

Discrimination against Women in the Developing Countries: A Comparative Study

A. M. Sultana and Nor Erlina Bt Mohd Zulkefli

Abstract—The aim of the article is to examine discrimination against women in the developing countries. Discriminations against women are common in various developing countries. The article focuses gender discrimination against women within the household which is well documented. The article argued that the socio-cultural values and norms have a strong influence on the issue of women discriminations. There are various forms of socio-cultural practice that create discrimination between men and women especially in rural society. The study is a comparative study based on primary data collected in selected study areas. Two developing countries namely Bangladesh and Malaysia have been selected as the study area. The study was largely qualitative, using ethnographic approaches. As the part of the community, researcher personal experience has been added from Bangladesh perspective. In Bangladesh, two villages namely Mashimpur and Mohiskota under Dinajpur District have been selected as the study area. The researcher was tailored in a way to capture the socio-cultural influence on discriminations against women based on their personal experience. Secondly, discriminations against women in their daily lives were examined through interviews and participation observation from Malaysian perspective. The study was conducted in Malay community namely in Gugusan Manjoi. Finally, some recommendations were made to establish the equal right for women was highlighted.

Index Terms—community, discrimination, traditional ideology, non-traditional ideology, socio-cultural norms.

I. INTRODUCTION

The main aim of this article is to discuss discrimination against women in the developing countries. Women discrimination can be considered as unequal treatment of a person based on solely on that person sex. Discrimination against women has been an ongoing concern for the past years. It hasn't been resolved up to the present times. In many societies, especially in the patriarchal societies, men are considered as the authority of the family. Women's role is only for bearing child and housekeeping. Patriarchy can be defined as the "rule of the father" but in social terms, refers to the system of male dominance i.e. where children name is traced through the father; where the ownership, control and inheritance of all assets are in the hands of men [1]. Therefore, patriarchy establishes discrimination against women in various aspects.

The article focuses discrimination against women at the household level. Discrimination against women is often viewed at household level. Due to patriarchal ideology and socio-cultural practice parents give priority on son in every aspect. The article examines discrimination against women in

two developing countries namely, Bangladesh and Malaysia. Both countries are Muslim and practice same culture in many aspects. If we look in contemporary Bangladesh, the socio-cultural values and norms has a strong influence on the issue of women discriminations. Various studies show that in Bangladesh women or girl are everyday targets of discrimination within their household [2-4]. There are various forms of discrimination links in the socio-cultural and ideological relations between men and women in the rural society. It describes some of the common situation in which women discriminate from birth to adulthood. Due to biological differences women are discriminated by the society of being female. Women's discriminations are reinforced by various socio-cultural norms which creates women's discrimination in the household.

Due to cultural practice, from a very young age girls learn domestic skills and begin to take on domestic duties, such as cooking, sewing, washing, cleaning, and child caring and supplementing the household income with cottage crafts. In rural areas, it is a strong belief that a son should be educated because, unlike a daughter who after her marriage serves another family, a son will need to support his aged parents. For such beliefs, most families prepare girls for marriage and girls are taught to be obedient and quiet, to respect the leading roles played by males and to take on the responsibility for bearing and rearing children, and this responsibility not only hinders them in attending school but also precludes them from external jobs [5sultana]. Daughter disadvantage may be due in the part of social norms that daughters move away from their parents upon marriage. Therefore, daughters are considered as the non-permanent family member of the family while sons are considered as the asset of the family. This attitude may bring discrimination against women in family.

Similarly, in Malaysia, Malay women face discrimination based on their socio cultural belief or custom (*adat*). '*Adat*', Due to cultural belief, sons are treated as an asset, thus they enjoy greater freedom than girls. From this belief system, the position of primary authority in family falls on the man. The father is the head of the household. Women manage the household but the husband regarded as the primary authority.

