necessity. It means almost three in every four women are beyond any coverage of health check-up during their pregnancy. Strikingly, this life-threatening negligence of women's reproductive health comes from the social view that conception and child-delivery is a natural process and nothing much can be done in this regard. Many studies show that if any kind of complication occurs during pregnancy or delivery, the superstitious people of the villages regard it as 'upri batash' or 'alga dosh' (ICDDR, 2012). All these beliefs take a heavy toll on women's reproductive health. Inadequate access to nutrition and healthcare during childhood, early marriage and early motherhood, burden of domestic work etc. have a substantial impact on women's overall potential.

In the villages of Moghia union, women were found trapped in the reproductive cycle described above. However, uneducated women from lower income groups were found to be more vulnerable. The impact of childbirth-related complications has disastrous effects on women's economic capability and personal life. Hence, it can be argued that girls' education with traditional curriculum and teaching methodologies have very little scope to alleviate age-old cultural norms that inhibit women's independence and autonomy.

10.4 Patrilocal Residential System

A girl child's sense of self largely depends on how her parents, siblings, friends, relatives think about her. From childhood, girls learn that they are not permanent members of their parental family

and they will be sent off to other homes. Thus they develop a weak self-identity. Hence, the patrilocal residential system and detachment from parental family have a considerable impact on women's disempowerment in Bangladesh. After marriage, in most cases in an unknown family atmosphere, economic dependence and emotional sufferings for blood relations inhibit a woman's self-confidence. Therefore, girls' socialization process and living within a patrilocal system can be seen as an influential factor that limits their self-esteem. This self-esteem is crucial to gain 'power from within'- a sense of being able to act against socially constructed forms of disparity and oppression in order to be empowered. One study showed that the type of the family has a significant impact on women's autonomy, particularly in the early stages of marriage (Amin, 1996a:187).

Another aspect of this system is that the in-laws' family provide the space for execution of patriarchal practices. The male authority and all forms of patriarchal violence are possible due to family support and social legitimacy to control and punish wife. The role extended family plays is on one hand to justify the patriarchal values, norms and practices, and on the other hand, to discipline women to behave according to patriarchal norms. Another important characteristic of such family operation pattern is that the sons are regarded as women's most critical resource. Therefore, ensuring their lifelong loyalty remains a constant preoccupation. Understandably, older women, especially mother-in-laws, for their own survival strategy, obstruct romantic love between son and daughter-in-law to keep the conjugal bond weak. Rita, an educated respondent from Khalisakhali village, shared such experience,

There is no freedom in in-laws' home. Even if my sister-in-law can enjoy some freedom, I cannot. It is like a prison. I have to cook for everyone, but I eat when everybody else finishes their meal. They don't even approve of me talking with the neighbours. My mother-in-law does not want my husband to stay with me. That is why she sent my husband abroad so that we cannot stay together. Women pass their happy days before marriage, in their father's home.

Hence, the patrilocal residential system substantially curtails women's self-worth and potential. This plight of women, which is taken as unchangeable, enhances the son-preferring attitude of the dominant culture. Knowing the sufferings of being a woman from their own life experiences, mothers too do not welcome a girl child and take them as a burden.

10.5 Unequal Inheritance: Barred Access to Resources

The right to property is one of the fundamental rights of a human being. Frustratingly, women in Bangladesh do not have the right to property- a crucial step to establishing their human rights. Personal laws that originate from religious customs and beliefs of the believers in particular faiths, decide issues relating to marriage, divorce, guardianship, inheritance, succession etc. Muslim Family Laws Ordinance 1961 determines Muslim women's inheritance rights. According to Muslim law, a daughter receives half of the share a son gets from the property of their father. In the absence of a son, the son's share of the father's property is allotted to his male family members. Conversely, the inheritance of mothers' property is based on equality. Sons and daughters receive equal shares of their mother's property. Unfortunately, very few mothers in the country own property due to the unequal inheritance law. Muslim laws limit a widow's property rights within 1/8th share which means only 12.5% of her husband's property. Reflecting patriarchal norms and attitude, this law makes husbands' share from their wives property just double, i.e., 25% of the total property. Appallingly, Hindu law has no provision of giving daughters any inheritance. These discriminatory laws are significant deterrents of women's empowerment.

Majority of educated women in the villages of Moghia union of Kochua Upazila were found to have almost no access to their fathers' property. As a matter of fact, in most cases, there was little property for the women to claim. However, many of the middle-class women whose fathers owned some land or other property did not claim any share because they thought it would hamper their relation with their brothers, and lose their rights to visit their parental home in absence of their parents. This fact was also found in many other studies (Adnan,1993: McCarthy,1993:Agarwal,1994). However, some women mentioned that there was very little property in their ancestral home where brothers were supposed to reside.

When asked about their resources, both the core groups mentioned gold assets in varying amounts. Particularly uneducated women from low-income groups termed this gold asset as 'jinish' and found it very necessary to overcome financial crisis. One of them says,

Girls should own something, as they have to bear the all the household responsibilities and take care of everything. Who will help them when they encounter any problem? They can get some money in exchange for mortgaging something (gold jewelry). This can help them in times of great need.(Kichhu thaka uchit, karon meyerai songsarer shobdik dekhashona kore.puro

dawitya tader. Ar tara jodi kono karoney bipodey pore-takhan key takey sahajyo korbe?kono jinish (gold jewelry) jamin rekhe taka paisa pawa jae. Boro proyojan samlano jae.)

Uneducated Sharifa Begum also gave importance to women's access to resources³¹. The reasons she stated was to help the husband to get through business losses by mortgaging valuables owned by women,

It is very important for girls to have own some property. It is useful during any kind of problem. When my husband's business failed, and the fishes in the 'gher' died, we had no money in our hands. Then we mortgaged my bangle and got some money to overcome the problem. Later, we took back the bangle(Meyeder shompotti thaka khub dorkar. Jekono somosyae kaje lage. Dekha jachchhe swamir Byabsa kharap, ghery machh more gelo- dekha gelo hate taka paisa nei. Takhon bala bandhak diye taka ene bipad katano holo. Pore abar bala ferot ana hoyechhe.)

Another respondent who also did not have any resources like most of the other uneducated respondents termed resources as 'bipoder bondhu',

It is good to have some property. You can take charge of the family in husband's absence, or any other problem. You can mortgage it and get some money. It can be used for the family. It is like a friend in bad times.(Kichhu sampad thakley bhalo hoe. Swamir abartamaney jekono somosyae poribarar haal dhora jae. Bandhak rekhey taka paisa ana jae. Sangsarar kaje lagano jae, eta bipoder bondhu)

Understandably, in a rural area where the majority of people fall into the economic category of poor or lower middle class, the women encountered financial hardships, which are termed as 'bipod', very often. Thus the resources that help women to overcome the financial crisis of the family were found very important to women. One female neighbor of a uneducated woman posed a very pertinent question regarding women's access to resources,

It would be quite good if girls owned some resources. It is useful during hard times. But if the fathers and husbands do not give them their resources, then where will girls get it?(Bhaloi hoy meyeder kachhe kisu (resources) thakle. Bipoder somoy kaje lage. Kintu baba ba swami na dile meyera pabe kothae?)

³¹In most cases respondents meant gold jewelry when they mentioned resources.

Thus, women have almost no way to get access to resources if male guardians do not give them any. *baba ba swami na dile meyera pabe kothae*- this view was common among rural women. The rural women were found to take it for granted that resources will be in male possession. For obvious reasons, the educated women of the villages of Moghia union also mentioned the necessity of having resources. But unlike uneducated women, they stressed the access to resources for greater economic independence, not for coming out of the family's financial crisis. Chhonda Akhter, who wished to continue her studies after SSC but failed due to marriage, says,

To ensure their financial solvency it is imperative that girls own resources. This increases self-confidence, and reduces dependency on others. (nijer arthik nishchoyotar jonye meyeder obasyai sampatti thaka uchit- ete atmabiswas bare, anyer upor nirvarshilota kome)

Although Chhonda own some resources, 60% of the total educated women of the union did not have any resources. It can be argued that uneducated women from low-income group are more active in family decisions and its income-related matters. This is why uneducated women's prime reason for having resources is to save the family from crisis. Hence, the potential vulnerability of their families made uneducated women more concerned about resources. Conversely, educated women belonged to the upper economic class and faced the problem of financial vulnerability less than uneducated women. Perhaps this is why they were found to be less vocal in advocating women's access to resources.

However, it is interesting to note that majority of the respondents regarded women's access to resources as a way to manage family financial crisis rather than their own interests. As Sen observes, Indian (subcontinental) rural women could not understand the notion of personal welfare. Instead they tended to merge personal welfare with that of the family welfare. It can be seen from the presented data and facts that Sen's theorization is true for the village women of Moghia union. Therefore, the issue of women's economic independence, a vital part of women's autonomy, remains unchanged.

10.6 Embargo on Women's Free Movement

As in the rest of the country, particularly in rural areas, women encountered many obstacles regarding free movement outside home. In Moghia union, the scenario was not very different. However, the women in Moghia were found to be slightly more progressive than other rural areas of Bangladesh, perhaps due to the similar ratio of Hindu-Muslim population. But the class factor

appeared as an important determinant of the level of women's mobility. Poor working women's mobility was found to be the highest in the villages of Moghia union. Conversely, the mobility of educated higher class women was less. Marital status was another important factor in determining how much freely a woman could move. One respondent shares his view-

Before marriage, almost all girls enjoy some freedom. They can go outside their homes with any excuse whenever they want. Not all girls can do this- but most can. (Biye na howa porjanta meyera sobai motamuti swadhin thake, ichchha korle jekono chhuta barir baire aste pare, sobai parena- beshirbhage pare.)

It is interesting to note that almost half of all the husbands acknowledged the fact that women enjoy less freedom of mobility after marriage. Thus, it can be argued that the patrilocal residential system significantly curtails women's mobility. The social code of conduct of a married woman is very different from that of an unmarried woman. A conduct which would have been forgiven by the natal family would hardly be given consideration by the in-laws.

A village school teacher, Heera Khatun, emphasised male authority which hinders women's mobility-

A woman cannot do anything without the permission of her husband in his house. Our social system is chiefly responsible for this.

However, another female teacher, Shipra Saha, held a different point of view which advocated that a compromising attitude was needed to keep the family in order.

I can enjoy individual freedom to some extent. We are not given complete freedom in several aspects of the society. Again, if you want to be totally free then it creates a kind of disorder in the family. We try our best to move freely.

Educated Shipra Saha wants women to be more sacrificing in terms of their freedom and mobility, for the sake of family peace. This attitude was found pervasive, not only among women of Moghia union, but also the rest of the women of Bangladesh. Thus, it can be argued that patriarchal values are the prime obstacles to women's mobility, irrespective of the educational level of women. Education cannot change the prejudice and values that discourage women's movement outside home.

10.7 Sexual Harassment

The fear of sexual harassment is another key factor that acts as a disempowering agent. Women from all strata of the society, from urban upper class women to lower class women in villages, are under the constant threat of sexual harassment. One female respondent observes-

There were many obstacles before, girls couldn't go outside home. People used to say lots of dirty things. But now, these obstacles have lessened.

Perhaps she meant that as more and more girls are going to school and college, people are becoming more used to seeing girls outside home. But she had to admit that people did say a lot of bad things about girls going outside home. An uneducated working woman from Moghia union describes the male attitude towards women thus-

It seems that a dead man springs from his grave seeing a woman. They pass many bad comments. Society harbours a negative impression of women. (Meyeder dekhle to mora beta o laphaia othe. Nana akotha kukotha bole. Somaj meyeder bhalo chokhe dekhena.)

Her words reflect the harsh reality of sexual harassment which women encounter in public places. Another important thing to note is the last sentence of her statement- 'society harbours a negative impression of women'. The customs and norms of the society are so male-biased and anti-women that even this uneducated woman noticed that the society has a negative attitude towards womenfolk in general. This patriarchal outlook of the society causes it to blame women for any sexual harassment they face. This culture of blaming the victim is also responsible for the countless 'fatwas' and 'shalishes' which give verdicts of flogging and ostracizing the victims of sexual harassment and violence. Reflecting on her personal experience of such social attitude one respondent says,

Women have to face a lot of problems. They could not go outside home. Then after marriage she is completely captivated. Some husbands don't want them to work. Then, they face problems on street, men stare offensively.³²

As the respondent mentions, men's 'offensive stare' and such other sexual behaviours tend to curtail women's movements. Unless such acts are prevented, how women can move freely, and eventually be empowered even if they are educated remains a big question.

³² Meyeder anek somosyae porte hoy. Barir baire jawa jae na. Bie hoye gele to ekebare bondi. Anek swami baire kaaj korte dite chae na. Rastae o anek somosya, purush lok kharap bhabe takae

10.8 Social Disapproval of Women's Work outside Home

Majority of the women in Moghia union stated that they could not think of taking a job outside home due to objection from husbands and parents-in-laws and negative social attitudes. As Table 8.00 shows, among the total educated women, approximately 16% and 43% of the non-educated women mentioned negative social attitude as the main cause of them not being able to work outside home. A large number of working women complained that many people passed dirty comments when they worked outside home. One uneducated respondent expressed the following view regarding men's attitude towards women's work outside home-

It is girls who have to face all the problems. Men cannot bear anything they do. They fear that if a girl earns, she will rise above him. And people on the street always wait for a chance to find faults in girls. (Maiye manshiri nie joto shomoshsha. Tago kono kaj e purusher shojjho hoyna. Taka income korli je tar upore uthe jabani-- eigulo bhabe. Ar rastar manushto opekkha kore boshe thake khut dhorar jonno.)

Her views focus on three types of problem- firstly, men's in-built hatred for womenfolk; secondly, men's ego is hurt when a women is a breadwinner of the family (*Taka income korli je tar upore uthe jabani- eigulo bhabe*); and thirdly, the hostile attitude of the people outside home towards working women.

Thus, women's employment is mostly viewed as something unacceptable to the male ego. Social dignity may rise for educated girls but little scope has been found through this study where girls can capitalise on their education towards empowerment in terms of economic solvency and taking part in decision-making.

