

# The Empowerment of Women: They are coming anyway

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## *Abstract*

*Women as a category are defined under the umbrella of patriarchal values. They are always considered as subordinated, inferior and dependent on men. Their status is always measured in relation to their fathers, husbands or their sons. These were fixed, rigid, determined, and remained unchanged for quite a long time. They are still experiencing discriminatory law, policy, and employment practices. But they are coming out of their traditional boundary anyway. Women are empowered economically but not socially. Social empowerment is more important than economic empowerment. Why this is so? Answering this question needs a critical examination of the prevalent circumstances that force women to lead a passive life with reference to their marginalization of employment, their health burden, forms of violence conducted against them, and also power relations that exist around them.*

## **Introduction**

Theoretically, women as a category are defined under the umbrella of patriarchal values. Their knowledge and lives are always driven by moral and intellectual commitment to social justices (Safarik, 2002). This does come with a cost. They create a delimited boundary around them which portrays them as daughters, wives, and mothers. These identities were fixed, rigid, determined, and remained unchanged for quite a long time. An expansion of social and economic life through education, occupation, and income opened up windows of opportunity, which no longer blurred their visions of becoming something one day. They desire it from the bottom of their heart. They are still experiencing discriminatory law, policy, and employment practices (Aleman and Renn, 2002). But they are coming out of their traditional boundaries anyway.

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Ethical principle of market teaches us that the distribution of income must be justified. This principle says income will be distributed, “according to what he and the instruments he owns produces” (Freedman, 2002:161-162). However, state action basically determines how a person will be treated economically and socially. True equal treatment means paying accordingly after evaluating products. Equality has different connotations sociologically. If two persons are given the same amount of money for two different jobs, one with tedious and cumbersome work and one with rewarding, then we may call it unequal sociologically. This ethically unequal but universal exploitation is a day to day reality for women. As women, a woman has nothing to lose. Like Marx and Engles wrote in the Communist Manifesto, “The Proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win” (Cited in Freedman, 2002:197). Unlike proletariats, women are winning the world. Are they winning in Bangladesh?

The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms Discrimination Against Women and the Constitution of Bangladesh guarantee sexual equality. But these two umbrella acts have never gone challenged. Patriarchal attitudes nonchalantly act on for continuing its activities. Some argue that women also receive benefits from patriarchal society by claiming that they are being suppressed, subjugated, and subordinated. Even though we have made laws for women but still women have limited access to social power and have less ability to control their own lives (Monsoor, 1999).

Women are mostly dependent on men for their mere survival. Traditional and conservative society and overwhelming power of men as household heads and major earners make the situation worse for women. In most cases, women have no say in major decision making activities (Hartman, 1987). In traditional households, even in some modern households, concept of “our family” merely exists. Women always come last whatever the issue is. The whole idea is women do not understand anything, even their own issues. Somebody has to take or make decision for women. All these make women as much vulnerable as children.

However, with the changing demands, patriarchy attempts to redefine women in relation to international division labor. In fact, export-oriented manufacturing industry has driven many women away from their homes and for the first time ever we see that women, who are positioned bottom of the bottom in the society, receive phenomenal attention and have changed their status from family laborers to wage laborers. Economically, this is an era when we see women were rediscovered as “preferred labor” (Kabeer, 2000). Arzi and Aranda (1981) called this as “Comparative Advantage of Women’s Disadvantage.” Actually, the

job which women are taking over is low paid, seasonal, sometimes cumbersome and tiring. Even fully knowing well, women are eager to perform these jobs because they were never given a chance before. Employers who employ women knew that these jobs are labor intensive. They do not necessarily need skilled labor and they can pull them out anytime they wanted to (Kabeer, 2000). Women are empowered economically but not socially. Social empowerment is more important than economic empowerment. Why this is so?

In answering this above question, the paper attempts a critical discussion of issues and problems relating to women's empowerment. In answering the above question, the paper attempts a critical discussion of issues and problems relating to women's empowerment. Section 1 dwells on the historical marginalization of women in regard to employment. The health burden of women that forces them to lead a passive life is discussed in Section 2. Different types of violence committed against women are highlighted in Section 3 and the power relations that exist around women are discussed in Section 4. Some concluding observations are made in the final Section.

