

BREAKING THE CHAIN: DYNAMICS OF INTRA-HOUSEHOLD RELATIONSHIPS & NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT:

This paper attempts to focus on the dynamics of the family and social relationship of women through the prism of NGO activities in Bangladesh. It examines the involvement of women in NGO activities and its impact on the dynamics of the household and social relationships, particularly of women, in the light of field data from Bangladesh. Gradual demonstration of the effects of success stories in society acted as the final contributing factor in generating mass acceptance of NGOs in Bangladesh. As a result, people's attitude toward and trust in NGOs have changed significantly, allowing women to participate in the public domain enhancing their economic and social situation simultaneously. Nevertheless, women's movement and activities continue to be restricted by both male members of the household as well as society. Likewise, the research conducted, in this case, was qualitative in nature and samples were taken from members of selected NGOs in Bangladesh; 20 case studies were done on the basis of in-depth interviews and participant observation. It was concluded that two major factors can propel the breaking of the chain of societal oppression of women in Bangladesh: internal poverty and length of NGO membership.

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Key words: *Household, Kinship, Gender Relations and NGO.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Development action of NGOs in Bangladesh, from its inception, had a progressive outlook, which was in contradiction with existing social norms and values. Thus, even though NGOs have been proactive in working towards the betterment of women, from the very embryonic stage they were met with resistance from social and religious fundamentalists. Since the last few decades, women related policy approaches such as Women in development (WID) and Gender and Development (GAD) have been implemented by the development agencies for the advancement of women. NGOs have already achieved part of the intended result through the different development approaches to bring changes in the life of rural poor women. Nonetheless, Mosse (1994), in an ODI study of 16 projects with a focus on economic development in rural areas of Bangladesh, India, Uganda and Zimbabwe found that "contrary to expectations, there was little evidence to suggest that the projects as a whole greatly improved women's economic and social status, or effectively challenged prevailing patterns of discrimination" (Robinson 1992). Participation of women in the development process through the NGOs was, therefore, a formidable endeavor – both on the part of the NGOs and on the part of those women who challenged it. Nonetheless, NGOs are now widely accepted as an agent of women's development parallel to the government in the developing countries like Bangladesh (Hamid1996; Naved 1994; Amin 1994; Razzak 2011; Carr 1996; Boserup1970; Chen1996; Mizan1994; Chowdhury1989; Kabeer 1994).

In traditional societies, as in Bangladesh, women are socially and culturally suppressed by their male counterparts, both within and outside their homes (Hamid, 1996). Thus, naturally the changing social norms have an impact on family, as a whole, and its internal relationships. This process of change, in most cases operates alongside social norms and values, working to amend the male dominated intra-household relationships, representative of traditional kinship patterns. Within a limited scope, this paper will attempt to portray the voices of the rural women of Bangladesh on how this change is taking place and the role of a selected NGO.

This paper focuses on the dynamics of the family, intra-household and social relationships of women from the perspective of gender through the prism of NGO activities in Bangladesh. It is organized as follows: methodology, a brief discussion of theoretical perspectives on kinship patterns, types of family, concept of household, household work, intra-household and social relationship and gender relations in section I. Section II examines the involvement of women in NGO activities and its impact on the dynamics of household and social relationship -- particularly of women -- in the light of field data. Section III encompasses a brief summary of the findings and discussion with concluding remarks.

1.2 Methodology

This research is based on qualitative research methods using both primary and secondary sources of information. It used ethnographic data to prepare case studies that is mainly based on in-depth interviews, participant observations and narratives of the respondents. Key informant interviews added new insights to analyze the data. Total sample size chosen for the study was 53 (see Annexure 3 Table 2) Therefore, the sampling was used to maximize the number of cases which are directly related to the activities of the selected NGO - *Shaptagram Nari Shanirvar Parishad* (SNSP).

The Research Tools and Techniques:

Pilot Survey

Researcher had to spend a lot of time both in the field and talking to the experts. In this process, pilot surveys were conducted in two different districts of Bangladesh. The locations of the preliminary field trips (pilot surveys) were Munshigonj and Faridpur district - near the capital Dhaka. The selection process of NGO was a hectic one since a large number of NGO is operating in Bangladesh. To select an NGO, the first and foremost criterion was that the NGO must have been working on women for at least for 10 years. (see Annexure 4).

Selection of Respondents

As mentioned earlier, the study used qualitative methods and the selection of respondents or cases was done to meet a specific purpose in selected locations. The method followed to select the respondents may be considered as *purposive* or quota sampling. Therefore, the sampling was done on purpose to maximize the number of cases who are directly related to the activities of the selected NGO.