10.9 Cultural Censure of Women's Political Participation

Political participation of women can be viewed as an important aspect of women empowerment. The provision of reserving 3 seats of Union Parishad (lowest local govt. administrative unit) membership for women to be elected by direct vote³³ in 1999 has caused some changes in the rural political scenario. This step resulted in 12,828 women being elected as Union Parishad members all over the country (MOP, 2000).

³³ Union Parishad (Union Council) is the lowest administrative unit of local govt body consisting 12 members. There are 4,432 union parishads in 64 districts of the country. 3 seats of membership are reserved for women to be elected directly by the peoples vote (GOB, 1997:33).

To understand the impact of this significant change, particularly in rural areas, respondents were asked to express their views on the social acceptability of female UP members. An HSC graduate Madhabi Rani, said,

Women (UP members) are marginalized in the meetings. The attitude of the male UP members is not respectful. Women members are neglected (by the male UP members) in many ways.

Madhabi's opinion was echoed by many others in her village. A large number of women were found to harbor the opinion that positions like UP member, chairman, etc fit men, not women. Most of the women in Moghia union were found to lack the political awareness, which would enable them to improve their subordinate position in society. It can be argued that patriarchal values guided men and women to stand against women's political participation.

Lack of education and gendered division of labor which compels women to lead a domestic life with very little free time resulted in them having little chance to be aware of politics or recent provision of women's participation in the local government and its social impact. Thus the provision of incorporating women in the political process to empower them appears to have a negligible impact on poor rural women as family and social norms directly oppose it through restrictions on their mobility.

This attitude is reflected in Hemanta Halder's observation,

Even though the government has reserved seats in union parishad for women, the women members hardly attend the meetings as the male UP members and chairman treat them very unfairly and disrespectfully.

Thus, provision of women's political participation is failing to give the expected positive results due to the pervasive influence of patriarchal mindset. However, Asia Begum and Nazma Begum, both members of Moghia union parishad, set examples of courage and leadership that give other women a positive feeling about women's ability.

Thus the socio-cultural norms present numerous barriers to women's political participation and empowerment, while a few women are struggling to break free and rise out of their subordinate position in the society. Still, education was not found to have a strong link with women's political participation. Even though most of the female UP members were SSC graduates, they were marginalized by their male colleagues and barred from playing their proper role in the council.

10.10 Violence against Women

Violence against women refers to acts, attitudes or threats that cause physical or psychological harm to women and restrict their human rights in public and private spheres. As fear of violence too poses a threat and potentially curtail women's human rights, very few women are immune from the incidence of violence in Bangladesh. According to the police headquarters, from January, 2011 to June 2011 a total of 8,886 cases of violence against women have been recorded. It is needless to mention that the reported incidents were only the tip of the iceberg. Due to social stigma, fear, lack of trust in the legal system, and threat of further assault most of the incidents are not reported. Hence, an alarming number of girls and women are exposed to different forms of violent torture including beating and beating to death, strangulating, burnt or burnt to death, rape, gang-rape, killed after rape, acid thrown on them, and so on, both in public and private spheres.

Higher rate of girls' education, decreasing gender gaps in education, increased number of women in the labour force, larger number of women in the bureaucracy, including the top tyres, nothing seems to check violence against women. As Professor Naila Kabeer points out the causes of this scenario,

... but blocking the transformative potential of this evidence of progress is an age-old patriarchal system which regards women as inferior to man and its toxic interaction with the new global culture of consumerism and its relentless sexualisation of women's bodies. (Forum, volume 7, issue 3, March 2013)

As Kabeer focuses on patriarchal system for this widespread violation of human rights, socio-cultural customs, norms and practices are mainly responsible for this horrendous picture in the area of violence against women. It can be argued that the centuries-old patriarchal mindset of men's superiority over women, which is still etched into people's minds, cannot be wiped out by only education.

Table 10.1: Frequency and Types of Violence 2004-2008

Year	Types of violence									Total
	Dowry	Acid-throwing	Abduction	Rape	Murder after rape	Trafficking	Murder	Injury	Others	
2004	3081	198	1594	3097	17	68	62	134	4568	12815
2005	3130	177	2069	2796	22	138	97	49	2949	11427
2006	3417	135	2087	2566	14	107	109	75	2558	11068
2007	4146	137	2736	3495	33	113	142	74	3374	14250
2008	4487	120	2874	3387	65	105	131	87	3023	14279

Source: Police Headquarter, GOB 2009

10.10.1 Situation of Wife Beating in the Union

Violence against wives is a common phenomenon in Bangladesh. An Oxfam study (2008) showed that 37% of women who were or had been ever married reported sexual violence by their husbands. In the Moghia union, a huge majority of women admitted that they were exposed to physical assault either on a regular basis or in some cases occasionally, by their husbands. There is a difference between the rates of these incidents among educated and uneducated women. However, there always remains a significant difference in their sharing of personal information. Throughout the field study it was found that educated women were much more cautious about giving information about their personal life. Conversely, uneducated women were more open in sharing their views and experiences, no matter how personal.

Table 10.1 shows that non-educated women are more vulnerable in this regard. But, educated Mafia Akhter did not hesitate to express her views in favour of wife-beating. She had said, *'when a wife is unruly, the husband has nothing to do but to beat her.'* This view was not uncommon among the educated women in the union. However, some women took a milder stance. They think that women should obey their husbands so they get beaten less often. However, majority of the women regarded wife-beating as a bad habit of men that they were destined to live with.

It is interesting to notice although that table below shows that uneducated women are exposed to physical violence more often, their participation in family decision-making was also higher. Perhaps this is because although non-educated women have achieved some sort of relational empowerment due to their life-struggle, men do not hesitate to exercise socially proffered male power whenever needed.

Table 10.2: Percentage of Wife Beating in the Union

Categories	Educated women	Uneducated women
% claiming to have been beaten ³⁴	52	78
% claiming not to have been beaten	48	22

³⁴ To avoid asking such a personal question directly, the interviewer obtained the information in a collective form by asking, how many in every ten women within her neighborhood did she know to be assaulted. However, a good number of non educated women replied by sharing their own experiences.

In the Moghia union, the ratio of Hindu-Muslim population was almost the same. A degree student of the Charkathalia village of this union, Kalyani, shares an interesting point of view -

There is less wife-beating in the Hindu areas. Hindus have to fast for a long time and go through many difficult procedures to get married, so wife-beating, desertion is not common. After following strict religious rules of the marriage ceremony a man gets a wife. That is why there is less wife beating is much less in the Hindu areas.

(Hindu parae mardhor kom. Hinduder onek kosto kore, uposh kore biye korte hoi, tai sohoje gae hat tole na ba chhereo jaena. Kothin dhormio bidhi-bidhan mene, gotro milie, logno dekhe, agun sakkhi kore, sat-pak ghuriye, onek kosto kore purush ek jon stri pae. Tai tara ei somporkotake mullo dei. Shey jonno hinduder moddhe mardhorer ghotona onek kom.)

But it seems that the difficult procedure of marriage is not the only reason for less wife-beating among Hindus. Historically Hindus are far more educated and culturally advanced than Muslims, and Hindu girls have always enjoyed greater freedom of mobility than Muslim girls.

Kalyani's college friend Sima says-

Muslims can get a wife by just saying 'quabul', so they value their wives less. That's why they beat them often and even desert them.

(Musolmanra kabul bollei bou pai, tai bouer morjada tader kachhe kom. Morjada nei bole jokhon tokhon mardhor kore, chhereo chole jai.)

Whether the process of getting married is easy or difficult may have an effect on the behaviour pattern between the husband and the wife but what certainly exists behind this violence is male authority over women. It can be argued that socially accepted male supremacy is the prime reason of violence against women.

10.10.2: A Case of Acid Violence in Moghia Union

A separated mother of two children in her mid-thirties, Shulekha, an uneducated woman (studied up to grade-5), had acid thrown on her face and body. This case of acid violence, a fierce form of violence against women, is taken as a case study to analyze its multifaceted aspects within the context of patriarchal social structure.

The Case

Sulekha , a separated Hindu woman, paid 30,000 Taka to her elder cousin-in-law for a piece of land she had got from her parents. After a long while when he was not showing any sign of arranging written registration, conflict erupted between them. The perpetrators used to throw stones at her house at night in order to threaten her so that she moved away from her house. They made bad comments about her character when she asked for money. Afraid of being killed, she informed the UP member, local journalists and police about the matter. The UP member arranged to discuss the matter with both parties on Friday. That night when she went out to toilet, she found 3/4 persons behind the bush. Three of them were Muslims and one was Hindu. They threw something towards her. In a moment a sharp burning made her scream at the top of her voice. People of the neighbourhood rushed to the spot and found that it was acid.

Analysis of the case

In the case, the dispute is about legal rights over land between Shulekha and her cousin-in-law. The case also indicates that because the woman challenged the male authority of her cousin-in-law and made the dispute known to public, she was attacked. Therefore, it is not only the question of land ownership but also non-submission to the male power and her denial to stay under male guardianship. Since her husband was mentally disabled, her cousin-in-law considered himself as her guardian, as per patriarchal norms. The underlying dynamics of the gender relation is not only land dispute but to control her sexuality. The nature of the conflict is undoubtedly patriarchal.

The mastermind of this crime, Sulekha's cousin-in-law, refused to transfer the land possession to her officially. When she made the dispute public, and informed the journalists and police of the dispute, he exercised his male power to punish her for her disobedience and denial of his male authority in a violent way. Acid is known to be used for women who deny the male desire or wishes (ASF, 2005). Material interest, i.e., to grab the land, also played a vital role here.

Hegemonic masculinities can be identified as the main factor behind this acid violence. There is a strong connection between masculinities and violent acts as respondents mentioned that young men often got entangled in violent conflicts relating to love affairs in order to prove his masculinity to his peers. College student Leon Shikder said,

When a man is rejected by a woman he cannot show his face to his friends and peers. He is belittled. Then he wants to take revenge and the thought of using acid comes to his mind. (Ekjon purush kono narir kachhe protyakhayto hole shei purush bondhuder kachhe mukh dekhate parena, chhoto hoye jaye. Takhon protishodh nite chae. Acid er kotha mathae ase.)

10.11 The Dowry System

The most common reason for domestic violence in Bangladesh occurs due to dowry demands. For obvious reasons, this is a significant aspect of the cultural attitudes that have a negative impact on women's lives. Although 65% of the educated women thought that dowry demand is less for educated women, in reality most of the educated respondents' parents had to give dowry for their marriage. But according to the Dowry Prohibition Act 1982 (MOWCA, 1997:71), demanding and giving of dowry is a punishable offence. But, legal action is hardly in use as the social custom of dowry has become so pervasive and widely accepted that it is almost necessary to give it for daughters' marriages (WB, 1990).

The social custom of dowry makes its way through many new tactics such as starting a new business or medical treatment since it is illegal. One respondent focuses on it,

Most of the people give dowries. It looks bad if you don't give anything at all. If I were educated, I wouldn't be married off with an uneducated man. But at present different tactics are being followed to take dowries, such as for starting new business or for treatment of diseases.

Hence, as we can see from the prevalence of custom that effectively commodifies women even though it is banned, law is not sufficient to transform the mindset. Another respondent who was a father of an uneducated woman echoed the previous respondent's view,

Almost everyone has to give it to some extent. Many still take dowries using different tactics. We gave a small amount. The dowry-system should be abolished. The groom's family does not demand it directly- they express their demands using strategic language. (Sobar belae e kom beshi lage. Joutuk ekhon lokera nana kaedae nyae. Amra alpo diechhi. Joutuk ekhon tule deya uchit. Barpakha chaena-koushale bujhiye daye.)

Thus, dowry system that significantly decrease women's dignity and make her a family burden, goes on with the increased rate of girls' education. One husband's diplomatic answer reflected the covert ways in which giving and taking dowry remains widespread among educated and non-educated women alike.

What are you talking about? I didn't even take a piece of cloth, much less, a sum of dowry-money. I hate the dowry system. Taking dowry demeans one in the in-law's eyes, and entails a lot of bad comments. But still my in-laws gave me a cycle. I did not want to take it. I cannot stand giving/taking dowry. And girls' parents and brothers want them to be happy, so many of them persuade the grooms to take something.

One father of an uneducated woman who owned a grocery, says

We gave almost no dowry, just a nominal amount. We gave our daughter gold jewellery, hoping she will be happy by the grace of Allah. Now it has become a personal matter. Government has banned it, but society does not obey the law. (Joutuk amra ek prokar deini, oi alpo kichhu deya. Sajaya disi- meyeta allahar rohomote jeno sukhe thake. Eta ekhon jar jar bayper. Sorkarer nishedh ase, kintu somaj mane na)

As the father admits 'sajaya disi', this is the traditional way of terming dowry when it realizes by gold ornaments. Although there is a social custom of giving the daughter gold ornaments on her wedding, grooms' parents often compel bride's parents to give gold ornaments in their wedding bargain, even if the bride's parents cannot afford it. For poor parents, this comes as a huge burden which ultimately turns girls into an economic liability.

10.11.1 Correlation of Girls' Education with Dowry Demand

Respondents' views on whether education or employment has a negative correlation with dowry demand presented in the table that obtained through quantitative questionnaire may not show the whole truth regarding the issue. Qualitative in depth interviews reveal many other factors and forms of this social disease. Sabul Molla, 35 year-old uneducated farmer thought,

Dowry is mandatory. If the girl is slightly dark-skinned, dowry amount increases. It has nothing to do with whether the girl is working or not. Dowry amount depends on the girl's appearance. The incidence of dowry exchange is supposed to decrease, but actually it has increased. Everyone is grabbing something however they can. It is difficult to find a good man. As long as the family is well-off the parents do not hesitate to give it, as long as they can get the girl off their shoulders. Now dowry has become a social custom. (Joukuk lagbei. Ektu kalo hole joutuk beshi- tate chakri korlei ba ki na korlei ba ki. Cheharar pore nirvor kore joutuker poriman. Joutuk komar kotha kintu ekhon barse. Je jevabe niye pare. Bhalo lok khuje pawai mushkil. Poribar swachhal thakle keu gorimosi korena. Meyetake chharate parle bache. Eta ekhon somajer bidhan hoye daraise.)