However, in Malaysia, although there is no discrimination between men and women in constitution, gender inequalities have often been manifested by the visible forms of differentiation in terms of economic, political and social position relative to men; opportunities and access to resources; and the differential impact of various development programs on gender division of labor [6-10]. In education government of Malaysia has given equal opportunity between men and women, gender differences can be observed in the field of education. A higher proportion of male students preferred technical field while female students

Manuscript received March 7, 2012; revised April 6, 2012

Authors are with the Sultan Idris University of Education, Dept. of Social Studies and Citizenship, Faculty of Human Sciences, 35900 Tanjong Malim, Perak, Malaysia. (e-mail: sultana@fsk.upsi.edu.my).

are heavily represented in management and arts field. This situation indicates gender based inequality and discrimination are in the selection of the area of the study. Therefore, the article attempts to determine in what extent gender based inequality and discrimination against women occur in the two selected developing countries.

II. OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this article are: firstly, the article discusses discrimination against women in the two developing countries namely Bangladesh and Malaysia. Secondly, the article examines parents' perception on discriminations against women in rural communities. The article is a comparative study between two developing countries namely Bangladesh and Malaysia. From Bangladesh perspective, as the member of the community principal researchers' personal experience has been added for deeper understanding. Parents' perceptions were examined through interview. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed in this article. The research was conducted in Gugusan Manjoi which is situated in Ipoh in Malaysia. A total of 50 respondents were interviewed. Parents' perceptions were measured using on the issue 7 items on a four-point Likert format. In this format, the responses agree, strongly agree, disagree and strongly disagree were presented with the values of 1, 2, 3 and 4 respectively. Moreover, In order to collect qualitative information depth interviews were conducted with a small number of respondents.

III. DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN: BANGLADESH PERSPECTIVE

In this section, everyday forms of women's discriminations have been based on principal researchers' personal experience In Bangladesh; socio-cultural discriminatory practices begin at the time of birth. For example, the birth of a male child is very much welcomed to the Muslim community. In contrast, girls' arrival is not ritually recognized by the family and the community [4, 5]. In rural areas, the body of a newborn male child is touched with a stick, whereas the newborn female body is touched with a glass bangle and a plant whose leaves fold when it comes in contact with other substances [4]. A son creates joy for the family, whereas a daughter receives a half-hearted reception [4]. Birth of sons is very much welcomed as a future earning member who is expected to support the parents in old age. On the other hand, a daughter is considered a burden to the family [11]. From childhood, a girl becomes fully aware of the fact that her brother is an important asset to the family and she is treated as a non-permanent family member. In the rural community, it has observed that some of fathers refused to see a new born baby if the baby is a daughter. Even a mother was blamed and tormented by her husband if she delivers a daughter whereas this is the fact that naturally a father is responsible whether the child is a boy or girl. Bangladesh has the highest ratio of preference for sons over daughters where sons are generally preferred over daughters. From my own observation, mother has son preference due to cultural practice rather than expecting any financial

contribution or any social support from son in her old age. But normally, Bangladesh has a high son preference as sons contribute more than daughters to family income, provide adequate support in old age to their parents, impose less of a financial burden and carry forward the family name. Daughters are often considered as an economic liability due to the dowry system as well as the high cost of weddings. Once daughter married, she becomes physically as well as psychologically isolated from her natal home. They are seldom seen as making significant contributions to their natal family [12].

In education, girls receive lower education opportunity than boys. In the very early age, a girl learns to expect endurance and modesty. For such social cultural beliefs, a woman always tries to make up an ideal wife and a good mother. A girl is taught to sacrifice her individual identity as a good wife and a mother [4]. Hence, in education, a son is always preferred over a daughter for schooling. It is not felt necessary for Bangladeshi girls to receive formal education. Education for girls is often considered irrelevant. Most of parents allow their daughters learning and reciting the Quran [5]. In rural areas, a girl is less likely than her brothers to attend primary school. In some cases, where a decision has to be made about which children to send to school, parents always decide to invest in their son's education rather than their daughters. So the girls are given fewer opportunities than the boy in every regard.

