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WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE: WOMEN'S WORK, *purdah* AND THEIR RIGHTS ON RESOURCES IN RURAL BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT

As the economy of Bangladesh is based mainly on agriculture and most of the agricultural production takes place at rural areas of Bangladesh, it is noticed that village women are related to agricultural production directly or indirectly. But as our society is patriarchal, women's work is different from men's work and it has little appreciation within their family and within societies. This article is based on the study which was conducted to analyze the condition of working women in Char Khankhanapur village of Rajbari district, Bangladesh and to enquire about their present condition within the patriarchal social system of the village. This article shows that rural women have a great influence on village economy through their labour, both within and outside the household. However, it also highlights that though women are taking part in income generating activities, their position within society has not changed universally because of the patriarchal construction of purdah (seclusion). The article focuses on the fact that, despite women earn they have little access to private property, such as land, agricultural resources, money, jewelry, etc. It proposes to reconsider the understanding, as outlined by the Women in Development (WID) paradigm, that women's participation in paid work will always improve their social status.

Keywords: Women's work, Women's rights, Women empowerment, Rural Bangladesh

INTRODUCTION

Human society has changed over time, from the hunting-gathering society to today's industrialized society. Today, though society is more related to industrial production system, agriculture still has a great influence over food production all over the world. (Prakas, 2003). It is claimed that women took the steps ahead to introduce agriculture in hunting-gathering society. However, women's participation in agriculture was always invisible as most of the society considered that its male member who produce.

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Women's contribution to the overall economy, particularly in agriculture, is high throughout Asia. In Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan and Vietnam high percentage of women are employed in agricultural sector, estimated between 60 and 80 percent.(FAO,2003). Bangladesh is a developing country, where more than 65% of total population depends on agriculture directly or indirectly. (BBS, 2007), contributing to its GDP (Gross Domestic Product).

Generally in rural areas, agricultural production system is maintained by both male and female with their traditional indigenous knowledge and instruments. For labor and capital to produce, they mainly depend on their family members and kin network. But after the introduction of new technologies, agriculture production now not only depends on manual labor or traditional instruments. Agriculture revolution has taken place and has made agriculture more labor intensive. The introduction of modern technology and cash crops has benefited men rather women by creating a productivity gap between them. While men deals with large scale cash crop production, women are relegated to the subsistence sector of food production using tradition methods of cultivation.

Traditional Bengali culture gives us a picture where women are involved in agricultural activities. But the common view about women involvement in agriculture is that they are involved in only the post-harvesting processing of crops. (Rahman, 2000). Once, religion was considered as an obstacle for women's participation in agriculture or any kind of outdoor work. This gender division of labor in Bangladesh was strictly demarcated with women being responsible for agricultural work within the household and not allowed to undertake field work. (Begum,1985). Women were commonly expected to be in 'purdah' (seclusion) and not encouraged to work outside their 'bari' (homestead) (Abdullah and Zeidenstein, 1982). Thus women's contribution in agriculture was little noticed and their labor added no value to national GDP. However, the situation is changing now. Poor women engage themselves in intra-household work as well work outside home. Some educated women are also taking jobs in government and non- government organizations. Thus they are breaking the boundary made for them and are redefining the concepts of 'purdah'.

Poverty, absence of male members and modern technologies give many poor women the opportunity to involve in more intensive agricultural production. But their contribution is not considered as it should be judged. Even they are getting lesser wage while they are taking part in outdoor agricultural work. Often policy planners have little attention towards this issue when they approve development policies.