He pointed out a number of factors relating to the dowry problem which were found to be realistic during field research. Its essentiality, bargain process and use of girls' appearance and fair color as a measuring standard, more vulnerability of darker skinned girls in the dowry demand and its increasing trend irrespective of women's employment status. This is because according to patriarchal values, physical beauty matters immensely for a girl/woman as it is considered as her main asset, not her education or intellectual capability. More importantly he mentioned the widespread social acceptability of dowry and parents utmost effort to get rid of a girl child, even in exchange of dowry if they can afford it.

Parvin Begam, wife of a date and palm tree juice processor, shared that her parents had to give her husband a bicycle as her dowry. Echoing the previous respondent's views regarding girls' look, she said,

My parents gave him a cycle. They did not ask for anything else. Everyone said that less dowry was needed because I was good-looking. If I were educated it would not have been less. (Ekta cycle disilo, pore ar kisu deya lageni. Sobai bole-chehara sundor howar karone joutuk kom lagse. Shikkhito hole eksom lagto na.)

Goljahan, 30 year-old mother stresses the attitudinal aspect of the family of the groom. She did not think dowry is less for educated women. Her logic is clear, since it is a matter of attitude and does not depend on whether the girl is educated or not.

Dowry-demands depend on the groom's family. Who demands will demand it from both educated and uneducated girls' families. (Joutuk chheler poribarar upar nirvor kore. Jara nyae tara sikkhito, ashikkhito sobar kachh theke i nyae)

Another respondent also emphasised family tradition,

Many do not want dowry, but if the groom is good, educated, then the parents give something if they can afford it. If the girl is educated fewer dowries is needed. It also depends on the groom's family. (Joutuk aneke chaena, tobe jamai Bhalo hole - shikkhito hole baba-ma'I diye dyae samortho thakle, meye sikkhito hole joutuk kom lage. eta chheler bongsher upor nirvor kore)

Uneducated Rehana Begam also had similar views; she too believed that family culture had a great role to determine whether its members would demand dowry. She did not seem quite sure about the idea that education lessens dowry demand,

Dowry demand is a problem. It depends on families. My husband did not take it but others are realizing their demands. Dowry is supposed to be less for educated girls. (Joukuk ekta somosya. Eta poribarar upor nirvor kore. Amar jamai (swami) aneni kintu anyora antese. Shikhhito hole joutuk kom lagar kotha.)

This idea of Rehana Begam that ‘dowry is supposed to be less for educated women’ is perhaps the reason for which women from both the educated and uneducated group mentioned this assumption as a reality in the table below.

42 year-old, mother was confident in sharing her views that dowry demand is not less for educated women because she had to give it for her HSC graduate daughter,

Everyone has to give dowry, irrespective of their education level. My daughter is a HSC-graduate. We had to give dowry for her marriage. (Joutuk sobar i dite hoy.shikhhito meye ashikhhito meye -sobar. Amar meye HSC pass. Tar biyete amader joutuk dite hoyechhilo.)

Table 10.3: Correlation of Girls’ Education and Dowry Demand

Categories	% EW	%UW
Educated women need less dowry	65	78.2
Education has nothing to do with it	35	21.7

Another respondent raised a different issue regarding dowry demand of educated girls,

‘Dowry demand is not less for educated girls. They cannot marry an uneducated man, and to find an educated groom, parents have to give dowry.’

An educated women was not sure whether education or a good husband made her marriage dowry-free,

My family wanted to give something, but he did not take anything. I really appreciated it. Again, it could be that since I was an educated girl, he did not take anything. (Amar poribar dite chaise kintu she aneni. Ekarone amar khub bhalo lagse. Abar ami lekhapora jani bidhae tara joutuk nyaeni eta o hote pare)

25 year-old, mother of two children who could manage to attend the school only up to fifth grade, Shefali Begum thinks that '*an educated girl herself is a valuable dowry*'.

Another uneducated mother, deserted by polygamist husband, declared with conviction,

My daughter is growing up. She is studying in class seven now. I will give no dowry when she gets married. I will make her pass matriculation, then I will put her in the police force. (Amar maiya boro hoitase, class seven'e pore, tar biyae joutuk dimuna, ore metric pass koramu, tarpor police'e dhukaiya dimu).

Through the hardship of life, this working uneducated mother can challenge the social norms since she broke apart these customs to survive when she was deserted by her husband. It was the real-life experience which gave her a sense of ability to work, to become a breadwinner and more importantly, become an empowered person who can challenge cultural norms if it puts a hindrance on her way.

Hence, it is difficult to say that whether dowry demand is less for educated girls. Strong cultural values stand as a barrier and resulted in low positive consequences of girls' education in real life situations of the rural perspective. Furthermore, this social custom sometimes makes parents reluctant to spend on daughter's education, as they need to save money for dowry. Consequently, in rural areas of Bangladesh, 73% of total education expenditure of a family is spent on sons whereas daughters' average allocation is only 27% (STD, 2000). Thus ideology that derives from patriarchal cultural practices in Bangladesh put serious hindrances in making congenial atmosphere where girls can enter to the process of getting control over their own lives.

10. 12 Concept of Purdah

Purdah or seclusion was found to be one of the major inhibiting factors, which deter women from their human rights. In their renowned ethnographical study '*A Quiet Violence*', Betsy Hartmann and James Boyce mentioned a village madrassah teacher- Mofis, who had two wives and had a habit of wife beating. While discussing about the role of women Mofis had cited the familiar village proverb '*A woman's heaven lies under her husband's feet*' then described the virtues of an ideal

woman.³⁵ Mofis's character, as described in the book is a classic character in rural Bangladesh. It is surprising that the book was written in the context of 1974-75, almost four decades after which, the rural scenario in terms of the way religious leaders preach women's duty has not changed. They still disseminate religious values through Waz Mahfils and its cassettes and CDs that are misinterpreted and tailored in order to ensure women's subordination. Purdah is one of the issues they frequently preach women. The villages of Moghia union were no exception. However, almost equal number of Hindu-Muslim population and increasing number of school going girls and working women made the attitude rather mixed. Nonetheless men's stance, particularly that of husbands, on purdah remained rigid. 75% of the all the husbands of the educated women were in favour of maintaining purdah. One male respondent's view regarding purdah was-

The system of purdah has almost disappeared now. Still you need to obey it. According to Islam, one should maintain purdah. It is a personal matter, depends much on one's own. Educated girls maintain less purdah.

The husband of an uneducated woman said-

Purdah is compulsory in Islam, but everyone does not obey it. Burkha is expensive too. As educated women have to go outside more often, they have to abide by it more.

It was seen that when male respondents were asked to give their opinion about purdah, they referred to the Islamic code of conduct to justify their views.

³⁵ *"The prophet's daughter Fatima was almost an ideal woman, but even she had her faults. One day her father told her she didn't observe purdah strict enough. She quarrelled with him, saying, 'why, I am the most discreet and proper girl in the world.' He laughed and told her to visit the wives of the woodcutters who lived in the forest. Then she would understand what he meant. So Fatima went to the woodcutters' village. She called their wives, but they refused to come out of their houses. Discouraged, she finally left. When the woodcutters returned and heard of her visit, they scolded their wives. 'What, you didn't go out? Why, that was Fatima, the prophet's daughter! If she comes again, you should greet her.'*

Fatima told her father what had happened and he urged her to return. This time she brought her two small sons, Hassan and Hossain. She called the women, but from their houses they could see the boys. They shouted, if you come back alone, we'll see you.' That night their husbands were angry. 'those boys are only her sons' they told their wives. 'they are religious people you should not turn them away.'

On the third day, Fatima returned alone. (Mofis paused for emphasis with a twinkle in his eye) This time the women greeted her and took her into their houses. In one courtyard, Fatima saw a club and a rope laid carefully against the wall and asked, 'what are those for?' The woman of the house explained, I put them there for my husband. When he wishes to beat me he can use the club, and with the rope he can tie my hands.'

Fatima was impressed, and that night she told her father, 'You're right the woodcutters' wives are far better than I' (cited in 'A Quiet Violence', Hartmann and Boyce, 89:1983)

Table 10.4: Opinion Regarding Purdah among Core and Sub groups

<i>Categories</i>	% EW	% UW	% MEW	% HEW	% FEW
<i>1.a Educated women need less purdah</i>	15.38	52	51	59	22.2
<i>1.b Education has nothing to do with it</i>	84.6	48	49	41	77.7
<i>2.a In favour of purdah</i>	16	00	20	75	64.2
<i>2.b Not in favour of typical purdah</i>	84	100	80	25	35.7

EW-Educated Women, UW-Uneducated Women, MEW-Mothers of Educated Women
HEW-Husbands of Educated Women, FEW-Fathers of Educated Women

It was surprising to note that while 16% of the educated women were in favour of purdah, none of the uneducated women showed any interest in maintaining it. Perhaps uneducated women's lifestyle did not permit them to maintain purdah. Uneducated working woman, Shahida Begum said,

I have to earn my own living. I do everything by myself. I don't care about purdah. I have to move about like a man. (Khetе khetе hoy. Nijer kaj nije kori, purdah-tardah bujhina. Amar beta manusher moto cholte hoy.)

Thus, necessity has taught her to break social traditions. On the other hand, a large number of people said that purdah has become a fashion. They thought maintaining purdah had little to do with a girl's educational status. One male respondent says-

It has become a fashion nowadays. They wear it to hide themselves. It is not related to someone being educated or uneducated. But, I have observed that educated girls wear bourka more than who are uneducated, as they need to go outside home more.

This social tradition of preserving *purdah* can be seen one of the main barriers to women's free movement. It considerably limits women's right to work. Consequently, due to lack of participation in income earning activities, they remain out of the decision-making process of the family, even about matters that effect their own lives. Not surprisingly, only 27% of total rural female population of the country enjoys the right of free movement (STD, 2000). Thus the traditional norms of purdah limit women autonomy in Bangladesh significantly.

Chapter 11

Analysis of Factors behind the Socio-Cultural Barriers to Women's Empowerment



11.1 Classic Patriarchy - Root Cause of Socio-Cultural Barriers

In her renowned article ‘Bargaining with Patriarchy’, Deniz Kandiyoti defines her theory of classic patriarchy. Classic patriarchy refers to an operation system of patrilocally extended households. As discussed in chapter 2, under classic patriarchy girls are married off at a very early age into households headed by their husband’s fathers. Women’s lives revolve around the cycle of deprivation and hardships they encounter when are young, superseded by the power they hold and exercise over their own daughters-in-law later in life. As Kandiyoti says,

In classic patriarchy, the cyclical fluctuations of their power position, combined with status considerations, result in women’s active collusion in the reproduction of their own subordination (1997).

Thus, the cyclical nature of women’s power in the patrilocally extended households and the authority of older women, particularly mothers-in-law encourage internalization of this form of patriarchy within women themselves. As Kandiyoti showed, the system of classic patriarchy prevails in regions of North Africa, the Muslim Middle East (including Turkey, Pakistan and Iran), and South and East Asia (specifically, India and China).

In Moghia union, by large, the society is classic patriarchal in nature. Here, in spite of changing economic patterns from agrarian to industrial which resulted in an increasing number of nuclear families, women’s internalization of their subordination was so rooted that they wholeheartedly believed that women were inferior to men in many aspects.

The chief aspects of a classic patriarchal society- girls are married off at an early age, and are obliged to live in their in-laws’ households- were present in the Moghia union. Many respondents, including a few men, contended that the in-laws’ home is not a favorable place for girls and women. The perpetuation of the classic patriarchal society throughout generations incepts numerous norms and customs which persists even when the original form of patriarchy changes. This was found to be the case in Moghia union, as explained in the previous chapter.

11.2 Patrilocal Residence

As Kandiyoti observes, *‘the key to the reproduction of classic patriarchy lies in the operations of the patrilocally extended household...(89:1997)’*-this process of reproduction of women’s subordination was active in the families in villages of Moghia union. Like in many parts of the

subcontinent, women's subordination is embedded in family relations. Separation from natal family at a very young age makes them dispossessed individuals. Moreover, socio-cultural norms about mobility and modesty, such as talking in a low voice, submissiveness, obeying older persons, and never arguing even if something is wrong from the in-laws' side make young brides timid, voiceless and effectively inferior.

In April 2013, a teenage girl committed suicide when her brother-in-law came to take her back to her in-laws house from her father's house. She had wanted to continue her studies, but her in-laws had refused to let her do so. It is obvious that this incident is not isolated. More importantly, dowry-related violence has a strong connection with the patrilocal residential arrangement in the country. In most cases of dowry-related violence, the close kin group of husbands such as their parents, brothers, sisters takes part in the crime directly.

In the villages of Moghia majority of the younger women expressed deep pain for being a woman who is destined to stay in a place 'where everybody is ready to find her faults.'

As discussed in chapter 6, numerous folk songs like the Uttar Pradesh rural song and Bhawaia songs of Bangladesh depict the plight of women in in-laws house. Nevertheless, the socialization process make women realize that married women's true honor lies in staying in-laws' house complying its code of conduct. In the villages of Kathalia, Char Kathalia and Kholisakhali a significant number of young educated women were found to be in a helpless situation in their in-laws house regarding the strict code of conduct, mobility, barring from talking with neighbors and eating meals after everyone else. However, it was surprising that some men also pointed out the problem of patrilocal residential system and spoke for women. It can be argued that, despite having education, this system of classic patriarchy and patrilocal residential arrangement substantially curtails women's self worth and effectively makes them believe in women's inferiority. Girls' education alone does not appear to be able to remove this age old cultural practices.

11.3 Hegemonic Masculinity

As discussed in Chapter 4, patriarchy creates a condition of Gramscian hegemony (Mayo, 1999) involving both force and consent which is essentially in favour of male dominance. Masculine hegemony refers to a set of structures and values that support the established order and male interest. Through this process, patriarchy creates a definition of manhood. This ideological standpoint, which is called masculinity, has a hierarchical position over femininity. According to

Connell (1995), masculine hegemony is a condition of dominance that sanctions the hegemonic power of man essentially over women, but also over other oppressed men.

