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SOCIO-CULTURAL BARRIERS OF WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN BANGLADESH

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Abstract

Education is a pivotal indicator of human development. Thus access to education of women is essential for ensuring socio-economic development in Bangladesh. This paper, based on secondary sources, is an attempt to explore the socio-cultural barriers of women's education at various stages in Bangladesh. A number of literatures are reviewed on women's education in terms of gender disparity. This study shows that due to a variety of socio-cultural factors, women's education is being hindered. At the same time, this study also shows that women are deprived of educational attainment in relation to men counterparts. Changes are needed as malpractices are embedded in our social systems, and mass awareness should be developed to build up a gender balance society.

Introduction

In all countries of the world, education is recognized as the cornerstone for sustainable development. It is a fulcrum around which the quick development of economic, political, sociological and human resources of any country resolves [1]. Recent developments in sociology paid particular attention to issue of gender and equality of opportunity. To the sociologists, definitions of gender are seen as learned, rather than in-born. It is believed that educational institutions are important arenas for acquiring these roles. Girls learn to become girls and boys to become boys there. There is also concern that education systems do not operate fairly for all learner that learners' chances of doing well in schools and everywhere do not depend only on their ability but vary according to factor such as gender. Since the society of Bangladesh is highly male dominated

and gender stratified, the birth of a daughter is viewed as a burden as women's socio-economic and educational status is lower than that of men's in every sphere of life [2, 17, 44, 45]. Existing patriarchal social structure is highly responsible for the downward situation of women. The socio-economic indicators of female status reveal that women bear a disproportionately high share of the country's underdevelopment compared to men [46]. In the recent years the government of Bangladesh has paid attention on the value of women's education. As such, over the last decade, some projects and programs have been undertaken to educate the people of the nation. Yet, there is still a large gender gap in Bangladesh when it comes to education. Similar to many developing countries, women's education in Bangladesh lags far behind compared to that of men's. The majority of women in Bangladesh have yet to be empowered to participate actively in the social, cultural, economic, educational, and political life of the country. Gender discrimination is widespread in all spheres and at all levels, as indicated by official statistics on education, health, nutrition, employment, and political participation. Despite efforts at increasing the supply of female education through various projects and programs, building of more schools, subsidies for female pupils etc, the demand for female education is very low [2] which resulted into higher gender disparity all over the world. Bangladesh also seems to no exception in terms of gender disparity as it is male dominated society and women are subordinated at every sphere of life.

To date, education receives the highest allocation of resources in the Bangladeshi social sector. As boys are perceived ultimately to take care of parents, sending them to school and investing in their education is preferred to investing in girls. Nevertheless, the primary level enrollment rates for girls have gone up remarkably. The gap between male and female enrollment, which stood at 22 percent in 1985, declined to 3 percent over the past decade and a half [3]. Although noteworthy achievements have been made in female enrollment at the primary level, progress has been very slow in secondary level education. At this level male and female enrollment rates improved by 5 and 10 percentage points, respectively, between 1985 and 1995 [4, 35]. At the primary level, girls' enrollment is increasing; it has risen from 45 percent in 1990 to 49 percent in 2000 [5]. At the secondary level, the dropout rate of female students reaches half, which is higher by 10 percentage points than the rate of male students. Very few women continue their education up to the tertiary level [5]. This negatively affects the

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overall rate of return from education and women's labor market entitlements. Lower access to technical education and higher secondary education, gender-biased curriculum, and curriculum without job prospects are critical concerns for women's education that must be addressed through coordinated efforts.

Methodology

This study is mainly based on the review of information collected through various secondary sources i.e. published books, journals reports and research works. Moreover, some online materials have been used in this paper.

Definitions of Key terms

Education

This study defines education as a process of acculturation through which the individual is helped to attain the development of all his potentialities and their maximum activation when necessary, according to right reason and thereby achieve his perfect self-fulfillment. Education is the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or young adult (male or female) develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behavior which are of positive value to the society in which he/she lives. It is a process through which a person acquires knowledge, skills, habits and values that enables him to function effectively as a member of the society. Education helps one to maximize his physical, mental and emotional capabilities which are useful for him and his society [1, 6].

Women Education

In this sense, women education means the process by which women acquire the knowledge, skills, norms and values that are necessary for their development and that of the society.