In-depth Interview

Researcher used a two-page questionnaire for collecting identification data for all categories of respondents (Category 1, C2, and C3). The questionnaire was supplemented by a structured guideline/ interview schedule *line* to conduct the interviews in all categories of the sample (see Annexure 2). Researcher also interviewed NGO leaders and staff, social workers, policy makers, and the members of the administrative and implementing machinery, in relation to their role and responsibilities, on various aspects of gender and development programs. Both the questionnaire and the guideline were pre-tested during the process of study area selection (pilot survey). The interview guideline and table of participants numbers and characteristics have shown in Annexure 2 & 3.

Case Study

Twenty selected case studies on women (C1) who are under the NGO programs constituted an important tool for this study to grasp a better understanding of the dynamics of intra- household relationships.

Participant Observation

Participant Observation is a popular ethnographic tool. This involves living or an extended period alongside the people being studied. To get a deeper understanding of the complex and sensitive situation of rural women it is necessary to make a study which is participatory in character. Based on this, researcher spent on average more than a day for each woman (even more if needed) who constituted the target group of the selected NGO.

Field Notebook and Diary

Researcher had maintained a notebook and used it for recording the important points, in as details as possible, during the interviews and discussions. Moreover, a field diary also maintained to note down the experience at night of whatever has happened during the day.

1.2.1 Analytical technique: processing of data from both primary and secondary sources

The information obtained from the case studies were edited and compiled into a matrix for the ease of discussion and interpretation. The matrix had all the indicators that were initially selected and entered into the interview guideline, based on which the interviews were conducted and case studies prepared. Researcher used her own field experience and understanding in raising the arguments and drawing the conclusions. Secondary sources of information were heavily utilized to complement and supplement the qualitative primary data that were collected from the fields. Various documentary sources from selected government offices, donor agencies, women's

program implementing machinery of the NGOs, as well as published documents (books, journals, monographs, and reports) were reviewed. As mentioned earlier, a diary of the fieldwork, which helped shed light on the socio-cultural perspective of the study and in raising the arguments and drawing the conclusions.

2. CONCEPTS OF KINSHIP, FAMILY, HOUSEHOLD AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS: BANGLADESH CONTEXT

To understand the dynamics of rural society in Bangladesh, the kinship, the concept of household and family patterns need to be analyzed. Kinship, family and marriage are closely related terms of key significance in the field of both anthropology and sociology. 'Social anthropologists have dedicated much of their endeavor to analyzing kinship systems of particular societies... and it constitutes the framework within which the individual is assigned economic and political functions, acquires rights and obligations, receives community aid, etc. particularly in traditional societies kinship is of greater significance' (Bottomore, 1986; Haviland 1974; Giddens 1993). Kinship either comprises genetic ties or ties initiated by marriage (Haviland 1974; Kuper and Kuper, 1985). Family relations are always identified within kinship groups (Giddens, 1993). Family involves connections with other kin, terms and conditions of marriage, and the connection between marriage and sexuality – all these concepts differ widely in different cultures.

Marriage is a bond between two people living together in a socially approved sexual relationship; Giddens (1993) and Murdock (1949) regarded the institution of marriage as a universal feature of society. They contended that marriage exists 'when the economic and sexual functions are united into one relationship' (Jary and Jary, 1991).

A family is a group of kin having responsibility for the upbringing of the children. A family is a group of persons directly linked by kin connections (mother, father, other offspring, grandparents, etc.) (Giddens, 1993; Haviland 1974). A network of kinship ties connects household and families, and kin networks formed the base of social security prior to the emergence of the welfare state. (Kuper and Kuper, 1985).

'Household' is not a universal category, but a culturally relative term. The household has been a different concept to grapple with, both theoretically and methodologically, because it is at once many things. Household, as defined by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), is a dwelling unit where a single person lives alone or a group of persons normally lives and eats together from the common cooking arrangements. Persons living in the same dwelling unit, but having meals from separate cooking arrangements constitute separate households. Generally, the eldest male or female earner of the household members is considered to be the head of the household.

The Female Headed Household (FHH) is formed through a historical, social and economic process (Rahman and Hossain, 1992). FHHs are created through divorce or marital instability, abandonment, migration, or death of the husbands, when they (women) are left behind to fend for themselves without any male support. Two types of FHH have been seen in the rural areas in Bangladesh. The *de facto* households where females are the main income earner as a head of the household by death, desertion or divorced from the husband. 'Head' is a legal and social concept and a person does not have to maintain continuous residence in the village to be a *de jure* head. Households were defined to have rural based *de facto* heads where the *de jure* head (either male or female) was a migrant, leaving behind someone who was in charge (Hamid, 1996; Rahman 2003; Cain et.al. 1979; Duggan 1997). Although the exact number is estimated differently by different organizations, but most of the FHHs are poorest. FHHs are now very common in rural areas in Bangladesh (Rahman 2003; Cain et.al. 1979; Islam 1982; Wiest 1991; 1998). According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), between 1994 and 2014, the rate of increase in FHH had been modest – from 8.7 per cent to 12.5 per cent. A married woman enjoys better social prestige and security than a single or deserted woman. Nonetheless, feminists also argued, 'such households (FHH) have a positive effect on female autonomy and despite suffering from stigmatization as deviant form, many functions very successfully both socially and economically' (Momsen 2001)