As discussed in the previous chapter, 52% of educated women and 78% of non-educated women of the Moghia union were exposed to physical assault. Educated women were not spared either. Wife-beating was a regular phenomenon in the Moghia union. One of the reasons behind this is the mindset that women are properties of men. Masculine hegemony dictates that men are the guardians of men and have every right to mend them when they find any 'fault'. This hegemony also sets a feminine code of conduct that include modesty, shyness, patience, active in carrying out all kinds of domestic chores, particularly cooking in time, taking care of children, providing services to the elderly members of the family, and more importantly, providing services to her husband when he returns home after work. If a man finds any fault in any of her work he doesn't hesitate to show his masculine power and physically assault her. Non-educated Rabeya, a day-labourer³⁶, shares,

One of my eyes has been permanently damaged as a result of my husband's brutal physical torture. Man can do anything they want by using muscle power. My husband married six times. I had to bear a lot of beating in my husband's house. I had shed so many tears for some rice and clothes. Now I earn my own living.

When she was asked to give her perception of girls' education she said,

Girls' education is very good. If educated, girls won't have to put up with their husband's beatings.

Unfortunately, Rabeya's assumption was not correct. A significant 52% of educated women of the union also suffer like her. Another thing to note is that this phenomenon is not confined to low-income groups only. Thus, education was not found to be a safeguard against beatings and many other humiliation and subordination of women in conjugal life.

However, it is more prevalent in low-income group. As Hartmann and Boyce observes, *'Wife beatings were frequently an outlet for men's sense of powerlessness and frustration in the face of grinding poverty (89:1983)'*. They referred to a wife of a sharecropper who shared- *'When my husband's stomach is empty, he beats me, but when it's full, there is peace.'* While this reason may be applicable for some cases of wife-beating, but other reasons were also found playing an active role in wife-beating. When asked why men beat their wives, a battered wife answered, 'their nature

³⁶ She was engaged in road-repairing work, under LGED

is bad.’ This ‘bad nature’ is created and nurtured by the values of masculinity. In some cases, mothers- and sisters-in-law provoke the husband. Psycho-analysts explain that a person expresses violent anger when his/her surrounding atmosphere allows him to do so. It can be argued that not challenging men’s ‘bad nature’ is an important factor behind its continuation. It is interesting that hegemonic masculinity within the classic patriarchal society make women internalise the legitimacy of men’s ‘bad nature’. However, some sort of resistance is seen in some cases, none of which are any overt or serious form of protest against violence.

It is appalling to know that even though almost four decades had passed since Hartmann and Boyce had carried out their ethnographical study (1983), rural women’s views regarding challenging domestic violence had changed little. When Shomala, a battered wife, left her husband, most of the women in her village criticised her behaviour vehemently. They expected her to be more patient and bear beatings and hunger. The ethnographers concludes-

For most women, submission to physical beatings and verbal abuse, or to the emotional pain of polygamy, is not too high a price to pay for social approval and physical survival (92:1983)

This ‘social approval’ and ‘physical survival’ still act as the key reasons for putting up with physical torture and verbal abuse. Hence, an important factor in domestic violence is their economically dependent status. Moreover, women are legally and socially inferior to men, and purdah secludes them from the outside world. Thus, social values regarding women’s role and conduct do not approve of separation or divorce, no matter how serious the reason may be. On top of all these, there are numerous misinterpretations of religious code of conduct regarding women’s role which act as supplementary to the values of classic patriarchy.

As for educated girls’ perception of their own well-being, the scenario is also frustrating. Pedagogy was advocated by Paulo Freire in order to help the oppressed reach ‘critical consciousnesses’, overcoming the magical and naive consciousness levels appeared to have a little link with the curriculum and teaching method used in Bangladesh. Girls’ education basically is viewed as an equipment of national economic development instead of a tool to promote human rights. This is why girls’ education fails to bring significant change in women’s subordinate position in society. The Government has a provision of recruiting 60% female teacher at primary schools. But this provision failed to impart ‘critical consciousness’ to act against women’s subordination due to lack of necessary gender training. In Moghia union, a significant percentage of female teacher

respondents were found to have an internalized patriarchal mindset. And the scenario was even worse in the case of male teachers.

Apart from the poor level of gender consciousness among teachers, another important aspect is the comparatively greater influence of informal education. Socialisation, informal education, attitude, knowledge and experience from the from the family, neighbours, religious institutions, peer groups and locally available media play a very important role in developing a person's point of view. The knowledge about masculinity and femininity, learnt through the process of informal socialization has direct role in patriarchal violence. Through socialization, girls and boys learn about two different sets of values, i.e., masculinity and femininity which fits their respective community. Thus, through this informal education, boys learn to be dominant, unemotional and controlling, and girls are taught to be tolerant, kind, obedient and submissive. Thus, powerful informal education easily overrides the formal education which is characterised by gender-insensitive curricula and weak teaching methodology.

11.4 Violence Outside Home

As Lindisferne says, masculinity varies from culture to culture (1994). Caroline and Filippo Osella and Radhika Chopra show³⁷ hyper masculine performances of young men in South Asia are influenced by the iconic and hierarchically superior figures that represent personification of a desired masculinity such as that of movie stars (2004). A respondent from Kholishakhali village, HSC graduate Dipti Halder was compelled to stop her daughter's education in secondary level in the face of severe stalking. She says-

My daughter was a very good student. As she was good-looking, the local goons started to stalk her on her way to school. They were involved in politics. When they threatened to kidnap her, we sent her off to relatives in India on one night's notice. Later she got married there. She is there, we are here. We see her once every 2-4 year. This hurts me so much. (Amar meyeta porashonae khub bhalo chilo. Meye dekhte sundor howae schoole jawa ashar pothe ei elakar mastan chhelera bhishon utpat shuru korlo. Ora rajneeti korto. Tule neoar humki dile amra ek rater modhye take India-e atmior barite pathie dite badhyo holam. Pore okhanei meyer biye hoe jaye. Amra ekhane, meye okhanei thake. Dui-char bochor por dekha hoy. Meyer jonno khub kharap lage.)

³⁷ Discussed in Chapter 4.

Teasing, as an expression of infatuation, of the heroine by the hero is a common phenomenon in Bollywood and Bangladeshi movies. Perhaps, this is one of the reasons for the increasing incidence of violent eve-teasing, as access to these movies are becoming easier for stalkers and they merge their identities with the heroes and try to imitate them in acts like eve teasing. Thus South Asian masculinities have an impact on young stalkers. Another aspect of the above-mentioned case is the stalkers' connection with the political parties. The stalkers may also have regarded the local political leaders as icons of power to follow, apart from the shelter they provide. Therefore, South Asian masculinities can be identified as one of the main factors behind this sexual harassment.

In fear of being a subordinate man in the eye the peers, they become hegemonic in preserving masculinities. In many cases, like the above two examples, these young men had a connection with a political power and usually they belonged to the upper economic class. This was also seen in the case of acid-survivor Sulekha Rani. It appeared that the perpetrators viewed as women inferior and they had some kind of inherent right to demand their attention and love and women should comply with all their demands. The deeply ingrained hatred towards women folk and the desire to punish them evidently plays an important role for the choice of acid as a means of violence.

If we consider the cases of Sulekha Rani and Dipti Halder's daughter, the masculinities of all men are identical whether they belong to religious majority or minority. The perpetrator demonstrated his aggressive masculine power in destroying the physical look of Sulekha Rani as he was denied guardianship. The perpetrator asserted his masculinity by imprinting the survivor with acid as punishment for an alleged illicit relationship and asking for her land to be registered.

Hence, political culture plays a very important role in violence against women. Santosh Kumar Debnath, a teacher from Kholishakhali village, put emphasis on political culture,

In fact to show their power, one political party pressurise and threaten the other. They patronise and provide shelters to their members no matter the extent of their crimes. This is the reason behind the occurrence of various forms of crimes including against women.

Member of Kachua upazilla parishad, Mujibor Rahman Didar, thinks-

Perpetrators escape through the loopholes in the law with the help of money. These perpetrators have to be punished. Violent acts can be prevented by using recreational tools such as dramas and songs to raise awareness among people. If the chairmen of the upazilla and union parishads arrange seminars in the villages, people would be more aware and careful to commit such crime.

Besides monetary power, political affiliation of perpetrators is an important factor regarding gendered violence in public sphere. Association with political parties ensure material gains and make members ready to fight the opposition in every way possible. This culture has spread throughout all spheres of the society, resulting in a form of enemy discourse. In enemy discourse the negative images and aspects of ‘the other’ are emphasized. This attitude dictates that members of in-group must be protected and leaders must be invested with great power to fight off the ‘other’. At micro level, enemy discourse leads to conflict, often in a violent form, not only between major political parties but also among their beneficiaries and supporters. These conflicts often pave the way to gendered violence. The political culture of strong in-group protectionism destroys rule of law as the perpetrators of violence against women are provided with shelter. There are numerous incidents of dowry-related murders which went unpunished as the perpetrators had political connections or paid bribes to the law enforcers.

This protectionism, in one hand it indulge people in further crime as they manage to go unpunished. On the other hand, the example itself works as a source of inspiration for a prospective perpetrator. To be in this unique protection system perpetrators connect themselves beforehand with the party in power. Thus the political context and corruption of law enforcers provides opportunity for the violence against women.

In last two decades, through the influence of neo-liberal economic policies, an increasing numbers of women from different economic group are engaged in income-generating activities in formal and non-formal labour market. The rate of participation of women’s labour force is increasing drastically. In garments sector, 80% of workers are girls/women. This changed scenario in terms of women’s economic development challenges the patriarchal ideologies of men’s breadwinner role, gendered division of labour, women’s restricted mobility etc. Within the asymmetrical gender relations in the society this increased participation in the labour force impacted hugely on the increased rate of violence against women.

Besides women’s increased participation in economic activities, emergence and development of NGO sector with major objective of women empowerment at the grassroots level, women’s rights movements, and civil society contributed significantly on a transition from gender hierarchy, ideologies and internalization of negative gender norms. This socio-economic structural transformation impacted on the long preserved ideologies of male supremacy. Consequently, an

upsurge of vindictive attitudes that comes out of a sense of losing control and fear of being subordinate masculine can be seen in among the men folk. Acid throwing, strangulating, administering poisons, fatwa by the semi-literate Mullahs and violence against women in many other ways characterize this gendered social phenomenon.

11.5 Capitalist Economic Pattern and Dowry

In Bangladesh, there is a legal provision under the Dowry Prohibition Act (1982) that anyone receiving or giving dowry will be punished by fine and /or imprisonment. But in practice, this legal provision has hardly any impact on the social mindset which legitimizes dowry demand. In fact, according to the Islamic law, as a condition of marriage, dower (mehr) is necessarily payable by the husband to his wife in the form of cash or kind or property (MHHDC,2000). Although the upper class partly maintains the system of mehr (both the parties bargain with each other to fix an amount, most part of which they show as already realized in the form of the gifts given to the bride), the women of low-income families are either denied mehr or a nominal mehr is fixed. Moreover, in absence of any restrictions on husbands' right to divorce, women run the risk of being deserted any time. They do not want to amplify that risk by asking for her mehr. In most cases, this mehr is realized only when the marriage dissolves. Despite the existence of general legislative provision and marriage condition of Islamic law, people engage in this practice.

When the respondents the villages of Moghia union were asked about purdah, majority of them answered by referring to the religious instructions associated with it. On the other hand when asked about dowry demand, none of the respondents mentioned that it was something opposed to the Islamic rule of marriage. Hence, it is obvious that religious leaders/Imams had never addressed this issue to the villagers. It is interesting to note that although the religious leaders/Imams are excessively concerned about women's purdah and their compliance with Islamic code of conduct relating to duty toward husbands and household, prefer to remain silent regarding violation of Islamic rule of marriage by demanding dowry. Perhaps it is the material and more importantly misogynistic interest which keep them silent.

Increasing dowry demands can be explained by deepening economic crisis in the face of the increasing rates of unemployment among youths. However, economic necessity had existed in rural areas before. During the British period, the concept of giving dowry to the groom's family was almost non-existent. Conversely, the groom's family had to pay a 'bride price' during marriage in

almost 90% cases (White, 1992). From the 70's, this custom universalized itself gradually within all the classes, starting from the upper-economic strata. This is reflected in the statement of Karuna, an elderly respondent,

My parents did not need to give any dowry for my marriage. I got married in 1960. There was no system of giving and taking dowry at that time. Dowry giving and taking started later. This increased after the liberation. Now the situation is very bad.

Therefore, it can be argued that the religious customs and norms regarding marriage were overturned by the deeply-embedded male supremacist mindset. Lack of rule of law, coupled with the capitalist economic culture, also played an important role in aggravating this social disease. This capitalist culture promotes that material and financial gain are the highest achievement of a person. Thus, using the patriarchal values where sons are regarded as 'assets', the groom's families started to demand a high price for their valuable 'assets'. As seen in the previous chapter, there were a number of different perceptions about the dowry-system. One of the key features of this system is that the majority of men either denied taking dowries or said that their in-laws forced them to take some things. Further investigation revealed that these men did receive some forms of dowries. This may have happened because of, firstly, it showed that deep-inside, they may have known that this was no fair demand. Secondly, in fear of the Dowry Prohibition Law, they did not disclose anything publicly. Finally, in spite of the knowledge that giving and taking dowry is illegal, they wanted to prove their worth by accepting dowries.

White shows the dowry pattern of upper and lower Muslim families and upper and lower Hindu families from the British period to 1986(0000). Her study reveals that during British period, all the Muslim upper-class families and 80% of lower-class families received dowry (mehr) from the groom's family during marriage. During Pakistan period, 60% of upper-class women's families received mehr from the groom's side, but a trend started with 40% families being equal with the groom's side or not engaging with realizing mehr or dowry. During the period 1971-81, the percentage of families realizing dowry from the bride's side increased sharply to 50 among the upper families. This percentage increased to 60% during the period 1982-86.

