

## **Empowerment of Women in Bangladesh: Impediments and Recommendations**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Empowerment of Women is one of the topics which is frequently discussed in recent times all around the world. Women are making their entrances in different sectors side by side men which was previously unimaginable. This particular research will investigate the impediments that stand in the path of empowerment of women in Bangladesh. In addition, this study will recommend some views that will mitigate the impact of the impediments standing in its way. Moreover, this study is going to discuss the social status of women in Bangladesh where the window of empowerment of women is narrow. Finally, this research will surely motivate the empowerment of women in Bangladesh and create consciousness inside them so that they get the impetus to empower themselves in personal, social, economic and political sectors. This research is the combination of all the previously done study concerned to empowerment of women.

**KEY WORD:** *Consciousness, Empowerment of Women, Impediments, Recommendations, Social Status*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Empowerment of Women is rising gradually in Bangladesh. In South Asian rankings, Bangladesh has surpassed other countries in case of establishing women empowerment (WEP,2017, p.17). According to WEF, Bangladesh has conquered the top position in several progress spots of the “ Economic Opportunity and Participation Subindex”( 2017,p22). Then, it is proved that women are in emerging position both in social and political sectors ( WEF,2017,pp. 48-49).Morgen and Bookman(1988) in their essay“Rethinking Women and Politics” suggested that empowerment of women inaugurates when women start to realize the factors of their powerlessness and they try to change themselves by increasing their consciousness (p.4).UN explained that Empowerment is the process of eradicating gender discrimination to pave the environment of equality (as cited in Ahmed and Barman,2009, p.194). According to UN, there are six stages in empowerment. They are following:

- 1.Welfare
- 2.Access to Resources
- 3.Conscientisation
- 4.Participation
5. Control
6. Empowerment (as cited in Ahmed and Barman,2009, p.194).

Women empowerment is a process by which women can regain proper rights from the society, community and country. It is noticeable that women are suppressed everywhere in Bangladesh. The traditional ideology always hinders the empowerment of women. The government and non- government organizations in Bangladesh are trying to overcome these types of inevitable issues . Non-government organizations are taking various initiatives to tackle this complicated issue. Various non-government organizations are providing loans to empower the women and attempting to make them self-reliant. Government organizations are arranging manifold seminars and encouraging women so that they get empowered.

### **Impediments to Women Empowerment in Bangladesh**

Women empowerment refers to the capability of women to exert control over every aspects of life such as social, economic, political,intellectual and so on. Empowerment of women is a burning issue in the context of Bangladesh. Day by Day, the women of Bangladesh are becoming conscious of their own rights but a number of

impediments have been existing in our country. Now, this paper is going to discuss the impediments in regard to empowerment of women in Bangladesh. They are discussed below.

### **1.Social Cause**

There are various social causes that obstruct the empowerment of women in Bangladesh. Now this section will analyze the social causes in the context of Bangladesh.

#### **1.1 Patriarchal Values**

Women empowerment develops socialization. Various institutions such as family, educational institutions, religious institutions, mass media contribute as the means of socialization. Patriarchy prevails also in Bangladesh like many other countries around the world. Due to patriarchal values, most of the families have a negative attitude towards women in Bangladesh. Patriarchal attitudes instill the idea of weakness in the minds of women in Bangladesh right from childhood. These patriarchal values hinder the empowerment of women. It is perceived that almost all the women in Bangladesh feel comfortable to get introduced after the identity of the father and husband. Most of the parents and husbands do not want their wives to be in job sectors. This is why women fall short of being self-reliant which can lead them to empowerment.

#### **1.2 Lack of Education of Women**

Education enlightens our outlook and gives us light of knowledge as well as sharpens our consciousness. Besides, it also increases one's social esteem. Unfortunately, women are lagging behind in case of education whereas education is considered as the cornerstone of a nation. Parents have negative attitude regarding the education of women. Early marriage of girls is a most common fact in the context of Bangladesh. People in the rural areas are totally unconscious of the importance of education of women. They believe in various superstitions and fanaticisms. Due to lack of education, women cannot be able to get rid of their own problems. As a result, they fail to solve their issues by themselves. However, women are far conscious of their rights than the past in recent times.