### **1. Historical Marginalization of Women's Employment**

Women and men's role according to social prescription empower the women economically but not socially. This also defines the role of men and women. Sex differences, masculinity/ femininity, and causes of sex differences became the issues of research in the 1920s. In the 1930s, instead of sex roles, the term social role became more popular among academicians. Socially defined behavior, the learning process and how that can be applied in real life was also used for gender. By the 1940s, the terms "sex role", "gender role", "male role", and "female role" gained acceptance in varied fields associated with gender roles (Connell 1987).

Prior to industrialization, the division of labor was complementary between men and women and it was more integrated. The production process involved both sexes and family members worked in places near to the household. The work of both sexes had been valued as large families were considered good for everybody who stayed in the same household. The development of agricultural technology reduced women's involvement in farming in western societies, and they started doing household activities which were described as non-economic and unproductive. This happened because women's work had no exchange value but use value. Children also became a liability to parents because they could no longer help parents due to restrictions on child labor. Rearing them became costlier than ever. It was a woman who had to assume responsibility for children. Women took

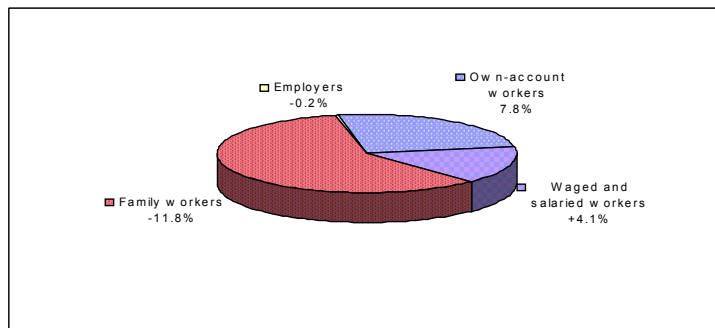
care of the home front; men took care of the public front. The work place no longer remained near the household. This had implications for gender roles - an enormous differentiation in men and women's roles was evident in the industrial era. However, in the industrial era, the demand for female labor also changed the differentiation in the division of labor, and more and more women became involved in the job market all over the world in different time periods (Marini 1990). Both women of advanced societies and underdeveloped countries experienced female labor force demand and opted to involve the job market. This prompts the question: if women become economically active, why do men still have the dominant role in society?

When both men and women try to exchange material or non-material objects, both integration and differentiation takes place at the cost of somebody's value. If one person has more exchange value than the other, the person with more exchange value becomes dominant over the other. Men's superior gender role is the by-product of the unequal exchange patterns that exist in society. The elements that give men a more active role than women are achievement, motivation, skills, and risk-taking behavior in certain domains (Homans 1958). All these elements are viewed as more valuable and scarce, and only can be obtained through a higher level of difficulty. As a result, individuals as well as society value men's task performance. In contrast, women's work is thought of as being done very easily and help is widely available. Since men's work has been seen as scarce and valuable and help is not always available, men's work has become more highly valued and has a greater price. Society has continued to reward men's work and awards by providing more power and prestige to men. Cultural norms reward male superiority in the society by accepting this perspective on men's role (Parker and Parker 1979).

As a result certain types of jobs were always barred for women through cultural and social prescriptions. The logic is simple. Women are not physically strong and some jobs involve moral danger. This implies only women will uphold moral values and moral character. Moreover, women's involvement with certain jobs makes those jobs more feminine and relatively low in status. Social construction of feminine jobs make these jobs unattractive to many. This means that women are more likely to do certain jobs which men will not do. In addition, compared to men, women's wage is low, fringe benefit is low and job security is also low (Momsen, 2004). All of these literally impose ban on women to be active socially even though they are economically active and empowered. Under this social

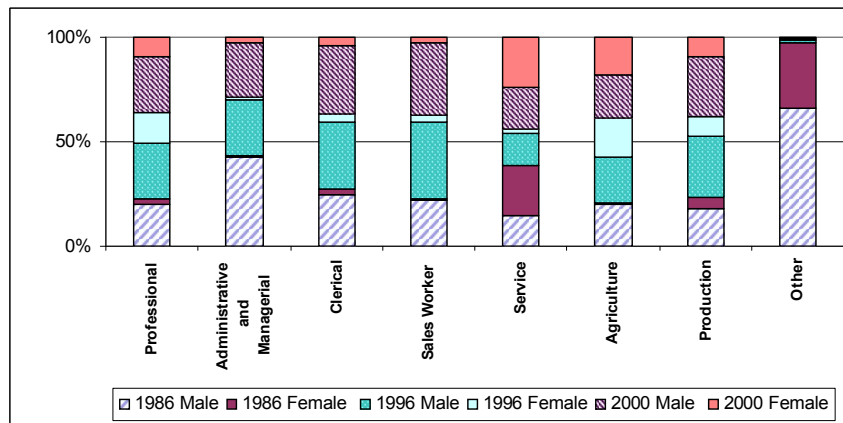
construction, analyzing the state of women in Bangladesh needs critical attention. Global employment trends show that still women make major share of the family workers in South Asia, even though the rate is declining (Figure 1). It went down 11 percent from 1997. However, the rate is getting better for waged and salaried