Constitution of Bangladesh and Women's Education

Article 17 emphasized on Free and compulsory education. The State shall adopt effective measures for the purpose of - a) establishing a uniform, mass-oriented and universal system of education and extending free and compulsory education to all children to such stage as may be determined by law; c) removing illiteracy within such time as may be determined by law. Article 28 emphasized on discrimination on grounds of religion, etc.1) The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of

religion, race caste, sex or place of birth; 2) Women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of the State and of public life (3) No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth be subjected to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to access to any place of public entertainment or resort, or admission to any educational institution; (4) Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making special provision in favor of women or children or for the advancement of any backward section of citizens. The Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees equal rights to all citizens, but in family matters such as marriage, divorce, custody, maintenance, and inheritance laws discriminate against women. These have also helped to create constraints in terms of women's education.

Theoretical Perspectives

Sex Role Theory and Education of Women

The sex role paradigm has probably been the most popular theory in educational literature in the 70s. It argues that the observed gender inequalities in education, such as women's lower completion rate, under-achievement at higher levels of education, and segregation in traditional subjects, are attributed to the differential schooling experiences of men and women, who are socialized into different roles. Its proponents argue that education or schooling is responsible for gender inequalities only to an extent that it fails to challenge, and has reinforced gender stereotypes prevailing in society. The education system itself is intrinsically neutral; if properly reformed or developed, it can be a liberating vehicle for women.

Three areas in schools are identified where gender stereotyping is seen to be at work. They are daily interactions, curriculum practices, and school arrangements. Most studies find teachers sexist in their language, interaction patterns, and attitudes. In teaching, they usually hold lower expectations of girls and give them less attention in the classrooms [7, 8]. In disciplining, they emphasize or ridicule the gender status of students and hence bring their behaviors in line with their sexes. In giving academic or career advice, they persuade students to aspire to courses or choices which resemble the traditional sex roles [9, 10, and 39]. Teachers may not be aware of their sexism but, if not challenged, they can hamper the development of anti-sexist pedagogy [11]. Apart from daily interaction, curriculum materials also prescribe different roles, attributes, and behavior for boys and girls. Males not only

outnumber females in their occurrence in readings, texts, or literature, they are usually presented as the main and prominent characters; intelligent, adventurous, and rational; doctors, scientists, or engineers, whereas women are usually auxiliaries; expressive, emotional, and irrational; mothers, caretakers, or housewives [41]. More than necessary, social arrangements in schools differentiate students on the basis of their sex and encourage them to maintain rigid and separate roles. Boys and girls have to line up, sit, or are listed separately; have different toys to play with; are assigned to different duties; engage in different sports activities; attend different classes, such as Home Economics for girls and Woodwork and Design for boys. Sex differentiation not only discourages cooperation amongst boys and girls, the practices can fix their gender identities and lead them to further demarcate themselves in other activities, such as the use of space and the choice of peers [38].

Feminist Approach of Education of Women

Liberal feminism claims that women are oppressed as they suffer unjust discrimination because of legal and social constraints. The remedy therefore lies in legal measures to remove these constraints and to change the social attitudes through education. Radical feminists argue that patriarchy, that is the social and economic and political dominance of men over women, exists in almost every society and even predates capitalism. In this respect, role of education is to reproduce the rule of patriarchy and to sustain men's interests in controlling women. To secure their dominance, men have to establish an ideology of male superiority in the culture and to socialize women to accept their rule as inevitable. Educational institutions are important institution which help congeal, enforce, and reproduce male control by hammering women to see themselves as inferior and weaker [12]. Women are trivialized as pathological, insignificant, and unintelligent in curriculum materials, their contributions denied, their voices stifled, as only men's views and their (men) story are presented. More importantly, women's sexuality is heavily controlled but narrowly defined in male terms: institutions, its discourses and knowledge, normalize boys' sexual aggressiveness but deny girls' sexuality.

Socialization Theory and Women's Education

The feminist argument stresses that early socialization rather than biological inheritance is responsible for gender differences in ability and aptitudes. Among the socialization theories, the social learning

theories suggest that children learn about appropriate attitudes and behaviors from their parents, peers and teachers [13]. The social learning theories emphasize the importance of imitation and modeling, since children learn new behavior by imitating both adults and other children [14].