### **2. Economic Causes**

There are several economic causes that halt the window of empowerment of women in Bangladesh which are as follows:

#### **2.1 Poverty**

In Bangladesh, majority of the people live below poverty line. Women in Bangladesh are considered as the 'poorest of the poor' (Ahmed & Barman, 2009). Women in Bangladesh are confined to the vicious cycle of poverty. Basically, lack of resource, lack of ownership of resource, discrimination between men and women in different aspects are some of the factors of poverty of women in Bangladesh (Ahmed & Barman, 2009).

#### **2.2 Lack of Working Sectors:**

Unemployment problem is the biggest problem in Bangladesh. Lack of working sectors for women hinders empowerment of women in Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, women have shortcoming of technical knowledge, proper training, information gap etc. Women do household chores but they do not get financial assistance by doing that. However, Bangladesh will not be able to reach its desired goal if women fail to attend in different working sectors.

#### **2.3 Lack of Ownership of Resources:**

Empowerment enables women to gain control over resources. Then, it is justified by every religion that women do not have equal share on resources that a man enjoys. This discrimination creates a patriarchal society which glorifies men neglecting women. Due to lack of ownership of resources, women are unable to take important decisions and neglected in family (Parvin, 2013).

### **3 Political Cause**

Less participation of women in politics is a great barrier to women empowerment. Only 5-10 percent of women in the world is participating in politics nowadays (Ahmed & Barman, 2009). It is a great regret that participation rate of women in politics is considerably low and it is reflected in our political parties. Even, the number of women representatives are also low in parliament. Statistics proves that men and women are almost equal in Bangladesh. There are two major political parties in Bangladesh such as Bangladesh Awami League and Bangladesh Nationalist Party. The participation of women is not satisfactory considering those parties. This lack of participation of women in political arena also hinders the development of women empowerment.

#### **4. Legal Cause**

Last but not the least, legal cause narrows down the horizon of empowerment of women. In the constitution of Bangladesh, “All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law”(Government of People’s Republic of Bangladesh : Legislative and Parliamentary Division,2019 ).However, the real scenario is quite different to what is stated in constitution. Different legal institutions such as police. Sharia law creates discrimination between men and women in case of marriage, divorce, guardianship of children, hereditary right etc. Again, different laws in regard to violence of women have their own limitations. Thus, laws written in favor of patriarchy put the empowerment of women at bay for a long time. Similarly, different legal institutions such as police station, court etc. consider women negatively. Sometimes, women get victimized by the members of those institutions. Yet, the women working in different legal institutions are neglected by their male counterparts.

#### **Misinterpretation of Religion:**

Misinterpretation of religion and fundamentalism hinder the path of empowerment of women in Bangladesh. Majority of the people in Bangladesh are Muslims. Religion of Islam states that the maintenance of women completely relies on men. This religious view supports the patriarchal society that impedes empowerment of women. Misinterpretation of religion creates chaos that minimizes women empowerment. Again, fundamentalism is another factor that wants women to be inside home. In addition, it bars women from active participation in workforce alongside men. Fundamentalism considers a woman disrespecting Islam when she goes to school or becomes a part of a Non -Government Organization (NGO).

However, there are various causes for example psychological causes, environmental disaster and communication gap that obstruct the empowerment of women in Bangladesh.

#### **Recommendations of Women Empowerment in Bangladesh:**

This paper aims to recommend some of the means that tend to eradicate all the impediments which are already mentioned.

#### **1.Development of Institutional Knowledge and Education:**

Maximum women in rural area of Bangladesh are illiterate. They are totally out of the light of knowledge. Again, presence of women in different educational institutions is very low in case of rural areas. Without proper knowledge and quality education, empowerment of women is next to nothing. Due to lack of education, women have lost their capacity within family and community. This loss of capacity of women allows the patriarchal society to impose rules over woman so that men can dominate women. This is why women have to acquire proper institutional education and knowledge.