**Figure 1 : Changes in Employment Status of Women in South Asia, 1997-2007**



workers. Female unemployment rate is still higher than men (5.8%) (International Labor Organization, 2008). The same pattern is also seen in Bangladesh. We see less women being involved in the professional, administrative, clerical, and sales related jobs. Women make majority share in service sector. They are also coming in production related works and agricultural works. But they are outnumbering men in only one sector, that is the service sector. From 1986, data shows that

**Figure 2 : Total Employment of Women by Occupation in Bangladesh (000), 1986-2000.**



women are the key players in service sectors (Figure 2). After 2000, International Labor Organization modified the categories and it shows that women labor force still shows the same pattern in 2003, as in 2000. They are still behind as legislators, senior officials, managers, professionals, and clerks (Figure 2). But they still have demands in service sectors (5772000) and agricultural sectors (2243000) (International Labor Organization, 2008). This implies that feminization of jobs is really happening in Bangladesh.

## **2. Health Burden of Women**

Although women comprise half of the population of Bangladesh, women's health concerns have received little attention until recently. When it comes to women's health issue, primarily the issue has been discussed by the elderly as to what steps should be taken. If they decide that she needs medical attention at that time, a woman is allowed to see a doctor. If they think the issue is not severe enough, it goes underneath other issues, which are at utmost priority (Kitts and Roberts, 1996). Within the limited power and mobility, women get less attention for their health problems. This causes chronic morbidity that leads to a prolonged suffering and pain. Even if women notice symptoms of diseases, they cannot take risk of visiting a health care center or seeing a doctor because it becomes luxury for them. Since their responsibility involves the well-being of the family, they do not see themselves visiting a doctor while leaving behind domestic works and children at home who need them (Bhattacharya and Hati, 1995).

In many Asian countries, since females generally receive less modern medical care and depend more on traditional healers, they can be expected to suffer from many chronic diseases. Gaining an understanding of the women's health concerns in Bangladesh necessitates recognition of the economic, social, and cultural context, all of which may constrain the potential for women to receive appropriate and timely medical treatment. This means health priority is constrained by economic, social, and cultural contexts. Compared to men, women are less likely to intake modern medicine, also less able and reluctant to spend money on their needs and, nevertheless, usually treat them by using commonsense knowledge and also ask help from traditional healers or simply carry disease burden, which put them into prolonged sufferings (Rathgeber and Vlassoff, 1993).

Overall, compared to men, a higher prevalence of chronic morbidity has been reported among women by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. According to Health and Morbidity Survey of Bangladesh, the annual prevalence of morbidity was 166.2 per 1000 persons. The survey found high rural morbidity than urban

morbidity. The prevalence of fever or pyrexia of unknown origin, gastric problems and diarrhea are the three common problems among women. However, women also suffer rheumatic fever and high blood pressure. These two are the leading causes of morbidity among women in Bangladesh. The ratio of female to male tuberculosis in the 0-15 age group is high, ranging from 1.6 females to 1 male in rural areas, to between 1.8 to 2 females to 1 male in urban areas (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 1997).

Omar et al. found that (1996) 14.3 percent women suffered from anemia and 3.7 percent women received medication from doctor. Out of 7.6 percent women who suffered from diabetes, only 1 percent received medication. A majority of women were ill due to gastric problems (34.7%). Among them only 11.9 percent took medicine for their ailment. Almost half of the total women population (49.4%) travel alone for seeking medical help. One of the main evidences of women's morbidity and subsequent mortality is that this is one of the few countries where male life expectancy is higher than female. In many cases, treatment related to women's disease is available locally and women have less opportunity to get hold of modern medicine (Goodburn et al., 1995).