IV. DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN: MALAYSIA PERSPECTIVE

The article examines respondent's perception on discrimination against women by using Likert scale. The respondent's values and beliefs are important factors in determining whether there is any discrimination in communities. In order to examine respondent's perception, 7 items were constructed and the results are presented in Table 1. In the first statement respondents were asked, "Women are homemakers while men are the breadwinner of the family" 8 percent of the respondents agreed and 58 percent respondents 'strongly agreed'. The results show that most of women believe in traditional role that should be played by women. These indicate that majority of the respondents are closely linked with the traditional ideology. Discriminations against women clearly noticed in the second statement as a large number of respondents considered daughter as the non-permanent family member as they move away another family after marriage. However, regarding educational opportunity for sons and daughters there is no discriminatory attitudes was observed in respondents attitudes as the majority (52 percent) of the respondents 'agreed' with statement "Son and daughter should given equal opportunity in every aspect".

The results show that most respondents like to give equal opportunities to both of their children. There is only 1 respondent strongly disagreed with this statement. Although majority of respondents like to give equal opportunity to their children in education, there are discrimination observed in the fourth statement "Science and technical subjects are not suitable for women." There are 4 respondents agreed and 29 respondents strongly agreed with this statement while there

are only 16 respondents strongly disagreed with this statement. It can be said that most of the respondents believe that science and technology are more suitable for men. It also

shows that they have high expectations to son rather than daughter.

TABLE I: RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTION ON DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

No	Questions	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither Disagree or Agree		Agree		Strongly Agree		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Women are homemakers while men are the breadwinner of the family	16	32	-	0	1	2	4	8	29	58	50	100
2.	Daughter is the non-permanent family member as they move away another family after marriage	14	28	7	14	2	4	13	26	14	28	50	100
3	Both of son and daughter should given equal opportunity in education.	1	2	-	0	-	0	18	36	31	62	50	100
4.	Science and technical subjects are not suitable for women.	16	32	-	0	-	0	4	8	29	58	50	100
5.	Men are more suitable for holding higher position rather than women	10	20	8	16	-	0	13	26	19	38	50	100
6.	Men should make most of the important decisions in the family.	7	14	13	26	3	6	17	34	10	20	50	100
7	Women should to be respectful and obedient to their husband in every aspect	-	0	13	26	3	6	19	38	15	30	50	100

It can be said that gender based factors has an influence on women's gender ideology in various aspects. The results indicate that most of the respondents still hold traditional ideology. The study also used the in-depth interview for deeper understanding. Some depth interview findings are presented in below. In measuring gender based discrimination against women in education, respondents were asked to give their opinion about their children education. One respondent Zaitun Bt Hussin stated:

"If I really need to decide which children should be selected to send further study, I will choose son because he will take care of me and my other children in the future."

From the above statement, it can said that although a number of respondents agreed to give equal opportunity to their children in education, in some cases parents always like to consider their son rather than their daughter especially when a decision has to be made to choose only one child for education. Discrimination against women in education can be noticed in the above statement. In the developing countries son preference is common. Due to this practice sons are always preferred in education. However, discriminating parental attitude in favor for boys had found in low and moderate educational respondent. Patriarchal ideology typically was also observed in the majority of the participant's opinion. Another respondent namely Che Su Binti Loong expressed her opinion regarding her daughter's education. She stated that:

"I prefer my son in education rather than my daughter. I have high expectation for my son as he will be the breadwinner of family. My daughter would not help me as my son as she will move another family after marriage"

The respondent wanted to see her daughter as a good wife

and mother and for this secondary education is enough for her daughter. She was against the idea of sending her daughter to university for higher education. On the other hand, she had the dream that her son should be graduated. However, discriminatory attitude is also observed women participation in politics. One of respondent Noor Baizura said:

"I do not prefer my daughter to get involved in politics because this area is more suitable for men. Men are more qualified to be a leader"

Similarly, Mohd Yunus Bin Jamal said

"I will not encourage my daughter to be a politician. It is because, as a woman politics is challenging for her. There are many obstacles for her if she involves in politics. There are no constraints for my son if he wants to be politician. I will give him full support if he wants to be a politician."