#### **2.Increase of Social Consciousness:**

In Bangladesh, there is false consciousness regarding women and their activities. Measures should be taken to eradicate the discrimination between men and women in every sector and establish equality for both men and women in Bangladesh. Various social organizations can take multiple initiatives to increase consciousness of community regarding women. However, mass media and social media can contribute to accelerate the level of consciousness in favor of women to create a larger scope of empowerment of women in Bangladesh.

#### **3.Providing Proper Training to Women:**

Proper training must be provided to women to ensure the empowerment of women in Bangladesh. Those women who are the elected members of local level must come under this training program. Sometimes, these elected members do not know how to behave with the inhabitants of community. Then, these training program help them behave properly with others. Finally, various program can be arranged to make them efficient enough.

#### **4. Opportunity of Employment:**

Opportunity of employment is the most significant factor for empowerment of women in Bangladesh. In the developing country like Bangladesh, opportunity of employment for women is very limited. Again, there is discrimination between men and women in terms of salary in different job sectors of Bangladesh. Moreover, behavior toward women in different working sectors are also abusive in most of the cases. For empowering women government has launched the quota system for women in job sectors such as 60 percent recruitment of women in primary education and 30 percent in madrasa education under quota (Parvin, 2013). Thus, more opportunity of employment of women will change the male dominated scenario in job sectors of Bangladesh.

#### **5. Acquisition of Ownership of Personal Resources:**

The more the women acquire ownership of personal resources, the more they get empowered. The establishment of ownership of resources defines the empowerment of women. Patriarchal system is existent in Bangladesh where women are excluded from acquiring ownership of personal resources. Though women enjoy ownership of resources, control still lies in the hands of men. Contemporary laws have to be amended to minimize the discriminative situation to get women empowered.

#### **6. Control of Religious Misinterpretation:**

By controlling religious misinterpretation, the recent scenario of women empowerment can be improved a way better. Superstitions should be removed from the society and try must be there to establish a society based on science and logic to strengthen empowerment of women in Bangladesh. As a result of removing superstitions and establishing a science and logic- based society, women can contribute to society and enable themselves to be empowered.

#### **7. Proper Execution of Laws:**

Through the proper application of laws of women, their empowerment can be implemented satisfactorily. Though women have constitutionalized laws for them, they are unable to enjoy the benefit of those laws. Formulation of proper laws can regain the desired empowerment of women.

#### **8. Empowerment of Women in Politics:**

By engaging more women in political arena, empowerment of women can be achieved in politics. The social context of Bangladesh does not allow women to engage in politics. Voting rights of women cannot be considered as their active participation in politics. Women have to participate in politics from grassroot to national level to regain their political rights. To restore the empowerment of women, women need to be engaged in political parties, bureaucracy, parliament and local government. In the parliament of Bangladesh, there are 350 seats among which 50 seats are reserved for women. Recently, government has taken necessary initiatives to increase the participatory level of women in politics which will be much effective for empowerment of women.

#### **9. Materialization of Women Development Policy:**

Materialization of policy regarding development of women is highly needed to ensure the empowerment of women. According to National Women Development Policy 1997, measures should be taken so that women can be the part of the developmental works of all aspects ( as cited in Ahmed and Barman, 2009,p.208). It is found in National Women Development Policy of 2004 that discriminations have been created in this policy where women have lost their rights. In 2008, caretaker government has formulated a National Development Policy for women. Besides, government has proposed a five- year plan for empowerment of women and tried to formulate this proposed plan in an utmost manner.

#### **10. Identification of Impediments of Women Empowerment:**

Identification of impediments to empowerment of women in Bangladesh is a must to ease the path of women empowerment. There are various impediments choking the rise of empowerment of women in Bangladesh. Each of the problem with its depth and cause should be dealt with and those problems should be solved with proper planning according to the context. Thus, identification of impediments of women empowerment will create the needed policies Finally those policies will contribute to the empowerment of women.