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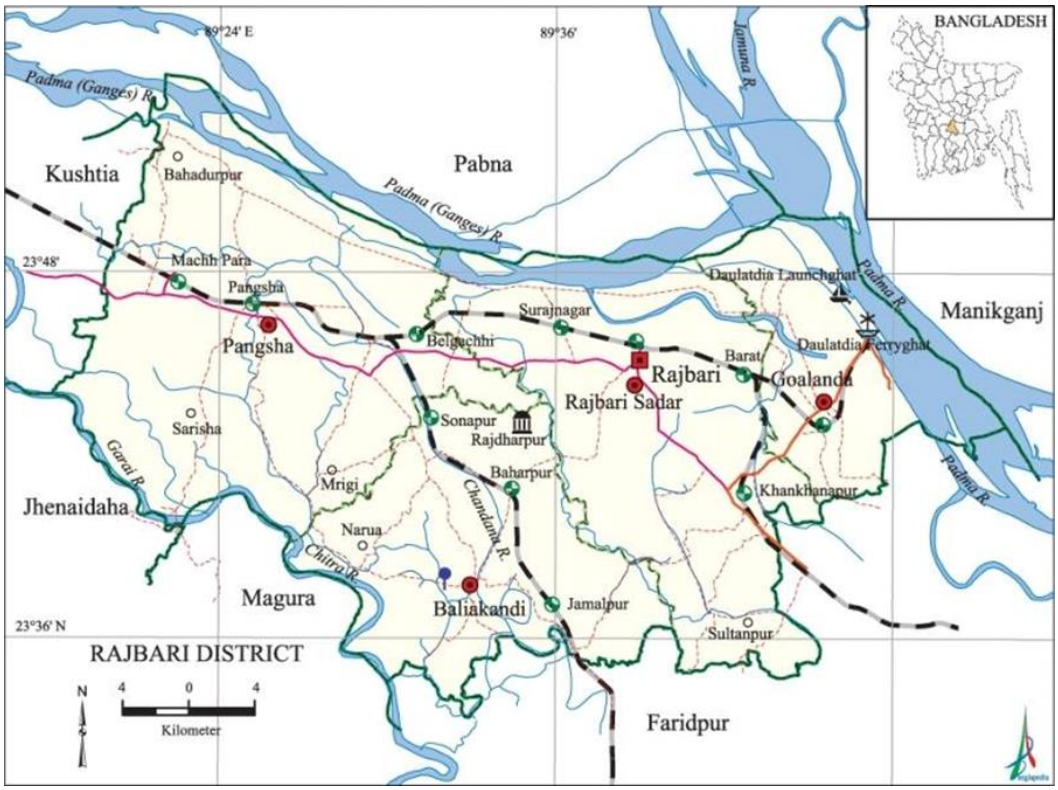
METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

I conducted my field research at my own village and I had both advantages and disadvantages of my field. I am from a well-off family and my father is a well-known person within the village so I got easy access to well-off families and I also had the opportunity to talk to laborers who work at our agricultural farm. I also did not face accommodation problem. I got much information from the union council. My first visit to my field was on January 2013 when I was just building rapport with the villagers and was visiting our Union Council. Then I made subsequent visits to my study village on September 2014 and October 2015. It was quite difficult for me to select a key informant for my study. I was known to the villagers so I did not have the problem to enter in the society. But I only had my concern of getting informants from the lower-economic class. So I had to choose someone from working class. I chose Morjina Begum (pseudo name), who worked at our agricultural farm as well as our home sometimes. She introduced me with other women who work in field with male from other village. She was 35 years old and she had three children. Her husband also worked as a day laborer. I chose her as my key informant because she knew me and I could easily make her understand about my research. As she worked both within and outside of the households and she had acquaintances with women similar to her.



Map: Rajbari district, Bangladesh

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For my research I used purposive sampling. This sampling system allowed me to select informant as I needed for my research, which included my set of informants from different stages of society. I took informants from land owning class as well as from labor class. My informants also included people from policy level and from local people. I took total of 20 women regarding them in the center of the household:

- 7 women from land holding family
- 7 women who works as agriculture and household labor
- 3 women who own land
- 3 women who take care of their land in the absence of their husband
- 10 Local men
- UP chairman

I tried to be a participant observer so that I could come closer to them and could be a part of their life. While I visited other people's houses, I tried to find out leisure periods of women like noon or afternoon while they were making their dinner. I sat beside them and observed their daily work and talked to them. But, I could not attend agricultural work at field as my family had some restrictions for me. I talked to those women while they were taking a break. There is a trend in my village that the workers are provided meal while they are working. So while women taking their meal I talked to them. I always used local terms while taking to my informant because if I talked in *suddo bangla*(appropriate Bangla) that will make a distance between me and my informant, local terms are familiar to them and they also feel comfortable answering in local language. I mainly followed semi-structure interview for collecting my information. I prepared some questions taking my objectives under consideration. Then I carried a small note book in my hand and talked to my informants. I didn't write anything in front of my informants. I came out from their houses and then wrote down some key words in my note books. After returning home, I rewrote every detail. I also used some specific questions for collecting basic information like name, age, education, family members, earning members etc. To collect more intensive and comparative data I use focus group discussions. It helped me getting interactive data and I could be able to get more data at a time. Women were also spontaneous while they were talking in a group. They discussed about their personal life as well as others who were not present there. I separated poor and rich women, older and younger women. I conducted focus group discussions in small groups consisting 3 or 4 women.

