

## **Patriarchy Practice and Women's Subordination in the Society of Bangladesh: An Analytical Review**

by

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### **Abstract**

In Bangladesh, it has been a common scenario that men dominate, oppress, and exploit women, and it is accepted by the social institutions because of their patriarchal structure. In the family, women are considered as passive dependents and property of their husbands. Women are also excluded from economic and political power through patriarchy. This study focuses on the concept of Patriarchy and how exactly it's related to our society. Moreover, it also highlights the status of women in a patriarchal system like Bangladesh and the instruments of practicing patriarchy in Bangladesh. The study shows, in every step, women in Bangladesh are being dominated, oppressed, and deprived in family, workplaces, politics, and education. I conclude that our society is influenced through Patriarchal tendency that creates rapist, puts women at risk and it's the reason women are lagged in economic status than men. At the end of this paper, some recommendations to free women from the chain of patriarchy and its impact are given. The qualitative method has been used in this study and data was collected based on secondary sources that include books, journals, and other secondary materials.

**Keywords:** Practicing Patriarchy, Patriarchal society, Sexual harassment, Rapist

### **Introduction:**

Like most of the developing countries, patriarchy is the prime obstacle to women's advancement and development in Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, patriarchy describes a distribution of power and resources within families such that men maintain power and control of resources, and women are powerless and dependent on men. Though Bangladesh's constitution recognizes women's role the same as men.<sup>1</sup> But patriarchy impedes women's constitutional rights. For the development of any country, equal participation of men and women needs to ensure but in Bangladesh patriarchy is the main obstacle. Fostering economy, ensuring social justice and equality of men and women in every aspect of life, it is obligate to comprehend the system, that keeps women dominated and subordinate, and to demonstrate its workings to work for women's development systematically (Dar & Bhatt, 2020). This study, hence, is an attempt to analyze the concept of patriarchy and its impacts on the society of Bangladesh.

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<sup>1</sup> According to Article 19, section 3 and Article 28, section 2 Of Bangladesh's constitution, the state shall endeavor to ensure equality of opportunity and participation of women with men in all spheres of national life.

### **Objectives of the study:**

- i. To identify the areas of men's control over the women in the patriarchal system.
- ii. To describe the scope of practicing patriarchy in Bangladesh.
- iii. To exemplify that does Islam egg on Patriarchal practice?
- iv. To illustrate how do sexual harassment and capital accumulation strengthen patriarchy in Bangladesh?
- v. To discuss the way to reduce patriarchal culture in Bangladesh.

### **Defining Patriarchy:**

Patriarchy is an ancient Greek term that means: 'the rule of the father'. Originally this word was used to mean the herding societies of the Old Testament where the father's authority over family members was absolute (LeGates, 2001). A definition introduced by Lerner claims that "patriarchy refers to the system historically derived from Greek and Roman law, in which the male head of household had absolute legal and economic power over his dependent female and male family members" ( Lerner, 1986, p. 217). Ferguson has identified patriarchy as the rule of the father (Ferguson, 1999, p. 1048). According to Steven Goldberg, patriarchy is any system of organization (political, economic, financial, religious, or social) in which the overwhelming number of upper positions in hierarchies is occupied by males (Goldberg, 1979). Walby argued patriarchy is a system of social structures and practices, in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women (Walby, 1990, p. 24). The definition provided by Geetha, patriarchy is the absolute rule of the father or the eldest member over his family (Geetha, 2007. p. 8). The patriarchy is best defined as control by men. The organization of society on the supremacy of the father, in the clan or family, the legal dependence of the wives and children, and the reckoning of descent and inheritance in the male line (Weber's Dictionary).