Socio-cultural Barriers of women's Education in Bangladesh

The fact that women are less educated than men is largely due to ancient tradition and common mentality. The reason why women are seldom as well educated than men lie outside the education system. Ideas about the appropriate roles for women in the labor market or in society, about the biological unsuitability of women for science, and about the gender-based division of work in the household and on the farm influence decisions about schooling. Ours is a patriarchal society so that all socio-economic and cultural institutions are governed by patriarchy. Subordinated position of women also made by patriarchal society. Moreover, in Bangladesh, socio-cultural rules, norms and beliefs hindered the overall progress of women in general and women's education in particular. In most societies, yet it is understated that the benefits to education, especially for women, when we consider formal labor market returns alone. Returns to informal sector work are more difficult to calibrate since work is often unpaid or earnings are poorly measured [16]. Various Socio-cultural Barriers of women's education is discussed below:

Patriarchal social structure

In Bangladesh, patriarchy highly predominant at all stages of the society. Class mobility allows movement between rich and poor, but the division of social space and the difference in behavioral norms between men and women are rigidly maintained. As a primitive social institution, the family constitutes the basic unit of social control, sets the norm for male and female roles. Within this system, the father, or in his absence, the next male kin is the head of the household. As a result, both decision-making powers (about education, employment etc.) and economic operations are controlled by the hands of men. In a male controlled family, women are deprived of educational attainments. Patriarchal rules and norms always disfavored women's education and incarcerated them within the four walls. Patriarchy

Lack of Economic Support

In Bangladesh, a large number of people live under poverty line in both the rural and urban areas. For economic reasons, many parents consider women's education as a waste of funds. Such parents believe that money spent on a girl's education is a waste, since she will soon marry to her husband's family, thus leaving only boys in their original family to provide for their parents. Girls, children from rural areas and urban periphery areas, children from socio-economically backwards families and ethnic minorities are often denied access to the governmental education system [37]. (Therefore, when families are faced with the option of choosing between sons' and daughters' education, the daughters are always the victims.

Conservative Social Systems

Conservative observers of society believe that when women become educated they become disrespectful and no longer adhere to male dominance. This is one of the fears that village mullahs and elite harbor resulting in their dispute against non-government organization run primary school [17]. Those who give a little more thought into the contributions of an educated woman limit their thinking to deciding that co-educational institutions are not suitable or, in some cases, not acceptable [17]. They agree that women should become doctors, engineers, lawyers etc. but must attend institutions meant for women only [18]. The liberal are not so liberal either. They might not have such hang-ups as to profession or choice of educational institution, but they ultimately hanker after the secret wish to see women in their traditional roles. Moreover, they are not comfortable with such words as 'empowerment' or 'emancipation' and fail to combine all two with the term 'education' in relation to women.

Early Marriage / Child Marriage

Bangladesh law prohibited marriage before age 18 for girls and age 21 for boys. But marriage before the age of 18 has been the reality for many girls which have negative impact on the education of women. In our society, women are treated as burden in terms economic returns and output [19]. Thus, parents are prioritized to marry off their un-aged girls. According to UNICEF's global estimates, more than 60 million women aged 20-24 were married before their 18th birth day [19, 20]. In Bangladesh, 78.4 percent of

women aged 20-49 percent living in rural areas are married before they turned 18 compared to 65.2 percent in urban areas [20]. Mean age at marriage has significant impact on their lesser education.

Mean age at marriage

Year	Women		
	National	Rural	Urban
1991	18.1	17.9	19.0
2001	20.4	20.1	21.3
2002	20.6	20.4	21.4
2003	20.4	20.2	21.5
2004	19.0	18.9	19.9
2005	17.9	17.8	18.8
2006	18.1	17.9	19.0
2007	18.4	18.1	19.4

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2008.

From above information it is clear that there is negative correlation between early marriage and women's education level as well as the household economic status.

To engage in household activities

In our traditional society, girls are used to engage in household activities which hampered their educational life. Parents think that women are for household activities and sons are for outside incivilities. This belief embedded in their thought. As a result girls are deprived from education. Besides, the female child works thrice as much as, or even more than the male child. This is because house keeping is considered a central feature in the upbringing of the girl child, while the boy child is often free of this time consuming engagement. House keeping tasks may often make the girl child to become too tired to concentrate on her studies.