Though I was conducting field in my own native village, I experienced both pleasure and pain in my field. I had the opportunity to be close with my village people and invent new part of people's life. I could also know much about women's perception about society, their work and their problems which I never knew before. I had the chance to come closer and I found how they

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treated me and other women from my social background. Some of them considered me as NGO workers and some of them think I may be from census bureau. I needed time to make them understand. Some women who were from lower economic class felt shy talking to me. They felt I am educated; I may not like their answer. Some of them share their personal problems with me and try to find solution. They told many things which was not related to my study but I let them talk. I had to face some difficulties in availing working class women and men. I had to talk to those women who came from other village, when they took a break within their work hours like lunch time. Sometimes I waited while they processed foods for their family. I also talked to them when they were working in households.

Women from rich family talked about the necessity of purdah (seclusion) in their life and their social position. Younger women talked more spontaneously than older women. Older women talked about their lives and family problems and also about the recent social changes in women's lives. However, while I visited our Union Council office, I had to be formal. From there, I collected basic information about my village that includes population, male-female, earning source, occupations, household heads etc. I recorded the interviews who gave me permission to do so. During focused group discussion, I took permission to record. Above all, I tried to keep myself reflexive during my research.

In the village, women have little or no education. Most of my informants did not have education, some of them complete primary school and few of them complete or attended secondary school. Three of my informants completed their higher secondary and started working in government primary school. Though some of them started school, poverty or early marriage caused drop-outs. Most of my informants are in middle age and some of them are young and few of them are old age. As I was conducting this study to know the perception of work among women so I tried to include women from all social class. Most of my informants were married and few of them were widow or divorced. I included women from different social class so that I could make a comparative analysis.

WOMEN'S WORK AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Bangladesh is an agriculture based country and a maximum number of people live in a village community, structured with certain laws and values. But, condition is changing over time because of globalization of market economy and expansion of capitalism. Some development initiatives are also taken for the development and engagement of rural women with income generating activities.

Traditional Bengali culture gives us a picture about women's relation with household works. At Khankhanapur, women works can be categorized in some sectors. Those are:

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- Household work includes cooking, cleaning, children rearing and maintaining household.
- Agriculture work (within household) - post harvesting work like drying, parboiling, threshing, husking winnowing and store the seeds.
- Agriculture labor (field) - preparing field for planting, help male labor.
- Others include primary school teacher, small business, health-worker, and some other government and non-government jobs.

Women are mainly related to household work in my study area. They perform household work like cooking, cleaning, feeding children, washing etc. They also conduct agricultural work who own land or who work as day laborer. They mainly do post-harvesting work. As agricultural labourer, women help men preparing field, weeding and other less labor intensive work. Few village women, who have higher education or who complete their higher secondary, work for government or non-government organizations. Many women of my study area take loan from NGOs and engage themselves in animal sharing.

Earlier a strong boundary was maintained at Khankhanapur for male and female at work place. Women mainly did only domestic work and post harvesting work but now a days, the situation is changing. Women now work with men in the field. Though they do not participate in all types or work related to crop cultivation, their participation is notable. They work as pay worker. As one of my informants who is aged 60 said, "earlier no 'meyalok' (women) would go to field. Field was only men place. But now rich men hired them to help male worker." Participation is changing for some reasons. Those include male migration to city and outside the country, increase of female headed household and the intrusion of cash crops in everywhere. (Kelkar, 2012).

Some scientific innovation is also changing the work pattern of women at Khankhanapur. Earlier all the post harvesting work like winnowing, parboiling or threshing were done by women. But now all those work are done by machine within short period of time. So many poor women labor lost their necessity here. Moreover, seeds were only prepared and preserved by women earlier but now high breed seeds are available in local market so women have little work in seed storage. Thus the need of manual labor has lessened in agriculture and women now choosing to migrate to city for work.