### **How exactly patriarchy is related to our society?**

It is a social system in which men are considered superior by definition. Patriarchy is a blind belief. In our society, Men have more control of the ideology, resources, and authority in our lives than women. "For example, words in themselves are highly patriarchal, as the Hindi word for husband is "swami" which means owner. Even the idea of marriage in Hinduism perpetuates patriarchy with the practice of "Kanyadaan" which means the father of the bride is handing over all his rights and duties towards his daughter to her prospective groom (Vani, 2019; Mia, 2020). This way the father gives her daughter a gift to the groom. All this denotes that a woman is owned, first by her father and then by her husband. These words need to go as patriarchy sneaks into our daily vocabulary; from birth to death we are constantly confronted with ideas of patriarchy. Women are not even allowed to perform funeral rites."<sup>2</sup>

### **Status of women in a patriarchal system like Bangladesh:**

In a patriarchal system women's lives are controlled by men in the following areas:

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<sup>2</sup>Kamla Bhasin said, in an interview of The Dhaka Tribune on May 21, 2017. Available at <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/law-rights/2017/05/21/patriarchy-kamla-bhasin-obr>

### **The patriarchal mode of production:**

Women work within the household they provide services in looking after their children, husbands, and other family members such as old parents or other relations living with them, and these services are considered “free” and even they remained dependent on their husbands. Women’s labor is also controlled by men they may prevent them from working outside, men may allow them to work only part-time not allowing them to use the full capacity of time, often they forced to work at very low wages, sometimes husbands taking away the income they earn by being involved in illegal works. Thus, in short, it can be said that men earn economic gains through exploiting women’s labor power (Obaidullah, 2020).

### **Women’s Reproduction: Control over women sexuality:**

Third world poor developing countries, such as India, Bangladesh, women especially rural poor, illiterate backward women do not have the right to choose when to bear children or how many children they would like to have. They don’t have the power to decide whether they will use a contraceptive to control pregnancy or terminate a pregnancy. In this aspect religion, traditional culture, and “taboos” play a dominant role in controlling women’s reproductive choice - an outcome of patriarchy.

Women often please their men by providing sexual services when they demand, despite their unwillingness. Men may even force their wives, daughters, or sisters to get engaged in prostitution. Rape and the threat of rape are also used as an instrument of controlling women’s sexuality thus putting them into shame and dishonor.

### **Property and other Economic Resources:**

In the case of Bangladesh, we often find that resources are divided among men in a hierarchical order that is from father to eldest son and the next one. Even if women have the legal right to inherit any assets, a whole system of customary practices, emotional pressure, social sanctions, prevent them from acquiring and enjoying these rights.

### **The Instrument of Practicing Patriarchy in Bangladesh:**

Certain institutions are patriarchal and exert patriarchal control over women. These include:

#### **The Family:**

The family, the basic institution in society is the most patriarchal. The hierarchical relations existing in the family keep men at the top and women at the lowest. It’s within the family that we are taught and learn the ideas of subordination, discrimination. Boys learn to be assertive and dominant, while girls to be submissive. For example: If a boy cries, we often say: “Boys don’t cry” and thereby socialize the little boy into hardness, toughness, and insensitivity.

#### **Misinterpretation of Islam in Bangladesh:**

People in Bangladesh do believe, in Islam, man is the earner and woman is the server of men. They think Islam gives superiority of men over women. These beliefs originate patriarchy. Scholars say, “Bangladesh is a Muslim majority country where 89.5 percent of the population is

Muslim and patriarchy in Bangladesh is further legitimized and strengthened through Islamic religious practices” (Ali, 2012; Chowdhury, 2010).

This is the patriarchal view of Islam. The patriarchal society of Bangladesh misinterprets Islam to control and exploit women. The Quran states that,

“The believers, men, and women are protectors, one of another.”<sup>3</sup>

Marriage in Islam is based on mutual peace, love, and compassion, not just the satisfaction of men’s needs.

“The Quran states that the husband and wife are the garments of each other.”<sup>4</sup>

Parents must support and show kindness and justice to their daughters. Abdullah ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated: The Prophet Mohammad (SM) said,

“Whosoever has a daughter and he does not bury her alive, does not insult her, and does not favor his son over her, Allah will enter him into paradise.”<sup>5</sup>

Anas (May Allah be pleased with him) reported: The Prophet Mohammad (SM) said,

“Whosoever supports two daughters till they mature, he and I will come in the Day of Judgment as this (and he pointed with his two fingers held together).”<sup>6</sup>

Anas ibn Malik (May Allah be pleased with him) reported: The Prophet Mohammad said,

“Seeking knowledge is mandatory for every Muslim.”<sup>7</sup> (Here, the term ‘Muslim’ is used for both males and females).