#### **Social Positioning of Women in Bangladesh:**

Half of the population are women in Bangladesh. Our country is male dominated where “traditional forms of social and family relationships based on age-old religious norms and taboos have denied women status and power, rights and privileges” ( Zafarullah, 2001,p.201). Traditionally, women in Bangladesh are not only poor but ignorant and they are marginalized as well as devoid of privilege. Women are denied of their material needs due to the decision taken by men ( Nosaka & Andrews,2004) . Women always face two realities during their lifetime. One is traditional male dominated system and other is the persistent poverty. Asian Development Bank identifies the risk factors of vulnerability of women in rural area in Bangladesh and refers to the roles prescribed by society which prevents “ access to economic resources such as capital, skills..” that “ limit women’s participation in political and other forms of decision making that affect their lives” ( as cited in Zafarullah and Nawaz,2013).

Empowerment of Women has become a mockery as women are still neglected everywhere in the society. Women cannot express their opinion wisely and cannot take their decision by themselves without education. Women only serve the traditional roles of mother, sister, wife and daughter but an uneducated

woman fails to live up the standard in every sphere of life. In the history of Bangladesh, women are suppressed by men for years. Even, those people who support women are threatened by fanatics.

In recent times, scenario is changing regarding the status of women. Now, women are joining different working sectors such as offices, garments, hospitals, universities and so on. They are contributing greatly than it was before (Chowdhury, 2014).

To conclude, women must overcome the factors that have suppressed them for a long time to improve their social status so that they can achieve their desired empowerment.

### **Objectives:**

Every study has to undertake a plan with some fixed objectives. The objectives of this study are-

- a. to identify the impediments of empowerment of women in Bangladesh.
- b. to recommend few views regarding empowerment of women in Bangladesh.
- c. to find out the current social status of women in Bangladesh.
- d. to increase the consciousness regarding the necessity of empowerment of women in Bangladesh.

## **II. METHODOLOGY:**

Secondary sources have been used to collect basic data of this study. In this study, the secondary sources include various books, journals, articles, research works of other researchers and statistical accounts. All the data collected from secondary sources have been synthesized to the observation and explanation of the authors of this paper. The advantage of a research done on secondary sources is that collected data spans longer timescales and broader geographical locations. Thus, this research will be applicable in any country regarding the topic of empowerment of women.

## **III. DISCUSSION:**

This study found a number of obstacles regarding empowerment of women which exist in our society. It has been located that women are not self-reliant in Bangladesh and they cannot but depend on their fathers and husbands. They have lack of knowledge and are influenced by superstitions. Even, different social and religious norms hinder their individuality which is a must for their empowerment. This study investigates that women cannot continue their study due to poverty. The ratio between men and women is far different in regard to education in Bangladesh. This paper provided some insights which will empower women. The study proposes that change of religious and social views can develop the oppressed status of women. The existing social status of women which is totally opposite to the empowerment of women had been addressed in this article. Thus, this paper will motivate the progression of empowerment of women and mitigate the impediments concerned to empowerment of women in Bangladesh.

## **IV. CONCLUSION**

To conclude, it can be said that empowerment of women is impossible without proper consciousness and changing outlook of both men and women. This paper highlights the social status of women where women are dominated and neglected in different sectors of society in Bangladesh. There are number of impediments standing in the path of empowerment of women in the context of Bangladesh. It is expected that this paper helps strengthen the empowerment of women by locating few impediments in regard to that. Moreover, this article recommends few solutions so that the speed of empowerment of Bangladesh gets the desired mileage.

This study has suggested amendment of some laws which should be changed for empowering women of Bangladesh at present times. This paper refers few views to change the patriarchal views rooted for ages in the minds of the men of Bangladesh. To achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), empowerment of women must be implemented at any cost. As almost half of the population are women in Bangladesh, the empowerment of women brings about the revolution of economy of Bangladesh. It can be said without any debate that comprehensive development of Bangladesh in different sectors such as economic, political, social and so on will not come in effect if women are not empowered in Bangladesh. Thus, parallel movement of both government and private policies regarding empowerment of women will ensure the developed and dignified status of women in Bangladesh.

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