From the above two statements, most of respondents tend to have traditional ideology regarding women participation in politics. This situation was supported by previous study conducted by Noraini Abdullah [13]. According to author, women are lack behind than men in the participation of politics. Sanaz et al [14] also stated that women are facing discrimination in the participation of politics. Based on these perceptions, most of the respondents believe that the main roles of women to be a good wife and mother. In Malay society, although much progress has been achieved in women education, most of parents hold traditional ideology about the role of women. A study was conducted by Roziah Omar [15] noted that even though women have a great achievement in their education, but they still have to run their responsibility as a wife and mother. Wives are still expected to look after the well-being of their husbands and children.

V. CONCLUSION

The article examines discriminations against women in two developing countries namely Malaysia and Bangladesh. Through interviews and personal observation, it was noted that the factors that lead everyday forms of discriminations against women are socio-cultural beliefs and economic. Besides, the article also analyzes parents' opinion in giving opportunity to their children. It was noted that the majority of the respondents like to give priority son on some aspects. It was also noted that the socio-cultural factors have an influence on discriminations against women include: high son preference as sons are the permanent family member who will contribute to the family income while daughters are non-permanent family member who will move away another house after marriage. Discriminating parental attitudes in favor of boys were observed in majority of respondents' attitudes. Most of respondents tend to have traditional ideology in giving opportunity to their children. This article concludes that in the developing countries like Bangladesh and Malaysia socio-cultural influence is a major source for women's discriminations. The article suggests that in order to bring equal opportunity it is necessary to change parents' ideology. On other hand, education might play an important role to change parents' ideology as well as to bring equal opportunity between men and women in the developing countries.

REFERENCES

- [1] S. Batliwala. "Education for women's empowerment," ASPBAE Position Paper for the *Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, New Delhi, Asia-South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education, 1995.*
- [2] S. White, "Arguing with the crocodile," *Class and Gender Hierarchies in a Bangladeshi Village*, Dhaka. UPL. 1992.
- [3] H. Zaman, "Women and work in A Bangladesh village. Dhaka, Bangladesh," Narigrantha Prabartana, *Feminist Bookstore*, 1996.
- [4] H. Zaman. "Violence against women in Bangladesh: Issues and responses," *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol.22,issue 1. pp.37-48, 1999.
- [5] A. M Sultana, J. A. Jawan, and H Ibrahim. "Influence of Purdah (Veil) on education and employment of women in rural communities," *European Journal of Social Sciences*. 11 (2) .pp267-280. 2009.
- [6] M.K. StivVens, "Perspectives on gender: problems in writing about women in Malaysia," *Fragmented Vision-Culture and Politics in Contemporary Malaysia*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1992.
- [7] S. Walby, "Patriarchy at work: patriarchal and capitalist relations in employment," *Cambridge. Polity Press*, 1996.
- [8] D., Fable, "Gender, racial, ethnic, sexual and class identities," *Annual Review Psychology*, 48, 139-62., 1997.
- [9] A. Aminah, "Gender differences in the boundary permeability between work and family roles," *Pertanika Journal of Social Science and Humanities*, vol.6, pp.43-49,1998.
- [10] I. Maimunah. "Women's access to land ownership: Some implications for development planning," *Pertanika Journal of Social Science and Humanities*, vol.1, issue2, pp.101-114., 1993.
- [11] A. M Sultana and J. A. Jawan, "Social cultural obstacles in women's education and empowerment in rural Bangladesh," *1st East Asian International Conference on Human and Social Development*, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 12-14 November2005.
- [12] N. Chowdhury. "Gender issues and politics in a patriarchy," *Women and Politics Worldwide*, Yale University Press. New Haven, 1994.
- [13] A.Noraini, "Women participation in the political development process in Malaysia," Kuala Lumpur: *Universiti Malaya Press*, 1994.
- [14] I Sanaz, S Junaenah, and S, A.H. Harman, "Women's participation and development: *A Review on Social Cultural Obstacles for Women Participation in Iran*". Bangi: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.,2011.
- [15] O., Rozia and H Azizah, "Women in Malaysia breaking boundaries," Kuala Lumpur: *Utusan Publication and Distributors Sdn.Bhd*, 2003.