Social relationships and lineage groups are characterized by, and bound together through system of well-defined customs, rights and obligations in Bangladesh. The typical village in Bangladesh is composed of a number of neighborhoods or *paras* which, in turn, are made up of smaller neighborhoods or *paras*. Sometimes the majority of people in a *para* share a basic occupation: as agriculturists, fishers, weavers, potters and so on. The residents of a *bari*, divided into households living in separate *ghors*, are members of a patrilineal family at varying stages of the family life cycle. Potentially, these residents include a father, a mother, sons and their wives and children, and daughters until they marry or return home.

2.2 Family, Household, Social Relations and Gender: Feminist Perspectives

Kinship system exerts an extremely important influence on women's lives. For a married woman, her husband's kinship group is her circle. The radius of that circle will vary depending on the size of the *para* in which she lives and the homogeneity of the *para* in terms of kinship and other social criteria (Cain et al., 1979). Ideally, these family and kinship systems offer a woman security and support throughout the various stages of her life, even in the event of her husband's death. But these same patriarchal norms impose a rigid set of rules and restrictions on women's economic and social mobility. As a result, within this system of kin-focused residential and social groupings, women face extremely gendered divisions of labor and space.

Feminist sociologists have noted the important role played by women in maintaining and sustaining kin networks. Women are identified as 'kin keepers'. Both "gender" and "kinship" studies have been concerned with

understanding the rights and duties that order relations between people defined by difference. The 'household' is critical for the analysis of the gender roles and relations, and is usually the focal point of the sexual division of labor (Kabeer 1985, Brydon and Chant 1989; Harris 1981, Guhathakurata 2003). Momsen and Townsend (1987) arguing from a feminist perspective, identify the household as an 'arena of subordination'. There is substantial evidence to indicate that the workload of women, especially in the poorer (agricultural labourer and small cultivator) rural households in the developing countries, is enormous and their responsibilities and labour involved are critical without little or no control over resources and decision-making (Guhathakurata 2003; Momsen 2001; Agarwal 1985; Peplau and Gordon 1985). By custom the life of a woman in Bangladesh is shaped by the patriarchal, patrilineal, and the patrilocal nature of the social system (Kabeer 1994; Guhathakurata 2003). Within the female space of hut and homestead each woman at different stages in her life plays different social roles; that of daughter, bride, wife, mother, mother-in-law and widow. The dominant male determines each role in that stage of her life. So much so that very often women are not called by their given names, but referred to as so-and-so's daughter, bride, wife, or mother, and even many years after a husband's death as so-and-so's widow. A woman is seldom granted respect and rights as an individual, rather her rights, respect and status derive from her relationships with specific males. (Rahman 2003).

In rural areas, women's freedom of movement outside the households is severely restricted by 'society' called the *shamaj*, which strongly governs the lives of rural people in various ways (Adnan, 1989). Hence, patriarchal control over poor women's labour is operated not by the family patriarchs, but by the village patriarchs. The societal, cultural and religious attitudes have resulted in discriminatory laws and/or practices, which prevent women from participating as equal members of society.

Religion is also a basic source of gender differences that is to say, the kinship, religious, and socio-political systems all support and reinforce women's exclusion from public life (Mosse, 1993). In the study areas in Bangladesh, women met resistance in joining NGO activities because of religious attitude of their male relatives in the household.

Evidence suggests that, poverty changes the dynamics of the household relationships differently from others. Poor women, by and large, face less resistance from society as well for their involvement in the public sphere (Guhathakurata 2003). That is to say, the concept of class is another important determinant to analyze the dynamics of the intra-household and social relationships of women in the rural areas in Bangladesh.

NGO interventions help womenfolk to challenge the male dominated socio-cultural-religious systems in the study areas in Bangladesh. Poverty pushes kinship and social relationships to turn in a positive way towards women. The point of mere survival breaks all the ice of socio-cultural and religious barriers for the rural poorest women in Bangladesh. In this connection, the role of NGOs is very significant in creating awareness among those women in particular and society in general.

2.3 NGOs and Intra-Household Relationships

To start working on women, NGOs have considered Intra-Household Relationship (IHHR) as an important indicator for the development of women. Dynamics of IHHR determine the rate of success or failure of NGOs' gender related activities. Thus, status and autonomy of women depend on the dynamics of women's relationship within the household (Bottomore, 1986).