In Bangladesh, women's access to and control over assets is an important determinant of their inability to lead a healthy life and access to health services. Bangladesh, a predominantly Muslim and rural country, is confronted with serious handicaps of social and economic underdevelopment. The economy is based on largely premodern techniques of production. As a result of this, landownership and access to productive resources is critical for survival. Since ownership of land and access to resources carries a set of rights, women are always being barred of owning land or have access to resources (Youssef and Hetler, 1983).

In addition, the existing religion in the country plays a crucial role. Islamic inheritance laws govern Muslim women in Bangladesh. Among the Hindus in Bangladesh, daughters do not have the right to inherit their father's property (Mitra and Kumar, 2004). Women's access to material resources was restricted, leaving them dependent on their male relatives. Being born as women means women have to depend on men not only for household issues but also for outside world activities. All these have implications for women's chronic disease status (Dey, 1998).

“Women's access to health care is also influenced by restrictions on mobility and seclusion of women in the household” (Okojie, 1994). Bangladesh is also an extremely patriarchal society. The societies in this region tend to be characterized

by the practice of female seclusion, patrilineal descent and inheritance, patrilocal principles of marriage, and strict patriarchal authority structures within the family. The married woman is restricted to move around within the house. This means women have less opportunity to work outside and even if she works, unpaid family labor or domestic helper are the two most common forms of employment among women (Kabeer and Mahmud, 2004) which also has implication for women's chronic morbidity. She is not permitted to go out of the house unaccompanied by a male member, and cannot speak to an adult male except those who are immediate members of her own family. Thus, being examined by a male doctor would not be an option available for women who are observing purdah, and they would not be able to visit a health facility unaccompanied by a male family member. Because of restrictions on their interactions with the world outside the home, women in seclusion may have limited access to information that is important for self-care and preventing ill health (Mittra and Kumar, 2004).

Moreover, the status of women is largely defined by their husband's status, which is a crucial determinant of their health. Women of lower socioeconomic status are more likely to be deprived of the benefits of sufficient and appropriate health care in young ages, which may affect later chronic conditions (Liao et al., 1999). Women's century long inferior status in Bangladesh complicates the relationship between women and health-facility providers. In many instances, by looking at women, health-facility providers know that whether a particular woman comes from a good family or not. Women get differential treatment from health-facility providers based on their background. The situation gets worse when women fail to express their real needs. On top of that women tend to ignore the follow-ups due to their household activities and responsibilities.

But leading a chronic disease free life also depends on educational attainment among women in Bangladesh. Women's education influences their health status directly and also indirectly. Usually, education is seen as a better predictor of morbidity due to circulatory systems. An uneducated woman will not be able to differentiate signs and symptoms of different diseases (Kitts and Roberts, 1996). Women use their education as a means to get benefits from their environment. Women who are economically active account for more person-years lived than who are not. However, whether a woman is involved with manual or non-manual work also makes a real difference in terms of excess morbidity. For healthy and better living, women use their occupation experience to fight with diseases and eventually mortality (Martikainen, 1995). For instance, simple knowledge about diarrhoea and cleanliness, which women learn from workplace, saved thousands of women every year.



### **3. Violated Women: Is this Real?**

Usually, violence is considered as a form of crime. But it is never seen as a health problem until recently. This is also considered as violation of human rights which demands protection. Beijing Platform of Action considered it as one of the 12 critical areas of concern. The end result of violence is not good either; it is a major obstacle to achieve equality, development, and peace in a society. When we discuss about violence, we think it happened outside. In reality, most violence against women occurs within the home by their loving in-laws (Momsen, 2004). Since the definition of violence varies widely, to make data comparable, the World Health Organization defines it as “The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation (cited in Krug et al., 2001: 5).” Based on this definition, Krug et al. (2002) stated that around 91 percent of violence against women occurred in the low and middle income countries.