Though most of the women in my study area are related to agriculture, there is difference in their participation. Women from higher class and land owning family do no engage directly in cultivation or work in field. They maintain 'purdah' and do only post harvesting work within household or help the female worker within household. But the women from lower and landless class work in crop cultivation with male. They work in the field, clean grass, weeding and transplanting and harvesting. They also do post harvesting work in rich farmers household.

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During the harvesting seasons, women become busy preparing their yard, they sweep and smear their yard with cow dung. They also make food for hired labor. Land owning people hired female labor to help doing all this. Men arrange to transport crops to home and women arrange to prepare seeds for next season. They winnow the crops, dry it and store that in a proper way. Though some women working in field with male, they only do small and supporting work like prepare the seed bed. Men do heavy work related to agriculture. Rich women only participate as supervisor of household work. They considered inappropriate working outside home. That is a matter of breaking 'purdah'.

It can be seen that there is a clear indication of separating women work and men work at Khankhanapur. This can be explained through White (1992) and Rosaldo(1947). Both of them give us the idea of 'public' and 'domestic' sphere of society. According to them men are related to public sphere while women related to domestic sphere. Women take part in agriculture only through domestic post harvesting work while men take part in outside household agriculture. As Rosaldo(1947) said, domestic is understood as lower social organizations related to mother-children and family, for this women is related to home and child bearing. I also find the same picture at Khankhanapur. Women do all the work related to household chores and they also raise children. Men rarely participate in that work. They considered this as meya lok ar kaj (women's work). And this is considered as dishonor for men to participate in these types of work. Women also think those are women's work and men have nothing to do with it. As one of my informant claimed, "ghorer kaj(household work) should be done by women, this is my work why my husband should do that. That will be a shame for him," Thus they separate the 'work' as 'ghorer kaj' (household work) and 'bairer kaj' (public work) or 'mather kaj' (working in field).

Women who are from higher, land owning class consider work as 'nijer kaj' (own work) and cannot be paid. As one of my informant asserted, "I do all the work after getting crops from field. I also supervise female worker at my home. This is 'ghorer kaj' (domestic work) and 'amar nijer kaj' (my own work). How can I claim money from my own 'songsar' (home)."

Women who work in agricultural production with men get less payment than a male labor as their work is considered easier than men's work. As Rosaldo (1947) noticed, within every division of labor, men's work is considered more prestigious and money earning. Women get less payment than male labor and their work is considered only as 'sahajjokari' (supportive) to male labor. One of my informants Shahera Banu was one of those women who worked on other people's field with male laborers. Her husband was a poor day-laborer who pulled a van. She had three children and they were too little to support the family. So she and her husband worked hard to maintain their family. They did not have any land. She worked as a helper of male labor in the field like wedding, collecting seeds and fiber. She mainly worked in peak hours like planting or

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preparing time to seeds and cutting the ripe crops. She also worked in household to help women in rich family. She gets 100 to 120 during ingathering time if she works in field and she gets 100 and meal if works in household. Women's work is only considered as 'helping hand', not the main work and their wages remain less than the male labor.

Women are happy contributing to family income and getting opportunity to spend for them. They are able to provide more facilities for their children with their income. As one of my informants said, "It is a pleasure for me to give everyone new cloth (notun kapor) then I forget about my pain." Most of the women who are working now did not engage to any kind of work in their earlier life. Most of them were only housewife and they only did housework which had no economic value. Some of them were students.

Women's participation in the workplace has a great influence in their family life as most of the women were housewife earlier. But now they are agricultural or household worker or job holder and they have to pass most of their time in the workplace. This thing makes a difference in their daily life and their family practices. Most of my informant get up early in the morning, do their cooking and then leave for their work. After returning, they have to do cooking and cleaning for them and for their husband and for their children. After all day's tiredness, they have little time to rest and those who have children don't get sufficient time from their mother. All this things influence their whole family life. As society expect women to complete all the work related to household including child-rearing. As Rosaldo (1974) indicates in her domestic sphere, through domestic we understand lower social organizations related to mother-children and family.

As women are engaging income earning process their position is now changing within their family. Women's wages improve their position in the family. Women are now taking part in family maintaining. Earlier the family only depends on husband's earning. But now women are able to add their family income. Women are now taking part in family expenditures. Their incomes are making their life more comfortable than before. When the family only depended on one person's income it was difficult to lead a comfortable life because there was poverty everywhere. So, their income keeps an important influence in family maintenance. As Foucault (1977) asserted that power is the thing which shape and reshape social structure and which produce meaning. Earning money gives women power to reshape their position within their family as well as society.