In a traditional society, as in Bangladesh, interventions of NGO, especially in women related activities, gradually change the situation both in emotional and physical terms (Hossain 1992, Amin and Pebley, 1994, Naved, 1994; Mahmud 2003). It has been observed also in the study areas in Bangladesh that the changing dynamics of IHHR have a significant impact on the other indicators of women's empowerment like mobility of women, self autonomy and the decision making process (Hashemi et.al. 1996, Naved 1994). Gender related activities of NGOs played a prominent role in helping women with their changing attitude towards male dominance. WID to GAD approach is well known among the realm of NGOs that are particularly working with women. They are not only trying to empower women, but also focus on the causes of disempowerment of women. A brief discussion on the findings of the research in relation to intra - household relationships, gender relation and role of NGO is given below to comprehend the dynamics of social changes in rural Bangladesh.

3. ARE NEW VOICES EMERGING?: CHANGING DYNAMICS OF INTRA-HOUSEHOLD RELATIONSHIPS AND THE ROLE OF NGOs IN BANGLADESH

This section of the paper aims at explaining the dynamics of intra-household and social relationships of the women respondents in relation to the participation in various development activities of the selected NGO (SNSP). A broad, three-dimensional perception was revealed in relation to the respondents' experience on the dimensions of their intra-household and social relationships after joining NGO activities. Women (respondents) were asked whether they met any resistance from the household or from society in joining NGOs. If so, who resisted and why? And how does she cope with it? If the respondent had joined the NGO, who performed the household work and other responsibilities in her absence? The perceptions or experiences are summarized in the following: positive attitude indicating that the family, kin and society did not extend any resistance or negative attitude meaning that the family, kin and society resisted the respondent's effort toward joining the NGOs, and indifferent attitude stating women are incapable of preventative action. Nonetheless, the study tried to capture this intricate dynamics

of women's participation in the NGO activities in the existing family and kinship patterns and the imposing socio-cultural system. Under the following broad framework main issues will be discussed - Breaking the Chain: Household and Family Dynamics; Breaking the Chain: Kinship Dynamics; Breaking the Chain: Dynamics of Social Processes.

3.1 Breaking the Chain: Household and Family Dynamics

The process of paradigm shift in the attitude towards women's mobility and participation in economic and social activities starts from the household level. Whether or not a woman will be allowed to take part in any activity outside the household entirely depends on the (usually male) household head and other elderly men or women. Findings revealed that poverty, new economic opportunity, good intra household relationship, self motivation and awareness are the major catalytic factors to join NGO that have changed the dynamics of women's life.

3.1.1 Poverty: A Pre-disposing Factor

Endemic poverty acted as the pre-disposing factor in stimulating a huge change in attitude, which led people to explore ways to bring about economic benefit. NGOs in their early stages mostly got the attention of the poor section of society. NGOs, to a great extent, provided successful examples in the study areas that involvement with NGOs can be beneficial in alleviating poverty. This opportunity of economic emancipation acted as a strong driving force in changing the overall social prism of viewing the participation of women in NGO-driven or other outside economic activities. The poorest of the society responded to the call of the NGOs in bringing about this change almost from the very inception of the NGO-led development process. Women in the poorer households, thus got minimal or no resistance from the household. The norm of society or *shamaj* proved weaker than the urge for survival. Attitude of the households in particular and the *Samaj* in general had, therefore, experienced an almost dramatic change and resistance towards women's participation in NGO activities or outside economic activities.

A visual look of the respondents' analyses reveals poverty as the main driving force that pushed them to break the household and social norm. For example, respondent (C1) cases clearly cited poverty to be the main cause. A closer look into the voice of women would provide stronger support to this analysis. Because of lack of resources and income, **Surjoban, Mamota and Deepali** (pseudo names have used for the sake of privacy of the respondents) are open to any non-traditional work.

Surjoban is a daily labourer and her family depends on her income. She faced no resistance from her household or society. She said, "*I didn't get any resistance from anywhere. I have children to feed and have to send them to school, why I should I care about shamaj?*".

Mamota prior to joining the NGO was a housemaid in the neighbourhood and used to work very hard. She said, "*my husband never stopped me. Rather he encouraged me because of my contribution to the betterment of the family. It brings economic stability of my family and reduced my husband's burden*". She stays with her mother who takes care of the household and the children while she is gone for any NGO activities. She added, "*my mother and sisters are always there when I have to go out for work or NGO daylong workshops*". Kin relations helped women to go out for income.

Deepali is a leader of the female Agri-laborer group in her locality. Her husband never resisted her because the family mostly depends on her earning. She is very assertive and strong and works hard for improving her economic situation. She is playing a dominant role in her family. Moreover, she strongly protested against the local elite when they raised questions about her movements in the locality.