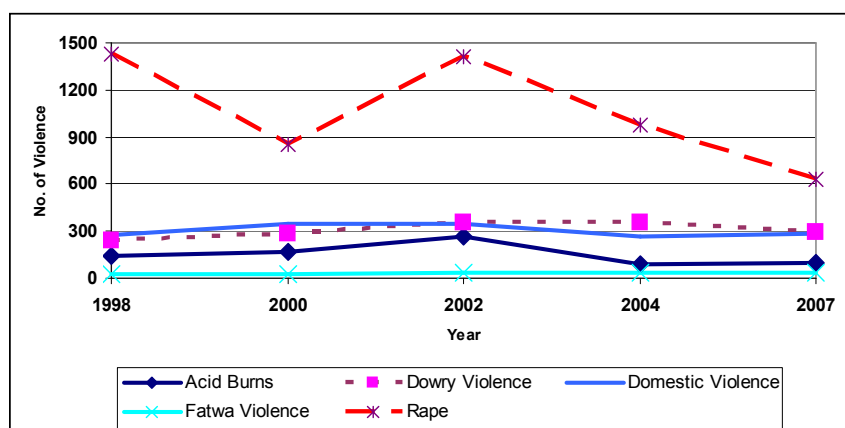
Some argue that violence is high in societies with high inequality and societies that are going through major changes. This leads to a high volume of interpersonal violence. Women of transitional societies and developing world experience more violence than their counterparts of Eastern Europe and Central Asia (Narayan et al., 2002). Compared to other countries, Latin America and the Caribbean and Asia reported decline in interpersonal violence (Momsen, 2004). Why this is so? Violence is nothing but abusing power over women. Men continue to do so as they are the sole authority of maintenance or creation of inequality. Women experience several dimensions of violence. They are violated based on their gender, age, marital status, class, race, religion and ethnicity. Moreover, economic and political inequalities are often translated into structural violence against women, which one cannot deny (Bennett and Manderson, 2003).

Around the globe we see different patterns of violence conducted against women. Some are social, some economic and some political in nature. Social violence involves killing or rape, suicide, disfigurement, and female genital cutting. Among the economic violence, dowry deaths, female infanticide, and backlash are the three common patterns. Forced adoption, sexual slavery, and rape as ethnic cleansing in war are the major forms of political violence. All three types of violence against women are prevalent in Bangladesh. Acid burn is high in Bangladesh, which is not at all seen in other parts of the world. Family disputes, land dispute, loan dispute, refusal to get married or refusal to have sexual relationship, and extra marital affairs are the major

reasons why a woman becomes acid victim. In 1998, a total of 138 cases were reported as acid victims but only 69 women filed case against the violator. This rate went down to 95 cases, and 42 cases were filed against the persons who threw acid in 2007. In fact, dowry related crime went up in 2007. Almost 300 cases were reported, 49 cases were filed against in-laws and 187 women were dead due to dowry related violence. Women were also beaten up by their husbands, by members of husband's family, or by their own relatives for various reasons. Some are also murdered by their husbands or by their in-laws (Ain O Salish Kendro, 2008). Due to the severe nature of the problem, Bangladesh Government has implemented the Dowry Prohibition (Amendment) Ordinances in 1982, 1984 and 1986 to lessen dowry related violence (Monsoor, 1999). Unlike other countries, we observe fatwa related violence in Bangladesh due to rape, love, premarital pregnancy, oral divorce, allegation of extra marital relationship, and allegation of sexual relationship. Even though the number is small, it is increasing. Up until 1998, no case was filed against anyone. Domestic violence is also increasing in the country compared to 1998. However, rape drops down from 1998 to 2007. It went down almost 50 percent (Figure 3). However, the real picture may be far worse than what has been presented here since these data captured only reported cases, not the total number of actual cases.

Since 1983, Government of Bangladesh enacted The Cruelty to Women (Deterrent Punishment) Ordinance of 1983, which states, "a person with imprisonment for life or provides death penalty for kidnapping or abducting women, trafficking in women and attempting to cause death or for committing

**Figure 3: Distribution of Violence conducted against Women, 1998-2007**



Source: Ain O Salish Kendro, Documentaion Unit, 2008

rape (Monsoor, 1999:239)”. This is an extension of the Penal Code 1860. However, this ordinance also includes other issues which are causes of concern with reference to violence. With increasing violence, later on the Repression against Women and Children (Special Enactment) Act XVII of 1995 was enacted to reduce violence against women (Monsoor, 1999). Even after implementing these laws, violence is still there. This has deep rooted social causes.

Like other South Asian countries, the pattern of socialization teaches boys and girls differently, which means they grew up with completely discriminatory socialization process. This eventually leads to unequal power relationships in adulthood. Consequently, women always see themselves as passive and dependent on men whereas men see them as persons with authoritative power, decision-makers who have the right to discipline women whenever it is needed. This puts women into a vulnerable position. Thus, violence is generated through gender discrimination in economic power and participation (Bandyopadhyay and Khan, 2003).