### **The Legal System:**

In Bangladesh, the legal system is highly male-biased. That is, it favors men and economically powerful classes.

### **The Political System:**

In Bangladesh, Political institutions at all levels from Union Parish to National parliament are highly male-dominated. Though the local government bill (1997) provided for direct election to one-third are women’s reserved seats in all four tiers of local government but in practice, even when the women hold the key position, they are usually surrounded by men.

### **The Knowledge System:**

Stereotyped ideas still prevail regarding the choice of subjects between male and female students. Females are discouraged to study subjects such as biology, botany, pharmacy,

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<sup>3</sup> Quran 9:71

<sup>4</sup> Quran 2:187

<sup>5</sup> The Hadith, Ahmad, authenticated by Al-Hakim, graded Hasan by Ahmad Shakir

<sup>6</sup> The Hadith, (Sahih Al Muslim)

<sup>7</sup> The hadith, Sunan Ibn Majah, 224

engineering which is still considered to be the domain of males, while females are encouraged to study philosophy, literature, history, psychology, political science.

### **Patriarchy Creates Rapists:**

- i. Historical reasons for women being victims of sexual harassment include patriarchy and culture.<sup>8</sup>
- ii. Patriarchy is creating rapists in society, No one born as rapists, you-I-we made them rapists. No sexual desire, rapists has power, it is the ‘power of crime’.<sup>9</sup>
- iii. No doubt rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment are the results of patriarchy. Men have power, they can utilize forces; this is the belief that exists in society, families, rituals, cultures, values, books, paths. On the contrary, learning to respect every person, giving dignity - this idea is absent in our society. We grow up in the patriarchal society and see abusive remarks towards women and it’s being considered normal work. If someone avoids courageous works, we call him “girlish”. The women are dominated, it is a normal concept in our society and it is the source for the beginning of many catastrophic behaviors.
- iv. 86% children juveniles are victims of rape from the overall rape incidents in Bangladesh between the ages of 6 to 12 years. The news of 23 rape and rape attempt in the first 18 days of January in 2019, has been published in the media. Of them, 15 are children and adolescent girls.”<sup>10</sup>

These statistics proved that our patriarchal culture is mostly responsible for being raped a woman otherwise child wouldn’t have been victimized. After the ‘Nirbhaya’s’<sup>11</sup> rape in India, a lot of research has been done on why so many rapes happening in that country.<sup>12</sup> “Researchers found two reasons basically, a major cause is the patriarchal tendency. The second reason is to say that there is no effective provision of remedy and prevention.”<sup>13</sup>

### **Examples of Practicing Patriarchy in Bangladesh:**

- i. Wife Beating, slapping, kicking, pushing, or hitting (with fists or weapons such as sticks & machetes), strangling is quite common in the country. Patriarchal norms have naturalized domestic violence in Bangladesh.<sup>14</sup>
- ii. Sexual harassment at the workplace by the superiors is a common feature.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The daily Ittefaq, 12<sup>th</sup> September, 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Kamla Bhasin said at The daily Ittefaq in May 2017

<sup>10</sup> The daily Prothom Alo, 10<sup>th</sup> May, 2019.

<sup>11</sup> In 16 December, 2012 in Munirka, a neighborhood in South Delhi, a 23-year-old female was beaten, gang-raped, and tortured in a private bus in which she was travelling with her male friend.

<sup>12</sup> According to NCRB, more than 2000 rape crimes are committed by boys under 18 years of age in India every year. It proves no sexual desire rapists has power.

<sup>13</sup> The daily Prothom Alo, 10<sup>th</sup> May, 2019.

<sup>14</sup> The Dhaka Tribune; 6th December 2018 reported that two-thirds of women in Bangladesh around 66% have been victims of domestic violence and 72.7% of them have never disclosed the experience to others.

<sup>15</sup> The Daily Star; on 05 may, 2019, reported that a study of December 2018 shows, 85% of garment workers face verbal abuse, 71% face mental abuse, 21% face physical torture and 13% face sexual abuse at the workplace in Bangladesh.