3.1.2 Economic Opportunity and Social Network

People exposed to acute poverty constantly keep looking for economic opportunities to sustain themselves. This new dimension of economic opportunity, as opposed to disaster relief or charity, attracted the willing and hard working section easily. Economic opportunity acted as the main inciting factor to encourage the poor people pre-disposed to poverty. Almost all the main respondent cases supported this analysis. Arju Begum, Laily Begum and Jahanara belong to an economically superior class compared to the other respondents and can survive without NGO support. But, they are also engaged in NGO for economic and social benefit. The promise of economic proliferation has attracted them since earnings from the NGO program are deemed as a source of additional income. Kodbanu claimed that her husband supports her. "*With the involvement if you could earn some money, why not?*" her husband had said.

3.1.3 Intra-household Relationship

Positive attitude on the part of the family stemming from good intra-household relationships favors NGO involvement. Good IHHR is one of the positive motivating factors that paved the way to involving women in economic activities related to NGOs. A positive mutual understanding between husband and wife could lead to active involvement in NGOs. For example, Category 1 respondents **Shaheda, Rokeya, Amena** have good relationships with their husbands and because of that they didn't face any resistance from their household. Some of their comments were interesting and are worth mentioning.

The story of Shaheda is a notable one. Shaheda said proudly, "*my husband is a good person and he never objected to my desire, but the neighbours were hostile to joining the NGO*". But her husband was strong and bold,

and said to neighbours, *"if my wife becomes bad, it's my problem. This is none of your business"*. She added, my husband is very supportive, he takes care of the household work in my absence.

Rokeya is from a landless family and has a good relationship with her husband. She runs a tea stall in the government land in her village. Both of them are trying hard to improve the economic situation. Her husband never opposed her from participating in the NGO activities. She even went outside her village to join the NGO activities, but her husband never resisted. But the villagers passed bad comments, she said. *"Bringing women out of the household and having them working along with men is an anti-religious activities, but the atmosphere and the overall attitude have changed a lot"*, Rokeya observed.

Amena has an excellent relationship with her husband. She was very confident and had expressed a very positive feeling about her husband when she was asked about her marital relationship. Her husband never stopped her, not even on an occasion when she stayed overnight in another village for a training workshop for a couple of days, she proudly remembered. She, however, also faced obnoxious reactions from the neighbours. Still now, even after her years of association with the NGO, people express curiosity. *"Even now they continue to ask silly questions like, what the Samity is all about? What will be the benefit out of it?"* – she complained.

3.1.4 Self Motivation and Awareness

Strong determination and self-motivation made it possible for some of the respondents to join the new tide of development. Showing a strong sense of freedom and responsibility, one of the respondents, Lalbaru, was adamant that she would join the NGO. She assured her husband, *"I will take care of the loans and payment of instalments myself and will not bother you"*. The husband was silent and the resistance disappeared. He never allows her to join any NGO activities that would require her to spend the night elsewhere. He, however, did not stop her from joining the day-long programs.

Minoti Rani Podder convinced her husband, *"we are poor and I should do something about it. Joining the 'Samity' (savings group of the NGO) is a good way of improving the economic condition"*. Her husband was convinced and allowed her, she claimed. Now her husband helps her in the household work and takes care of the children when she goes out for training or participating in various NGO activities. She initially faced a lot of resistance from the family and society. But her adamant attitude helped her overcome the situation. She said, *"I didn't bother about what other people thought or said. I didn't even listen to my in-laws"*. All women involved with the NGOs from an early stage, faced strong opposition from society even if not from the household. Similarly, Marium made her husband understand that it was not harmful for the household; rather it was beneficial. After completing all the household work and taking care of children she participated in the tailoring program of the NGO as a part of her plan to enhance the economic well being of the family.

3.1.5 Female Headed Household (FHH) and Independence

It is pretty common in the study areas that socially vulnerable women are facing poverty all on a sudden when deserted by the husband. It is also very common that the responsibility for the children, if any, of the broken family falls on the deserted wife, not the husband. As the new head of the family, they are now forced to earn a living to support her family. The FHHs enjoy more freedom than others, despite the acute poverty and distress they have. It was revealed that the FHHs, being their own decision-makers, could avail the opportunities stemming out of NGO activities much quicker than the housewives could (Mosse 1993). As a de jure household head (absence of the male household head), Mamotaz enjoyed relative freedom in the decision-making process.