Women get an agency through their work. They have a strong position now in the family and they are conscious about their rights so if they face any inconsistency within the family, they will be able to protect them. Rowland (1997) described empowerment as "a process where women become able to organize themselves to increase their independent right to make choices and to control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own subordination."

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Some women are engaging themselves with income generating activities. And they are getting the power to protect subordination in some areas. Through work they increase their 'social capital'. While working, they are meeting people around them and some of them getting closer to each other. They are coming in contact with people outside their family, which increases chances of having new social relationships.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS ON RESOURCES

Rural areas of Bangladesh are mainly patriarchal and male members of the family get traditional land rights from their father. Khankhanapur is not different from that. The main property here is land and men are the owners of property. At Khankhanapur, total household is 355 and most of them are male headed household. Few household head is female but they are so for some reasons like the absence of husband, widow etc. Since men are the main owner of land and women do not have the knowledge that they may own land. Women consider land as men's property and they better understand that. Women who even have land ownership do not have control over it. Mainly their brothers or husbands take the decision of productions. One of my informants Mukti, who is a rich man's wife, had enough land. Though her husband maintained all the production system and hired labor to produce, she had much to do. She supervised all the post-harvesting work and preserved and maintained seeds until the next season come. She had two children and they helped her to grow vegetables and poultry in household surroundings. She earned some money from selling vegetables and eggs to village women. She did not want to get the ownership of land or control over it. She also said, "My husband provide me everything I need and he have better knowledge about agriculture and how will I deal with male laborer? That will be a shame for my family."

Women also consider claiming land from parents as a matter of dishonor as they think that will harm their relationship with their brothers as well as parents. As Mukti asserted, "I even don't claim land from my father as that can hamper our relationships with brothers." Some other women from rich family contain same ideology. As Ardener (1975) considered that muted group need not to be silent but they will express their view within the male dominant structures which is made for them. Women's view of their rights is shaped by the dominant ideology of society and they are expected to express their felling through this dominant mode of expression. As Ardener said (1975) "Muted groups are silenced by the structures of dominance, and if they wish to express themselves they are forced to do so through the dominant modes of expression, the dominant ideologies.

However, some women from lower income family or working class women considered that land as support. They think if they own land then they can have sufficient production to fulfill their needs. But they also consider land as men's property. They think men have better knowledge

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about land and production process so they should own land. But one of my informants considered that she should own the land. Johora Begum is one of the women who lost land because of their husband's vagrancy. She has two children, one daughter and one son. Before her husband had some land and they cultivated that. Their life was going on. But her husband became lazy and tried to collect money selling land all on a sudden. After that all of their land is sold. As the land was in her husband's name, she rarely had anything to do. She tried to protect but her husband beat her. She claimed, "if the land was owned by me then my husband could not sell them and we would not face difficulty." This situation is also available in other family. As land is owned by men so they take all the decision regarding land. Another women informant who owned land and had control over land considered this as an advantage for her. Though she had to take help from her sons and brothers, she had rights to take decision. This was because her husband did not have the interest in agriculture.

Morzina Begum comes from a well-established family. Her husband works in local court and she have 4 children. She had her own land and she took decision about production. She hired laborer for agricultural work and also sold the product in local market. She said, "My husband doesn't have any interest in agriculture so I have to handle all of it, but I don't work in the field. I appoint someone to supervise and most of the time my brothers help me." She also appointed female worker to help her in post-harvesting work. Though some different picture is available but most of them belief that land is men's property and they should own that. Women have little access to land rights.

Often men take the decisions about what to plant, when to cut, how many laborers will be appointed or where to sell. Women have nothing to do with that. Women only do post harvesting work within household or help male labor in the field. As Rosaldo (1974) think this 'public' and 'domestic' structure gives a structural form of economic and social life where men and women places is fixed by society. Some women may produce vegetables in their homestead but they do so through men's control and approval. Even if women wish to take small credit and start poultry business, they need the approval from their husband or legal guardian. Most of my informants claimed that their husbands do not have any interest to listen to their decision and some women claimed that they do not have sufficient knowledge about cash crops production. So it is better their husbands take the decisions. As one of my informant said, "My husband take all the decisions about production, he hire labor and supervise them. As I am a woman from rich family, I cannot go to field to supervise the laborer or to take care of crops. This will be considered as 'shorom' (shame). White (1992) notices that 'purdah' make different surroundings in labor and production system. Honor and shame concept is also related to women. Thus production process is fully controlled by men. Some women confined with their identity and forced to remain

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separated from production process. Their ideology is shaped that way as Ardener (1975) showed on his theory.