- iii. In Bangladesh, people mostly prefer newborn male children to female. When a woman gives birth to a girl her husband and other members of the family start to oppress and undermine her and the child.
- iv. Parents think higher education is necessary for the male. In a patriarchal society, a woman doesn't get an equal chance with a boy to get higher education.
- v. Lack of freedom and mobility for girls is another main feature of patriarchy in Bangladesh. They cannot go out to work, meet with their friends, or come back any time, they have to return home before dusk.
- vi. In the Muslim families of Bangladesh, sisters get half of their brothers' share, most of the cases, sisters don't take it because it reduces their acceptance in their father's/brothers home. In Hindu families, women get nothing.
- vii. Male control over the female body or gross sexuality is a common feature. It is mostly the husbands who decide on family planning methods.
- viii. In most cases, women have no right to choose their husbands; rather the male members of their families impose decisions on them. After marriage, women are traditionally not allowed to provide support to their relatives.

### **Patriarchal Impacts on Bangladesh:**

According to a report from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) "Women in this country do three and a half times more wage less work than men. A woman works for an average of 24 hours a week but she doesn't get any wages. These activities include cooking, washing clothes, care for the kids, taking up them in school, etc. One the other hand, a man works seven-hour a week the same work that a woman does."<sup>16</sup> The latest labor force survey of BBS states that at the end of 2017, 72 lakhs women and men were working without wages among them 54 lakhs were women and 18 lakhs, men. According to this report,

- i. Many women do not get jobs because they spend more time on household chores.
- ii. Many are forced by family to leave jobs for child-rearing.
- iii. Women cannot do business because they have to work with the kitchen and house. Most importantly, they do not get any kind of wages for these kinds of works.
- iv. 60% of women do not have opportunities for financial transactions.
- v. 57.5% of women do temporary jobs whereas 16 % of men do the same.
- vi. More than 64% of men have a bank account or have access to mobile banking whereas only 40% of women have this opportunity.
- vii. Only 6% of women have access to the Internet, 93% of men use mobile phones whereas 83% of women do it.
- viii. Women are lagged behind in getting work opportunities or participating in labor forces. Only 26% of women are in the labor market whose ages between "15-24" years whereas 54% of men are in the labor market whose age "15-24" years. According to BBS women are not able to go to the labor market because most of the girls get married at this age.
- ix. Men have the opportunity to do paid work than women. They work for an average of 52 hours a week. Women do 32 hours a week.

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<sup>16</sup> BBS, 2019

### **According to CPD<sup>17</sup> reports:**

Unpaid works that are not included as a national income which is done by women the estimated annual value in (2013-14) fiscal year was equal to about 76.8 percent of total GDP. If such accounts added the contribution of women to national production will increase from 25% to 40%.

### **A Report of “Odhikar”<sup>18</sup> shows that:**

For dowry in Bangladesh in 2018, 71 women were killed, 69 were physically abused, and 2 committed suicide, about 157 girls were the victim of sexual harassment, 9 committed suicide, 2 were killed, 33 were injured, 27 were assaulted, 4 were abducted and 73 were victims of rape attempts.

### **The way we can free women from the chain of patriarchy and its impacts:**

The organizer of South Asia and founder of the feminist movement “Sanghat”, Kamala Bhasin she said, ‘He is not for She, “He for He” will help to eradicate inequality for women. If men make men aware, then the dream of feminism will come forward and men will benefit from it.

### **Women have to change themselves:**

There is a deep disease in this society somewhere and the name of that disease is patriarchy, manhood. It can be part of women too. The women who went to fire Madrasah student ‘Nusrat’<sup>19</sup> are also part of that patriarchy. Simultaneously victims and predators. Where some women in our society fighting against patriarchy, on the contrary, someone is keeping coordinating men to practice patriarchy. Women first have to be changed, they have to be committed to be changed and have to break the chain of patriarchy.

### **Changing culture:**

In the family, in schools, in education, in the media, in drama, singing, and cinema, the education of women misprizing should be stopped. Women’s equality, equal treatment, equal participation need to exercise. Men have to stop thinking that women are subordinate, oppressive. Nowadays, it’s a common scenario that in the daily movement at street women of any ages face an indication of physical touching and unexpected physical touching. There are very few women in the country who have not been victims of such violence. The men who do these things may not be rapists, but they are sadistic. These are the ones who in next favor the rapist. There is no way

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<sup>17</sup> Centre for policy dialogue (CPD) seeks to be the leading institution for in-depth research and dialogue to promote inclusive policymaking in Bangladesh, and strengthen regional and global economic integration.