House keeping Tasks performed by both the sex

Sex	2002-03			2005-06		
	National	Urban	Rural	National	Urban	Rural
Both Sex	35.1	21.5	21.2	68.8	62.7	70.9
Women	65.7	40.8	39.8	80.6	75.8	82.5
Men	5.7	3.3	3.5	6.2	7.8	5.5

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2008.

It is seen that those who are outside the labor force a large portion of them are engaged in household work. At the national level in 2005-06, 68% of the total population who are engaged household [19, 20]. It is important to note that the working aged populations who are engaged in household for women in urban and rural area are higher in 2005-06 compared to 2002-03 [21]. It expressed that participation in household work are increasing day by day which is a negative sign for women development.

Labor force aged 15 years and over by level of education and sex and locality: Level of Education	2002-2003					
	National		Urban		Rural	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
No Schooling	57.6	48.0	44.7	33.4	62.0	52.6
Class1-5	14.9	17.4	14.5	16.5	15.0	17.7
Class six to eight	10.1	12.0	11.5	12.1	9.7	10.6
Class nine to ten	7.6	8.9	9.0	10.6	7.1	8.4
SSC/HSC & equivalent	6.8	9.6	12.6	15.9	4.8	7.7
Degree & above	3.0	5.0	7.7	11.5	1.4	3.0
	2005-2006					
	National		Urban		Rural	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
No Schooling	50.86	37.08	39.76	24.98	54.26	40.85
Class1-5	22.88	24.12	21.34	21.55	23.35	24.92
Class six to eight	10.72	13.29	10.79	12.80	10.71	13.44
Class nine to ten	5.45	8.19	5.63	7.88	5.40	8.29
SSC/equivalent	4.61	7.54	7.76	10.20	3.65	6.71
HSC/equivalent	2.32	4.23	5.39	7.93	1.38	3.08
Degree/equivalent	1.82	3.32	4.75	7.93	0.92	1.88

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2008.

Data shows that at the higher level women's educational performance is low than that of men's. Though at primary level, women's achievements are high in compare to the secondary and higher secondary level. Overall, this picture doesn't mean that the

position of women is at satisfactory or nearly satisfactory level. Actually, educational achievements at primary level do not reflect the accurate position of women in a society. At the national level, 50 percent women have no education that indicates vulnerable position of women compared to men. Besides, 4.61 % women have passed SSC examination and engaged in labor forced which is not satisfactory compared to men [20]. Because of having no more education women are engaged in general labor force. Moreover, only 1.82 percent women have graduation or equivalent degree that indicates lower position of women in educational attainment.

Existing Norms and Beliefs

Traditional norms and beliefs are always discouraged women's education as men are used to hold the supremacy of power within the family relationships and everywhere. In Bangladesh, girls are to face various socio-cultural barriers and hangovers that keep them at home. Moreover, girls are often faced conflicting messages about their gender roles from the familial environment. Usually this happens when the girls first begins to menstruate, that is, when she is about twelve or thirteen years old [16]. This is based on the tradition that the girl is now an adult and that she must learn household work, not education. Such kind of norms and beliefs are embedded in our social and cultural system as it is male dominated society as a whole. There is common perception rooted in our mind that benefits of education are lower for women dampens demand for education [17]. In addition, pregnancy, childbirth, and childcare duties remove women from the education for substantial periods.

Veil (Purdah) system

One dimension of patriarchy which limits women's economic and educational activities is the prejudice of *purdah* or female exclusion. By this system women are confined to the house and are denied access by tradition and culture to participate in the socio-political development of their society. For example, belief in *purdah* reduces female mobility and the scope for full participation in national life, as in education and employment; hence, it enhances dependence [46]. Veil system is highly responsible for lower education of women in a male dominant society like Bangladesh. Though the importance of female education is being realized now a day, still a portion of our society think that female should be kept behind the veil or the *purdah*. The practice of *purdah* in Islam makes it difficult for married Muslim women to fully benefit from the educational system [1].

Similarly, in traditional religion women must always stay in the background. In the rural areas of our country, some of the illiterate *mullahs* do not believe in the education of women including their female children and wives [18]. They think that the place of the woman is in the kitchen. They also think that women should not go out for education [22]. Such men prefer to marry illiterates as wives for fear that the educated woman is too assertive, domineering, free, and in general a threat to the male-dominated society [1]. In the name of religion some uneducated fundamentalists strictly oppose women education as they do not believe in education.