Some researcher claim that women get freedom through spending their wages. “Women empowerment based on their earning and their power to spend that earning is set in the structures of patriarchal society.” (Hossain: 2012:23). But rural women do not have the rights to spend freely. Most of the women who works as household labor or as agricultural worker earn to fulfill family needs. They spend their earnings buying domestic product and some of them also buy cloth for her and for children. One of my informants Shahera Banu spends her money buying daily necessary, as his husband cannot earn enough always and sometimes she buy new cloths for her children and themselves. “It is a pleasure for me to give everyone new cloth (notun kapor) then I forget about my pain.” Some other working women, who have a prestigious job in government and non-government organization, informed me that they can spend their salary but they have to inform their husband about that.

One of my informant Mariom akter whose husband is an immigrant and he works in Saudi-Arab, has some land. She is only 25 years old and she has one daughter. Her husband earns much to meet their basic needs but as they have some land so her husband wish to cultivate those land to get crops. This is not easy for young women like her to maintain the cropping system. Few years before, they were in joint family. But for some reasons they became separated. So she has to look after her own portion. Most of the work is done by male labor in field but she with some haired women does post harvesting work. Her husband sends money to pay the laborers and while the collection of crops is done she sells the crops in local market with the help of her father-in-law and keeps the money in a bank account. “My husband is the owner of our land. I only maintain them. When he will be back, he will take care of them.” She said. “My husband provide me everything what I and my daughter need. He also sends goods from abroad.” She also informed that she can spend money as she wished but she had to inform her husband. She considered land as men’s property so it should be in their name. “I only do my duty. Sometimes my mother-in-law and sister-in-law quarrel with me but I don’t have a headache” she said.

Thus though women earn few of them have freedom to spend as they wish. They have to spend under the supervision of men or they just include their earnings with in daily needs. Social structure of patriarchy gives a structural form of economic and social life of women. As Rosaldo (1974) think this ‘public’ and ‘domestic’ structure give a structural form of economic and social life where men and women’s places are fixed by society. Women’s economic life is also shaped by society’s view.

Despite women in rural areas of Bangladesh have little access to resources, they own some jewelry through their marriage and some of them get some land from their parents. But women

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barely have little control over all these. Some of my informants claimed that though they have jewelry, their husbands are the main owner of those, as their parents give those as a token of gift or dowry in their marriage. They said they do not have the right to sell or exchange that and if their husband wishes to sell this for his need or for family need, he can sell that. As one of my informant Rawson Ara said, "My father gave me some jewelry but my husband sell them and I did not have anything to do with that. I tried to protect but he beat me and insult me saying that he doing this for family as we are needy people. But letter he spend all the money by himself and he spend a little for families welfare." Another woman from well-off family who was unwilling to reveal her name said, "My father gave me jewelries and a cow during my marriage. All my jewelry is kept by my mother-in-law now. I only can use them while I go to my parents' house or any invitation."

Most of the women from working class and from poor family express the same. They claimed if they say anything against their in-laws, they are considered as aggressive or bad women. As feminist anthropologist Edwin Ardener (1975) said that dominant groups in society generate and control the dominant mode of expression. "Muted groups are silenced by the structures of dominance, and if they wish to express themselves they are forced to do so through the dominant modes of expression, the dominant ideologies. However, Ardener considered that muted group need not to be silent but they will express their view within the male dominant structures which is made for them. (Ardener 1975). Some of the above cases suggest so.

WOMEN'S NEGOTIATIONS WITH '*Purdah*'

Bangladesh being a patriarchal society, the concept of 'purdah' is very strong for women. Though it may be flexible in urban areas, it is still considered in the core of rural life. The concept of 'purdah' is not only related to covering women with cloth, as well as preventing them working with men outside domestic yard. 'Purdah' involves keeping women confined within the home and covering them in veils whenever they venture out of their home. In a wider context, 'purdah' refers to women's modesty and restrictions on their interactions with males who do not fall in specified categories with whom contact is permitted. (Rozario, 2001). Not only men but also women own the concept of 'purdah' for themselves. Working outside home is considered as the violation of 'purdah'. To prevent honor and dignity women should remain in homestead.