3.1.6 Motivation by NGOs and Demonstration Effect of Success Stories

Examples of success stories created a demonstration effect that has a deep impact on society and especially for the younger people who are motivated by the NGO endeavour. Salina from Bangladesh faced no problems in joining the NGO. She said, *"By now NGOs have been accepted by all but earlier social situations were not favourable toward the participation of women"*. Ayesha, Anjolee, Jahanara, and Rokeya joined the NGO in its initial stage and confronted many social hindrances. All of them are in agreement that social barriers have been removed to a visible extent and motivation by the NGOs played an important role in this regard. People gradually understood the positive roles of NGOs seeing those who have benefited. This is a direct demonstration effect. Moreover, NGOs earned the trust of the people by doing motivational and awareness generating work as well as by establishing widely visible positive instances in society. Rahima is working in the NGO project and trying hard to educate her girl to ignore 'primitive' social values, she claimed. She expects that her daughter will get a good job like the NGO 'apa' (respectful address to the female field organiser), so that her and as well as her daughter's future will be secured. In addition, she will get an eligible groom for her daughter, she added.

3.2. Breaking the Chain: Dynamics of Kinship Pattern

Women who are involved with the NGO for more than five years participated in meetings, workshops and training that the NGO conducted. One needs the support from her kin in order to take the time off. In joining the NGO events any of her kin like mother, sister, daughter who are not living in the same household must help her take care of the household work, minor children etc. This is extremely important in shaping the attitudes of

the household head. As evidenced from most of the respondents' views, the attitude of the household heads or husbands was positive as long as they did not have to compromise their comfort. Had they been feeling any disturbance in their routine life in the absence of the women (wife or daughter or daughter-in-law), the attitude would have been universally negative. Kinship support is, therefore, very important for women to be able to reach out and participate in development activities.

3.3 Breaking the Chain: Dynamics of Social Processes

3.3.1 Samaj Still Matters

While the greatest challenge for women in the rural societies of Bangladesh in participating in public activities emerges from the household, the society or *samaj* has a strong role to play. Even though the family or the household is conducive to the participation of women in public events, the social, cultural and religious norms may prevent one from reaching out. A number of factors shaped the attitude of the neighbours and society.

3.3.2 Social Relation, Sexuality, and Religion

The traditional division of social spheres of the two sexes largely determines the social world of women; women are excluded from the public male sphere – fields, markets, roads and towns – and are permitted to move about at prescribed times and for prescribed purposes. Religion, kinship and patriarchy and political system restricted the mobility of women (Chen and Ghuzanvi 1979). Though women are working outside and are members of the work force, they do not enjoy the right of choice, a term difficult to conceptualise. Anjolee, faced strong resistance from the society at the time she decided to join the NGO, she said *"sometimes people called me a bad woman and then my husband beat me up"*. The *samaj* was not ready to accept women's presence in the outside world. Rokeya had a bad experience when she first joined the NGO a couple of years back. She said, villagers commented that taking women out of the household and having them work along with men side by side is an obnoxious thing. Ayesha Begum, a deserted woman, earns her living working as a maid from dawn to dusk. She faced resistance from society. People said very obnoxious things like *"NGOs are using women in (dirty) business and subsequently they will send them to the foreign country where they (expatriate NGO worker or donors) are from"*, she mentioned. Because of social insecurity, and social and religious-cultural values and norms (*purdah*), elderly people faced less resistance and younger people faced more resistance from society and the households. Monoara, a widow faced less resistance from the household and society. They moved easily because of their old age. But young women like Salina faced difficulties both from the household and society because of their young age. Like others Salina's husband did not like her to go out because of social insecurity and cultural religious norms and values. She remembered that an angry mob burnt the first office of a NGO in their village (*Komorpur*). People thought that women would become a Christian because of involvement with the NGO. But Selina thinks that the situation has changed a lot now.

3.3.3 Poverty Versus Class identity

Two powerful systems of social stratification dominate rural Bangladesh: patriarchy and class. The term patriarchy is here to mean "a set of social relations with a material base that enables men to dominate women" (Cain et al., 1979). The elite class evidently did not allow the women in their household to join the NGOs in the rural areas. Women got less resistance in the poorest households as well as from society toward their effort to join NGOs. Surjoban and Mamota like many are from a very poor family and they did not get resistance, neither from her household, nor from society because of belonging to a lower class with lower socio-economic status as mentioned earlier, she said that she didn't get any resistance from anywhere. Again as Deepali had mentioned earlier that she got strong resistance from society, *"even people wanted to beat me up because I didn't care about Samaj"*, she remembered the early days of her joining NGOs. Now NGOs have been accepted by all so she has no social resistance to work outside or join any economic activities with NGOs, she said.

3.3.4 Gender Still Matters

The young women, mostly faced cultural-religious resistance. In case of Sufia and Arjumanara (a dropped-out respondent, C3), husbands didn't want them to go outside. Therefore, they could not join any group meetings or avail any of training except that of being a member of the savings group. As young and docile persons, they silently accepted their husband's decisions. They were very positive about the role of NGO but they were too docile to protest, although they were convinced that it would be beneficial for her family. She repented, *"it is not possible to do anything good if husband is not a supportive or willing person"*.