As for the lower-class Muslim families, realizing dowry money started with 10% families from the Pakistan period and remained almost same during the first decade after liberation. During 1982-86, it increased to 50%. Thus, it can be seen that the upper-class Muslim families started the trend of

giving dowry to the groom's families. Gradually, this custom disseminated throughout the lower-class.

In the case of upper-class Hindus, only 20% gave dowries during the British period. This increased dramatically to 60% during Pakistan regime, whereas, only 25% of lower-class Hindus engaged in this practice. Alarming, from 1971 onwards, almost every family from both classes of Hindus was engaged in the practice of taking dowries from bride's side. Thus, among the Hindus also the trend was set by the upper-class.

Frustratingly, after liberation, despite the Constitution's recognition of its democratic obligation to women and promising in article 28(2) that 'the women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of the state and public life' women became more vulnerable in terms of dowry-demand. It can be argued that a number of factors played an important role in making this situation worse. These factors include the flourishing of free market economy, improved communication systems, greater access to information about different consumer goods through media, lack of rule of law, lack of initiative to prevent it by religious leaders, and moral erosion. Capitalizing on women's inferior position in a patriarchal society, these factors functioned and created an atmosphere that nurtured this misogynistic custom and operate in a violent way when necessary. At present among all the cases of gendered violence, the percentage of dowry related violence such as murders, burnt alive, strangulating, administering poison and beating is the highest. In this way the dowry issue became a stumbling block to women's autonomy.

Capitalist market economy resulted in accumulation of wealth among a group of people and incited a huge competition of material gain. Thus, many imported brand items and consumer products, such as 'Honda', refrigerator, television, etc and 'Phoenix' cycle for the low-income group, became the items of dowry. As learnt from the Moghia union, dowry was realized in many ways, such as starting a new business, medical expense and many other things since one respondent shares '*they express their demands using strategic language*'. In the face of deepening economic needs and crisis, increasing living expenses, desire of financial gain and luxury items seeing its use by the rich, rural male biased society make women the instrument to secure a comfortable financial base. For obvious reasons, dowry constantly ascertains bride's inferior position and dependency to husband and her in-laws. However, parents in the villages thought it would make daughters happy. Arguably, this system is one of the main causes of parents' son-preferring attitude, as daughters' cause a large expense for dowries while boys bring wealth to the family through it. Thus, daughters

are viewed as a huge economic liability. Therefore parents become more attentive in saving money for their daughters' dowries instead of preparing them to be independent (Kishwar, 1999). In addition, this system of dowry exacerbates the situation of early marriage as dowry for younger girls is comparatively less (Steps, 2012). Thus, dowry system creates an environment, as one respondent mentioned; *parents want to get rid of daughters even at the cost of dowry (Baba- Ma joutuk diye holeo meyetake chharate parle bache)*.

More importantly, as discussed in the previous chapter, the findings of this study show that dowry was not less for educated women because they require educated husband and educated men's dowry is higher. Hence, it can be argued that without containing the social problem of dowry, which effectively reinforces the process of women's dependency and inferiority, girls' education cannot be empowering.

11.6 Men's Disapproval of Women's Jobs

Male ego and his pride for being the sole breadwinner of the family, is hurt when a woman does a job outside home. Historically, gendered division of labor has assigned men to carry out all the tasks in the public sphere of the society and women, the private sphere within the home. Access to the public sphere ensures that men's sole access to knowledge, experience, livelihood, and thus have control over resources. Conversely, women have been denied any access to the outer world. They are expected to carry out the repetitive, monotonous household chores which do not have any economic value. This system dictates that women are 'unproductive' whereas men are productive as they carry out income-earning activities. This is one of the key logics presented to perpetuate patriarchy. When more women started to come out of the house to work and set examples for many other women, patriarchal ideologies are shaken. Since the patriarchal values are weakened, men impose restrictions on women's paid job outside home.

Gamburd shows in her study on Sri Lankan migrant housemaids who worked in the Middle East that Sri Lankan people like to see women stay at home and men earn a living (2002). In the Sri Lankan village of Naeaegama, 90% of the migrant workers were women and 70% of them were married or separated/divorced with children. All the husbands of the Middle Eastern migrants were termed as 'lazy spendthrifts' by the villagers even though more than half of the husbands were

employed. Here, the bread-winning role of the women migrant workers hurt the male ego of the villagers. The study also shows that the female migrant workers (housemaids) were humiliated by the Arab people who used to say, '*Sri Lankan men must be "donkeys" because they send their wives abroad*'. The phrase has at least two different implications- one is Sri Lankan men's incapability of being breadwinner, and another carries an overtone of sexual incapability.

Another important thing to note is that the harsh realities of life and desperate attempts to survive with children made poor uneducated women disregard the patriarchal code of conduct which negated women's role as breadwinner. As Hartmann and Boyce observes-

With less to lose, poor women are often more willing to break with tradition. Economic necessity forces poor, single women... to move beyond the village, and the resulting knowledge that they can operate without the protection of men gives them a strength which other women lack (1983:95).

11.7 Access to Resources

As discussed above, men are very reluctant to allow women to work outside home in fear of losing male privilege. However, deepening economic crisis and increasing living expenses threw the men at crossroads. As a solution, they (men) made a compromise. They allowed the women to work outside to increase the family income, but the salaries are taken and spent by the husbands. As Shondha Mondol, a service-holder, said-

Women are earning nowadays. Sometimes working women need fewer dowries. But in most cases, their salaries are taken by their husbands.

Even men admitted that women cannot spend their own salaries. Probir Halder, a respondent said- *In 99% cases, the salaries of working women are spent by their husbands.* Hence, it can be argued that, preservation of patriarchal ideologies is one of the main reasons for the disapproval of women's paid job. However, when men are compelled to allow their wives to work, they try to control the expenditure of their wives' incomes, thus maintaining their control over economic resources.

As discussed above, women's right to resources is in such a bad state that they are denied any kind of rights in this regard. According to Muslim law, a daughter receives half of the share a son gets from the property of their father. In the absence of a son, the son's share of the father's property is allotted to his male family members. To make matters worse, most women do not claim the meager inheritance allotted to them by law. There is a widespread culture that claiming their inheritance

would jeopardize the relationship with their brothers and make them lose all future support from them (Adnan, 1993; McCarthy, 1993; White, 1992; Hartmann & Boyce, 1983).

Women's rights organizations of the country have long been rightfully demanding that this discriminatory law of inheritance be abolished and replaced by one which ensures that women and men get equal share of inherited property. Nevertheless, discriminatory property laws remain unchanged. Although in many Muslim countries, including Tunisia, Morocco, Iraq and Iran, women are getting equal rights regarding property inheritance. The Ministry of Law is working to pass a law that only ensures that girls get equal inheritance in the absence of sons (Law Commission, 2013). It is necessary to make provisions that daughters also get equal inheritance in presence of sons too. Arguably, getting the half of what (in father's property) their brothers get symbolizes women's inferior position in the family and thus legitimizes women's subordination in the society. At the same time this discriminatory legal status act against CEDAW, the UN charter of protecting and promoting women's human rights under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Unfortunately, government of Bangladesh still has reservations on its most vital part, article 2³⁸ and 16.1 (c)³⁹ On the other hand, economic independence of women is largely dependent on their access to resources. If this access is curtailed in the name of Islamic rule of law, at a time when the country's legislative system mostly follow modernized, amended or original version of the British law, true development of women will become extremely hard. Hence, it can be argued that this discriminatory law of inheritance has a psycho-social and more importantly, economic impact on women.

To conclude, it can be argued in light of the above discussions in this chapter that a classic patriarchal society, like Bangladesh, which is characterized by a patrilocal residential system, coupled with the custom of dowry, purdah, violence against women, disapproval of women's work outside home and denied access to resources play a very negative role in establishing women's autonomy through education.

³⁸ It says, complete elimination of discrimination through all possible constitutional, legislative and legal provisions.

³⁹ It says, equal rights in marriage and its dissolution.

Chapter 12

Analysis of the Correlation between Girls' Education & Empowerment



In this chapter, we will discuss the relationship between girls' education and empowerment. In the preceding chapters, we analysed the different aspects of girls' education and its empowering impact. These chapters comprised discussions and analyses on four basic aspects of the impact of girls' education. These are: perception of education, ways in which educated girls are making use of their schooling, viewpoint of educated women, non-educated women, their parents, friends and neighbours regarding the utilization of education by taking jobs outside home, and socio-cultural factors that inhibit girls' education and empowerment. After acquiring an in-depth picture of the above mentioned aspects relating to women's empowerment in the preceding chapters, an analysis of the relationship between girls' education and empowerment will be the central focus of this chapter.

12.1 Reviewing the Concepts of Education and Girls' Education

Concepts of Education

Before presenting an analysis of women's empowerment with regard to their education, we need to shed light on the origin of the concept of education. Education was viewed largely as a precondition for development. At this stage, it is necessary to explain the meaning of this development. As discussed in chapter 4, the term 'development' started to be used after the Second World War, when the issue of the advancement of the underdeveloped countries came forward. Following western modernisation and development system was thought to be a solution of this problem (Merchand and Parpart, 1995). This system viewed education as an important investment to create efficient workforce and thus ensure national economic development (Heward and Bunwaree, 1999). In this way, with a view to making social change, education has become a tool to develop human resources. That is why the Human Capital Theory argues that education is a productive investment to bring about faster economic growth rather than something for individual consumption. Stressing the investment on human beings to develop human resources in order to bring about national development, education has been envisaged as a tool to produce a skilled and informed population (Townsend-Coles, 1969; Lowe, 1970). Thus, the policy of expansion of education in the developing world was incepted with an aim to accelerating the economic growth rather than viewing it as a basic human right.

Concepts of Girls' Education

In the western world, feminist concepts of girls' education originated from liberal feminism's institutional concept of WID. Various national, international and UN development agencies, especially World Bank, adopted policies according to WID to integrate women in the development process. To achieve this goal, different approaches such as welfare, equity, anti-poverty, efficiency and empowerment (Moser, 1993) have been adopted. But the problem of WID policies was that it gave greater importance to women's role in production rather than addressing their subordinate position in family and society. Girls' education was viewed as an instrument in lowering birth rate and child mortality and increasing family-income. In this way, WID policies instrumentalised women and overlooked the social structure of gender relations. Overcoming these limitations, Gender and Development (GAD) framework addressed gendered power relations and stressed the redistribution of power structure and education is considered a means to facilitate it. But the problem of this framework is western hegemony regarding women's development in the developing world. Despite the planning and implementation of such policies to promote girls' education, women's empowerment remained largely unrealized, as the education system did not address this issue from the beginning.

The Historical Legacy

As discussed in chapter 4, Wood's Education Despatch of 1854, suggested a need for girls' education with the idea that this would impart a stronger impulse to the education. However, in Colonial India, where education was a tool for producing some male servants for colonial administration, girls' education was viewed as a way to produce housewives able to cope with the industrializing society. This historical footprint was followed for quite a long even after the British left the subcontinent. Perhaps, this is why various studies show that in South Asia, education is perceived as having a different meaning from empowerment. As Kerkhoff shows, the primary purpose of girls' education in the Indian subcontinent is increasing family status (1998). And arguably, the societal perception has a considerable link with whether education will empower women. In such conditions, implementing of WID and GAD policies could do little to bring women's empowerment through education. This study also found that girls' education was viewed as a matter of great prestige, above everything else. Uneducated women regretted for not being educated because they did not receive this respect from the society. Hence, girls' education is still

largely regarded as a status symbol, rather than something which will help them step out of their subordinate position in society. Girls' education historically started in order to produce informed and capable housewives and perpetuate gendered division of labour and women's subordination. Still now, the main aim of girls' education has not changed much in terms of curriculum and teaching methodology. In addition to the aim described above, the issue of national development has been added. Therefore how far women's own cause are addressed, needs to be analysed since women's empowerment through education is a policy agenda of the country.

12.2 Level of Self-respect and Self-Confidence: Power from Within

Self-confidence is considered as the core of the empowerment process. A person's sense of ability and self respect is crucial to the empowerment process. As discussed in chapter 4, Kabeer and Rowlands (1994:245; 1997:13) showed different forms of power such as 'power over' (controlling), 'power to' (generative), 'power with' (collective) and 'power from within' (transforming consciousness).

The 'power over' form brings people into the decision-making process through political and economic participation. This form of power also helps to understand the dynamics of oppression. In 'power to' and 'power with' forms, empowerment promotes awareness about people's own interests so that they can take part in decision-making individually and collectively. Coming to the point of self-confidence, 'power from within' of the empowerment process is understanding of socially structured forms of oppression and a sense of being able to act against it. Hence, this gives people a sense of consciousness and self-confidence. This process also requires people to develop self-respect and acquire respect from others (Kabeer, 1994; Rowlands, 1997). In his theory of co-operative conflict, Amartya Sen called this consciousness 'perceived interest' and 'perceived contribution' which has a great role to empower women. These will be discussed in this chapter separately.

Table 12.1: Comparison of the level of self-confidence among educated and uneducated women

Variables	Educated women	Uneducated women
Thinks she can support herself if left alone ⁴⁰	24.5%	73.6%
Thinks men and women are equal	40.6%	37.4%
Thinks she can't support herself if left alone	75.5%	26.8%
Thinks men and women are not equal	59.4%	62.8%

As table 12.1 shows, appallingly, 75% of educated women did not think that they could support themselves if left alone, whereas, only 27% of uneducated women thought so. An overwhelming majority of uneducated women were seen to possess the confidence to declare that they would be able to support themselves if left alone. It may be mentioned here that almost half of the uneducated women were compelled to be engaged in paid jobs in the lower segment as they were either separated or deserted by their husbands, or inflicted with abject poverty. Practically, they were supporting not only themselves but their children as well. This income-earning role of uneducated women, defying social norms and customs, made them confident and aware of their ability. One uneducated respondent Julekha Begam thought-

All inhibition comes from within. You may take it seriously if you want, or may not. People will say many things, but they should not be given any importance. I am a woman, but I don't pay any heed to these things as I have to raise my children. (Badha shob nijer kase. Dhorle dhorle hobe, na dhorle na. Nanan jone nanan kotha bole kintu shay kothae kan deoa uchit na. Ami mohila manush, kintu ami amol dei na karon amar chhele-meye manush korte hobe.)