Violence against Women

There is a notion grounded in our mentality that women are not physically and mentally fit for challenging profession. So they do not need more education rather than they should engage household activities. This is called Psychological torture or violence against women. It's the real scenario of a patriarchal society. There are some superstitious people in our country who believe that women are inferior to men in terms of intellectuality [17, 22]. Thus their (women) duty should be limited within the four walls. Besides, they think that a women's duty is to rear up children, perform the household activities and help the male members of their family as they are treated as auxiliary force. As a result, access of women's education is being hindered which may hamper overall development of our country as women constitute half of the total population in Bangladesh. Moreover, physical violence against women makes them vulnerable as violence is a serious threat to proper mental development. Directly or indirectly it decreases the capacity of women in terms of educational attainment. Previous researchers found that education decreases violence [48].

Problem in Subjects Selection

The positions of women in education are full of contradictions and dilemmas in male dominated societies. Due to male dominated curricula of education, women are unable to select their academic subjects. In our society, traditional concept in subject selection is that girls are not fit for science and technology, rather they are perfect for humanities and arts oriented subjects. In addition, it is frequently commented that females drop out at a high rate from information technology courses. Such kind of expression often creates mental weakness among the women. Without evidence it may not be true at all. Most often subjects are selected and imposed

by senior male members of their family though they are not engaged in study. And women are compelled to follow up their guideline in terms of continuation of study. But it is seemed to women as burden to continue. A large number of them are dropped out in the middle position. This is because; women remain under-represented at the higher level. More striking is the obstinate segregation of the two sexes in the traditional 'female' and 'male' subjects. As men usually specialize in science subjects, they are more likely than women to study further and pursue a professional degree, and command a higher income as well. The genderization of subjects and curricula is even more serious in the younger generations, despite economic, social,- and educational changes [42]. Although rising educational attainment has enabled more women to enter the labor force, it guarantees them no equality with men in employment. Even with the same degree of education, income disparity between the two sexes persists [40]. When the trend of educational expansion is inspected closely, the effects appear to be uneven: girls of working class origin seem to benefit least from the reforms [40, 43]. On the whole, the impacts of educational expansion upon women are uneven and paradoxical. Although some women have made inroads into the non-traditional areas of study or occupation, their overall positions in education, such as their persistent segregation in the lower levels or less competitive subjects, are worrying and puzzling.

Stereotyped Gender Roles

It is seen that for many years, women, are made to believe that their rightful place is in the home front; as housewives, producers and caretakers of children. It is called stereotyped gender roles of women. In a male dominated society, rights women are determined on the basis of their roles. It is a common concept embedded in our society that women's roles are limited within the household. Hence, it is our general perception that education is not needed for women as they earn, on average, less than men in the labor market. But prior study found slight difference that there is evidence on the margin, the returns to education is equally as high for women as for men. Specifically, having any upper secondary education raises wages by 11.5 percent for women, compared with 5.3 percent for men [16]. It also increases economic growth. So women's education may have significant impact on economic growth [23, 24]. Nevertheless, in our society always stereotypes boys and girls into different roles, and interpersonal expectations govern and sanction gender conformity and gender deviation. Through socialization,

messages of the appropriate attributes of men and women, that are masculinity and femininity, will be transmitted, and these shape individuals' perceptions and their expectations of themselves or others. As girls are traditionally socialized to be feminine and home-based, they will regard academic excellence as incompatible with their female virtues and fear to succeed [25]. Therefore, they naturally scale down their aspirations and avoid infringing the unacceptable boundaries. Rather they prefer gaining satisfaction from the domestic spheres to striving for more rewarding positions in the public sphere.

Preference of Male Son

Our patriarchal social system always preferred male son in terms of tradition of hereditary, social security and economic output. On the other hand, girls are neglected and burdened in terms of economic unproductively. Though women invest much more time and labor in household activities than men, is not calculated. The son's preference is predominant in male dominated culture; parents cast different expectations, exert various pressures, and invest differently in their sons and daughters [26]. Parents think that male sons are much more secure for their later life. But girls have to be married off and they will go to husband's house within a certain time. In this respect, boys are given priority in terms of investment in education, and girls are deprived of various opportunities and rights including education. Son preference also increases the family size significantly in the long run. Researcher found that in Bangladesh son preference is so strong that even education above primary level cannot counteract it [44].