3.3.5 NGO's are a New Power Structure in Rural Areas

The reasons for keeping connections with the NGO are two, first, to get better opportunities in terms of jobs for their son or daughter, and second, the fact that involvement with NGOs bring social prestige and good network by establishing connection with NGO leaders who are local elites. Husbands of Laily (C1) and Jahanara (C1) are not very progressive, but they let their wives get involved in the NGO. They think it's good to keep connection with NGOs -- an alternate power structure. Indirect evidence that the NGOs are becoming a part of the power structure comes from a very different perception of some of the respondents. For example, Arju Begum, Laily Begum and

Jahanara (C1) although belonging to the economically better class, are engaged in NGO activities for the economic and social benefit. The promise of economic benefit has attracted them since saving in the NGO program is deemed as a source of additional income.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is evident that women who were involved at the very early stage with the NGOs had faced resistance and assaults from society and neighbours mostly because of cultural-religious attitude. In some instances, distrust or suspicion about the role of NGOs was also instrumental. But it has emerged from the perceptions of the respondents that now this negative attitude towards NGOs has been removed to a considerable extent. Society is now more open towards NGOs and participation of women in NGO activities. Women are experiencing less resistance now from the household or society. From their perspectives, the attitude towards NGOs and women's participation in NGO activities has changed a lot. The question arises, what particular roles the NGOs played in changing or at the least in modifying the attitude? The following arguments have been made in answering this question.

While poverty acted as the pre-disposing factor, NGOs successfully created economic opportunities that were attractive to the poor. Acute poverty forces the suffering population to ignore the socio-religious hindrances in society. The economic incentive packages are often carefully designed to address the needs of particular groups, such as women. In fact, most of the NGOs in Bangladesh target vulnerable women's group as the recipients. For example, women who are destitute, deserted, widowed and divorced, join the NGO programs to access a source of income.

NGOs are conspicuous agents, particularly in Bangladesh, of promoting the gender issue in the development process. The fact that "seeing is believing" works really well. By now, NGOs, particularly, have created a number of success stories, which leads to a demonstration effect.

NGOs raise awareness and create motivational activities to inform the community on issues of gender and women's empowerment by highlighting success stories. Most successful NGOs have strong mass communication and public outreach programs.

The dynamics of a woman's relationship within the household, determines both her status and the sphere of her autonomy. Whenever women attempt to enter into the public sphere, which is still dominated by male, they face hindrance from male relatives (father, brother, husband, son-in-laws, etc.) as well as from society. In a traditional society, as in Bangladesh, interventions of NGOs, gradually changed the situation of women both in private and public spheres (Hossain, 1984, Amin and Pebley 1994, Naved 1994; Mahmud 2003; Carr et.al 1996; Hashemi et.al 1996).

Finally it is found that two factors contributed to the breaking of these social barriers: (i) internal poverty and (ii) length of NGO membership. Thus poverty acted as the pre-disposing factors to force women to participate in economic activities. Next gradually the demonstration effects of success stories in society acted as the final contributing factor in generating mass acceptance of NGOs approaches. As a result, people's attitude towards NGOs has changed significantly, allowing women to participate in the public domain to enhance the economic and social condition.

The Women in Development (WID) approach is well practiced in the sphere of NGOs that are working with women. However, to prepare women for the new challenges of patriarchy, NGOs should have shifted from Women in Development (WID) to Gender and Development (GAD) approach; GAD as a holistic approach (Young, 1993), focuses on both practical and strategic gender needs. This approach is not only trying to empower women, but also focusing on the causes of disempowerment of women in a patriarchal society.

However, it is still not evident whether and how women negotiating with patriarchy not only have changed their condition but also the positions within family, intra-household and in society. This paper asserts that NGO-led development process has been changing the pattern of gender relations within family, intra-household and social relationship in rural areas in Bangladesh. In order to understand and contextualise the pervasive influence of patriarchal structure, future research in this area is urgently needed. This is imperative to the understanding of the complex dynamics of the gender relations in rural areas in Bangladesh.

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Annexure -1

GLOSSARY AND ABBREVIATIONS

NGO	Non- Governmental Organizations
WID	Women in Development
GAD	Gender and Development
Para	Typical village in Bangladesh is composed of a number of neighborhoods
Bari	House / residence , divided into more than one household
Ghors	Living in separate rooms/ unit, household
shamaj	Set of norms of the society
Shalish	Rural based local court called the <i>shalish</i>
Apa	Sister
Purdah	Religious and social practice of female seclusion prevalent among Muslim and Hindu communities in South Asia

Annexure -2

Guidelines for Interviews

Section 1. Identification

- Name
- Age
- Marital Status
- Husband's/Father's/Mother's Name
- Academic Qualifications
- Current Principal Occupation
- Number of Dependant Children (in case of the married ones)/Size of the Household
- Asset (Land, Housing, Livestock, Jewelry, etc.)
- Age, Sex, Education, Occupation, Income, and Wealth of other household members