Thus, teachings from life experiences have made many uneducated women like her more confident about their abilities and priorities than an educated woman.

On the other hand, limited mobility of the educated upper class women curtailed their knowledge about the outside world. Thus, they had less access to information about the local livelihood pattern. Moreover, educated middle class women were found to have greater compliances with the male biased social norms which prevented them from acquiring self-confidence. Also, incidents of

⁴⁰ In response to this inquiry, many women did not give a clear yes/no answer. Some of them said 'if left alone, we will have no choice but to support ourselves.' Others were relatively silent regarding this.

separation or desertion are also less common among them. A large proportion of both the core respondents, irrespective of their level of education were thought that women are not equal to men.

Perhaps this value is acquired by the process of transmission of core values through the family. As Brodarick elaborates on the basics of Family Systems Theory, that it is an axiom that families are committed to passing on their core values to their next generation. Thus, patriarchal values are disseminated through generations (1993). Girls adopt the male biased ideas and actions of their mothers and other female kin. Regarding this, Brodarick comments-

Studies by sociologists on patterns of intergenerational transmission have found not all values and lifestyle components flow as freely through cross-sex as through same sex intergenerational linkages (1993).

Therefore, only education cannot wipe out the patriarchal mindset since informal teachings from family and society is more influential than the teachings imparted at school. Thus 'power from within'-entering into the process of empowerment through understanding of socially structured forms of disempowerment – was not found among the educated respondents in the villages of Moghia union. Hence, it can be argued from the data and facts obtained from Moghia union of Kochua Upazila that, education does not necessarily impart 'power from within'-the core of the empowerment process, since other factors which inhibit women's self-esteem are active in the society.

12.3 Role of Family and 'Gender and Co-operative Conflict'

In classic patriarchal societies like Bangladesh, family plays a central role in maintaining women's subordination and disempowerment. The villages of Moghia union were not found to be an exception in this matter. Numerous facts, data and their interpretation presented in the previous chapters show that the system prevailing within the family institution is the centre of rural women's lives. As discussed in chapter 4, Amartya Sen's theoretical framework on gender and co-operative conflict is an ideal one to analyse the situation of women's empowerment in rural Bangladesh (1987). This framework shows the way women's false perceptions form in male-dominated societies regarding their betterment and contribution to the household. These false perceptions justify their deprivation and perpetuate the structural inequalities. As Sen shows, 'co-operative conflict'- the simultaneous existence of co-operation and conflict which household members face at

the same time as they add to the total availabilities through co-operation and conversely, engage in conflict when dividing the total availabilities among the members of the household (1987). Social arrangement of the household has great importance in the conflict dynamics as the sexual division of labour is a part of it. Features of other social arrangements, such as who does what, who consumes what and who takes what decisions, are crucial to the co-operation and conflict of the household. These social arrangements are particularly important to unfold the deeply asymmetric sexual division of labour. As Sen shows, in the context of productive arrangement, the division between paid and unpaid work results in systematic biases in the perception of who is producing what and earning what. Undeniably, these biases play a central role in forming perceptions about the inferior economic position of women (1987). These social arrangements, which often tend to be considered as cultural features, were discussed in the previous chapters in detail. Conceivably, within the family co-operative's governing system, the above mentioned factors have a profound disempowering effect on rural women's lives in Bangladesh.

12.3.1 Women's Bargaining Position

As Sen observes, division of labour is a bargaining problem and forms a class of co-operative conflicts. Sharing the benefits of the family institution depends hugely on the process of bargaining. It is needless to mention that members with greater bargaining power acquire a larger share of family resources. Understandably, men in Bangladesh society have always enjoyed a privileged position regarding access to resources because of their stronger bargaining position in comparison to women. The findings of this study also reveal that women's position was far more vulnerable in terms of bargaining capabilities in the rural areas. These findings were discussed in the previous chapters. As discussed in the theoretical framework chapter, according to Sen, the determining factors of the bargaining power depend on three characteristics of the beginning parties: their well-being levels at break down position; perceived interest and; perceived contribution to household prosperity. At this stage, we shall focus on these three areas to assess the level of empowerment of SSC graduate women in Moghia union.

12.3.2 Women's Breakdown Position

The breakdown position refers to the capacity of someone to operate individually when a co-operative breaks down. It shows the relative strength/vulnerability of a person in the bargaining

process. If the breakdown position of a person weakens when the family co-operative breaks down, the bargaining position that person is weaker compared to others in the co-operatives. The findings of this study clearly show that the breakdown position of the wives were more vulnerable than their husbands in the family co-operatives in rural areas. Hence, wives fall into dire straits if the family breaks up.

In such insecure situations, the outcome of the bargaining process is less supportive of them. This was seen most clearly in cases of separated and deserted women in villages of Moghia union. Not only did these women have to cope with the financial hardship which results from the breakdown of the family co-operative, but also face countless forms of social humiliation such as threats of sexual violence, harassment for not having a male guardian, bullying in the public places, etc. However, hardly any of these women were formally divorced. Rather, they were deserted or separated due to their husbands' multiple marriages. Divorce is considered taboo in the rural areas and women themselves fear it greatly due to the social mistreatment it entails. In such conditions, rural women were found to be desperate to keep the family intact, even if it means putting up with physical and psychological torture.

In addition to this, as the findings of the study show, patrilocal residential system, problem of dowry, virtual detachment from their natal families at an early age, ill-health, frequent pregnancies, childcare, etc effectively lowers self-confidence of women. This lack of self-confidence further weakens their bargaining position. In villages of Moghia union, both educated and uneducated women were found to be entangled with this vicious cycle. However, a good number of uneducated working women acquired a sense of ability - power from within- through their life struggles. On the other hand, educated women's vulnerability was more covert than that of uneducated women. SSC level education could not protect them effectively from the above-mentioned socio-cultural features which deter them from acquiring a stronger bargaining power. Conversely, they were found to be more compliant with the socio-cultural values and norms.

12.3.3 Women's Perceived Interest

Perceived interest is another important factor which determines one's bargaining ability. The outcome of the bargaining process depends on how clearly a person perceives his/her own interest. If a person undermines their own wellbeing, they are likely to get a worse deal in the 'collusive solution' (Sen, 1987:24). As discussed in chapter 7, table 7.1 shows that highest number of both

educated and uneducated women of Moghia union perceived education as training for raising and educating children properly. Thus they sidestepped their own interests and focused on their children and family's wellbeing. Some even talked about development of the country through girls' education, but showed little concern about their own interest. Thus, women tended to merge their interest with that of the family and children. As a result, women lost the individual strength needed to survive alone. However, as table 7.1 shows, slightly higher number of uneducated women perceived education to realize their rights and own cause, thus disapproving the general notion of correlation between education and consciousness. Hence, women's lack of understanding of their own wellbeing and acceptance of structural inequalities reproduced their subordinate position in society. Moreover, classic patriarchal values do not allow women to understand their individual interests. Consequently, women become trapped in the cycle of disempowerment and subordination. Therefore, within such social realities, how far formal education- without addressing the gendered power relations and its effective transformation- will empower and liberate women remains to be considered.

12.3.4 Women's Perceived Contribution

Bargaining outcomes cannot be favourable for a person who bears the perception that he/she is not making substantial contribution to the overall wealth of the group (household). A combination of a range of activities, such as income-earning, producing or purchasing food materials and other goods, producing eatable food out of food materials, agricultural crop processing, etc, is necessary for household prosperity. Regrettably, the male-biased definition of productive and non-productive work, along with paid/unpaid division of labour makes women doubtful about their contribution to the family (Sen, 1987). As Sen shows, 'productive' activities are the result of a chain of other activities such as housework, food preparation from raw food, serving food to the 'producers', etc which are essential for the workers' survival, being capable to carry out outside-work. In addition, women also have to carry out reproductive responsibilities and childcare, thus producing and nurturing future workers. But activities carried out within the walls of the household that support workers are considered unproductive and remain unpaid. Hence, women themselves are unsure about their contribution to the production process. Thus, women lag behind in the bargaining process despite their substantial contribution to the household prosperity. The bellow table shows the level of perceived contribution among the educated and uneducated women in Moghia union.

Table 12.2 Comparison of the level of awareness about men women equality among educated and non educated women

Statements	% of Educated women				% of Non-educated women			
	SA*	A*	D*	SD*	SA*	A*	D*	SD*
Wives work no less hard for the family than husbands	70%	30%	-	-	52.9%	47.1%	-	-
Husbands contribute more to the family	-	20.0	40.0	40.0	5.56	22.0	44.6	27.7
Unequal access to decision making in the family is fair	-	-	60.0	40.0	5.26	5.26	57.8	31.5
Unequal access to education in the family is fair	-	-	70.0	30.0	5.26	21.0	47.3	26.3
Unequal access to healthcare in the family is fair	-	70.0	30.0	-	10.5	52.6	36.8	26.3

*SA- strongly agree *A-agree *D-disagree *SD-strongly disagree

As table 12.2 shows, although at first most of the core respondents agree that wives work no less hard for the family than husbands, but when their opinions were cross-checked by the second question, a significant portion of them thought that husbands contribute more to the family than wives. The women in Moghia union did not seem to perceive their own contribution to the household prosperity to be significant or equal to the husbands. It was seen that they gave more value to paid work and monetary income. A significant number of uneducated women said that if they were educated, they could have helped their husbands by doing a job and contributing to the family-income. It appeared that they did not think that they had participated in the chain of activities that made the 'productive' and paid job possible. However, educated women had a better perception of their own contribution to the family than uneducated women. Surprisingly, while majority of the core respondents⁴¹ did not agree with unequal access to family decision-making, most of them had no problem with unequal access to healthcare. This can be explained by the fact that women have very low awareness about their own interest and have internalized the idea that they deserve less opportunities, care and healthcare than men.

⁴¹ As mentioned in chapter 5, core respondents refer to educated women and uneducated women.

Educated women appeared to have a stronger interest in education and could not approve of unequal access to education, whereas uneducated women seemed to accept this discrimination. However, changing social patterns had compelled them to encounter various practical problems due to their unequal access to decision-making. On the other hand, unequal access to healthcare did not cause any immediate practical problems for them in addition to their generational habit of undermining their own health and interests. As a result, they ignored the issue of healthcare. Although educated women showed better understanding about women's perceived contribution but women's overall perceived contribution was much lower than their actual contribution. In such situation, most of them could not make favourable outcome in the bargaining process in the family. As a result, they fell in a helpless situation when conflict occurred and the family co-operative broke down.

It can be argued from the above discussion about Sen's three determinants⁴² of bargaining power that women in the Moghia union were lagging behind in the bargaining process since the lion's share of co-operative outcomes went to men for their stronger position in all the three indicators of relative bargaining power. However, educated women showed slightly better position than uneducated women in terms of understanding their contribution. But since the bargaining process entails a range of activities and social arrangements, including division of labour, it appeared hard to transform women's weak position into a stronger one by education alone. Arguably, stronger breakdown position is a prerequisite to empower women by claiming a fair share in the bargaining deal.

At this stage, having analysed the situation of women in Moghia, in light of Sen's theorisation on gender and co-operative conflict and Kabeer & Rowlands' empowerment model, we will focus on the United Nation's index of Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) to re-evaluate the situation of women in Moghia. As we know, the GEM index measures gender inequality in three basic dimensions of empowerment-- economic participation, decision-making, political participation and power over economic resources. This index is used by the UNDP to determine the level of gender inequality of its member countries. The situation of women in Moghia is discussed below using the three dimensions of GEM.

⁴² Breakdown position, perceived interest and perceived contribution

12.4 State of Economic Participation

Due to its significance in assessing empowerment, the situation of women's economic participation was discussed, and the findings related to it presented in a separate chapter (chapter 8). As discussed in chapter 8, women's participation in paid work is one of the main indicators of the level of their autonomy and empowerment. Various studies show that greater economic participation strengthens women's bargaining power enhances their status within the family (Sen, 1987; Adnan, 1993; Kibria 2002; Sultan, 2010).

In the social context of Bangladesh women are perceived as economic liabilities and their economic status is dependent on men due to the problematic definition of productive and unproductive labour⁴³. Women in Moghia union were no exception in this regard. As their work within the household is unpaid and has no immediate economic gain, their labour is considered unproductive. Besides this problem of perception, another important aspect is women's participation in wage employment. As Table 8.3 shows only 13% of educated women in Moghia were engaged in wage employment. Majority of these employed women were teachers of primary school. Indicating their relative advancement, a significant number of these female teachers were Hindu. On the other hand, almost 3 times this number of uneducated women was engaged in paid job, although in the lower segments.

There is a perception that education can change the life of girls and women by opening up employment opportunities (World Bank, 1996) and thus, make them able to take part in decision-making and hence, achieve greater control over their lives (Watkins, 2000; Amin, 1996:186). But it is very important to note that unless it is included in the policy, girls' education cannot automatically open up employment opportunities, as was seen in Moghia union. This study found that job opportunities for educated women in Moghia union were extremely limited. Only a few posts as school teachers were available there. Besides this, a few educated women worked as home tutors, and in rare cases, NGO workers.

Some attempts of microcredit through groups (samity) and cottage industries to promote income-generating activities for uneducated women were met with limited success due to women's restricted mobility, to the business places, particularly markets and more importantly, lack of

⁴³ This is discussed above in 'Perceived Contribution' part of this chapter.

information⁴⁴. Thus the findings of this study – most of the employed women were engaged in lower segment jobs that do not require any educational qualification. Various other studies also found that job opportunities for low-skilled women are higher in lower segment jobs (Otani,2000; Mahmud, 2003).

Apart from the limited job market in rural areas, other factors that inhibit women's employment are objection from parents-in-law and husbands, childcare and negative social attitudes. Among all these inhibiting factors, educated women emphasized childcare and family maintenance, whereas majority of uneducated women stressed negative social attitude and abuse. However, deepening economic crisis forced many conservative families to reconsider their stance regarding women's paid job outside home. One male respondent, shared-

Some days ago I went to see a prospective-bride who is working in a school and has DPS⁴⁵ of Tk50,000. I personally felt interested in her for my brother.