But the situation is changing now. Women are taking part in agricultural production outside household as well as receiving job where they work with male colleagues. Khankhanapur is not different from this. Here, traditionally women were related to domestic work and men were related to outside work. But now few women have their job and a few poor women working with men in the field for agricultural production as day laborer. Though women are participating work

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outside home, they have to go through some problem. For their own they have redefined the concept of purdah and negotiate with social situation.

It is expected that every women and girls will remain in purdah. This is stronger for higher class women and girls. It is expected that women will remain within household and while they will travel or come outside they should wear a 'burka' (veils) and be with a male member of the household. Younger girl should not go outside alone. While walking in village road their eye should remain down. If any girl walk quickly and talk much outside the home she is considered as (shameless) 'chokkulozza nai'. 'Purdah' is related to the purity of women and to the honor of her family and lineage. 'Purdah', immobility, modesty, silence and dependency of women are very important qualities ensuring women's sexual purity. (Rozario,2001). Women's daily behavior like walking, talking and clothing all are included within their conception of 'purdah'. Women's 'lozza' (shame) defines honor of her group. Women are considered the bearer of honor of her community.

Working with male in the field is considered 'kharap meya lok' (bad women) or lozza nai (shameless). Not only had the male members of the community but also many women of this community had same kind of belief. Though younger women are now taking education and they are being flexible about purdah but elder women remain in the same concept. They even do not like their daughter or daughter-in-law to take part in outside work or go outside without 'burka'. Women from poor family enjoy more freedom than higher class women. (Rozario, 2001). Working women from lower stage of society considered purdah as a burden for their living. They considered their work as their livelihood. If they remain in purdah then they have to starve. As one of my informants Rawson Ara says, "As a poor women, how can I concentrate on what other people think or say? They won't provide me money or food or cloth. I worked to support my husband and to educate my children." Working women from lower income family also think they are doing the right thing. They do not have bad character like stealing or begging and they even do not have any illicit relation with male laborer. They just work and they considered this as 'pobitro' (pure). As one of my informant Shahera Banu said, "I am a needy women, I need to support my husband. If I don't work then our children have to be in hunger, I cannot think about what other people say. But sometimes I have to go through irritating situation."

Women considered they work for necessity and if they have enough to fulfill their need they would not work. As one of my informant Rahima asserted, "Actually I don't feel comfortable enough to work in the field with male. If my husband could earn enough then I don't need to work." Working women from poor family participate in work outside home because they have to earn to face their daily necessity. Economic necessity makes women impossible to maintain the traditional boundary of 'purdah'. Although the physical mobility of poor women is frowned upon

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by the wealthy, the former have no choice but to accept their low status and dishonor as a consequence of their mobility. (Rozario, 2001).

Women who work in government or non-government job have different belief about 'purdah'. They think the traditional concept of 'purdah' cannot be maintained in today's competitive world. One of my informants Rehana Begum who is a primary school teacher considers though she is working outside the home, she remains in purdah. She does not lead any 'ussrinkhol' (violent) life. She teaches the children in the school and she also complete every household work including raising her two children. As she says, "I wear 'hijab' and 'shari' (long piece of cloth to drape the body) while I go to school. I cannot wear burka because I have to remain in the school from 10 am to 4 pm and in the summer the electricity fails now and then. I become sick. If I follow the traditional purdah concept, it will be impossible for me to work. But I want to teach."

Surovi, another one of my informants says, I work in a government bank. I have my office from 10 am to 4 pm. I wear shari and always keep my head covered with 'achol'(contour of shari). As I remain within the bank while I am working so I do not need to wear a 'burka'. I do not think people consider this as bad. Purdah is not only remaining in burka and remaining at home. I can continue this while I am working outside." The perception of 'purdah' appears in a new form to working class women from higher income group. They considered their social mobility as their freedom and they considered their work as the honor of their family. Thus, though the degree of perception varies among working women from different class, the common perception of women's restriction remain same. Women's situation makes them redefine purdah and adopt their life style with society. Though the situation has not changed drastically but it is now changing. Women are now taking control on production system and negotiating with 'purdah'. As Rozario claimed, 'purdah' refers to women's modesty and restrictions on their interactions with males who do not fall in specified categories with whom contact is permitted. (Rozario, 2001). This is considered as a matter of dishonor for the family. But now the situation has changed. Women from higher class are now taking part I outdoor activities.