Section 2. Human Resources Status

- *Nutritional Condition*: (with special reference on the women in a household)
- *Illness*: History of illness, absence from work, mode of treatment
- *Sanitary Conditions*: Pucca/Kutchra, Outlook, Measures taken during menstruation
- *Family Planning*: Outlook
- *Source of Drinking Water*: Tubewells/Ponds
- *State/NGO Facilities*: Expectation/Frustration/Proposal

Section 3. Education

- Attitude/interest of women towards education
- What are the reasons for boys'/girls' not going to school. Is there any discriminatory attitude?
- Expectation behind children's (both boys' and girls') education
- Role of the Government and the NGOs: Expectation/Frustration
- Suggestions/proposals for change
- Satisfaction over the quality of education

Section 4. Intra-household Relationships

- Attitude of male members: Economic/Social
- Role of elderly women household members (mother-in-law and others)
- Attitude of neighbors
- Any resistance/help from other household members or neighbors for being involved with NGO activities (describe in details the experience of both the current and drop-out members)
- Relationship with children

Section 5. Economic Impact on the Individual/Household

- Occupational History
- Main Source of Income
- Weekly Income (Cash/Kind)
- Annual Income
- Daily Wage Time
- Change in Life-style Over the Last Five Years
- Future Expectations

Section 6. Social Impact

- *Decision-Making*: Children's marriage, selling or buying properties, big expenditures, children's education, mobility
- *Autonomy/Freedom*: Outlook, expectations, frustrations
- *Mobility*: Within the village, outside the village, to the market, to relatives' places, mode of participation in social congregations
- *Network*: Help in crisis (family connections/relatives, relationship with neighbors, local administration, medical treatment)
- *Security and Insecurity*: Reality as a woman, rituals/traditions, expectations
- *State Facilities/Services*: Expectations/Frustrations
- *NGO Facilities/Services*: Expectations/Frustrations
- *Media*: Participation in Radio, Television, Public Meetings, etc.), Voting, Political outlook
- Outlook about gender and development and its impact in a broader context

Section 7. Awareness

- *Awareness*: About Education, Health, Politics, Human Right Laws, etc.
- *Awareness about future*: Expectation/Frustration
- *Views about NGO activities*: What changes NGOs have brought about, Expectations, Suggestions
- *Attitude towards Government service systems*: Social impact, changes, suggestions
- *Expectations about life*: What changes are expected? What is needed to keep up?
- *Views about and explanations of change in life*
- *Views about changes in the conditions of women's life and participation of women in development activities. What are the impediments?* Detailed description.

Section 8. Institutional Impact

- Processes and causes of becoming a NGO member
- When and why did you join (explain in details)
- Mode of work (details description)
- Advantages/Disadvantages as a NGO member
- What is needed for change in status/what is needed for development .

Annexure 3

Table 1. Sampling category and the characteristics of the samples in different categories used in this study.

Category	Characteristics of Respondents in Different Categories
Category 1	Women who have been involved with the selected NGOs for more than five years. They were considered as the <i>Target Group</i> in the current study. Structured case studies were conducted on the samples of this category.
Category 2	Women who have discontinued their involvement with, or have dropped out of, the NGO activities.
Category 3	Women who never became members of the selected NGOs or never been involved with the NGO activities.
Category 4	Male members of those households from where women sample were taken.
Category 5	Leaders and staff of the NGOs selected under the study, and local community leaders of the villages under the selected NGO programs.

Table 2. Sample size of the study

Category	SNSP
Category 1	20
Category 2	10
Category 3	10
Category 4	10
Category 5	3

Annexure 4

I had visited the Grameen Bank (GB), Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC, the largest NGO in Bangladesh), Proshika Manabik Unnayan Kendra in Munshiganj district - three large NGOs with national networks that are active in working with women as a program focus. Afterwards, I went to my ancestral village in Faridpur district to visit the SNSP and it is a small Bangladeshi rural-based NGO. The SNSP works with the Gender and Development (GAD) approach where equal focus has been given on both males and females as part of the society. I interviewed a number of beneficiaries (members of the Mahila Samity (Women's Cooperative), NGO personnel of all the four NGOs about women in development activities in this area. Although other big NGOs have massive programs on women in development, I have chosen SNSP for the following reasons:

- SNSP started, and is still operating, its programs in my ancestral village Komorpur in the Faridpur district. So, it was expected that collecting information would be much easier for me than other place.
- Secondly, SNSP is one of the most well known NGOs in Bangladesh led by women and working for women for the last 21 years without any interruption.
- SNSP operates its program with the gender and development approach.