Another important aspect of women's economic participation is the fact that the salaries of majority of educated women were taken away by their husbands. Thus it can be argued that without transforming gendered power structure and patriarchal mindset, women's employment will not empower women.

Thus, it can be seen from the discussion above, the first indicator of GEM, i.e., women's economic participation, was not commensurate with girls' education in Moghia union.

12.5 Level of Participation in Decision-Making

As discussed elaborately in chapter 9, patriarchal values are so deeply engraved in the social psyche that even women think that they are not able to take decisions by themselves and regard it as a male domain. This subordinate position, regarding decision-making, takes root from an early stage in women's lives. Almost all the decisions regarding them are taken by their fathers (or older brothers if father is absent) before marriage, and by husbands and in-laws after marriage.

12.5.1 Control over the Body

As a result of the widespread socio-familial norms and practices of male chauvinism, women in Bangladesh have hardly any control over their bodies, which cause tremendous psycho-physical sufferings for them. Decisions relating to women's mobility, marriage and motherhood, taking a job

⁴⁴ Some respondents mentioned that they lost their money when investing in 'samity' for being uneducated.

⁴⁵ Deposit Pension Scheme

and bodily security are taken by men. This study reveals that women in Moghia union had little say in matters relating to their marriage, maternal health, reproduction, employment, mobility and bodily security. Wife-beating was a pervasive phenomenon in the union. 52% of educated women and 78% of uneducated women reported to have been beaten by their husbands. Education could not save them from physical assault of husbands who have a much stronger breakdown position than their wives.

It is interesting to note that the same patriarchal values that condone violence against women at home also prompt men to protect them when they are outside. Insecurity in the public places also keeps women from stepping outside the household without a male companion. It may be mentioned here that this phenomenon occurs as a result of the male perception of women as a sex object. Studies on masculinity⁴⁶ also show that sometimes sexual advancement is synonymous with masculine power.

12.5.2 Freedom of Mobility

Freedom of mobility is one of the prime indicators of women's autonomy. Although, decisions about freedom of movement are vital to develop a self-identity towards empowerment, findings of the study related to decisions on their own mobility were rather frustrating. In societies like Bangladesh, women's freedom of mobility is highly controlled and restricted. In rural Bangladesh women's mobility is limited within the extended kin-based homestead. This restriction limits their ability to move outside without a male guardian and substantially curtails their ability to deal with matters related to the outside world. Limited mobility is also the cause of women's meagre knowledge about the social world outside the household. In a patriarchal society women are not expected either to become independent. Instead they are required to stay under male guardianship at all stages of life (Adnan, 1993). Various studies show that due to their limited scope of mobility, rural women tend to rely on men to conduct market transactions (Ackerly, 1997:144; Osmani, 1998:82) when they engage in activities such as microcredit. Rural women's lack of confidence regarding financial matters also come from social constraints on their mobility and access in the market.

⁴⁶ Discussed in chapter 4

Table 12.3 Comparison of the level of freedom of mobility and between educated and non educated women

Variables	Educated women	Uneducated women
Have freedom of mobility	29.5%	58.8%
Do not have freedom of mobility	54.6%	23.5%
Can go outside informing husbands	15.2%	17.6%

The table above shows that only 29.5% of educated women enjoyed freedom of mobility, which means that a vast majority of them (70%) did not have that freedom. The effect of this lack of freedom was also reflected in table 7.5, where approximately 7.3% of the educated women perceived education as a way to achieve freedom of movement. This also reveals how much they yearn to be free, at least to move. On the other hand, majority of the uneducated women were in a better position in this regard. Almost 60% of them had the freedom to move freely. One of them described her freedom thus-

I move by my own will. But my familial responsibilities prevent me from taking pleasure trips. I have to take care of the livestock and buy the groceries. I go to the house next-door to watch TV. We have a CD at home but don't have a TV. (Nijer ichchhae choli,kintu berate jawar upae nei. Chhagol-Goru egula nie jhamela,tai jawai hoyna. Shodai aana lage. Pasher bari jai. Ghare CD ase, TV nai,tai TV dekhte jai.)

Maybe she did not have many opportunities to move due to her responsibility of looking after livestock. But she was the decision-maker of her own movement. Another thing to note is her non-compliance with the socially accepted feminine code of conduct that dictates that men are the ones who should go to the marketplace, not women. Therefore it can be argued that despite their education, class differentiation may curtail women's freedom of mobility and result in decreased autonomy.

12.5.3 Women's Individual Freedom and Role of Marriage System

In Moghia union where only 30% educated women enjoyed freedom of mobility and 70% did not have any freedom to move, it was not surprising that only 35% of women have individual freedom. The table below shows a clear picture of the attitudinal aspects of both men and women respondents

regarding women's individual freedom. It is important to note that the system of marriage and patrilocal residential arrangement have an impact on women's individual freedom. Reflecting strong patriarchal values, 33% of fathers and 43% of the husbands thought that women do not need individual freedom.

Table 12.4: Broad categories of opinions relating to women's individual freedom⁴⁷ among core and sub groups of respondents

Categories	% EW	%UW	% Mothers	%Fathers	%Husbands
1.Women should have freedom	17.6	52.6	55.5	50	28.6
2.Educated women enjoy more freedom	11.8	5.3			
3.Women enjoy freedom less	11.8				
4. Women don't have freedom	35.3	21.1			
5.Women enjoy some individual freedom	11.8				
6.Women enjoy freedom	5.9	5.3	22.2		
7.Freedom is curbed after marriage	5.9				
8. Women don't need freedom		15.8	11.1	33.3	42.9
9.Women enjoy freedom at parents home, not at in-laws home			11.1	16.6	28.6

Educated Khadiza Khatun pointed out the problem of male-biased mindset-

To realize one's own right and to live with respect, individual freedom is necessary. But still, woman can't enjoy that. What is needed is a change in mentality.

But this is still the social reality and how education alone can change this mentality remains to be seen. Although Shukla Kundu, another educated girl, thought that education and employment increases a women's individual freedom, at least when it came to choosing a husband, she had to admit that in the end a girl cannot enjoy as much individual freedom as a man. Another important aspect was pointed out by many of the respondents is that freedom was curbed substantially after marriage. Even husbands of respondents admitted that girls' enjoy more freedom at their fathers'

⁴⁷ As the question was an open ended one, opinions relating to individual freedom came cautiously without blaming married life openly although 6% women mentioned it directly. Others mentioned it indirectly using the terms of category 3, 4 and 1

home. Thus, it can be said that some male -bias socio-cultural norms and practices is so strong that education could not help the women in Moghia to achieve individual freedom.

Hence, girls' improved access to education could not transform their feeble voice into a stronger and more effective one regarding decision-making.

12.6 Political Participation

Political participation is another vitally important indicator of women's empowerment. UNDP recognises the significance of political participation and put 'proportion of seats held by women in national parliament' as one of its quantifiable indicators of MDG goal no.3- 'promote gender equality and empower women' (UNDP, 2007). Frustratingly, in spite of women being heads of the two main political parties and Prime Ministers, women's participation in politics is still extremely weak. Jayaweera shows that despite decreasing gender gaps in education in South Asia, political participation in the region is not commensurate with it (1997).

Reflecting the impact of provision of 3 reserved seats in the Union Parishad membership out of 12, there was an increase in the total number of women members throughout Bangladesh (MOP, 2000). Studies show that women members are often marginalized by their male colleagues. Their political participation was more ornamental than effective. In Moghia union, at the time of field survey, women held no other political post other than that of UP members. Women members were found to be more active and vocal within a group of women. However, when they were among men, their voice appeared to become weaker.

Thus, empowerment of women through political participation will not be successful without extensive change in mindset and redistribution of the power structure.

12.7 Power over Economic Resources

Access to resources is another important indicator of the level of women's empowerment.

However, women's overall access to resources in Bangladesh was very poor. One of the main reasons for this is the unequal inheritance law, which was formulated in accordance with the Muslim Law of Inheritance. According to this law, daughters get half the share her brother gets from the property of her father. This law both reflects and fosters male-biased mindset in the society. To make matters worse, most rural women do not even claim the property that is allotted to them by law. In accordance with this national picture, women in the villages of Moghia union were found to have hardly any access to the property they inherited from their fathers. None of them

claimed any share of their inherited property because they thought it would hamper their relation with their brothers, whose support is very important in the absence of their husbands and parents. However, some women mentioned that there was very little property in their ancestral home where brothers were supposed to reside.

Apart from land property, 40% of educated and 10% of uneducated women owned gold jewelry of varying amounts. Reflecting women's lack of understanding about their own interest, most of them mentioned that these assets would be used by their husbands during times of financial hardship. Moreover, in the cases of educated women engaged in paid job, their salaries were taken away and spent by their husbands. On the other hand, breadwinner women of the women headed household established power over economic resources. Thus, it can be inferred from the above discussion that education and even employment cannot ensure women's power over economic resources.

Therefore, it can be argued that in each of the four above discussed indicators of UN Gender Empowerment Measure i.e. economic participation, level of participation in decision-making, political participation, power over economic resources-educated women in Moghia union were lag behind. Thus, there was no necessary relationship between girls' education and empowerment found in Moghia union.

Chapter 13 Conclusion



In the context of significant increase in girls' secondary education in Bangladesh, this study aimed to explore the impact of secondary level schooling on women's lives and their level of empowerment in rural areas. Although policy objectives of the government and international organisations, such as FYPs and MDG's includes women's empowerment as one major goal, researches on girls' education were found to be mostly focused on measuring quantitative achievements. As assessing the impact of girls' education qualitatively is more important, this study examined the process of empowerment in the lives of rural women who completed SSC level education. The study focuses on Moghia union of Kochua upazilla of Bagerhat district in the southern region of Bangladesh.

In accordance with the main purpose of the study research questions were formed based on issues such as the perceived meaning of education; utilisation of education through employment; participation in decision-making; and influence of socio-cultural factors relating to women empowerment. These issues are the indicators used by the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) index of UNDP. This study examined the process of empowerment of educated women using a set of theoretical framework with special emphasis on Amartya Sen's theory of gender and Co-operative Conflict (1987) and Empowerment theory of Kabeer and Rowland's (1993;1997). The empowerment level of educated women has been assessed using Sen's theorization on co-operative conflict relating to gender and its three indicators of relative bargaining power i.e., breakdown position, perceived interest and perceived contribution.

Perceptual Aspect

In British India girls' education was taken as a way to produce informed housewives capable of adjusting with the industrializing society. This historical trail has been followed for a long time after the independence of India. Thus, women's education historically upheld the middle-class values and limited social participation commensurate with their husbands' status. As a result of this, the perception of education in South Asia has always been different from empowerment. Various studies reveal that enhancing family status is regarded as the most important reason for educating girls. Needless to say, the societal perception is inextricably linked with the level of empowerment women may achieve through education. In the late 20th and early 21st centuries- due to the influence of various women's and development conferences such as EFA, MDGs- new ideas and approaches

of women's development including empowerment, advocated by different foreign donor agencies, was introduced in the country. These approaches originated from WID and focused on women's role in production rather than addressing the cause of women's subordination. Women's empowerment, as an aspect of social relationships, primarily means taking control over their own lives, identifying and understanding gender discrimination and acquiring the ability to change events in favour of them. Arguably, this process of empowerment which requires a change in the patriarchal structure of power relations for a transformation of women's subordinate position is largely unaddressed in these programs, including girls' education.

Furthermore, beyond these micro-social contexts, mighty supranational institutes like the World Bank tends to view girls' education as a means to higher economic growth and population control (WB, 2001) instead of valuing it as a cause of women's empowerment (Jeffery and Jeffery 1998). Within such a reality, how far women's empowerment, which requires uprooting of age old patriarchal cultural practices, social norms and stagnant orthodoxy, can be achievable using only education is a question of great importance.

Consequently, girls' education in rural areas was able to do little to transform this socio-familial process of women's disempowerment. Although educated women gained social prestige, education often tended to reinforce women's reproductive roles, which is reflected in the fact that majority of women perceived education as a training for an informed motherhood. Hence, educated middle-class rural women were found to have greater conformity with the male-biased social norms and were seen to lack self-confidence and a positive self-image, one of the main parameters of empowerment. These classic patriarchal values do not allow women to understand their individual interests, which in turn cause them to become trapped in the cycle of disempowerment and subordination.

Making the bargaining outcome favourable is crucial for the empowerment and autonomy of a person. This depends largely on the person's awareness about their contribution to the group (i.e. the household). Despite making significant contributions to the family by carrying out a chain of activities within the household which are essential for the 'workers', male-biased definitions of productive labour make women unsure about their contribution to the household and family economy. Thus not having a clear idea about their actual contribution results in women falling behind men in the bargaining process and make them unable to construct a favourable bargaining

outcome for themselves. As a result of this distorted idea of their contribution, wellbeing and ability, most of the respondents from both the core groups thought that women were not equal to men. In addition, 75% of the educated respondents in this study did not think they could support themselves if left alone. These structural patriarchal values are disseminated through the family, especially from the parent of the same sex. Thus girls adopt and emulate the male-biased ideas and actions of their mothers and other female kin from early childhood. Thus, it appears that adverse socio-economic conditions appear to inhibit women's 'power from within' –consciousness about their strength and self-confidence. Similar to the findings of other studies this study finds that even educated women lack self-confidence and are unaware of socio-political concerns (Huq, 1992:51; Jawayeera, 1997). However, girls' education provided them with some social dignity and limited participation in family-decision making.

Employment Factor

During the last three decades, the features of the country's economy have changed significantly. This paradigm shift toward privatization and trade liberalisation policies have an impact on a sharp increase in women's formal labour force participation. The increasing trend of women's paid employment can be explained by certain patterns of the sectors where women constitute a higher proportion in wage employment. During the second decade of independence, employment opportunities flourished in the market-based industrial sectors by the influence of the liberal market economy and capitalist development process. The main employers of the female workforce in the industrial sector are the garments industries. These export-oriented manufacturing sectors needed cheap labour force, and in response to this demand, women from the poorest economic class have been supplying labour even more cheaply than the men of the same economic class.