#### **4. Do Women Have Power?**

In Muslim cultures, men are particularly important because of the existing religious scripture. The teaching of Islam clearly expects women to be loyal to their husbands. According to Surat al Nisa: “men are the managers and maintainers of women, partly because Allah has endowed some of the people with more than others, and partly because men support women from their wealth...Men possess natural qualities which make them better candidates for the job of leadership of the family” (Surat al-Nisa 4:34 as quoted in Rahman 1986:424). Both patriarchal and religious fervor give men the upper hand over women in Muslim countries.

Marx in his book, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte” stated, “Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past” (cited in Bryson 1992). This has a major implication for the traditional definition of gender differences. Placing family and gender relationships in a historical context implied that any change in society could have changed the traditional gender role system in the society. However, this has not happened since Marx proposed the theory. Engels vividly referred to the traditional roles of men and women. According to him, historically women’s defeat stemmed from the time when mothers’ rights had been denied by society. Since then, women practically became slaves of men.

Historically, Muslim culture predominantly influences people's lives in Bangladesh. The relations between men and women are also a combination of Muslim culture and traditional patriarchal culture. Since men have been given more power culturally and are also expected to bear all the responsibilities at the household level, men often become the sole actors controlling assets and income (Ahmad 1991). Men in Bangladesh, like other developing countries, appreciate women if they work at home instead of outside. Women are believed to be born to take care of children and the elderly, to cook and to clean, and to look after domestic animals. Traditionally, they are not allowed to make decisions at the household level (Ahmed et al. 1999). Women are expected to rise early in the morning, to go to bed late after performing all the household chores, and to work seven days a week to make sure men do not have to involve themselves with household chores. Whether women work outside or not, the ideology of "superior male role" still exists in the society (Kabeer 1997).

Gender roles are also influenced by the power relations in the family. Power comes in different forms, such as force and coercion, political power, ideological power, and economic power. Since economic power is one of the main determinants of power relations, this has major implications for men and women in the society. In most societies women are considered as consumers and men are considered as providers. Moreover, economic power is conditioned upon several structural conditions which also have given more power to men than women, as men have more control over land, labor, resources, and the production processes. This also has increased men's choices and options (Blumberg 1984).

Theoretically, power theory applied to families assumes that in a relationship both people in the relationship behave rationally, have sufficient skills in bargaining, and are aware of each other's tastes and preferences. In these circumstances, individuals can achieve mutual benefits in multiple ways. If they have a common medium of exchange and equal bargaining power, a satisfactory solution can be achieved (Nash 1950). The equation would not be the same if there were unequal bargaining power (or skill). There could be perfect non-cooperation from the individual who has more bargaining power. An individual can value certain preferences regardless of their partner's preferences.

If women ask for the same rights as men exercise in the family, men may feel that women are trying to make problems in the family. They also may think if women work outside, then they would no longer depend on men which would cause an imbalance of family harmony. It is expected that a woman will work at home, no matter whether she lives in rural areas or in urban areas. Men also may think that

if women become independent, they would no longer care for their husbands and would make their own decisions regarding fertility preferences, family size, and use of contraceptives. Men also believe that if women have the power, they do not know at what point they should stop making decisions (Kabeer 1997).

We observe less participation of women in political arena. Women do not hold very many positions in major political parties in Bangladesh. Only 3 women hold posts in the national committee of Bangladesh Awami League. Both Bangladesh Nationalist Party and Jatiya Party kept one post for women whereas Jamat-e-Islami Bangladesh left none for women. Bangladesh Awami League handed

**Table 1: Distribution of Women in Major Political Parties**

Political Party	Level	Total Members	Female Members
Bangladesh Awami League	National committee	15	03
	Executive committee	75	11
Bangladesh Nationalist Party	Presidium and Secretariat	13	01
	Executive committee	65	06
Jatiya Party	National committee	30	01
	Executive committee	151	04
Jamat-e-Islami	Majlish-e-Shura	141	—
	Majlish-e-Amla	24	—

Source: Hossain and Masuduzzaman, 2003

eleven and Jatiya Party handed 4 posts to women in their Executive Committees. None is provided by Jamat-e-Islami. In the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, this number is 6. This reflects women's historical defeat in politics, along with their defeat in home front (Hossain and Masuduzzaman, 2003). Not only this, percentages of women who are placed as high officials are also low. Data from Ministry of Establishment show that still women do not hold major positions. Out of 4369 high officials, only one female work as a secretary and one as an additional secretary. Women joint secretary and deputy secretary is still low in numbers. However, we have quite a few senior assistant secretary (200) and assistant secretary (160) (Hossain and Masuduzzaman, 2003). But this number is still low compared to men who are placed as high officials (Table 2).