<sup>18</sup> A leading organization in Bangladesh working with the vision of “society where full enjoyment of human rights by every human being will be ensured.”

<sup>19</sup> Nusrat Jahan Rafi was a 19-year-old Bangladeshi student who was murdered after reporting her sexual assault to authorities. She was from Feni, Bangladesh. She suffered burns over 80% of her body. She died 4 days later on 10 April 2019 at the Dhaka Medical College and Hospital. Some women played vital role to get burned Nusrat. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-47947117>

to deny that this strong attitude towards women has created a widespread social problem in this country.

### **To stand against the disgrace of women:**

There is a need for social movement and social resistance against contempt of women-child rape, sexual harassment. A senior nurse from the hospital got a bus from Dhaka to spend the first day of Ramadan with her parents in the house but she was brutally killed after a gang rape.<sup>20</sup> When will we wake up, protest, resist?

### **Ensuring Rule of Law:**

We need an effective judiciary system. Even if a woman asks for justice, the worst system of ours disgraces the victim woman in every step. Though on the 16 April 2019 Supreme Court (SC) administration issued a circular that only female magistrates will record statements of female and child victims of rape and sexual harassment but in practice, women yet face patriarchal tendencies in this stage. In various cases, male officers discharge these functions.

Sexual violence against women is so intense in this country due to a lack of justice. Research of “The Daily Prothom Alo” conducted last year found that,

There was no punishment in 97% cases filed in the ‘Dhaka Women and Child Abuse Tribunal’ in six specific offenses like rape, sexual harassment. The results were found by analyzing the data of 7,864 cases filed in 15 years - 2002 to 2016 (only three percent got punished).

“Tanu” murder case in Cumilla. It has been three years yet investigation of this case hasn’t been finished.<sup>21</sup>

It is good news that on July 18, 2019, the High Court directed to finish the trial of the rape cases within six months.<sup>22</sup> Undoubtedly, it’s a good initiative.

### **We feeling creation between men and women:**

Our self-centered society is just multi-dimensional in this respect. Although this society is not as enthusiastic as opposed to wrongdoing, it keenly awaits every time to find out other faults. Like many underdeveloped societies, in our locality, women who have suffered from sexual violence have always been ‘boycotted’ by societal people but not the attacker/Rapist/guilty. Women were being tried to convince themselves that they have been attacked by their fault. So the blame goes for their clothes, attitude. This tradition should be changed, the men and women should think themselves the same as the creation of almighty. Men should show a positive reaction when women are being oppressed.

### **Conclusion:**

From the above discussion, it’s clear that, in Bangladesh, men dominate, oppress, and exploit women in every step i.e. in family, education, economy, politics, etc. The levels and nature of domination may differ from society to society but the broad principles remain the same, i.e. men

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<sup>20</sup><https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/2019/05/07/nurse-dies-after-being-raped-pushed-off-moving-bus>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/news/3-years-tonu-murder-no-progress-yet-investigation-1717672>

<sup>22</sup> Finish trials of rape cases in 6 months: HC "(2019, July 18)"; [Online] Available at [www.thedailystar.net/country/news/finish-trials-rape-murder-cases-6-months-hc-1773328](http://www.thedailystar.net/country/news/finish-trials-rape-murder-cases-6-months-hc-1773328) (Accessed on 18 July 2019)

are in control. Women work within the household that has no recognition, women do not have the right to choose when to bear children or how many children they would like to have. A study in 2014 was conducted jointly by the Steps towards Development and the World Vision shows that in Bangladesh, 70% of women do not own any property. As a result, they are dependent on the male members of the family such they can't do anything on their own.

So, to raise women's position, foster economic development in Bangladesh it is urgent to protect women from patriarchal subordination by creating wee feelings among women, ensuring the rule of law, standing against the disgrace of women. At last, the government and civil society organizations must play an effective role.

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