Women have their own strategy to maintain their honor and shame. Some women yet consider that they should not work in the field with male laborer as those are 'puruslok ar jayga' (men's place). As Asma Begum who works in rich farmer's house, said, "I do not work in the field that is men's place." She considered that women who work in the field with men are dishonored by others as they can't maintain 'Purdah'. As Rosaldo (1974) said, from primitive to modernized societies, this structure is common. She considered that though the dominance against women is different from society to society, this framework is mainly responsible for dominance.

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CONCLUSION

The aim of this article has been to examine the perceptions of women's work and women's perspectives of 'purdah'. Women's participations in work outside home and their social mobility is influenced by their age, sex, social beliefs and practices. In traditional practice, the village Khankhanapur resembles the picture as the other Bangladeshi village. They separated 'meyalok ar kaj' (women's work) and 'purus lok ar kaj' (men's work). Women's place and work is fixed within the household surroundings and with household works like cleaning, cooking, rearing children and doing post-harvesting work. Men's place is outside home including agricultural work and other business or jobs. Men are considered as bread earner and owner of all property over generations.

But in recent years, villages like Khankhanapur have experienced a change in women's participation in work place. Traditional agriculture based village community used to see women within the household conducting household chores. But the socio-economic change and poverty made them came out of their traditional boundary. Their participation in money earning activities is influencing their family and social life. This is also increasing women's mobility within society.

Women from poor socio-economic background participate in outdoor work in rich people's household to help their women-flock or in the field with male laborer. Though women's participation is considered as helping hand and they get fewer wages than the male. Women from land owning family do not take part outdoor agricultural work. They only do post harvesting work with the help of poor women labor. Some of them may grow some vegetables in their yards and they sell them with the help of any male member of the family. But poor women, who raise poultry, sell their eggs or hen by themselves within the village. Though women usually participate in agriculture or production system for their poor economic condition or in the absence of male members of household, their participation is changing their social position and their family life as well.

Usually, women have little control over agricultural production or any kind of market relate decision. They only can raise cows or goats but how to sell and where to sell is decided by the household head. They also do not have the ownership of land or any kind of property. Land is considered as men's property. Some rich women have jewelries but they only get the permission to use that. They do not have any selling or exchange rights. But some instances show women's possession on material assets.

My study area's social system is structured by class and gender representations. The surroundings are specified for men and women. Women are considered as the bearer of social

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honor and shame, purity and pollution. The concept of 'purdah' is mainly related to women's mobility and behavior. With the participation in work outside home, rural women are now redefining the concept of 'purdah' and are negotiating with social norms and values. Some educated women are taking part in jobs in government and non-government jobs. They consider this as prestigious for them as well as their family. They think it is not possible for them to remain in veils all times. They also sometimes defy the idea of women being confined within household. They think they are not conducting any violet behavior or they are not doing anything what may bring their family down. They give importance to their work. Poor women who are working with male labor or working outside household considered that as their necessity. Their economic conditions make them come out of their traditional role. They think though they are working with male outside home, they maintain a clear line between men and women. They think as they do not have any illicit relation with any male or they are not misbehaving, they are pure and their work is only for their living. They know their position is lower within the society but they have little to do with this because they have to fulfill their basic needs and maintain their family.

One of the notable things that are happening in rural life of Bangladesh is social change. The education rate of both male and female is increasing. As women from higher strata are taking education and engaging themselves with income generating activities, the rest women of the community is trying to follow them. Poor women, who engage themselves with earnings, are contributing to family income and their decision is valued. They wish to educate their children, which was impossible earlier with only their father income. So, children from poor income family are also participating in education. This is a good sign for Bangladeshi villages like Khankhanapur. This study considers that if women's education and free mobility is ensured then village women will be able to take active part in production system as well as in market economy. Their participation will add value to their family income and national GDP. Women who are engaging in agricultural work, needs to ensure their wages properly. Through participating actively with production process, rural women will be to exercise more freedom in rights over resources and in decision making, which might ensure their real empowerment.

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