Three important aspects of the women's wage employment are as follows. Firstly, women whose cheap labour made the rapid growth of the exports industries possible have little or no education; secondly, women have higher rates of employment in the urban areas than in rural areas; and finally, they are mostly engaged in the lower segment jobs. The findings of this study show that girls' education did not ensure their entry into the labour market in the rural areas due to the sheer dearth of job opportunities suitable for middle-class educated women. Only 13% of educated women in Moghia were found to be engaged in wage employment, majority of whom were teachers of primary schools. On the other hand, almost three times this number of uneducated women were

engaged in paid jobs in the lower segments. Thus it can be inferred that girls' education has little to do with labour market participation because of the employment patterns. These patterns give the female workers entry into the lower segments of the labour market, such as garments workers or as day labourers in the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors, without any education.

There are socio-familial barriers to getting a job outside the home because of the gendered division of labour and the mindset of viewing males as the main breadwinners. On the other hand, deepening economic crisis compelled the other family members to become flexible regarding women's paid jobs outside the home. Conversely, breaking social barriers in the face of grinding poverty, a significant number of uneducated women were found engaged in lower segment jobs and enjoyed greater freedom of mobility. Hence, economic independence, which is the most fundamental step towards empowerment, was found to have a weak link with girls' education in rural areas.

Decision-Making Role and political participation

In classic patriarchal societies like Bangladesh, family plays a central role in perpetuating women's subordination. This subordination is so rooted in the familial- social norms that women internalize their innate inferiority. It is needless to say that family power relation has a huge impact on women's empowerment and the equilibrium of power relation can be maintained by active participation in the decision making process. Frustratingly, women in Bangladesh, particularly in rural areas, are considered mostly as dependants and incapable to take decisions relating to their lives or the family and thus required to remain under the safe shelter of male guardianship. Hence, the findings of the study show, rural women have little say in decision making about themselves in areas such as, marriage, reproduction, employment or freedom of mobility, much less about other matters.

Thus, one of the fundamental indicators of women's empowerment- their control over body and bodily security was found in a jeopardy state, as 52% of educated women in the field area were exposed to physical violence by their husbands regularly. Hence, men's traditional attitudes towards women remain almost unchanged and girls' education fails to save them from being exposed to physical mental torture by intimate relationships. It is needless to mention that this physical violence has a profound negative impact on girls/women's mental strength and self confidence, the core of the empowerment process. However, the number of uneducated women who claimed to

have been beaten by their husbands was 30% more than that of educated middle class women. Not surprisingly, almost 80% educated women in Moghia union did not have equal participation in the family decision making process and believed that the 'korta' is the right person to take all sort of decisions.

It is obvious that two main components of women's empowerment, economic and political participation are very poor among rural women. Understandably, girls' education without ensuring employment or political participation cannot create an environment where women can participate in decision-making. Reflecting women's traditional subordination, women UP members were found to be more vocal in expressing their opinions within a group of women than in a group of men. On the other hand, poorer women in the rural society break traditional norms and raise their voices to ensure their survival. Thus, reduced gender gap in education is not commensurate with women's voice in the decision-making

Socio-cultural Inhibitions and Informal Learning

Patriarchal social arrangements such as the gendered division of labor, the division between paid and unpaid work and production system result in systematic biases in favour of men which drastically weaken women's bargaining position. In all the three characteristics of the bargaining parties which determine the relative bargaining power, i.e., wellbeing levels at breakdown position, perceived interest and perceived contribution, women fall behind men substantially. This weak bargaining position bars them from getting the benefits of the family co-operative and has a profound disempowering effect on the rural women's lives in Bangladesh.

It is undeniable that the informal teachings of socio-cultural ideologies have a huge role in maintaining women's subjugation. Cultural-traditional norms and practices such as patrilocal residential system, early marriage, dowry, purdah- which preserve men's supremacy and women's subordination- is strongly active in the rural areas. Virtual detachment from their natal families at an early age, ill-health, frequent pregnancies, childcare, etc severely lowers self-confidence of women. This lack of self-confidence further weakens their bargaining position. In villages of Moghia union, both educated and uneducated women were found to be entangled in this vicious cycle. However, a good number of uneducated working women acquired a sense of ability - power from within- through their life struggles.

Another important factor in women's empowerment is their access to resources. Appallingly, the women in rural Bangladesh have very little access to resources. Women's unequal legal share in inheritance and the culture of not even claiming that asymmetrical share of fathers' property hinder their access to resources. Women do not claim their lawful share of their fathers' property in fear of hampering the relationship with brothers whose support is crucial in fall back situations. In addition to their socio-legal backwardness in terms of access to resources, their perceived interest in this regard was found to be unclear. Although many women thought that having some resources is necessary, their main concern was supporting their husbands and families in financial crises, not enhancing their financial capability. Male power over women is so pervasive that even working educated women had almost no right over their own income as in most cases their salaries were taken away by their husbands. Thus it can be argued although educated women's employment is a vital step towards ensuring women's autonomy, without transforming the gendered power structure and patriarchal mindset, even employment after education cannot empower women.

Defying the legal provisions such as the Dowry Prohibition Act, Prevention of Women and Children Repression Act, etc, dowry continues to be a significant hindrance to women's empowerment in Bangladesh. Disregarding religious customs relating to Muslim marriage and law of the country, an overwhelming majority of men continue to realize dowry from the bride's family in the rural areas. Lack of rule of law, unemployment, poverty, capitalist economic culture, and above all, male supremacist mindset aggravated this social disease. Capitalist market economy resulted in accumulation of wealth within a group of people and incited a huge competition for material gain. Men tried to get ahead in this competition by capitalizing on women's inferior position and extorted dowry, in a violent way if necessary. Not surprisingly, most of the cases of violence against women occur due to failure to provide the required dowry. Education did almost nothing to protect women from this social curse. As a matter of fact, in many cases the dowry demand from educated girls was higher because they needed to marry educated men whose dowry demand was higher.

Hence, the deeply rooted social mindsets about masculinity and femininity hinder the process of individual and relational empowerment for women. In order to achieve a gender-balanced society redistribution of power within family and society is necessary. This structural change of power relations requires progression from 'power over' (controlling) to 'power to' (generative). Arguably, this needs the willingness to redistribute the power by those who hold it. Thus, it can be argued that

boys and men need to be aware of the socially-constructed forms of gender relations and have analytical skills to explain all their dimensions in order to empower women.

To conclude, girls' education that can strengthen women's bargaining power, act against exploitative gendered relations and empower them need to be well-designed, incorporating gender perspectives in every stages of the entire teaching methodology. Not only is this largely absent in the present education system, informal teachings which support gender discrimination are very active in the society. Lack of gender sensitivity in the curriculum, lack of teachers' training and linked social awareness programmes can be identified as some of the main obstacles to raising gender consciousness among men and women. In addition, poverty derived from an exploitative capitalist economic system, corruption which hinders the rule of law, disrespect for law (in the case of dowry demand) and lack of employment opportunities for educated women in rural areas further exacerbate the already abysmal situation of women. If women's empowerment is to be ensured through girls' education, it is essential to take necessary actions to uproot the orthodox patriarchal values, misogynistic norms and the socially constructed forms of discriminatory gender relations in addition to formulating a well-designed education system.

Recommendations

1. The state authority needs to review the quantitative success achieved by the educational expansion initiatives for girls such as Nationwide Female Stipend Programs by carrying out in-depth qualitative research to understand the real situation in the rural areas, identify the gaps between girls' schooling and empowerment and take up appropriate actions to bridge these gaps.
2. National Curriculum and Textbook Board should design and incorporate a gender-sensitive curriculum and teaching methodology in order to empower women through education. Training of school-teachers and education officials on gender equality is also imperative to design an education system that will help women to be empowered. The process of education must focus on transforming girls and women's subordinate position in society helping them achieve autonomy.

3. Representatives of the local government, from Union Parishad to the district level administration; including Chairmen, members and government officials at all levels should be trained on gender issues and given the responsibility to make the people at the grassroots level aware of the socially constructed forms of gender discrimination. Strengthening community groups to disseminate the ethos of gender equality is also essential.
4. Steps should to be taken to eliminate discriminatory laws such as the inheritance law which legitimize women's subordination in the society, and replace them with laws that ensure equal legal status for both men and women. Steps should be taken to ensure the enforcement of existing laws designed to protect women from repression and ensure their rights. Strict measures should be taken to contain corruption which hinders the enforcement of the laws designed to prevent discrimination against women.
5. The government, in collaboration with social and cultural organizations, NGOs and the media, should initiate a social movement against all forms of discrimination and violence against women in order to uproot the age-old mindset of male supremacy. The most important issues this movement needs to address are the system of dowry, early marriage, *fatwas*, and violence against women.
6. Technical-vocational education should be introduced for rural girls appropriate for the locality so that they can be employed after completing SSC level education. Creating diversified job opportunities for girls and women, other than in lower segments, in the rural areas is also crucial to ensure women's empowerment through education.
7. The economic development planning should be focused on the peripheral rural poor people, particularly poor women, to prevent the feminization of poverty which make women doubly vulnerable and obstruct their right to education. Hence, an egalitarian economic system is required to establish social justice instead of an exploitative capitalist system.

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ANNEXURE A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Section A

1. Name
2. Age
3. Marital Status
4. Husband's/Father's Occupation
5. Approximate family income
6. Husband's/Father's Education
7. No of Children (if any)
8. Family Type (Parental/Nuclear/ Husband's Extended Family)
9. SSC pass year
10. No. of Family Members/ Type of Relationship with other members

Section B

1. What do you think about girls' education? What it is meant to you? What motivated you to study up to the SSC level?
2. What did your parents think about your schooling? What was your neighbours' view about your schooling?
3. What is the social attitude towards educated women? Does the society encourage girls schooling? Do educated girls/women receive more social prestige?
4. Do you think educated women should be involved in income-generating activities outside home? Does education help women to be an earning member of the family?
5. Are there any familial or social barriers for women to do jobs outside home? If there are any, please give details of the type of barriers.
6. Does the culture encourage or discourage women's income earning role? Please give details in favour of your opinion.
7. Do you do any paid job outside home? If not, did you want to? If wanted, what was the reason for not doing? If you do, what type of job you do?
8. Do you think women should have personal properties? Do you have any personal assets other than husband's or family property?
9. Do you think educated women have better chance to influence family decisions?

10. What are your personal experiences about participating family decision-making? Could you be able to share decisions about conception and family expenditure heads in past? Is there any other family decision you have influenced in recent time?
11. Can you go outside home by your free will? If not, what is the reason for it?
12. Does the dowry demand is less for educated girls? Did your parents had to pay?
13. Do educated women need less *purda*? Please give your personal experiences.
14. Do uneducated women have to maintain *purda* equally as educated women?
15. What is your overall view about your life, family, education and other things relating to your freedom? What things you find in favour of you and what not?

Graphics Rating Box

Sl. No		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	Wives work no less hard for the family than husbands				
2.	Husbands contribute more to the family				
3.	Unequal access to food in the family is fair				
4.	Unequal access to education in the family is fair				
5.	Unequal access to healthcare in the family is fair				
6.	Unequal access to decision-making in the family is fair				

Level of Confidence, Attitudes and Opinion Questionnaire

Sl	Interview Questions	Yes	No	Ambivalent
1	Do you think you can support yourself fully if left alone?			
2	Do you think men and women are equal?			
3	Can you move freely outside home?			
4	Do you own any assets (land, non-land)?			
5	Did you/ will you have to give dowry for your marriage?			
6	Have you ever been assaulted physically by your husband or in-laws?			
7	Have you ever heard of others being assaulted?			
8	If yes, please give percentage			

ANNEXURE B: FIELDWORK SCHEDULE

Phase One -Duration 1 week

Date	From	To	Purpose
02.01.2007	Dhaka	Bagerhat	Visiting and Selection of the Field Area
03.01.2007	Bagerhat	Kochua	Meeting with Local People in K C G K govt. Primary School
04.01.2007	Bagerhat	Moghia Union	Pilot Survey, Visiting Villages and getting an overview of the Area
05.01.2007	Bagerhat	District Education Office	Reviewing Educational Data and Information and collecting relevant documents
06.01.2007	Bagerhat	Kochua Upazilla Education Office	Reviewing and Sharing of Necessary Information and Documents

Phase Two-Duration 1 week

Date	From	To	Purpose
15.12.2008	Dhaka	Bagerhat	Selection and appointing Research Associates for Field Survey
16.12.2008	Bagerhat	Kochua	Orientation of RA Team about the study
17.12.2008	Bagerhat	Kochua	Orientation of RA Team about the study
18.12.2008	Bagerhat	Kochua	Orientation of RA Team about the study
19.12.2008	Bagerhat	Moghia union	Sample Interview and Questionnaire Administration

Phase Three-Duration 3 week

Date	From	To	Purpose
15.06.2009	Dhaka	Bagerhat	Starting of Data Collection
16.06.2009-01.08.2009	Bagerhat	Villages of Moghia union	Data Collection through In depth Interviews and Questionnaire administration
02.08.2009	Bagerhat		RA Team Meeting and Sharing & reviewing of data collection experiences

Phase Four Duration 14 week

Date	From	To	Purpose
01.10.2009	Dhaka	Khulna	Data Collection through Focused Group Discussions, In depth Interviews, Questionnaire & Graphic Rating Scale
02.10.2009	Khulna	Bagerhat, Kochua	Data Collection
03.10.2009-11.10.2009	Bagerhat	Kochua	Continuation of Data Collection
15.11.2009-25.11.2009	Bagerhat	Kochua	Continuation of Data Collection
03.12.2009-14.12.2009	Bagerhat	Kochua	Continuation of Data Collection
02.01.2010-26.02.2010	Bagerhat	Kochua	Continuation of Data Collection
Completion of Data Collection and Field Survey			

ANNEXURE C: PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE FIELD AREA