All this implies that women are still not successful to employ their power outside home. Because of that they failed to contribute in making policies.

**Table 2 : Distribution of Women High Officials in Bangladesh**

POSTS	Total	Male	Female
Secretary	49	48	01
Additional Secretary	55	54	01
Joint Secretary	275	271	05
Deputy Secretary	659	552	07
Senior Assistant Secretary	2214	2014	200
Assistant Secretary	1117	957	160
Total	4369	3996	373

Source: Hossain and Masuduzzaman, 2003

The discrimination against women is also reflected in laws. Payment Wages Act 1937 is the classic example in this regard which states wage deduction should not be made from a woman if she breaks contract with her employer. This act, which is still valid in Bangladesh, includes women and children under one category. Obviously, two conclusions can be drawn from the above law. First, women are minors. Second, they are treated like person with physical disability. Moreover, women are considered as a category unequal to men or more accurately as inferior to men.

Bangladesh Shops and Establishment Act 1965 and Tea Plantation Ordinance 1992 clearly prohibited women from working between 8pm and 7am. This law has three different connotations. First, women have to be home at certain points of time when they are not allowed to work. Second, this ban implies that women do commit crimes if they are allowed to go out at night. Third, since men control laws, thereby they control women the way they wish. The Bengal Maternity Act of 1939 allows women not to work up until 6 weeks after a delivery. In reality, women let go of their maternity benefits and start working for mere survival. Even though the law made it clear that employers should not allow women to work and provide benefits, they too consider women as subordinated class (Monsoor, 2003).

## 5. Conclusion

It is readily comprehensible that women's position in Bangladesh is very fragile. Current research indicates that measuring the position of women is very complex. Some researchers attempt to define women's position with broad socioeconomic macro variables, whereas others concentrate on the variables that work at the community and at the individual level. Overall, the status of women is very broad, and it is difficult to find indicators of women's position in the society, which can enable us to compare status among different groups, or changes over a period, in a

given country. An enormous amount of literature used economic aspects of measuring women's position in the society. Empirical evidence in some developing countries indicates that certain changes, such as education, labor force participation, employment, and more job opportunities affect the status of women. Women's position, which is largely determined by economic characteristics, can play a major role in offsetting various sorts of exploitation against women. Thus, by looking at different aspects of women's life, this paper unmasks the real status of women in Bangladesh. Overall, the present paper attempts to show the current situation of women in Bangladesh. Even though the picture is bleak, still women are coming. They are coming out anyway whether they are given any opportunity or not.

This is evident that women face lots of obstacles, lots of barriers and lots of discrimination, but their position cannot be the same all over the world even though they share the same experiences. As a result, it is worth considering women's condition based on a particular country's context. But by looking at some indicators we get the vibe whether their identities are fragmented or superficial compared to other parts of the world. But still there remain growing concerns about how to handle women when it comes to their social empowerment. Some argue, if we include political participation, employment and earning, economic autonomy, reproductive rights, and health and well-being for looking at social empowerment, that would give us a better picture (Caiazza, 2000). This paper is an attempt to provide state of women in Bangladesh by looking at these scenarios.

Article 28 of our constitution states, "The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth" (Mitra and Kumar, 2004: 211). This is not really implemented in Bangladesh. Even though women (who constitute more than half of the population) play a major role in families, they are unaccounted for their outside and domestic works. National level data fail to capture their domestic works and unpaid labor. Official reports claim that women manage 8 percent of households, which is way too low than the actual number (30 percent). Considering income, women-headed households are the hardest hit. With this background, women continue to work, more specifically, women are on the move. They become more visible in labor force. In fact, their labor force participation is increasing faster than men. But evaluating their position based on economic factors would provide a partial picture; their position should be considered in relation to social factors as well (Mitra and Kumar, 2004). This will make women of political power and social prestige, which is much needed.

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