Gender Bias Education System

The career development of women is often shaped along specific occupations, traditionally stereotyped as female occupation. The school system encourages the boy child to be an engineer or a medical doctor, while at the same time encouraging the girl-child to become a gentle nurse or a primary school teacher. Educational institutions as the medium of socialization does not mistakenly reinforce gender stereotypes prevailing in society, but purposively function to perpetuate and legitimize male domination; what is learnt in schools actually undergirds the structure of power and privilege in society [27]. Beside the social norms and beliefs, education or schooling is highly responsible for producing differential educational performance of boys and girls; or for perpetuating gender

inequalities; or for constituting, regulating, sanctioning appropriate gender identities and sustaining the gender order of society. Barriers to girls' education begin at the primary school level where teachers and textbooks project attitudes that discourage performance of girls, or promote stereotypes of girls not being as capable as boys in learning technical subjects or mathematics.

Lack of Institutional Environment for Women and Girls

Most of our educational institutions continue co-education and have no gender sensitive environment in terms of privacy and toilet facilities. This may be because women and girls are faced variety of problems that hindered their participation in education and limited their educational attainment. Prior studies have found that single-sex schools may be more effective for girls' learning [28]. School facilities themselves can be hostile to girls. For example, In Bangladesh, parents have withdrawn girls but not boys from schools without latrines; and in Pakistan, many parents worry about enrolling girls in schools without boundary walls providing privacy [29].

Negative Attitude of Parents

Some parents also have negative attitudes towards women's education, especially illiterate parents who are fond of withdrawing their daughters from school in favour of their sons. Though girls and boys have the same opportunities for education [17] but girls are deprived of education as parents hold patriarchal attitude. The help that parents expect from their children also determines the relative schooling of sons and daughters [30, 16]. In our custom dictates that sons take responsibility for their parents. Whereas parents give their sons freedom to develop the knowledge and skills to increase their future incomes, they limit their daughters' education.

Sexual and Mental Harassment

Women who have been victim of sexual torture or behave inconsistent with the patriarchal traditions of their society often get stuck in a cycle that can continue up to addiction, depression or even suicide. Sexual harassment is common picture in male dominant societies like Bangladesh. In the educational institutions women are often victimized by their male counterparts. Women teachers and students are always under the threat of harassment by male colleagues, teachers, or students. Sexual politics in schools, they argue, can aptly explain why women underachieve [31, 32]. When women are colonized in a male-defined world and constantly

under men's intimidation, their perception, personality, and self-esteem will become crooked. It is now well recognized that schools are structured by a sexual division of labour; female and male students are differentiated and typified by various practices [33], processes, and interactions to the extent that they have different positions within schools, and that their identities, perceptions, and expectations of themselves and each other are shaped and gendered.

Faulty Socialization Process at Family Level

In male dominant society, education for girls' right from the very beginning is designed to make them primarily effective mothers and housewives. Hence girls are brought up in the traditional family set-up to be passive, obedient, 'ladylike' and always submissive to men [1]. In our traditional family system, girls are often engaged in kitchen room and boys are in reading room. Besides, boys are encouraged to be aggressive, competitive and independent. On the other hand girls cook, clean house, fetch water, and help their mothers care for younger children, especially those who are ill. These are the outcomes of faulty socialization process. Moreover, prior research found that most young girls spend at least one-third more hours per day working at home than boys of the same age, and in some age groups as much as 85 percent more hours [34].

Insufficient Educational Institution

In Bangladesh, many villages in rural areas continue to lack formal education institutions. 4.5 percent of villages have only a 50% education rate. Women from low socioeconomic families and women with uneducated parents are less likely to receive education than other women from wealthier families and who have educated parents [36]. Education opportunities for girls in urban slums and girls from ethnic minorities who do not speak Bengali as a first language have been decreasing significantly. In addition, educational institutions are not convenient to the girls child in terms of distance and communication.

After above discussion it can be said that, these socio-cultural factors determine whether girls enter educational institutions, how long they will remain, and how well they perform. Besides, socio-cultural problems related to women's education are deeply rooted in the social systems that must be changed in terms of balance society as social systems are governed by social beings. By eliminating

these barriers, women's opportunities of educational access and attainment can be improved. For this reason, some necessary measures are needed to uplift the present situation.

Suggestions to uplift the situation

- Gender sensitive curriculum formulation and textbook is badly needed to ensure gender neutral education system in Bangladesh. Planned or unplanned, text curriculum formulators in the past have been predominantly male and hence the gender biases often reflected in textbooks, course contents and examinations. Women should be connected with the launching of a curriculum censoring board. The full involvement of female in the curriculum formulating and censoring board will help to identify and remove possible gender bias that may be in the curriculum. Similarly, the misguided stereotypical division of work into men's and women's jobs must be eliminated.
- Women must have involvement in educational policy and plan formulation process. It can not be opposed that the deeper the level of involvement of women in formulation of policies of education pertinent to them, the greater the likelihood of coming up with policies that are relevant, responsive and sensitive to the plight of women.
- Enforcing legal provision of penalties for withdrawal of girls from school for marriage. Moreover, current non-formal education programs should be reinforced to provide selective type of learning for specific objectives for adult women and secondary school drop outs and women who desire to further their education.
- Poverty is an important risk factor to ensure of women education in Bangladesh. And education is the panacea to development. Hence, poverty alleviation programs should be well articulated, vigorously pursued and objectively carried out so that poverty level of parents will be reduced. This will enable parents to give equal opportunities to their children.
- Positive mentality towards women is essential that can be ensured successful participation of women in education. Besides, Positive attitudes towards women education would accelerate the process of empowerment in Bangladesh.

- In all stages of education girls' drop out rate must be prevented. School environment should be improved and necessary facilities should be provided that can help girl' regular participation.
- Girl child treated as burden in our patriarchal society. Hence, provide gainful means of employment opportunities which will override the financial burden of keeping a girl child at home and also marrying them off early for fear of higher dowry. In this respect, both the GO and NGOs initiatives is also needed.
- Financial assistance can be provided to the girls' parents that can facilitate them to send their school or college going student. Moreover, financial incentive like special scholarship award, tuition facilities and other financial grants can be specifically granted to women in order to check talented and promising females from wandering away from education.
- Traditional concept of subject selection is that girls are not fit for science and technology, rather they are perfect for humanities and arts oriented subjects is absolutely an illusive idea. Hence, women and girls need to be encouraged to attend school and to stay in school for longer years to learn science and technology subjects if they are to contribute their best to national efforts for self reliance and national development.
- It has become apparent under the present economic hardships that the stereotype image of men as the family's sole bread winner is no longer always true.
- Institutional environment must be improved in terms of privacy and other facilities. In the remote area, number of school should be increased so that will helpful and convenience to the girls.
- Misleading sexist categorization of jobs in homes, and employers of labor is a major discriminatory factor. It must be eliminated through creating mass-consciousness activities. Print and electronic media should play pivotal role in this respect. Overall mass-peoples' mentality change is badly needed to mainstream women in education and building up a gender balance society.
- Mass consciousness should be created against the uneducated *Mullahs* who are engaged in misinterpretation between women and religion. Peoples should be brought them under trial and

punished them significantly. At first, government should take some rigid initiatives in this respect as they are misleading general people.

- There is a common misconception about son's preference existed in our society that is totally wrong in terms of economic security and contribution to the parents in later life. This is one kind of superstition should be removed through social actions at different stages (e.g., individual level, group level and community level). Social worker may operate theses programs as they are perceived different values, and are capable of bringing planned changes.
- Existing laws should be modified and new law must be formulated to remove unwanted actions e.g. *fatwa against women's education, violence against women etc.*

Conclusion

It is clear that discrimination on grounds of sex is contrary to natural justice and is also morally unacceptable. Both access and participation of women in education is imperative for socio-economic development. In Bangladesh, subordinated position of women made them vulnerable within the family as it is well known that a large number of them are less educated than men. Similarly, there are some basic socio-cultural problems embedded in social system which is harmful for women. However, there has been an educational expansion in the past decades. Women and the lower classes that were previously disadvantaged in access to schooling have benefited from such expansion. For every educated nation the foil development of individual potential in every child is an important principle. Thus the educational justification for tackling sexism and gender issues generally is that by so doing, the quality of educational provision overall is to be improved. It is also suggested that sex and gender issues should be seriously analyzed to remove illusive idea and misinterpretation. Overall, as a human being we should respect each other that will help to building up a balance society.

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